

The Sweetest Bread

Once upon a time, there was a wealthy king, who could have anything his heart desired. He had everything, and they said he was happy, until he suddenly lost his appetite and could not eat anything. He slowly began to lose weight and he became grouchy and strange. Many doctors examined him but could not find a cure and so day by day he kept on losing weight.

One day, a white-haired, old man happened to be passing by the palace. He was poor but wise and knew a few remedies himself. They told him about the king, so he went to see him.

-Are you tired my king? He asked.

-Of course not, I sit on my throne all day; I don't even lift my little finger.

- Maybe you worry about your people?

-No, not at all. I am carefree, and I don't worry about anyone!

-Did you ever desire something that you could not have?

-That's not it either! I'm a King and whatever I wish for I see it before me!

The old man thought about it for a while and then said to the king:
«Listen, my king. As I see it, there is nothing seriously wrong with you. The bread they give you in the palace to eat is to blame for your loss of appetite. Order your servants to bring you the sweetest bread in the world to eat. If you can have that, you will be cured!”

The very same day the king gave the order to the palace bakers to prepare for him “the sweetest bread in the world!” All the kingdom's bakers threw themselves into the task, to make the king's sweet bread! They kneaded all kinds of bread with sugar and cream and brought them to the palace for the king to taste. He didn't even want to taste them.

None seemed appetizing enough to eat. Until one day, outraged, the king ordered the old man be found and brought before him.

-I will hang you for deceiving me! yelled the king, as soon as he saw him.

- Why, my king? asked the old man.

- Because the bread you said I should eat did nothing for me!
- Is that so? said the old man. It seems the bread they prepared for you was not as sweet as it should be! The king was about to have another burst of outrage but he saw that the old man was contemplating on something, so he waited.

- Listen, my king, said the old man after a short while. If you really want to try the bread that will cure you, you must come with me, for three days, and do whatever I say. If you are not cured you can take my head!
The king reluctantly agreed to follow the strange, old man.

The king wore paupers' clothing and old, worn out shoes; he took a cane in his hand and secretly left the palace. The king and the old man went to the old man's cabin. It was in a field sown with wheat, in a plain far away from the palace.

At daybreak, the old man gave the king a scythe and said: "Come, let's reap!" The king reaped in the sweltering heat all day. He made about forty sheaves of wheat. At night time, dead tired, they went to sleep. He ate nothing all day. The old man also had nothing to eat.

The next day, early in the morning, the old man woke the king and said: "Get up! We need to take all these sheaves of wheat to the threshing floor to have them threshed!" The king carried more than half on his back and then all day he beat them with the flail 'till the wheat was piled. The wheat was then tossed into the air, to have the chaff blown away by the wind and to allow the valuable grain to fall onto the threshing floor. It was then collected and put into sacks. They spent all day doing this work with nothing but a little water to drink. At night, they both went to sleep dead tired, once again.

The third day, at day break, the old man woke the king: "Get up" he said "Now we must take our wheat to the mill to grind it! You carry it on your back because I cannot and let's go to the top of the mountain where the mill is." The king had no choice but to do as he was told as this had been the agreement. He loaded the sack onto his back and tired and weak as he was, he carried it to the top of the mountain. Now he began to feel hungry but he said nothing yet.

They grinded their wheat and put it into a sack. The sack of flour was once again loaded onto the king's back and around noon they arrived at the cabin. "Come, let's knead!" says the old man. He took about 10 litres of flour, threw it into a trough and ordered the king to knead it into dough. Next, he sent the king to a nearby scrub to fetch some wood and by nightfall, they had a fire going in the oven to bake four loaves of bread. The king was very hungry by now and was eagerly waiting for the bread to be baked, so he could eat it! As the smell of the baking bread drifted through the room, his longing to eat the bread grew. "I'm very hungry" he said to the old man "Wait and you will eat!" he answered.

In a short while the bread was out of the oven, steaming and golden brown. Like a hungry wolf, the king grabbed one, cut it with his hands and started eating. His face flushed with joy as he took his first bite and he yelled: "This is the sweetest bread in the world! And yet I did not add any sugar in the dough!" Then the old man smiled and said: "My king, you should know that the sugar you added was your sweat needed to make it. Now you are free to go back to your palace. From now on, be sure to work hard and your appetite will never again be a problem."

The king followed his advice and when he returned to his palace, he worked hard for his people. He even went into the garden for work and ever since then, his lack of appetite was cured and he always ate well. If only we would all eat like that!

Translated from Greek text by Stergiani Agiomamitou