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THE GOLDSMITH AND THE MASTER THIEF



TONKE DRAGT

Translated by Laura Watkinson

PUSHKIN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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THE FIRST TALE

The Birth of the Twins

Right, now we shall begin. When we reach the end of our story, we shall know more than we know now.

ANDERSEN: 'The Snow Queen'

In Bainu, the beautiful capital city of Babina, there once lived a poor cobbler and his wife.

One morning, two puppies came running into the cobbler's workshop. They greeted him, barking and wagging their tails, and started playing with the shoes that he was mending.

"What's all this?" the cobbler shouted. "Away with you!" And he chased them outside.

The next morning, however, the dogs came back, barking and wagging their tails as before, and once again he chased them out of his workshop. But when he joined his wife in the kitchen at lunchtime, the dogs were under the table, eating together from the same plate.

"What are you doing?" he said to his wife. "Are you feeding those animals? They've already been into the workshop bothering me twice. Get rid of them!"

"Oh," said his wife, "but they're such friendly little things! And have you seen how thin they are? Let them stay. They clearly trust us to look after them."



"Absolutely not," said the cobbler. "We're poor and we have a child on the way. There is no way we can have two dogs."

"But we always have a few leftover scraps that they could eat," his wife replied. "And they can guard our house. Please, let them stay."

"As if we have anything that needs guarding!" said the cobbler, but his wife kept on pleading, so he gave in, because he was in fact just as kind-hearted as she was.

So then they had two dogs, which brought them a lot of problems, but also a lot of pleasure.

A week later, the cobbler found a basket outside his door. There were two kittens inside, meowing sadly.

"We have no use for these little beasts," he said to his wife. "I'm going to get rid of them."

"No, you can't do that!" said his wife. "They're so sweet. Look, they've only just opened their eyes. Let's keep them."

"Absolutely not!" cried the cobbler. "We're poor and we're about to have a child. Besides, we already have two dogs."

"Cats hardly eat anything though," said his wife. "And they catch mice."

Once again, the cobbler gave in, and so they had two dogs and two cats, which gave them a lot of trouble, but also a great deal of pleasure.

Some time after that, the cobbler was hammering away in his workshop when two pigeons came flying in through the open windows and sat on his shoulders, one on each.

"What do you want from me?" he asked. "I already have two dogs and two cats. And in a few days I'll have a child too. Away with you! Scram!"

But the pigeons stayed where they were.

Fine then, thought the cobbler. *I wonder what pigeon legs taste like*.

No sooner had he thought that than the pigeons flew up and away. The cobbler ran outside after them, trying to catch them, but they fluttered up onto the roof of his house.

"Right, then you can just stay up there," said the cobbler, and he headed back inside and told his wife that there were two pigeons on the roof.

"You mustn't eat them," his wife replied. "They came to you of their own free will – and that's good luck."

"Two dogs, two cats and two pigeons," muttered the cobbler. "I wonder what other good luck is in store for us?"

The next night, he received the answer to his question, when his wife gave birth to twins, two big and healthy baby boys.

"Well, well," said the cobbler the next morning, as he stood beside the bed where his wife lay, tired and happy, with a child in each arm. "Twins! And their birth was foretold by extraordinary events. So our sons are sure to become extraordinary children."

The boys were christened and given the names Laurenzo and Jiacomo.

"We don't have any money for christening gifts," said their parents, "but we'll still give them something. They shall each have a puppy, a kitten and a pigeon. Don't we make a lovely family?"



Laurenzo and Jiacomo grew up in good health, and they were as alike as two drops of water or two grains of sand. When they walked together through the streets of Bainu, with their dogs at their heels, their pigeons on their shoulders, and their cats in their arms, no one knew which was one and which was the other. Only their parents could tell them apart – not because of the way they looked, but because of how they behaved.

The brothers were inseparable, and they enjoyed their time together. They were poor, but how many boys are there who have not only a dog, a cat and a pigeon, but also a twin brother to play with? And what better places to play than in the narrow, winding streets and alleys of Bainu, or on the big square in front of the royal palace or in the rolling fields outside the city walls?

The twin brothers had lots and lots of interesting experiences when they were still little boys, and I shall tell you a story from that time.