

ELIJAH AND THE POOR MAN'S WISH

Once in a long ago faraway place, there lived a man who was old, blind, penniless, and childless. Even though there were so many troubles in his life, he was able to get by with joy in his heart, for he had the love of a sweet and kind wife. They had so little, but they were rich in the love they shared for each other. And whatever little they had, they would gladly share with others.

One day the man just needed the time and space to think about things. He had never complained, but now he needed to go somewhere and reflect on his life. He made his way down to the riverbank and began to think of all that had happened to him and how things could have been different. He was lost in thought when suddenly he heard something in the distance. It was the tap, tap, tapping of a cane coming closer and closer. There was the rustling of a long satin cloak. He smelled an aroma that reminded him of scents so sweet, they might have been in the Garden of Eden. And someone came and sat beside him, saying, "Do you know who I am?"

The old man thought of the sounds and the scent. "Are you . . . you must be Elijah the Prophet!"

"Yes, you are right. I am Elijah, and I have been sent here for a very special reason. God has looked here and has seen your suffering. Yet you do not complain; you are still grateful for life, and you and your dear wife share much joy. And, too, you are always ready to share with those less fortunate than yourselves. So I have been sent here to bring you a message. You will be granted a wish! What shall it be? What is it that you want?"

The old man did not move. He stayed very still, very quiet, thinking. What wish could he make? What did he really want? Should he wish for his sight? his youth? money? . . . Dared he wish for a child? Try as he might, he just couldn't make up his mind.

Finally Elijah spoke again. "I can see that this is a difficult decision, one not easily made. So why not think about it for a while? Go home and

consider what you will do. And then I will meet you here tomorrow, same time and same place. You can tell me then what you will wish."

Then the old man heard the rustling of the long satin cloak as Elijah rose to go. He heard the tap, tap, tapping of the cane going off into the distance. But the smell, like all of the scents in the Garden of Eden . . . that scent lingered long after. The old man stayed by the river, listening to the water gently flowing by. After a while the old man slowly made his way back home.

"Wife! Beloved wife! Come and hear of my adventure!" called the old man as he entered their house. And he told his wife the whole story. When he got to the end of his tale, he asked, "So please help me. What one wish can I make?"

"Do not worry, my wonderful husband. All will be for the best. For now, it is time for dinner. Sit down, have some nice soup and good bread. After dinner, we can rest and tell each other stories. Go to sleep tonight and have sweet dreams, and tomorrow we will decide what you should say."

And that is exactly what the loving couple did. The man had the most beautiful dreams all night long; and in the morning, after breakfast, his wife whispered something in his ear.

"Oh, my sweet wife! What a treasure I have in you! That is exactly the right wish. Now, if only I can remember!" Repeating the wish to himself, the old man left his house and made his way slowly back to his place by the river and began to wait. And he waited and waited, listening for the sounds he had heard the day before.

Soon enough, the old man heard it: the tap, tap, tapping of a cane coming closer and closer. There was the rustling of a long satin cloak; and then, finally, there was the smell like every scent in all of the Garden of Eden. And Elijah the Prophet came and sat down next to the old man.

"Shalom aleichem!"

"Aleichem shalom!"

"Well, so now it is time. I can grant only one wish for you. What will it be?"

What should he wish for? A child? money? his sight? his youth? his health?

The old man hesitated for a moment. He took a deep breath, and he began:

"May I live . . . to see the day . . . when my child . . . will eat . . . from a golden plate!"

Elijah threw back his head and began to laugh and laugh. "I can see that you have managed to get all of your wishes into one wish! I'll bet that God is enjoying this just as much as I am. And I am certain that God will see to it that every part of your beautiful wish is granted."

For a moment, all was still and silent. Then the old man heard the rustling of the long satin cloak and the tap, tap, tapping of the cane going off into the distance. But the smell, like every scent in the Garden of Eden, that sweet smell lingered long into the afternoon. . . .

And it has been told that the old man and his sweet wife and their lovely child lived a peaceful and joy-filled life together for many, many years. So may it be for us all. Amen.