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STORIES THAT NOBODY KNOWS

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Ergocles and the Giant

Years and years have gone by since Ergocles was haunted by a strange giant. So many that this tale has been almost forgotten. Still, the very old people must have heard it. But should you ask them, some will tell you it was all a pack of lies, for giants do not exist; others that Ergocles beat the giant and got rid of him forever; yet others will tell you that the giant exploded with anger, because he never managed to enslave Ergocles. The truth is that nobody really knows.

What everybody knew in those old days in Ergocles's village was that the giant had started haunting him since the time he was a little boy.

"Don't be lazy!" Ergocles's father would shout at him, if early in the morning he saw the boy talking to the flowers and the trees; or chatting to the animals late in the afternoon; or gazing at the stars at night, as if he were trying to count all of them. For Ergocles was doing all these things, even though he couldn't count the stars, or understand what the animals were saying, and even though the plants never replied.

"Don't be lazy", his father would tell him off. "You're now a big boy and time is speeding by. Go to school or go learn some trade to escape from

poverty, to escape the giant and not become his slave as it happened to me. If you remain poor, you will be weak and helpless like your father. And then, one day, the giant will come along and catch you. He'll enslave you forever, and you'll never be able to get away from him. Bear that in mind."

"I know I'll never be able to get away from him", Ergocles would murmur, as he listened to his father's advice. Then he would ask frightened: "Is the giant very big, father? Is he huge?"

"He has both a huge body and enormous power; it's only a face that he misses", his father would reply.

Ergocles was scared even more each time he was hearing such peculiar things; all the more because he could not understand how it was possible for the giant to have no face; and why did his father say that he himself was weak and helpless, when both his body and his arms were strong, and there was nothing in the village that he could not tackle? Then again, how was it that his father was the giant's slave, when Ergocles had never met this monster? Still, since his father said it was so, it had to be so, and the best Ergocles could do was to fear the giant.

So he started being afraid of him, and his fear grew so big that before long he thought the giant's head peeped over the hilltop early in the morning. In the afternoon he thought he could hear the giant's footsteps nearby; and at night, that he could make out a large shadow in the sky. So he gave up trying to count the stars, he stopped chatting to the animals, and forgot all about the flowers and the trees. Instead he picked up books, paper and pencils and off he ran to school with the other children to learn how to read and write.

But his fate had other things installed for him. For one day a successful

pedlar said to Ergocles's father:

"Your son is wasting his time going to school. What use will too much learning be to him? He can become a rich man even with the little he now knows. Apprentice him to me and if he learns the job well, when he grows up he'll have greater wealth than I have."

Ergocles's father didn't want to apprentice him. He loved his son and didn't want to lose him. Besides, his wife began to weep not wanting their boy to go away. So, the pedlar was ready to set off alone. But Ergocles, who now feared the giant more than he loved his parents, was determined to leave. If he went far away he thought, -who knows? - perhaps the giant would lose sight of him, would get all muddled up and never find him again.

"If you don't want me to become the giant's slave, let me go, father", he said. "I'll never make it in this village. I'll always be poor and the giant will get me. I shan't escape him."

His father thought it over and in the end, mastering his grief, he gave his consent, although his wife was shedding bitter tears. Was it that he gave in to his son's whim? Or was it that he didn't want to stand in the way of his child's happiness? Or, again, was it that he realized the time was drawing near when the giant would appear? The truth is that nobody really knows.

Anyway, off went Ergocles with the pedlar, to become his apprentice and learn his job, to become so rich and powerful that no giant or anyone or any-thing in this world would ever be able to enslave him.

The pedlar's business, however, was not an easy job. Ergocles was always on the move and he never had a minute to spare. There was not a hamlet or a village that he and his new master did not stop at, to unload, spread out

their wares and set to work. As soon as they would run out of goods they would go to the nearest market town to fill up their cart again with a new lot of wares. After the horse would have been well fed, after the master would have his fill of wine, and Ergocles a good meal, they would all set off again to call at other villages and hamlets on their way.

"I'm tired", the apprentice would say as the business expanded and the amount of loading and unloading grew.

But his master would not spare him. "Work is tiring", he would reply. "If you don't work you'll never be successful."

However, no matter how hard Ergocles worked, success never came his way. A whole year went by, then a second, and a third, and many more, but he was still as poor as ever; always an apprentice, always in the service of his master, loading the wares on the big cart, then unloading them again, and feeding the horse. They were always on the road, always on the move, always travelling from hamlet to village. And nothing, but nothing ever changed, and there wasn't one night that Ergocles didn't tumble into bed worn out and fed up with his ugly luck.

One night, one such night when he was more worn out and still more fed up than ever before, he had a bad dream. He dreamt that suddenly, as he was loading up the cart, the wares began to grow and grow, until they grew into a giant shouting in a thunderous and horrible voice:

"Ha, ha! Here's my good friend Ergocles. Elsewhere was I seeking him, but I find him here. Now I've truly caught him. I'll make him my slave, but he will never understand it".

Ergocles was at first so petrified with fear that he didn't know what to

do. But then, gathering all his courage, he shouted at the giant:

"You're wrong! You haven't caught me, and you're not making me your slave. I'm working for the pedlar as his apprentice. Day and night I look after his business, and one day I'll be rich and powerful and you'll never be able to enslave me."

But the giant laughed still more loudly, so loudly that Ergocles woke and sprang out of bed. His fright was such that he couldn't sleep again. Then looking up high in the sky he thought he really saw the shadow of the giant. When day broke he seemed to make out the giant's head behind the hilltop. And in the afternoon he seemed to really hear the monster's footsteps nearby.

That was when he made up his mind to leave the pedlar's employ. He wanted now to work for himself; to set up a business of his own to stop being fed up with his ugly luck. He would become rich and powerful quickly, to escape from the giant who was haunting him again. The next morning he told this to his master and asked for the wages of all the years he had been in his employ.

"I'll pay you", the pedlar said, "and you are free to leave if you want to. But you'll find it difficult to succeed all on your own. It means a lot of hard work, bear that in mind."

"It will be difficult, it needs a lot of hard work, I know it", Ergocles said, "but I've set my mind on it, and that's why I'll succeed."

So he took his money and straight away went to the big market town and bought a few wares. He put them in a sack, heaved the sack on to his shoulder and started wandering from hamlet to village, as he had been taught, to sell his mercantise.