
The adventure of the mason

There was, once upon a time a poor mason in Granada, who observed all the feast days including *San Lunes*, but who despite such devotion was very poor indeed. One night he was woken by a loud knocking at his door. He opened the door to find himself face-to-face with a cadaverous-looking priest.

"Good friend!" the stranger greeted him, "I have observed that you are a good Christian. Will you undertake a job for me this night?"

"I will do it gladly, Father, but on condition that I am reasonably paid."

"You will be well-paid, but you must agree to be blindfolded", said the priest.

After covering his eyes, the priest led him down narrow alleyways until they reached a doorway. The priest unlocked the door. They entered and the priest locked the door behind them and led the mason to a large hall. He removed the blindfold and took the mason through to a courtyard. In the centre was the dry basin of an old Moorish fountain, under which the priest asked the mason to form a small vault. He accordingly worked all night and just before dawn the priest put a piece of gold into his hand, and, blindfolding him once more, led the mason back to his home.

"Are you willing", he asked, "to return to complete your work?"

"Gladly, Father, on condition that I am well-paid."

"Well then, tomorrow at midnight I will call for you again", said the priest.

The priest did as he promised and the work was finished.

"Now," said the priest, "you must help me to bring the bodies up that are to be buried in this vault."

On hearing these words, the poor mason's hair stood on end. With trembling steps, he followed the priest into a separate room, but was relieved to see three or four large jars. They were full of money and it took all the mason and the priest's strength to place them in the vault. The vault was then closed, the paving stone fixed and no trace of the work remained. The mason was blindfolded again and led out of the building. After wandering through a

confusing maze of street, they stopped. The priest put two pieces of gold in his hand and said:

“Wait here, until you hear the cathedral bell toll. If you try to uncover your eyes before that time, evil will befall you.”

And he left. The mason waited faithfully and when the cathedral bell rang its matin peal, he uncovered his eyes, and found himself on the banks of the Genil. He made his way home and revelled with his family for a fortnight with the money he had earned; after which, he was as poor as ever.

He continued to work a little, and pray a good deal, while his family grew up gaunt and ragged. As he was seated one evening at the door of his hovel, he was approached by a rich old curmudgeon. The wealthy landowner eyed our mason, and with a frown, said:

“I have been assured, dear friend that you are very poor.”

“There is no denying the fact, sir — it speaks for itself.”

“I presume then, that you will be glad of a job, and will work cheaply.”

“As cheap, my master, as any mason in Granada.”

“That’s what I want. I have an old house fallen into decay, which costs me more money than it is worth to keep it in repair, for nobody will live in it; so I must contrive to patch it up and keep it together at as small expense as possible.”

The mason was accordingly conducted to a large deserted house that seemed going to ruin. Passing through several empty halls and chambers, he entered an inner court, where his eye was caught by an old Moorish fountain. He paused for a moment, for a dreaming recollection of the place came over him.

“Excuse me, sir, who lived in this house before?”

“A pest upon him!” snapped the owner. “A miserable old priest. Since his death the worst luck has befallen me. The people pretend to hear the clinking of gold all night in the chamber where the old priest slept, whether true or false, these stories have brought a bad name on my house.”

“Enough,” said the mason sturdily, “let me live in your house rent-free until some better tenant presents, and I will engage to put it in repair, and to quiet the troubled spirit that disturbs it. I am a good Christian and a poor man,

and am not to be daunted by the Devil himself, even though he should come in the shape of a big bag of money!”

The offer of the honest mason was gladly accepted; he moved with his family into the house, and fulfilled all his engagements. Little by little, he restored it to its former state; the clinking of gold was no more heard at night in the chamber of the defunct priest, but began to be heard by day in the pocket of the living mason.

I. Washington. (1832). Cuentos de la Alhambra.