

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

By OVID



Long ago, on a high hill in Greece, lived Philemon and Baucis.

They were poor, but never unhappy. They had many hives of bees from which they got honey, and many vines from which they gathered grapes. One old cow gave them all the milk that they could use, and they had a little field in which grain was raised.

The old couple had as much as they needed and were always ready to share whatever they had with any one in want. No stranger was ever turned from their door.

At the foot of the hill lay a beautiful village, with pleasant roads and rich pasture lands all around. But it was full of wicked, selfish people, who had no love in their hearts and thought of only themselves.

At the time of this story, the people in the village were very busy. Zeus, who they believed ruled the world, had sent word that he was about to visit them. They were cooking a great feast and making everything beautiful for his coming.

One evening, just at dark, two beggars came into the valley. They stopped

at every house and asked for food and a place to sleep; but the people were too busy or too

tired. They were thinking only of the coming of Zeus.

With sore feet and being very tired, the two beggars came to the hut of Philemon and Baucis. These good people had eaten very little, for they were saving their best food for Zeus.

When they saw the beggars, Philemon said, "Surely these men need food more than Zeus. They look almost starved."

"Indeed, they do!" said Baucis, and she ran quickly to fix supper for the men.

She spread her best white cloth upon the table, and fixed bacon, herbs, honey, grapes, bread, and milk. She set these upon the table in all the best dishes she had and called the strangers in.

Then what do you think happened? The dishes that the strangers touched turned to gold. The pitcher was never empty, although they drank glass after glass of milk. The loaf of bread stayed always the same size, although the strangers cut slice after slice.

"These are very strange travelers," whispered the old couple to each other. "They do wonderful things."

That night Philemon and Baucis slept upon the floor so the beggars might have their one bed. In the morning they went with the travelers to the foot of the hill to see them safely started on their way.

"Now, good people," said one of the strangers, "we thank you, and whatever you wish shall be yours."



As he said this, his face became like that of the sun. Then Philemon and Baucis knew that Zeus had spoken to them.

“Grant, O Zeus, that one of us may not outlive the other,” they cried in one voice.

“Your wish is granted,” said Zeus; “yes, and more. Go to your home and be happy.”

Philemon and Baucis walked home and lo! Their hut was changed into a beautiful castle.

The old people turned around to thank their guests, but they had disappeared.

In this castle Philemon and Baucis lived many years. They still did all they could for others, and were always so happy that they never thought of wishing anything for themselves.

As the years went by, the couple grew very old and feeble. One day Baucis said to Philemon, “I wish we might never die, but could always live together.”

“Ah, that is my wish too!” sighed old Philemon.

The next morning the palace was gone; Baucis and Philemon were gone; but there on the hill stood two beautiful trees, an oak and a linden.

No one knew what became of the good people. After many years however, a traveler lying under the trees heard them whispering to each other.

“Baucis,” whispered the oak.

“Philemon,” replied the linden.

There the trees stood through sun and rain, always ready to spread their leafy shade over every tired stranger who passed that way.