

Little Jack & Lazy John

A Tale From France

Twin brothers once owned a bakery. They were named Little Jack and Lazy John, and looked so much alike that it was difficult to tell one from the other. The only real difference between them was that Little Jack was industrious and hard-working while Lazy John was quite lazy.

Little Jack was also a happy lad, without a care in the world. He sang as he worked and he chuckled as he rested, and never was he seen to wear a frown. Lazy John, on the other hand, was as clever as he was lazy.

One day the king stopped at the bakery and asked for a fresh loaf of bread. Little Jack served him with great joy and smiled, sang, and laughed as he took a hot loaf from the oven and wrapped it in brown paper.

“Are you always this happy?” asked the king.

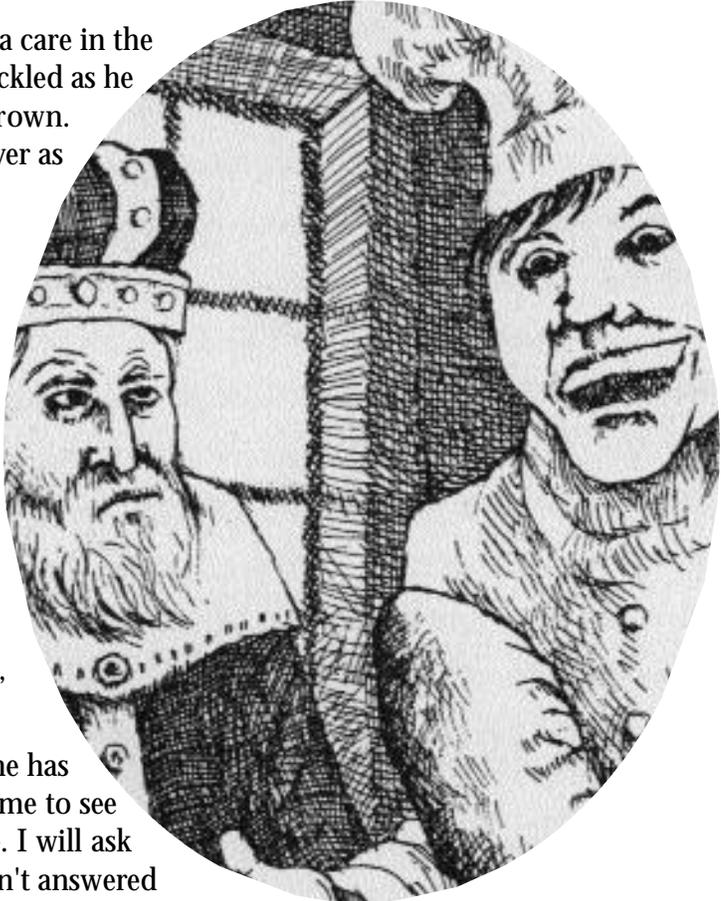
“Oh yes, Sire!” laughed Little Jack. “I’ve never known a sad ctay in my entire life.”

The king looked stern and said, “Everyone has troubles. It’s a rule of life. And it’s up to me to see that you are not an exception to this rule. I will ask you three difficult questions. If you haven’t answered them by noon tomorrow, your bakery will be burned to the ground.”

Little Jack looked worried and his voice shook as he asked, “What are the questions, Your Majesty?”

“First, how much am I worth? Second, how much does the moon weigh? And third, what am I thinking? You have until noon tomorrow.”

The king rode away. For the first time since he was a babe, Little Jack began to cry. Lazy John came in and asked what in the world the trouble could be. Little Jack explained and now his brother began to laugh.



“Let me go to the palace and answer the questions for you,” said Lazy John. “I’m sure that I can save our bakery.”

When the sun reached its highest peak the following day, Lazy John entered the palace with a smile spread across his face.

“Have you answers to my questions?” asked the king.

“Yes, Sire,” said Lazy John. “Good answers, each one.”

“Excellent,” replied the king. “Remember what will happen if you fail. Let’s begin. First, you must tell me how much I am worth.”

“Twenty-nine pieces of silver,” said the twin. “Our Lord was sold for thirty pieces and you are worth one less.”

“A good answer,” conceded the king. “Now tell me how much the moon weighs.”

“It weighs one pound, Your Worship.”

“One pound? Why only one pound?” demanded the king.

“Because, Sire, it has four quarters, and four quarter-pounds make one whole pound.”

“Very well,” said the king. “You are twice right. But in order to save your bakery, you must tell me what I’m thinking.”

“That is easiest, of all, my King. You are thinking that I’m Little Jack, the baker, but you are wrong. I’m his brother, Lazy John!”

The king realized that he had been tricked by the cleverest of men and began to laugh. He gave Lazy John a handsome reward and sent him home. The twin brothers kept their bakery for many long and happy years.

Pleasant DeSpain
Thirty-Three Multicultural Tales to Tell
August House