

## How Jupiter Granted a Wish

by Carolyn Sherwin Bailey

Each of the villagers in a town of Phrygia heard a knock at the door of his cottage one summer day in the long-ago time of the myths. Each, on opening it, saw two strangers, weary travellers, who sought food and a shelter for the night.

It was a part of the temple teachings that a man should succor a stranger, no matter how humble, but these Phrygians were a pleasure-loving, careless people, neglectful of hospitality and of their temple, even, which had fallen into decay.

So it happened that the same retort met the strangers at whatever door they stopped.

"Be off! We have only sufficient food for ourselves and no room for any but members of our own family."

There was not a single door but was shut in the faces of these travellers.

The afternoon was passing and it would soon be dusk. The strangers, tired and half famished, climbed a hill on the edge of the village and came at last upon a little cottage set there among the trees. It was a very poor and humble cottage, thatched with straw, and barely large enough for the two old peasants, Philemon and his wife, Baucis, who lived there. But it opened at once when the strangers knocked to let in the two strangers.

"We have come to-day from a far country," the one who seemed to be the older of the two explained.

"And we have not touched food since yesterday," added the younger one who might have been his son.

"Then you are welcome to whatever we have to offer you," said Philemon. "We are as poor as the birds that nest in the straw of our eaves, but my old wife, Baucis, can prepare a meal from very little which may perhaps serve you if you are hungry. Come in, and share with us whatever we have."

The two guests crossed the humble threshold, bowing their heads in order to pass beneath the low lintel, and Baucis offered them a seat and begged them to try and feel at home.

The day had grown chilly and the old woman raked out the coals from the ashes, covered them with leaves and dry bark, and blew the fire into flame with her scanty breath. Then she brought some split sticks and dry branches from a corner where she had kept them like a treasure and put them under the kettle that hung over the fire. Afterward, she spread a white cloth on the table.

As Baucis made these preparations, Philemon went out to their small garden and gathered the last of the pot-herbs. Baucis put these to boil in the kettle and Philemon cut a piece from their last fitch of bacon and put it in to flavor the herbs. A bowl carved from beech wood was filled with warm water that the strangers might be refreshed by bathing their faces, and then Baucis tremblingly made the preparations for serving the meal.

The guests were to sit on the only bench which the cottage afforded and Baucis laid a cushion stuffed with seaweed on it and over the cushion she spread a piece of embroidered cloth, ancient and coarse, but one that she used only on great occasions. One of the legs of the table was shorter than the other, but Philemon placed a flat stone under it to make it level, and Baucis rubbed sweet smelling herbs over the entire top of the table. Then she placed the food before the strangers, the steaming, savory herbs, olives from the wild trees of Minerva, some sweet berries preserved in vinegar, cheese, radishes, and eggs cooked lightly in the ashes. It was served in earthen dishes and beside the guests stood an earthenware pitcher and two wooden cups.

There could hardly have been a more appetizing supper, and the kindly cheer of the two old peasants made it seem even more delectable. The guests ate hungrily and when they had emptied the dishes Baucis brought a bowl of rosy apples and a comb of wild honey for dessert. She noticed that the two seemed to be enjoying their milk hugely and it made her anxious, for the pitcher had not been more than half full. They filled their cups again and again and drained them.

"They will finish the milk and ask for more," Baucis thought, "and I have not another drop."

Then a great fear and awe possessed the old woman. She peered over the shoulder of the older of the strangers into the pitcher and saw that it was brimming full! He poured from it for his companion and it was again full to overflowing as he set it down. Here was a miracle, Baucis knew. Suddenly the strangers rose and their disguise of age and travel stained garments fell from them. They were Jupiter, the king of the gods, and his winged son, Mercury!

Baucis and Philemon were struck with terror as they recognized their heavenly guests, and they fell on their knees at the gods' feet. With their shaking hands clasped they implored the gods to pardon them for their poor entertainment.

They had an old goose which they tended and cherished as the guardian of their cottage, and now they felt that they must kill it as a sacrifice and offering to Jupiter and Mercury. But the goose ran nimbly away from them and took refuge between the gods themselves.

"Do not slay the bird," Jupiter commanded. "Your hospitality has been perfect. But this inhospitable village shall pay the penalty for its lack of reverence. You alone shall remain unpunished. Come and look at the valley below."

Baucis and Philemon left the cottage and hobbled a little way down the hill with the gods. In the last light of the setting sun they saw the destruction which the people below had brought upon themselves. There was nothing left of the village. All the valley was sunk in a blue lake, the borders of it being wild marsh land indented with pools in which the fen-birds waded and called shrilly.

"There is no house left save ours," Philemon gasped.

Then, as they turned, they saw that their cottage, also, had disappeared. It had not been destroyed, though. It was transformed. Stately marble columns had taken the place of the wooden corner posts. The thatch had grown yellow and was now a golden roof. There were colored mosaic floors and wide silver doors with ornaments and carvings of gold. Their little hut, that had been scarcely large enough for two, had grown to the height and bulk of a temple whose gilded spires reached up toward the sky. Baucis and Philemon were too awed for words, but Jupiter spoke to them.

"What further gift of the gods would you like, good people? Ask whatever you wish and it shall be granted you."

The two old folks consulted for a moment and then Philemon made their request of Jupiter.

"We would like to be the guardians of your temple, great Jupiter. And since we have passed so much of our lives here in harmony and love, we wish that we might always remain here and never be parted for a moment."

As Philemon finished speaking, he heard Jupiter say, "Your wish is granted." And with these words the gods disappeared from earth. There was a long trail of purple light in the sky like Jupiter's robe, and beside it lay two wing-shaped clouds which marked the road Mercury had taken, but that was all.

Baucis and Philemon went into the temple and were its keepers as long as they were able. One day in the spring when the old couple had become very ancient indeed they stood on the temple steps side by side, looking at the new green the earth was putting forth. In that moment another miracle happened to them.

Each grew straight instead of bent with age, and their garments were covered with green leaves. A leafy crown grew upon the head of each and as they tried to speak, a covering of bark prevented them. Two stately trees, the linden and the oak, stood beside the temple door to guard it in the place of the two good old people who, for their reverence, had been thus transformed by the gods.

Source:

Bailey, Carolyn Sherwin. "How Jupiter Granted a Wish." *Wonder Stories*. Springfield: Milton Bradley Company, 1920. 181 – 188. Electronic.