

THE FOLK TALE OF THE LITTLE SPANISH COBBLER

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THERE ONCE lived a little old Spanish cobbler named Carlos in Barcelona, which is a city in Spain, as you know. He made and repaired shoes, which is what cobblers do, as you know. His clients were mostly the poor and hardworking men and women of Barcelona, and their poor children. One beautiful spring morning a young man entered his shop, which was on a cobblestone street, and asked Carlos how much it would cost to have his shoes repaired. When he took a close look at the young man's shoes, Carlos replied, "One gold crown, three silver pennies, and a piece of copper." The young man didn't blink an eye and gave the cobbler the money upfront, which means beforehand, as you know. You see, the old cobbler was actually a wise man, and he could tell that the young man was a very wealthy French prince, because his shoes were so well made, even though he was dressed in ordinary attire, because he didn't want to draw attention to himself, which means he didn't want people to recognize that he was a very wealthy French prince, as you know. The young man asked Carlos when he should return to pick up his shoes, and the little cobbler replied in a fortnight, which is two weeks, as you know. Then the young prince left the shop without saying another word.

Right away Carlos set about repairing the prince's shoes. He used the finest leather and sheepskin in the world, and the most costly gold thread, and he labored and labored nonstop, which means night and day, as you know, for two weeks until the shoes were in perfect condition, even better than when they had been brand new.

When the young prince returned he asked Carlos for his shoes, because several important foreign ambassadors were to have an audience with him in the Spanish castle in Barcelona later that same day, which means they were to see him, as you know. Carlos handed the French prince his shoes and asked him if the shoes were to his liking. After looking them over inside and outside and from all sides, the young man was pleased by the workmanship, so he gave the old cobbler three gold crowns, nine silver pennies, and three pieces of copper more as a tip, much as waitresses receive a handsome tip when they have performed especially good service, as you know. Carlos accepted the money, and the wealthy French prince left the shop wearing the mended shoes, which were in perfect condition, even better than when they had been brand new, as you know.

One week later, when Carlos was hard at work making a set of clogs for a poor client, who walks into his shop but the rich French prince? The little cobbler only looked up from his labors and asked the young man if he could help him. The prince replied, "I am the Prince of Orleans, soon to inherit the throne of the King of France. When I am crowned King at the palace in Versailles next month, I would like to employ you as my royal cobbler, because you do the finest and best work in your profession. I will pay you a handsome salary." But Carlos only said, "Good Prince, I am but an old cobbler working in my humble shop here in Barcelona. My clients are all poor like myself, and before you came to me, I had never received more than two pieces of copper to mend a pair of old shoes, and one silver penny to make the

finest pair of new shoes. I thank you for your kind offer, but I am content with my life here." "And if I pay you as much as your heart desires? Then will you join me in Versailles and be my royal cobbler?" the prince persisted. "Young man, surely you are most generous, but I am quite at home here in my little shop," answered the wise man graciously but unmoved. "What can I do to make you change your mind?" asked the young prince, who really wanted to employ this skilled old cobbler. "If you can make it rain five thousand buckets of gold crowns, fifteen thousand buckets of silver pennies, and five thousand buckets of copper pieces on the homes of the poor inhabitants of this town of Barcelona, I will go with you and be your royal cobbler." The rich young prince thought for a minute and realized that all of his great riches would be spent on the poor of Barcelona if he did what Carlos asked, so he turned and went away with a sad heart. He could not part with his vast wealth.

REMEMBER, children, fine workmanship is like a gift from God, and even the richest prince on earth cannot buy such a gift. And if he could, he would have to give all that he possessed to obtain it, and then he would have given away all his earthly wealth to the poor, which he would never do, because he is too attached to material things.

A poet by vocation, some 800 of Alan Lindgren's poems have seen publication. He has also published fairytales and folk tales, short stories, essays, five biographies, and an autobiography. Alan is also a gifted sculptor, a student of anthroposophy, and a painter and classical pianist. Alan wrote this folk tale for his novel, Michael and Los Angeles.

