
Las mentiras más gordas

The biggest lies · Illustrated English reading



An English translation of the Spanish story published on the website, to support reading and listening.

Read the Spanish story first, or use this translation alongside it.
The accompanying vocabulary and practice sheets are separate.
The impossible events are part of the young man's invented tale.

Marián Guitián · Learning the Cervantes Language

The king's strange competition

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A capricious king, who spent all day thinking up extravagant ideas, gave the strangest order in the world. He sent word to every corner of his kingdom that he would marry his daughter, the princess, to whoever could tell the biggest lies.

Since this world, to the misfortune of the few who always tell the truth, is full to overflowing with lies and liars, so many suitors came to the palace that there was no way to shelter and feed them all while they waited their turn.

They told the biggest lies they could imagine, but the king accepted none of them as his son-in-law. He was fed up with the little lies they kept telling him, one after another. Such lies were not worthy of the reward that a king as important as he wished to give. The prize was so great, he said, that the lies should be at least as great.

For quite some time, the competition was the talk of the whole kingdom. Eventually the news reached a modest hut in a small, remote mountain village, where a very clever young man lived in poverty with his widowed mother.

The young man asked his mother for permission to go to the palace. She agreed, gave him her blessing and packed the little food she had left as a snack for his journey.

After several days on the road, he reached the palace and asked to see the king. The king was already so tired of hearing small lies that he said at once: "Speak, and tell some really big lies! If you come with little lies like the others, you will receive a punishment instead of a prize."



Fishing in the air

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The young man began: “If Your Majesty listens carefully, you will hear what happened to me. My father was fond of fishing in the air from the top of a tree. One day he was up in the enormous holm oak in our village. He cast his line far into the air and immediately felt a great weight on the other end.

“I helped him pull, because it was so heavy, and we hauled in seven donkeys and two rams caught on the hook. I did not want to take the donkeys home empty-handed, so we found an anthill, skinned fourteen ants, tanned their skins there and then, and filled them with honey until they were ready to burst.

“The skins were so large and heavy that carrying them rubbed the skin off the donkeys’ backs, so I took them to a vet. The vet told me to put poultices of cooked broad beans on them. I did so, and imagine my surprise when I went to see them the next day: a broad-bean plant was growing out of each donkey’s backside! The plants were so huge and leafy that I harvested a hundred fanegas of broad beans.

“I did not know what to do with so many beans. Then I found out that they were selling at a good price that year, because none had grown anywhere nearby. So I went to sell them in a neighbouring village and exchanged them for their weight in gold.

“In one village I saw some men sweating and struggling to roll a quail’s egg with a lever. I traded fifty fanegas of beans for the egg and took it to my aunt, who had a broody hen, so she could put it underneath the hen.”

Fanega: a traditional Spanish measure used here for an amount of grain or beans. Its size varied; it has been retained rather than converted into bushels.



A tree with wings

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“As soon as she put the egg under the hen, a shoot appeared. In a few minutes it became a tree with wings. The tree flapped its wings and shot upwards, growing and growing until it reached the sky. I climbed up its branches and reached the sky too, but I felt rather strange there.

“Then Saint Peter came out to see what was happening. As soon as I saw him, I asked about my uncle, who lives in the street of the shoemakers. Saint Peter told me he was in the market square, selling the watermelons he had made in his shoe factory the day before. So I came down from the sky to speak to my uncle, and...”

“Enough, enough, enough!” cried the king. “There is nobody else on earth who could tell bigger lies than yours. You have won the prize and will marry my daughter, on one condition: from now on, you must never tell another lie in your life.”

Those who knew him say that he kept his word. He married the king’s daughter and, just as he had never told a lie before, he never told another one again.

