DANILLO NONSUCH

Once there were two brothers who lived in a village and were married the two of them. The elder brother was hardworking, broad awake and well-off, so – Godspeed! whatever work he settled down to came off well; but he had no children. As for the younger brother, he was poor. He and his good luck missed each other most of the time, as he was lazy, lackadaisical and always played fast and loose; and on top of it he had no end of children! This indigent man's wife was painstaking and genial, the rich one's, a tight-fisted curmudgeon! For they met half way, as the saying goes, every man with his shrew. The needy brother – may he be in need of sins, so God help him! – had a pair of oxen to tend in his manger, uncommonly good ones too: milky hided, young, tall-legged, with healthy pointed horns and their tales ended in ginger tufts of hair to match the ginger beauty-spots crowning the front of their heads – stout, bony oxen, the best kind of draught animals ready to take you as far as you could wish them to take you. But plough iron, harrow, wheel-barrow, sleigh, cart, double-carriage pole and shaft he had none, neither had he a sickle, rake, cudgel, fork of his own, or any of the gear that no settled farmer can do without. For he was absolutely no good. And whenever he needed any of the above-mentioned tools, he turned to other people whom he was always pestering, and especially to his brother who had everything handy. The wife of the rich brother was hard upon him every so often having set her mind to free him from his pest of a brother. He'd have her saying to him:

"Brother or no brother, every loaf of bread has its price."

"Come on, what can you do, woman, blood won't turn to water in a brother's veins!"

At this his wife had no further saying, she just shut up and chewed on her own useless wisdom. But it so happened that his cart, especially, was on travelling wheels all the time. Every other day she'd have Danillo, her brother in law, knocking on her door and asking to borrow the cart: one day it was for bringing faggots from the wood, the next but one to fetch flour from the mill, or to load the haystacks from a remote meadow, now for this, now for that with no end to it.

"Listen to me, brother," the elder said to the younger, one day; "I've had enough of our brotherhood!... You've got your oxen, why don't you get a cart as well for yourself? You've unrigged mine completely. Rattle here! Rattle-rattle there! – that's the way to break a cart down. So, you know how they say : "Come on, priest, give out your spurs then clap toes when they're gone."

"What – what else could I do, brother?"

"Let me tell you what you can do, right away: your oxen are big, fat and fine; why don't you take them to the fair , sell them and buy a pair of smaller, cheaper ones, then use the money you've saved to buy a cart? There you are, you'll be a settled man this way."

"I say, this doesn't sound like a bad idea at all ! It's the right thing to do."

So saying, he went home, tied the oxen with a rope and drove them to the fair. But, I've told you what kind of careless guy he surely was, who'd let the dogs eat all he had in his sack and did whatever he had to do the other way round. The fair was rather far and the transactions almost over by the time he set out to go there. But – who could stand in the way of Danillo Nonsuch? (for this was his nickname, the only addition he'd brought to his own household himself). He stuck the sheepskin cap on his crown, drew it over his ears thoroughly which made him feel happy as a dog with two tails, full of Mr. Laffs and as happy as Harry.

Driving forward to the fair his own Buck and Butch, the oxen, just as he was climbing a long, never-ending hill, he saw another man coming from the fair with a new cart that he'd just bought and was now making his way with it down-hill bare handed, dogging it down, then skinning it up.

"Hey! Wait a minute, friend," said our man with the oxen, who kept tugging at the tethering rope eager to reach the lush knot-grass growing by the side of the road. "Stop your cart a little while. I've a word with you."

"I wish I could stop but it won't let me, d'ye see what I mean? What's your word with me, then?"

"I say, this cart of your'n sure does case it 'round with no draught animal whatso'm'ever, and no question."

"It does, don't it, now? No draught beast nor all."

"Man, d'ye know summ'at?"

"Well, why don't yee tell me?"

"Let's strike a deal: you giv' me the cart, I giv' thee my oxen. I'm through worrying my brains off about 'em, fetching 'em hay, driving t'em to pasture, guarding them against the bad wolf and what not…I reckon I c'n manage to draw a cart behind me, can't I – all the more so as it courses undraught by no horses."

"Come off it man, you're kidding."

'No kidding," said Danillo.

"Come then, I can see you're an up-and-comer," said the man with the cart; "you've found me in my jollies; more luck to your elbow, man. God bless thy cart and my oxen!"

Then he trades off his cart for Danillo's oxen, takes them along up the hill, heading for the nearest forest, and gets lost from everyone's sight as fast as he can make it. Now the former, our Danillo, says to himself: "Keep it down and take the knock; I've had him! If only he wouldn't change

his mind; but he didn't look at all like the gypsy who'll take his word back, did he now?"

Then he takes his own cart and foots it down the hill and back home.

"Halt! mad cart and take it easy! Make sure to barrel it so when I load you up with sacks from the mill or with hay from the meadow!"

And he had a tough time keeping the cart put behind him on the road. But after a while the valley drew to an end and a hill stood right in front of him; so, try as he may, there was no drawing the cart up-hill. Screech here! Heave there! The cart obstinately pulled back.

"Here's your cart for you, Danillo, boy!"

Then he strains himself and moves it to one side of the road, props it up, gets astride the shaft and takes to thinking .

"I say – don't call me Nonsuch if I haven't given away the two oxen to get myself a cart or have I? Danillo or no Danillo, all this beats me."

Meanwhile he saw a man hurrying to the fair with a goat he was going to sell.

"Wait, friend," Danillo called, "why don't you give me your goat in exchange for this here cart?"

"Well, I don't know, my goat is not of the balky sort and it gives a lot of milk."

"Be that as it may, just you take the cart and give me the goat!"

The man with the goat did not hum and haw over it, but gave the goat and took the cart. Then he waited for other carts to come, tied his cart at their back and off he went to his home, leaving Danillo gaping for wonder.

"All the way," Nonsuch said to himself. "I've taken the man with the goat for a good ride, haven't I?"

Then he pulled the rope with the goat to the fair. But goats will be goats; it jerked and tugged at the rope so resolutely that Danillo grew fed up with her in no time.

"I wish I were at the fair sooner," Nonsuch was thinking "to rid me of this untoward beast."

And as he wended on, here came another man returning from the fair with a goose under one arm.

"Hi and welcome, my good man," Danillo called out to him.

"Hi to you too, blessed be the Lord!"

"Won't you strike a swapping bargain with me, friend? I could give you my goat and you could give me your goose, what'd yee say?"

"Snap! You're wrong, man: this isn't a goose, it's a gander and I've bought 'im for his seed."

"Giv'm to me, giv'm to me! And you shall have another good seed in exchange."

"I might giv'm to you if you'd add summ'at in the bargain; or else, more luck to the geese back home: there's gonna be a good turking in me

backyard to make'm geese quack and chime through the neighborhood and the townland."

So they haggle and higgle, a Roland for an Oliver and in the end Nonsuch marries off the goat! Then he grabs the gander and is off for the fair again. Once at the fair, the gander turned all the geese off and they quacked together at the top of their voices: quack, quack, quack, quack, quack!

"Now I'm in for it again: I've got rid of the deuce and grabbed hold of the dickens: this chap will rend my ears! But I'll wed you off too, and no question, you pettifogger!"

So, passing by a purse peddler he gives up the gander in exchange for one purse he had on display, with a long string to tie it around the neck. He takes the purse, turns it in his hands, left and right, then says to himself:

"Well, I never – from the pair of fine, fair oxen so good to look at – here I am stuck with an empty purse on my hands. Tut-tut! Tut-tut! Get going, you numskull, move on, you're no novice, or are you? I sure had the devil o' top o' me all this bargaining day, that's for sure."

Then he tromped and dallied around for some time in the fair and finally got himself home. When he arrived in his village he went straight to his brother's home to give him the good news.

"Good-day to you, brother!"

"Welcome, our Danillo! Ye sure were long at the fair, weren't you now?"

"Oh, well, I would be long, too, brother; I set out in a hurry and found out soon enough how to tarry."

"Well, what's the news you're bringing home from the fair, man?"

"Not too good news, no, I'm afreed! My poor good oxen've vanished as if eaten up by the wolves."

"What – have they met with the beasts of the forest, or did you have them stolen from you?"

"Nope – I gave 'em away with mee own right hand, brother."

Then he told all his tale, marked the places he'd been and the things that had happened, leaving naught out and added:

"So, to cut a long story short, I'm now left with a string-purse instead o' my oxen; and even this purse smacks of the wild desert, dear brother."

"Yee'r' a reg'lar duffer, now, dont' ye' now, man, you are it!"

"Right and so, dear brother, so things ha' been wi' me, they have – but from now on I could just hit the right nail on the head. Only, what's the good o' it at all? Be sharp as a needle and poor as a church mouse then have money to burn an' no matches ?! Here – take this purse from me as a present, I don't need it. An' I beg you for heaven's sake lend me your cart an' your oxen jus' one more time to bring to my wife an' my kids some faggots from off in the forest, 'cause they've gone with no fire in the stove for some time now! Then, glory be to God in 'is mercy, I'll not trouble you again – ever, for sure."

"Well, be blowed!" said his brother when Danillo had had his say. "I can see how the Dear Lor' filled the world up wi' all sorts of bunglers for lack o' no betters! Here: I'll give you the cart one more time but then yee gonna see the last of it, that's fo' sure."

Danillo doesn't wait to hear the same words twice. He takes the cart now with the oxen, too, from his brother and gets going. Once arrived in the forest, he sets his eyes on a tree, but the biggest tree he could sight in that forest, and drives the cart right by its side; and he starts hitting at it with his axe the sooner to fell it, without unyoking the oxen, with a mind to have the trunk fall right into the cart's enclosure. Danillo would be the Nonsuch in every job he did! He was at it some time, hitting and hitting his axe at the tree's trunk when, with a big cracking sound the tree crashed on top of the cart and crushed the oxen to pieces!

"I say! Now I've ruined my brother's property too, and he can whistle for his oxen. Much good may good do and bad is the best: if Danillo puts his foot in it, then Danillo must set things right. Come now, let's to my brother's in case I c'n manage to rope him in to lend me his mare, too, then shall I ride on wi' it into the wide-wide world for good and let me children an' wife in the care of the Preserver."

So saying, he sets out and while going he got lost in the forest. He trudged and plodded and reeled and waded but instead of lighting upon the road out of the forest he comes upon a pond and, spotting some moorhens in the water he throws his axe at them with a mind to kill one or two if he could and take it as a gift to his beloved brother… But the moorhens who were neither dim-sighted nor lifeless flew away; the axe sank and Nonsuch remained bare handed.

"Dear me! I have been low on luck today, I have! It did go hard with me! I guess someone's licked with the rough side of their tongue at me!"

Then he started out again shrugging his shoulders; he footed it for yet another while and eventually fell in upon the track. Then he did some more leg work and diddy-bop! he got to his own village and his brother's gate where he was up, blew hot and cold and said:

"Dear brother, do me one more good turn: lend me your mare to drive the oxen forth on its back as it's rained hard in the forest and what wi' the slime an' the ice on the ground there, I c'n hardly stand, let alone lead the oxen."

"Swounds!" said his brother, "You must be of the monk's kin, not fit to live the worldly life among people, to pester everyone and bring your wife and children into trouble an' more trouble. Oh be off! Haul ass and mare and be off to Jericho! I'd like to be done with you for ever an' a day!"

Mare, did he say? Just you give her in Danillo's trust an' he'll lead her to pasture: I'll have her beg forgiveness from the oxen and wish a good day to the cart. Then he stepped through the door, grabbed the mare and the axe on his way out and busted. It took his brother some time to see what was hap-

pening, and then he woke up to find the mare had gone. By this time, Nonsuch had already reached the pond in the forest trying to find his axe. Here, it dawned on him that he might be fit for a monk, as his brother had told him.

"I'm gonna put up a monastery here to make everyone wonder far and wide," he said.

And he sets to his task. First he makes a cross and thrusts it into the ground to mark the site. Then he goes searching through the wood for the right trunks: this will do for the corner pillars, that one will do for the foundation, this one's very good for the beams, that one for the piles and lintels and roof trestles, this would just do for the taps and tocsin. And as he went on like this he lit upon a devil who'd come up fresh from the pond's waters.

"Hey, what d'ye think you're doing here, man?"

"Can't you see for yourself?"

"No, no, no – stop! Don't tamper with this whereabout: the pond, the site and the forest on it are ours."

"So you'd have it that the grouse on the water as well as the axe at the bottom o' this pond here are yours, aren't they? I'm gonna teach a lesson to such as you, cloven-footed lot, who *will* become masters of the things that belong to our own world!"

Seeing he could not make Danillo change his plans, the devil dived into the pond: plop! to give the news to the Old Gooseberry about God's own man who'd taken to the ways of the dickens. What could the devils do now? They stood in consultation for some time and the Old Gooseberry, the devils' captain, saw it fit to send one of them up with a buffalo-skin barrel filled with coins destined for the anchorite Danillo, to send him packing.

"Here, take this lucre, man!" said the devil sent on this errand; "and fly the coop, or else you'll catch it!"

"You don't know how happy you are, you bunch of scurvy imps, as I'm so fond of money nor better than asceticism, or else you'd catch it hot!"

To which the devil answers:

"Don't you thumb your nose at the emperor of hell; just grab the dough and see to your own business."

So he leaves the money behind and returns under the pond's waters where he finds the Old Gooseberry in his doldrums having lost such a big treasure that he could have used otherwise to gain souls to his side.

Meanwhile, Nonsuch was racking his brains to find a way of seeing the money safely in his own home.

"Good!" Danillo said. "That's not really out of the way. Just you take to building monasteries if you would have the devils pay heed to you and come bringing you heaps of money on the nail to make you a rich man!"

Just as he was fretting about the ways to take the money back home, he had another devil appear before him who said:

"Well, man, my master has changed his mind; he wishes us to contend for the money and if you prove to have the more might of the two, you can take the money and go."

" I guess I'm in for it now," Danillo thought to himself and sighed. But, as the saying goes: first get flush then sure be brainy, and every young man is ever so handsome. Danillo had gained in wits, too.

"Prove the more might of the two, you're saying? Well and how's that to be?"

"I'll tell you: first and foremost we'll race around the pond each with your mare on his back, three times, without putting it down or stopping to catch our breath all through the race – and whoever comes off first can take the money."

And having said this, the devil grabs the mare, hoists it on his back and circles the pond three times in a tick. Nonsuch didn't really feel at his ease to see such might and main as the devil had shown, but he didn't lose heart and said:

"Why, brownie! I thought you'd be stronger than that! Fancy your taking the mare up on your back! I'll show you somm'at greater: I'll take her tight between my legs," and so saying he circled the pond thrice never even catching his breath.

The devil was seized with wonder but found nothing to say so he proposed another contest.

"Now let's see who runs faster," said he.

"What, are you thinking of outrunning me, me of all people, brownie?"

"Yea, why not?"

"Come here an' I'll show whom you'd better outrun!"

Then he goes with the devil to a nearby field of maze stubble where he sees a sleeping rabbit which he shows to the devil saying:

"Can you see a wee little someone crouching over there?"

"I can."

"That's my youngest child. Get ready: when I wake him up you'll have to follow him." So he starts crying: "oo! ta! na! na! na! ..."

Then the rabbit up and tears out running and the devil follows. They run and they run and in good time the devil lost trace of the rabbit. Danillo had been everybody's laughing stock formerly, but now he was going to make the devil his own game. While Danillo cracked his face haw-hawing at the devil's dumbness, here comes the devil way back under his breath.

"My, you sure have a swift-footed, jaunty child, let me tell you! Just as I was about to lay hold of him, I lost his trace and clear off, Dopey!"

"He takes after his begetter, and no question, the chickadee," Danillo assented. "So? D'ye still wish to outrun me?"

"No, thanks, no go! Let's wrestle, rather."

"Wrestle ? Fancy that! Unless you wish to give up the ship. I say! I took it that devils were no fatheads, or so say the elders; but you, I can see

one of these days you'll wake up dead like the numskull you are. Listen! I've got an uncle o' mine, 999 years and 52 weeks of age; and if ye can put him down first, then ye can measure up to me too, but I guess ye'll have what you want an' enough vying with him directly."

So saying he set out leading the way and motioned the devil to follow. There was a bears' lair deep in the forest, under some crags, that Nonsuch had chanced upon while looking, as the anchorite he was, for wild plant tendrils and strawberries. When they approached the place, Danillo said:

"Here's my uncle's good dwelling. Get in; you shall find him sleeping in the ash with his nose on the embers. Talking he can do none, as he's gone toothless and with no grinders for over one thousand years now."

When biding his time, the devil will do you know what… He enters the lair and starts moving the tip of his curly tail with the devilish tuft under the uncle's nose. This was enough of an invitation for the bruin who dashed out of the lair in his tantrums, taking hold of the devil, then pressing him so hard that he nearly squeezed the life out of him, making his eyes bulge forth as big as sprouting onions.

"Hah! Little did he think he'd find his pair here," Danillo said, while watching the scuffle from afar, being over the moon with laughter. But some way or another the devil came scot free from the tight embrace of the bruin's paws. Directly he saw that the devil had got off, Danillo pretended to help him out.

"Man, there's no use making a long arm now. If you knew the kind of tough uncle you had, why did you ask me to fight him in the first place?"

"How now? Didn't you like the spar? Come an' fight with me, too!"

"I sure will compete with you and you only – but it's going to be a shrieking competition: whichever of us shrieks the louder let him take the money."

"Fine," said Danillo to himself "an' I'll pick you the rightest shriek that's all right for you, I will. Listen now, bownie, you give the first shriek, I'm dying to hear it."

Upon which the devil straddles one leg to the west, one to the east, lifts his arms and grabs the sky's handles tightly, opens a big, gaping mouth and when he pushes his stentorian shriek forth, he gets the earth shaking, the valleys resounding, the sea spuming and foaming and sending a wave of fear along the spine of all the fish; the devils pop out of the pond waters in legions without number and the sky's canopy all but burst in pieces over the margins. But Danillo remained sitting on the money barrel, trying to stay sober and said:

"Well, chum, is that all the shrieking force you can muster? I think I haven't heard a sound. Do it again!"

The devil gives an ever more powerful shriek.

"I still couldn't hear anything. Shriek once again, will ye?"

The devil shrieks a third time, but so hard, you might imagine something had snapped deep in his chest.

"No way! I couldn't hear the tiniest bit of sound this time either...It's my own turn, now, isn't it?"

"Look here: ye gonna go deaf and feel your brains bursting in you skull when I do my shrieking. So – mark me well, I have some kind advice for you if you will listen."

"What's your advice?"

"Here: let me tie a scarf over your eyes and ears if you love life."

"Come on, tie anything you think fit but save my life!"

So Danillo ties a thick woolly scarf tightly over the eyes and ears of the devil, as for the "blind man's buff"; then he gets hold of a good solid-oak club, for, anchorite or no anchorite, he still put his trust in the club rather than the cross – and he goes crack! swatting the right temple of the devil.

"Ouuuch! Enough! Dear me, stop shrieking!"

"Oh no – keep in place, Old Lad! You shrieked thrice, I'll do the same. Bang! Here's the portion for the left one!"

"Ouch! Enough!"

"It's not enough." And he fetches the devil one more blow in the name of the Father.

"Ouch-eee!" howled the devil and, eye-tied as he was, moaning continuously and crawling with pain like a serpent, he plunged into the pond and told the Old Gooseberry of all that had happened and said it was not a whit easy, no sir, to cope with that there sorcerer.

Meanwhile Danillo was sighing many a deep sigh by the side of the money barrel trying hard to find a way of seeing it safely home. Right then a third devil came up to him holding the biggest mace that could be in his hand; he flung it down on the ground and said:

"Well, my man, let's see how good you are this time: whichever of us two throws this mace higher up in the air, he shall have this money barrel all to himself."

"My precious," Danillo thought to himself, "you're in for trouble again."

But they say the needful grow wide awake from being in need. Danillo was so, too.

"Why don't you throw it first, devil?"

Upon which the devil grabs the mace by its stem and, on throwing it, it goes so high up that it gets lost from sight completely; then it was a matter of three days and three nights for it to return, fall down and sink into the ground, but sink so deep that it reached the bottom and made the core of the earth shake all over!

"Now you throw it," grinned the big-mouthed devil.

"I shan't be late in throwing it, don't worry, but first you bring it back to the surface as you had it yourself."

The devil complies and brings it forth.

"Buck up and make haste, man, I've no time to spare…"

"Don't press me so, Tartar! You don't have your children pullin' at the strings of your'n apron, do you?"

The devil stops pressing, as he's got no choice.

Eftsoon the day shied away from the face of the earth. The sky was clear and the shiny evening stars made smiling eyes at the lesser glittering starlets, while the moon, looming from behind the hills in the distance swayed free in the breeze and high air, shedding its light all about on the ground.

"I say, aren't you goin' to throw that mace up, man, or are you now?"

"Oh yes, I am. Only, let me tell you, you can say good by to your mace as you're gonna see the last of it in a moment."

"Why?"

"Well, here's why: can you spot those dark blotches on the face of the moon?"

"I can."

"There live my brothers of the harp farm. And they're in great need of iron to shoe their horses. See how they're waving at me? They're waving for this here mace; and he barely finishes saying this then reaches out for the mace."

"Stop, you mad-cap, this mace is an heirloom from our forefather; and we won't trade it in for anything in the whole world over." So he up and snatches the mace from Danillo's hands, dashing into the pond to tell the Old Gooseberry about the mace's close call.

At that, the Old Gooseberry fretted and fumed, then summoned the entire devilish lot before him: he stamped his foot at them and yelled:

"Make sure one of you volunteers right here and now to go cursing this terrible rascalish fiend very thoroughly and with no delay!"

Directly he had one show himself up, shaking all over.

"All hail, your vileness! I shall go carry out your unlawfulsome orders."

"Go, then! And if you're skillful enough to succeed, you shall get your promotion."

So the devil set out breathing rage and in no time arrived before Danillo the anchorite.

"Hey, man," said the devil. "You sure've been givin' the toughest of times t'all the devilry; but now you'll have it coming, too : I'll frighten the soul out of you before you could say Jack Robinson! Let's call curses at each other, and whichever of us proves more skillful at it shall get the money!"

And in a trice, the devil took to croaking and spell-casting but so thoroughly doing that one of Danillo's eyes snapped in his head. Poor Nonsuch! He will have been doomed to pay for the sins of his brother's mare, of the goat, of the betrothed gander and of the oxen killed in the forest. Or he

will've been suddenly hit, poor man, by the curse of the geese he'd deprived of their gander!

Dear Lord – how much suffering is in store for a true anchorite who undertakes to part ways with all worldly passion and set his heart only on good deeds! …Nonsuch the anchorite was on the worst terms now with the devil… For, come to think: what tenderer bodily part is there beside the eye? Danillo throbbed with unbearable pain, still, no matter how excruciating the pain was, he took his heart between the teeth and said:

"Don't give me this kind o' tricks, you befouled demon, you! There's no fright'ning me! I'll make you bite your hands an' remember me by my name for ever an' a day!"

"Come on! Stop jawing and let's see your own good set words now! I'm dyin' to see you calling curses on me!"

"Just you put the barrel of money on your back then go straight to my place 'cause the good set words of my forefathers are not with me here. D'ye hear me?"

And, having said this, Danillo quickly mounts on the barrel; the devil then swoops up both on his back and flies on eagle's wing straight to the house of Danillo Nonsuch.

On seeing a buffalo flying on high, Danillo's children and his wife tore out in fear. But Danillo started calling their names, so, recognizing his voice, they stopped.

"Hark my dears, sons o' my flesh! Come to me soon and bring along the good set words of the forefathers! the spiked dog-collar and the carding combs!"

His flock of boys came pouring from all directions holding the good set words of the forefathers in their hands. It was now Danillo's turn to feel at home and in more luck than before.

"Take hold of this here guvnor and start cursing him as best you can an' make sure he steps high wide an' handsome."

You can trust children with giving the show to someone – they'll end up driving away the devil himself. They pounced upon their prey all in one and they hounded him down to Danillo's liking. So the devil took to yelling at the top of his voice; and struggling to escape from their hands all done up like a kipper he forgot about the money and the wager and had it away to the back of beyond, following his fellows.

As for Danillo, having no more differences to make up with anyone around him and holding his head above the water at last, he had his fill of everything, food and drink and fun, well into his old age, and lived long enough to see the sons of his own sons gathered around his table.

English version by
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