

A CLOAK FOR THE DREAMER

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Once there was a tailor who had three fine sons. The tailor loved his sons and appreciated their helpfulness.

Ivan, the oldest son, picked up all the pins from the floor of his father's shop and gathered all the little pieces of loose thread. Whenever he could, Ivan watched his father measure, cut, and sew. He wanted to be a tailor himself one day and work alongside his father,

Alex, the middle son, brought his father bolts of fabric to cut and then carefully put them away. Whenever he could, Alex practiced sewing together the small, leftover pieces of fabric. He, too, wanted to be a tailor and work alongside his father.

Misha, the youngest son, carried the finished jackets and cloaks and dresses to his father's customers all over town. Whenever he could, he stopped at the bookseller's shop around the corner. There, he poured over maps of the world and pictures of faraway places. Unlike his brothers, Misha did not want to be a tailor and work alongside his father. He dreamed instead of traveling far and wide, and of making his own way in the world.

One morning, the tailor gathered his three sons before him. "Now is the time," he said, "for each of you to show that you can do the work of a tailor.

"Our good customer, the Archduke, leaves on an important journey in just three days. For his journey, he has ordered three new cloaks for himself and three dresses for his wife. I can sew the dresses, but, to get the job done on time, each of you must make one cloak."

The sons were glad to help their father and listened carefully to his instructions.

"First of all," explained the tailor, "the Archduke wants his cloaks to be very colorful. Every bolt of fabric we have is of just one color, so each of you will have to cut pieces from many bolts and sew them into a single colorful cloth of your own design. Of course, the cloak

you fashion from your cloth will also have to protect the Archduke from the wind and the rain. Work by yourselves, so that all three cloaks will be different.” The sons got busy right away.

Ivan first studied the bolts of fabric. He had seen his father use them all at one time or another, so he cut a rectangle from each one. Then, using the pattern of bricks on the floor, Ivan carefully sewed the rectangles together. From this beautiful cloth of many colors, he fashioned a cloak for the Archduke. Ivan was ready on the morning of the third day to present the cloak to his father.

Meanwhile, Alex had thought of the colors of the Archduke’s carriage and the coat of arms that was painted on its side. He pulled down the bolts of red, yellow, and purple fabric and cut many squares from each bolt. He nimbly stitched the squares together to make one beautiful cloth of the Archduke’s colors, then fashioned the cloth into a sturdy cloak. Because of all his sewing practice, Alex worked quickly enough to have his cloak ready by the morning of the second day.

With a day to spare, Alex had time to worry. “Perhaps my cloak isn’t interesting enough,” he thought. “Perhaps the Archduke would want something more.” He thought again of the Archduke’s coat of arms and the pattern of its background. Then he went back to work.

Alex cut more red, yellow, and purple squares, but this time he snipped them in half on the diagonal. He sewed these triangles together to match the pattern on the Archduke’s coat of arms, and fashioned the new cloth into another cloak. Alex sewed even faster than he had the first time, and the second cloak was ready on the morning of the third day.

All the while, Misha was working, too. He thought of going out into the world as he cut circles from the bolts of fabric. He picked his colors from the maps he loved—blue for the deep oceans and winding rivers, green for the meadows of the countryside, yellow for the sands of the deserts, red for the routes between faraway places.

Misha sewed his circles together, carefully joining them where they met, and the cloth he made was beautiful. But when he held it up to the light, Misha saw that it was full of open spaces. He could tell this cloth wouldn’t make a proper cloak, but he did not have the time to start over. Misha completed it in time.

On the morning of the third day, when the tailor had sewn the last stitch on the third dress for the Archduke’s wife, he called for his sons to bring in their cloaks.

Ivan proudly showed his cloak of many-colored rectangles.

“You have made a beautiful cloak, Ivan,” said the tailor. “I am honored to present it to the Archduke. From now on, you will be a tailor, too, and work alongside your father.

Happy for his brother, but still unsure of his own work, Alex showed his two cloaks to his father,

“Why, Alex,” said the tailor, “you have made *two* beautiful cloaks! How thoughtful of you to use the Archduke’s own colors. He will be thrilled to wear these, I’m sure. And your quick, even stitches show me that you, too, are ready to be a tailor and work alongside your father.”

“Mow, Misha,” he said, turning to his youngest son, “let me see the cloak you have made.”

“I’m afraid I did not do it right, Father,” said Misha. He showed his cloak of circles and open spaces.

The tailor looked at his son’s cloak and, for a long time, said nothing. He was thinking of what his friend, the bookseller, had told him. Finally, he spoke.

“The cloak is beautiful, Misha,” said the tailor. “The colors remind me of deep oceans and winding rivers, green meadows and golden deserts, and the long routes between faraway places.

“But, it’s true that this cloak will not keep out the wind and the rain. We cannot sell it to the Archduke. Still,” he added, “no harm is done. Ivan and Alex have made the three cloaks we need.”

Then the tailor smiled at this youngest son. “Perhaps you were not meant to be a tailor,” he said. “But, you know that already, don’t you?”

“Yes, Father,” answered Misha.

“Then take these cloaks and dresses to the Archduke, and come back to get ready for your own journey. Tomorrow your brothers and I will send you off into the world.”

That night the tailor sat in his little shop, looking sadly at his third son’s beautiful, but useless, cloak. Though he knew Misha had to leave home, he hated to see him go. He knew Ivan and Alex felt just as bad as he did.

“If only we could give Misha something to protect him as he makes his own way in the world,” the tailor thought. He sat by the fire a little longer, and then he had an idea.

The tailor ran up the stairs and quietly woke Ivan and Alex. “I know what we can give Misha to take on his journey into the world,” whispered the tailor. “We can make him a new cloak from his own cloak of circles. That way, it will have all the colors of his dreams, but it will be sewn together in the practical way tailors sew things- and it will protect him from the wind and the rain.”

“But how, Father?” asked Ivan. “The circles won’t fit together.”

“I know, my son,” said the tailor. He motioned for his sons to follow him downstairs to the shop. There he explained how it could be done.

All night long the tailor and his two oldest sons worked on Misha’s cloak. Ivan snipped the circles apart, and his father trimmed them into hexagons. As his father cut, Alex quickly sewed the hexagons together to make one cloth of the dreamer’s colors. When the cloth was finished, the three tailors fashioned it into a strong and beautiful cloak. They stitched the last stitch as the sun came up on the day Misha was to leave home.

Later that morning, the tailor and his sons Ivan and Alex kissed and hugged Misha goodbye at the door of their little shop. Then they stood together and watched as the dreamer set off into the world, his beautiful cloak growing smaller and smaller in the distance.