

The Three Beggars

Walter De la Mare

'Twas autumn daybreak gold and wild,
While past St. Ann's grey tower they shuffled,
Three beggars spied a fairy-child
In crimson mantle muffled.

The daybreak lighted up her face
All pink, and sharp, and emerald-eyed;
She looked on them a little space,
And shrill as hautboy cried:—

“O three tall footsore men of rags
Which walking this gold morn I see,
What will ye give me from your bags
For fairy kisses three?”

The first, that was a reddish man,
Out of his bundle takes a crust:
“La, by the tombstones of St. Ann,
There's fee, if fee ye must!”

The second, that was a chestnut man,

Out of his bundle draws a bone:

“Lo, by the belfry of St. Ann,

And all my breakfast gone!”

The third, that was a yellow man,

Out of his bundle picks a groat,

“La, by the Angel of St. Ann,

And I must go without.”

That changeling, lean and icy-lipped,

Touched crust, and bone, and groat, and lo!

Beneath her finger taper-tipped

The magic all ran through.

Instead of crust a peacock pie,

Instead of bone sweet venison,

Instead of groat a white lily

With seven blooms thereon.

And each fair cup was deep with wine:

Such was the changeling's charity,

The sweet feast was enough for nine,

But not too much for three.

O toothsome meat in jelly froze!

O tender haunch of elfin stag!

O rich the odour that arose!

O plump with scraps each bag!

There, in the daybreak gold and wild,

Each merry-hearted beggar man

Drank deep unto the fairy child,

And blessed the good St. Ann.

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