**A Magic Ring**

Once upon a time there lived a young farmer. He worked very hard but was very poor. One day when he was far from home in the forest, an old woman looking like a peasant came up to him and said, "I know you work very hard, and all for nothing. I will give you a magic ring! It will make you rich, and your work won't be in vain. When you turn the ring on your finger and say what you wish to have, you'll have it at once! But there is only one wish in the ring, so think carefully before you wish."

The astonished farmer took the ring given to him by the peasant woman, and went home. In evening he came to a big city. There he went to a merchant and showed him the magic ring. When the merchant heard the astonishing story, he thought of a plan. He invited the farmer to stay in his house for the night. At night he came up to the sleeping peasant, carefully took the ring off the man's finger, and put on another ring, which looked exactly like the one he had taken off.

In the morning when the farmer had gone away, the merchant ran into his shop, shut the door, and said while turning the ring on his finger, "I wish to have a hundred thousand pieces of gold." And down they came, on his head, shoulders, and arms, like a rain of gold! The frightened merchant tried to get out of the shop, but in vain. In a few minutes he was dead.

When the farmer returned home, he showed the ring to his wife. "Take a look at this ring," he said. "It's a magic ring! It will make us happy.”

The astonished woman could hardly say a word "Let's try. Maybe the ring will bring us more land," she said at last.

“We must be careful about our wish. Don't forget there's only one thing that we may ask for," he explained. "Let's better work hard for another year, and we'll have more land.”

So they worked as hard as they could and got enough money to buy the land they wished to have. "What happy people we are!" said the farmer.

“I don't understand you," answered his wife angrily. "There's nothing in the world that we can't have, and still we spend days and nights working as hard as before, because you don't want to use your magic ring!”

Thirty, then forty years had gone by. The farmer and his wife had grown old. Their hair became as white as snow. They were happy and had everything they wanted. Their ring was still there. Although it was not a magic ring, it had made them happy. For you see, my dear friends, a poor thing in good hands is better than a fine thing in bad hands.