

**THE STORY OF THE PEASANT,
THE SNAKE, AND KING
SOLOMON
RUMANIAN FOLK-TALE**

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Once upon a time, when King Solomon the wise ruled over the people, some shepherds gathered under a tree and lit a fire, not for any special reason, but just to pass their time, as they often do. When they left, they did not take care to put the fire out; it was left burning under the ashes. Spreading slowly, it caught the great tree, which soon afterwards became a mass of living flames. A snake had crept on to that tree before and found itself now in danger of perishing in the flames. Creeping upwards to the very top of the tree, the snake cried as loud as it could, for she felt her skin scorched by the fire. At that moment a man passed by, and hearing the shrieking of the snake, who begged him to save her from the flames, he took pity on her, and cutting a long stick, he reached with it up to the top of the tree for the snake to glide down on it. But he did not know the mind of the cunning beast, which had aforetime deceived his forefather Adam, for, instead of gliding down to the ground, no sooner did the snake reach the neck of the good man than she coiled herself round and round his neck. In vain did he remind her that he had saved her life, she would not hear of anything, for she said, "My skin is dearer to me than to you, and I remain where I am, you cannot shake me off." Finding that he could not get rid of the snake, the man went from judge to judge, from king to king, to decide between them, but no one could help him.

At last, hearing of the wisdom of King Solomon, he came to him and laid his case before him. But King Solomon said, "I am not going to judge between you unless you both first promise to abide by my word." Both did so. Turning to the snake, King Solomon then said, "You must uncoil yourself and get down on the earth, for I cannot judge fairly between one who is standing on the ground and one who is riding."

Cunning though the snake may be, she did not understand the wisdom of King Solomon, and therefore uncoiling herself she glided down and rested on the ground. Turning to the man, King Solomon said, "Do you not know that you must never trust a snake?" The man at once understood what the king meant, and taking up a stone he bruised the snake's head. And thus justice was done.

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