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## THE BRAGGART OAK

Translated by CLARK MILLS

Oak, big-paunched, with many branches, high in air standing,  
Had long since done battle with lightning-bolts and tempests;  
In those brawls he's never failed to win the contest.  
Arms akimbo, he had always boasted beyond measure.  
Osiers, spruces, pine-trees, and the tips of lindens  
Drew his scorn, and most of all, the shrubs and willows.  
Oak, puffed up and swollen, from afar beheld a reedlet  
Quaking, tottering, and swaying in her hollow,  
Doubtless frightened by the gusts of wind, incessantly.  
Then that braggart, seeing her display of weakness,  
Quite sure of himself alone as big and powerful  
While the reed made her obeisance, held his sides with laughter.  
Yet when he had jested and guffawed too much,  
And with not a single kindly word for heaven,  
Suddely, from all sides, the winds arising  
Ripped that obstinate stiff-neck into pieces.  
And, already dying, from his whole vast belly  
All his bowels and intestines poured from him.  
This is how the braggart foundered to his end  
As in curtsyng the reedlet rose to grace,  
Clinging to her life in mud and swampy hollow.

Thus it is God brings all boasters to their trial,  
When they climb on the poor people's backs too often  
Or, like wantons, cuff or kick a weeping orphan.  
You, puffed-out pot-belly, your own end consider!  
See as you lie dying if you're treated fairly!

O poor people, in your jackets patched with sheepskin,  
Who have watered borscht and plain potatoes for your fare,  
Beggars, it would seem, too poor for gentleman's table  
— Honored if you stand beside his chimney corner,  
And in felt shoes, in his rich apartment, doff your caps.  
If some parasite smirks at you, do not feel ashamed!  
Haughtily, it may be, he wears a stolen greatcoat,  
In his gold perhaps the tears of orphans glitter.  
Each day, as God knows, the sighs of women rise to heaven.  
Beggars, play the simple parts that God sets for you!  
Few can be permitted to put on the regal mantle,

Nor can all of us go clad in costly finery  
And loll at ease in splendid lordly carriages.  
One, an awesome eagle, soars above the world,  
While another, a mere sparrow, shelters under eaves.  
Know that he who climbs too high in pitchy cloudbank  
Will be ordered back by thunder-bolts and lightning,  
While the one who, sparrowlike, can hide himself, or  
Like the mole, can burrow in a cavern corner,  
Yet who uses courtesy and honor — to him, even  
Lords themselves must, rightly, doff their caps.

*(Clark Mills)*