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Reading Article GP2

Article #9: A Brother in Need

a Vietnamese folktale

There were once two brothers, Gan and Duc, whose father died suddenly, without leaving a will. Gan, the older brother, took all the land and property for himself except for one small shack and one miserable patch of acreage, which he allowed Duc to have. Duc's field was so tiny it could produce barely enough for him to eat, and year after year he grew poorer and thinner despite his hard work. Gan's green fields, meanwhile, flourished every year until he was the wealthiest man in the province.

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the way you let your brother live.

"I have nothing to do with the way he lives," Gan snapped. "He can fend for himself, just as I have. Besides, my friends rank among the finest people in the province. It's only fitting that I treat them according to what they deserved."

"Nevertheless, he is your brother. And I'm sure if you treated him as your friend, you'd find more devotion in him than in these friends you treat as brothers."

But this conversation took place many times, and Gan never listened.

One evening Gan came home to find his wife in tears.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"Something horrible," she sobbed. "This afternoon a beggar came to the door and asked for something to eat. He looked so weak and pale, I couldn't say no. So I told him to step inside while I got something from the kitchen. But no sooner did the poor man cross our threshold than he fainted from hunger. He struck his head on the table and fell dead on the floor. I was so frightened, I wrapped his body in a blanket and dragged it into the garden."

"But there's nothing to worry about," Gan assured her. "You did nothing wrong. We'll explain the situation to the mandarin. You were just trying to help."

"You're wrong," Hanh cried. "The mandarin has never liked you. He's jealous of your riches and popularity. He'll use this chance to ruin us, if he can."

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So Gan hurried to the home of the man who had dined most at his table. His friend greeted him with a warm embrace and an eager smile. But when Gan explained in low tones how he needed help, his friend shook his head and backed away. He was sorry, he'd love more than anything to help, but his back was giving him problems, and he couldn't possibly carry the load of a dead man through the forest.

Gan hurried to another friend's house, where once again he was warmly received.

"It's been too long!" the friend gushed. "Tell me now, how can I help you?"

"I knew I could count on you," Gan sighed. "You were always the best of friends. Something horrible has happened." But as he told his story, his friend's expression changed.

"I wish I could help, Gan, you know I do," he lamented. "But the fact is, my poor old

grandmother is ill tonight and may even be on her deathbed. I can't possibly leave her. I knew you'd understand."

And so it went, from door to door, from friend to friend. Some had sick relatives, some were ill themselves, others had pressing engagements. None were able to help, and Gan trudged home alone, trembling with fear and disappointment.

His wife listened to what happened and said:

"There's no time to lose. You don't have a choice. You must go ask your brother for help."

Gan knew she was right—there was no one else now. He hurried into the night again and found his brother's humble house.

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and staggered home again.

They were stunned to find one of the mandarin's men waiting for them.

"You are to come with me," he ordered Gan, "along with your wife and brother."

They were taken to the mandarin's house, and there they found gathered all the friends whose help Gan had begged. One by one the informers stepped forward and told how they had refused to take part in the brothers' foul crime.

"Not only are you murderers," the mandarin said, "you tried to talk your friends into concealing your misdeed. Thankfully, your friends are better men than you. They are honest, and they are loyal to me. They followed you into the forest and then came to report your crime. So there's no use in denying it. We'll go retrieve the body, and then you'll get what is

due.”

The entire crowd trooped into the forest, and the hastily dug grave was uncovered. There was a gasp when the blanket was unwrapped and the corpse of an old ram, not a beggar, fell out.

“What is the meaning of this?” the mandarin demanded.

Gan and Duc stood as confused as the rest. Their accusers glanced at each other nervously.

Then Hanh stepped forward.

“This is my doing,” she confessed. “For a long time, I’ve watched my husband treat his

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from them on, Gan and Duc lived as brothers should.