

The Blind Fiddler

by G. E. Gorfu

This is a story I heard in my youth, and sometimes it is told in other parts of the world in various shades and versions.

There once lived a blind fiddler, let us call him Ato Tesfu, whose daughter used to lead to a shady tree in the center of the town market place, from where he would play his native fiddle, and collect alms. He was an excellent fiddler and entertained the merchants and all the people in the market with his wonderful tunes. Most people would stop to listen and open their wallets and belts, and drop coins in appreciation for the music he played.

At the end of the day, as the people begin to disperse, his daughter would again come, and taking the blind fiddler by the hand, lead him home. Home was a small shack on the outskirts of town, surrounded by a few sticks and shrubs for a fence. Next to the shack lived two neighbors, to the right and to the left. On one side lived another poor man, Ato Melkegna, who was a never do well, but on the other side lived a wealthy merchant.

When the blind fiddler, Ato Tesfu, returned home, he would eat his dinner, and take out his native fiddle, the *mesenko*, to play some more tunes throughout the evening, and late into the night. He loved to play, and as the moon came out, both his neighbors would sit outside in the cool air, admiring the evening, listening to the exquisite, free and live music that filled the night. They were lucky to have such a neighbor.



The wealthy merchant began to think that he ought to compensate the blind fiddler for giving him all the happiness and pleasures of listening to music night after night. He had a plan. He then invited his neighbor for dinner, which Ato Tesfu was happy to accept.

After he had him dined and wined, the merchant told Ato Tesfu, “I am grateful for the music you play night after night, which I have sat outside my home and listened. You do play such beautiful music and you make me happy, and sometimes even ecstatic. You have done it for free all these years, and I thought I should compensate you.”

With that, the rich merchant took out a small bag of gold and wanted to give it to Ato Tesfu. Ato Tesfu, however, protested, saying he played the music for himself and not for the merchant or any other audience and refused to accept. Nevertheless, the wealthy merchant firmly insisted upon him, and made him accept the gift. The blind man thanked him profusely, put the bag of gold in his chest pocket, and went home.

That night Ato Tesfu did not sleep a wink for fear of someone breaking into his shack to steal the bag of gold. Since this was a small village town, there were no banks or safe deposit boxes to keep such treasure. The rich may have very well built houses with high fences, fierce dogs, as well as sentinels and hired guards to keep their valuables safe, but what was a poor blind beggar to do to keep his bag of gold safe from thieves?

The following day, Ato Tesfu was nodding and falling asleep as he played in the market. People began to notice that he skipped some notes here and there. What was wrong? That

is not characteristic of him, they said. The following morning, it got even worse. He started mixing one tune with another, and his music started to sound worse and worse.

After several sleepless nights, Ato Tesfu decided to bury the bag of gold in his backyard, and hide it away. That is common practice among many people in the village. Therefore, he got up in the night, made his way quietly to his backyard, dug a hole in the center near a big rock, and buried the bag of gold. Immediately, he felt quite relieved. That night he slept better for the first time after so many sleepless nights.

A week passed, the thought of his bag of gold kept gnawing in his mind, and Ato Tesfu wanted to know if it was still there. One night, he quietly got out of bed, made his way again to the big rock in his backyard, and dug for his gold. The bag was gone. Was it a thief? It was a big blow. He did not sleep at all the rest of that night.

Ato Tesfu knew it had to be his never do well neighbor, Ato Melkegna, who took the bag of gold. He only had two neighbors, and it cannot be the rich merchant, as he had given it to him. Why would he steal it? It must be the poor neighbor, who must have heard the digging in the night and looked out to see what it was. He must have taken the gold.

Ato Tesfu thought and thought until he had finally hit on a plan to recover his gold. First he called on his never do well neighbor, Ato Melkegna, and told him he needed his help and advise on some important matter. Ato Melkegna came over to Ato Tesfu's house and asked, "What is the problem? What do you need?"

Ato Tesfu told Ato Melkegna the story of how their wealthy neighbor had given him a bag of gold for playing music in the evenings, and that he had buried this in his backyard. "However, the problem is," went on Ato Tesfu, "My rich neighbor has again given me a bigger bag of gold, and I am wondering should I bury it in the same old place, or dig up another totally new place?" With that, he showed him a much bigger and heavier bag.

After thinking for a moment Ato Melkegna said, "Ato Tesfu, since you are blind, it would be a real pity if you should bury your gold in different places, and then not be able to remember where you had buried it. If I were you, I would bury everything in one, and the same place. That way, I will not have any problem finding my gold when I needed it."

However, he said this in order to be able to steal the next bag of gold, and not with any kind thoughts for Ato Tesfu. Well, Ato Tesfu was quick, and said. "I think you are right. I should bury everything in one place to make it easy for myself to remember where I bury it. That way, I can also check and see if the bag I buried earlier is still there."

With that the never do well, Ato Melkegna, left. He then went home and started thinking: "If Ato Tesfu digs and finds the first bag missing, he will not bury the second bag in the same hole. So, let me put the bag of gold back in the hole. After he buries the second bag, I will be able to take both the large and the small bags together..."

That night the Ato Tesfu quietly listened for any noise coming from his backyard. Lo and behold, sometime after midnight, there came a faint and low sound of digging. He knew it was his neighbor, Ato Melkegna, putting back the small bag of gold into the hole. His plan was working. He waited patiently and silently until all noise had settled down.

When all was quiet, Ato Tesfu slowly walked to his backyard and dug by the big rock. He found the small bag of gold, took it out, and put it in his chest pocket. He then buried the big bag he had shown Ato Melkegna earlier that day, and went back into his shack.

The never do well, Ato Melkegna, who was hiding in the shadows watching, came and quickly dug out, but found only one big bag. He took it into his house and thought he now had a bigger bag of gold. To his dismay, however, he found that it was full of small rocks and pebbles. He had been outsmarted. He was mad, but what was there to do? Ato Tesfu never slept a wink for the rest of that night. He was afraid for his life. What if his never do well neighbor, Ato Melkegna, breaks in and kills him to take the gold?

Next day in the market, many people noticed the blind fiddler nodding and sleeping as he played, and the quality of his music had further deteriorated significantly. The cares and worries of looking after the bag of gold in the last few weeks were taking their toll on his health and wellbeing. He was very miserable, irritable, and not his usual happy self.

That evening when his daughter came to take him home, he asked her to lead him directly to their wealthy neighbor, the merchant's house. When he arrived there, the merchant saw him, and coming out to greet him asked, "I haven't heard you play music for these many evenings now. Are you all right? You don't look well Ato Tesfu? What is the matter?"

Ato Tesfu replied, "Sir, thank you for the bag of gold, but here, take it away, and give me back my peace of mind, my former happiness, and my peaceful sleep. I have suffered the most miserable few weeks in my life since you gave this bag. Please, take it away." With that, he handed him over the bag of gold and went home, relieved.

Soon after that, Ato Tesfu became his normal self again. He started to sleep well at night and to play that excellent music in the market, even better than he played before.

Moral: *Beware! Sometimes money brings more misery than happiness.*

[Back to Meskot](#)

The views reflected in the above story are solely of the author and are not necessarily shared by [Meskot](#). You may contact G.E. Gorfu for comments at gegorfu@yahoo.com.