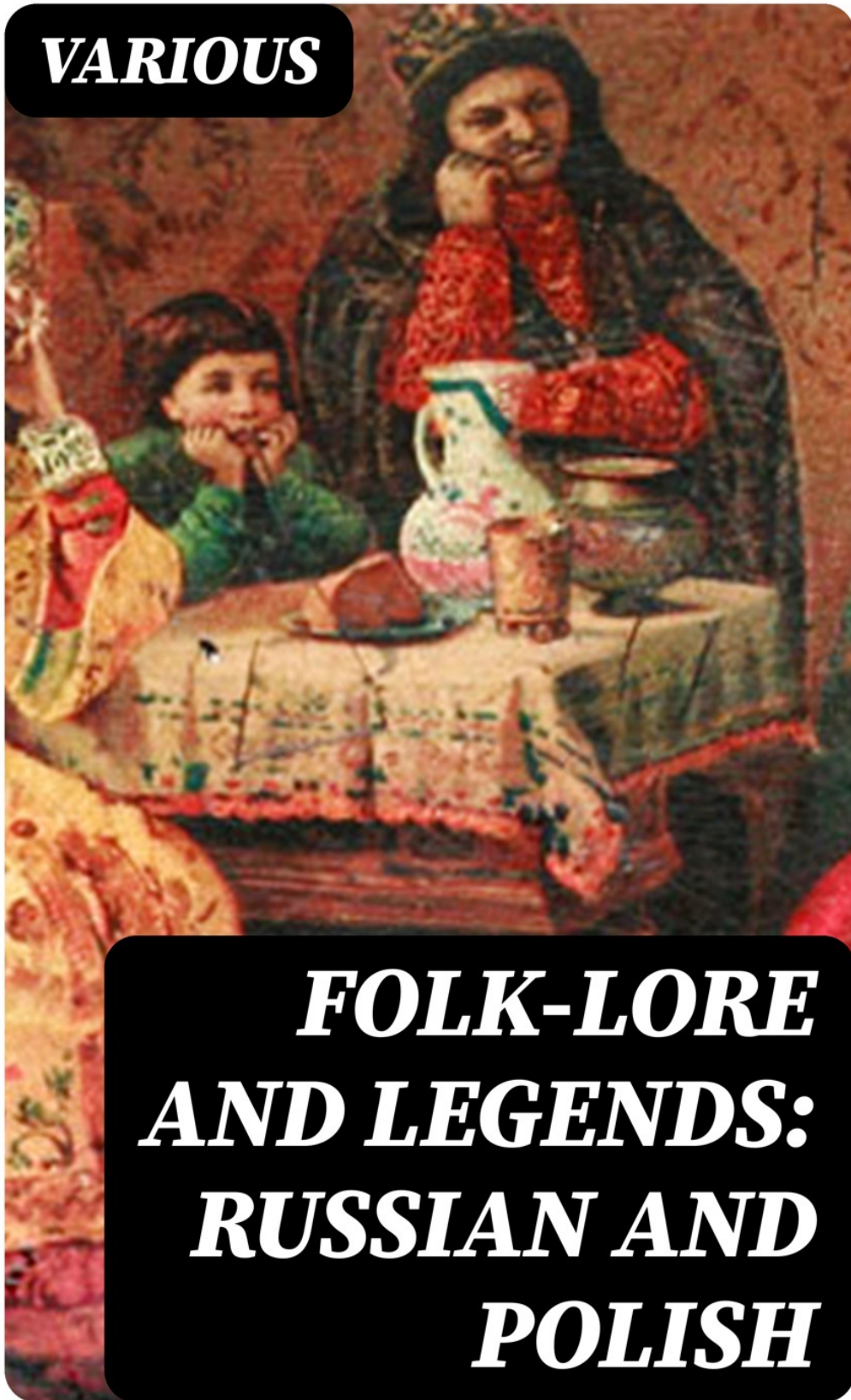


VARIOUS



***FOLK-LORE
AND LEGENDS:
RUSSIAN AND
POLISH***

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Various

Folk-Lore and Legends: Russian and Polish

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Once upon a time there were two brothers who lived upon a piece of ground. The one was rich and the other poor. One day the poor brother went to the rich one to ask him to lend him a horse, so that he might carry wood from the forest. The rich brother lent him the horse, and then the poor one asked him to also let him have a collar for it. The rich man, however, got angry, and would not let him have one, and then it occurred to the poor man that he could fasten the sledge to the horse's tail. Away he went to the forest to get his wood, and he got such a load that the horse could scarcely draw it. When he came home with it he opened the gate, but he did not think of the board at the foot of the gate, and the horse tumbling over it tore its tail out!

The poor fellow took the horse back to his rich brother, but he, when he saw that the horse had no tail, would not receive it, and went off to the judge Schemyaka to complain to him of the poor brother. The poor man saw that things looked bad for him, and that he would be sent for by the judge. He thought over the matter for a long time, and at last set off after his brother on foot.

On their way the two brothers had to pass over a bridge, and the poor man, thinking that he should never return from the judge alive, jumped over it. It chanced that, just at that time, a man's son was driving his sick father to the baths, and was passing under the bridge. The poor man fell upon

the old man and killed him, and the son went off to the judge to complain of his father's having been killed.

The rich brother, when he came to the judge, laid his complaint before him, telling him that his brother had pulled out his horse's tail. Now the poor man had taken a stone and wrapped it in a cloth, and he stood with it in his hand, behind his brother, intending to kill the judge if he did not decide in his favour. The judge thought the man had brought a hundred roubles for him in the cloth, so he ordered the rich man to give his horse to the poor man until the tail was grown again.

Then came the son to complain to the judge of the poor man having slain his father. The poor man again took the stone wrapped in the cloth and showed it to the judge, who thought the man must there have two hundred roubles to give to him for deciding the case. So he ordered the son to take his place upon the bridge and the poor man to stand below. Then the son was to throw himself off the bridge on to the poor man and crush him to death.

The poor brother went to the rich one to take the horse without a tail, as the judge had ordered, so that he might keep it till the tail grew. The rich man, however, was not willing to lose his horse, so he gave the poor man five roubles, three bushels of corn, and a milch-goat, and so they settled the matter.

Then the poor man went off to the son, and said—

“According to the judgment you must stand on the bridge while I must stand underneath it, and then you must jump off and crush me to death.”

Then thought the son—

“Who knows whether if I jump off the bridge I may not, instead of crushing him to death, kill myself?”

So he thought it would be best to come to an arrangement with the poor man, and he gave him two hundred roubles, a horse, and five bushels of corn.

After this the judge, Schemyaka, sent his servant to the poor man to ask him for two hundred roubles. The poor man showed him the stone, and said—

“If the judge had not decided for me I should have killed him with it.”

When the servant came back to the judge and told him that, he crossed himself—

“Thank Heaven,” said he, “I decided as he wished!”



THE WIND-RIDER.

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A magician was once upon a time much put out with a young countryman, and being in a great rage he went to the man's hut and stuck a new sharp knife under the threshold. While he did so he cursed the man, saying—

“May this fellow ride for seven years on the fleet storm-wind, until he has gone all round the world.”

Now when the peasant went into the meadows in order to carry the hay, there came suddenly a gust of wind. It quickly scattered the hay, and then seized the peasant. He endeavoured in vain to resist; in vain he sought to cling to the hedges and trees with his hands. Do what he would, the invisible power hurried him forwards.

He flew on the wings of the wind like a wild pigeon, and his feet no more touched the ground. At length the sun set, and the poor fellow looked with hungry eyes upon the smoke which curled up from the chimneys in his village. He could almost touch them with his feet, but he called and screamed in vain, and all his wailing and complaints were useless. No one heard his lamentation, no one saw his tears.

So he went on for three months, and what with thirst and hunger he was dried up and almost a skeleton. He had gone over a good deal of ground by that time, but the wind most often carried him over his native village.

He wept when he saw the hut in which dwelt his sweetheart. He could see her busied about the house. Sometimes she would bring out some dinner in a basket. Then he would stretch out his dried-up hands to her, and

vainly call her name. His voice would die away, and the girl not hearing him would not look up.

He fled on. The magician came to the door of his hut, and seeing the man, cried to him, mockingly—

“You have to ride for seven years yet, flying over this village. You shall go on suffering, and shall not die.”

“O my father,” said the man, “if I ever offended you, forgive me! Look! my lips are quite hard; my face, my hands, look at them! I am nothing but bone. Have pity upon me.”

The magician muttered a few words, and the man stopped in his course. He stayed in one place, but did not yet stand on the ground.

“Well, you ask me to pity you,” said the magician. “And what do you mean to give me if I put a stop to your torment?”

“All you wish,” said the peasant, and he clasped his hands, and knelt down in the air.

“Will you give me your sweetheart,” asked the magician, “so that I may have her for my wife? If you will give her up, you shall come to earth again.”

The man thought for a moment, and said to himself—

“If I once get on the earth again, I may see if I cannot do something.”

So he said to the magician—

“Indeed, you ask me to make a great sacrifice, but if it must be so it must.”

The magician then blew at him, and the man came to the ground. He was very pleased to find the earth once more under his feet, and to have escaped from the power of the

wind. Off he hurried to his hut, and at the threshold he met his sweetheart. She cried aloud with amazement when she saw the long-lost peasant, whom she had so long lamented and wept for. With his skinny hands the man put her gently aside, and went into the house, where he found the farmer who had employed him sitting down, and said to him, as he commenced to weep—

“I can no longer stay in your service, and I cannot marry your daughter. I love her very much, as much as the apple of my eye, but I cannot marry her.”

The old farmer wondered to see him, and when he saw his white pinched face and the traces of his suffering, he asked him why he did not wish for the hand of his daughter.

The man told him all about his ride in the air, and the bargain he had made with the magician. When the farmer had listened to it all, he told the poor fellow to keep a good heart, and putting some money in his pocket, went out to consult a sorceress.

Towards evening he returned very merry, and taking the peasant aside, said to him—

“To-morrow morning, before day, go to the witch, and you will find all will be well.”

The wearied peasant, who had not slept for three months, went to bed, but he woke before it was day, and went off to the witch. He found her sitting beside the hearth boiling herbs over a fire. She told him to stand by her, and, suddenly, although it was a calm day, such a storm of wind arose that the hut shook again.

The sorceress then took the peasant outside into the yard and told him to look up. He lifted up his eyes, and—O

wonder!—saw the evil magician whirling round and round in the air.

“There is your enemy,” said the woman, “he will trouble you no more. If you would like to see him at your wedding, I will tell you what to do, but he must suffer the torment that he meant to put you to.”

The peasant was delighted, and ran back to the house, and a month later he was married. While the wedding folk were dancing, the peasant went out into the yard, looked up, and saw right over the hut the magician turning round and round. Then the peasant took a new knife, and throwing it with all his force, stuck it in the magician’s foot.

He fell at once to the ground, and the knife held him to the earth, so that he could only stand at the window and see how merry the peasant and his friends were.

The next day he had disappeared, but he was afterwards seen flying in the air over a lake. Before him and behind him were flocks of ravens and crows, and these, with their hoarse cries, heralded the wicked magician’s endless ride on the wind.



THE THREE GIFTS.

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A very rich widow had three children, a step-son, a fine young fellow, a step-daughter of wonderful beauty, and a daughter who was not so bad. The three children lived under the same roof, and took their meals together. At length the time came when the children were treated very differently. Although the widow's daughter was bad-tempered, obstinate, vain, and a chatterer, her mother loved her passionately, praised her, and covered her with caresses. She was favoured in every way. The step-son, who was a good-natured lad, and who did all kinds of work, was for ever grumbled at, checked, and treated like a sluggard. As for the step-daughter, who was so wonderfully pretty, and who had the disposition of an angel, she was tormented, worried, and ill-treated in a thousand ways. Between her sister and her step-mother her life was made miserable.

It is natural that one should love one's own children better than those of other folk; but it is only right that liking and disliking should be indulged in with moderation. The evil step-mother, however, loved her child to distraction, and equally detested her step-children. To such a pitch did she carry these feelings that when she was angry she used to say how she would advance the fortune of her daughter even at the orphans' expense.

An old proverb says, "Man sets the ball rolling, but Heaven directs it," and we shall see what happened.

One Sunday morning the step-daughter, before going to church, went out into the garden to pluck some flowers to place on the altar. She had gathered some roses, when, on lifting up her eyes, she saw, right in front of her, three young men who sat upon a grassy bank. They were clothed in garments of dazzling white which shone like sunshine. Near by them was an old man, who came and asked the girl for alms.

The girl was a little frightened when she saw the three men, but when the old man came to her she took her last piece of money out of her pocket and gave it to him. The poor man thanked her, put the piece of money into his bag, and, laying his hand on the girl's head, said to the young men—

“You see this little orphan; she is good and patient in suffering, and has so much pity for the poor that she gives them even the last penny she has. What do you wish for her?”

The first one said—

“I wish that when she cries her tears may turn to pearls.”

“I wish,” said the second, “that when she laughs the most delicately perfumed roses may fall from her lips.”

“And I,” said the third, “wish that when she touches water golden fish spring up in it.”

“So shall it be,” said the old man, and he and his companions vanished.

When the girl saw that, she gave thanks to Heaven, and ran joyfully into the house. Hardly had she entered when her step-mother met her and gave her a slap on the face, saying—

“Where are you running to?”

The poor girl began to cry, but behold! instead of tears pearls fell from her eyes. The step-mother forgot her rage, and set herself to gather them up as quickly as possible. The girl could not help laughing at the sight, and from her lips there fell roses of such a delightful scent that the step-mother was beside herself with pleasure. After that the girl, wishing to preserve the flowers she had plucked in the garden, poured some water into a glass: as soon as she touched the water with her finger, it was filled with beautiful golden fish.

From that time the same things never failed to happen. The girl’s tears turned to pearls, when she laughed roses, which did not die, fell from her lips; and water which she only touched with her little finger became filled with golden fish.

The step-mother became better disposed towards her, and by little and little learned from her the secret of how she had obtained these gifts.

On the following Sunday she sent her own daughter into the garden to pluck flowers as if for the altar. Hardly had the girl gathered some roses, when, lifting up her eyes, she saw the three young men sitting on a grassy bank, beautiful, and shining like the sun, and by them was the old man, clad in white, who asked her for alms. When she saw the young men, the girl pretended to be afraid, but when the old man spoke to her, she ran to him, took out of her pocket a gold piece, looked hard at it, and then gave it to him, but evidently very much against her will. The old man put the money in his bag, and said to the three others—

“You see this girl who is her mother’s spoilt child? She is bad-tempered, wicked, and is hard-hearted as regards the poor. We know very well why she has been so charitable, for the first time in her life, to-day. Tell me then what you wish for her.”

The first said—

“I wish that when she cries her tears may change to lizards.”

“I,” said the second, “wish that when she laughs, hideous toads may fall from her lips.”

“And I,” said the third, “wish that when she touches water with her hand it may be filled with serpents.”

“It shall be as you wish,” said the old man, and he and his companions disappeared.

The girl was terrified, and ran into the house to tell her mother what had happened. All occurred as had been said. When she laughed toads sprang from her lips, when she cried her tears changed to lizards, and when she touched water it became full of serpents.

The step-mother did not know what to do. She paid greater attention than ever to her daughter, and hated the orphans more and more, and so tormented them that the lad, not being able to put up with it, took leave of his sister, praying Heaven to guard her, and, leaving his step-mother’s house, set out to seek his fortune. The wide world was before him. He knew not where to go, but he knew that Heaven, that sees all men, watches over the orphans. He prayed, and then walking down to the burial-ground where slept his father and mother, he knelt at the grave. He wept and prayed for a time, and having kissed the earth which