



Bopolûchî

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Indian

Intermediate

8 min read

Once upon a time a number of young girls went to draw water at the village well, and while they were filling their jars, fell a-talking of their betrothals and weddings.

Said one—'My uncle will soon be coming with the bridal presents, and he is to bring the finest clothes imaginable.'

Said a second—'And my uncle-in-law is coming, I know, bringing the most delicious sweetmeats you could think of.'

Said a third—'Oh, my uncle will be here in no time, with the rarest jewels in the world.'

But Bopolûchî, the prettiest girl of them all, looked sad, for she was an orphan, and had no one to arrange a marriage for her. Nevertheless she was too proud to remain silent, so she said gaily—'And my uncle is coming also, bringing me fine dresses, fine food, and fine jewels.'

Now a wandering pedlar, who sold sweet scents and cosmetics of all sorts to the country women, happened to be sitting near the well, and heard what Bopolûchî said. Being much struck by her beauty and spirit, he determined to marry her himself, and the very next day, disguised as a well-to-do farmer, he came to Bopolûchî's house laden with trays upon trays full of fine dresses, fine food, and fine jewels; for he was not a real pedlar, but a wicked robber, ever so rich.

Bopolûchî could hardly believe her eyes, for everything was just as she had foretold, and the robber said he was her father's brother, who had been away in the world for years, and had now come back to arrange her marriage with one of his sons, her cousin.

Hearing this, Bopolûchî of course believed it all, and was ever so much pleased; so she packed up the few things she possessed in a bundle, and set off with the robber in high spirits.

But as they went along the road, a crow sitting on a branch croaked—

'Bopolûchî, 'tis a pity!

You have lost your wits, my pretty!

'Tis no uncle that relieves you,

But a robber who deceives you!

'Uncle!' said Bopolûchî, 'that crow croaks funnily. What does it say?'

'Pooh!' returned the robber, 'all the crows in this country croak like that.'

A little farther on they met a peacock, which, as soon as it caught sight of the pretty little maiden, began to scream—

'Bopolûchî, 'tis a pity!

You have lost your wits, my pretty!

'Tis no uncle that relieves you,

But a robber who deceives you!

'Uncle!' said the girl, 'that peacock screams funnily. What does it say?'

'Pooh!' returned the robber, 'all peacocks scream like that in this country.'

By and by a jackal slunk across the road; the moment it saw poor pretty Bopolûchî it began to howl—

'Bopolûchî, 'tis a pity!

You have lost your wits, my pretty!

'Tis no uncle that relieves you,

But a robber who deceives you!

'Uncle!' said the maiden, 'that jackal howls funnily. What does it say?'

'Pooh!' returned the robber, 'all jackals howl like that in this country.'

So poor pretty Bopolûchî journeyed on till they reached the robber's house. Then he told her who he was, and how he intended to marry her himself. She wept and cried bitterly, but the robber had no pity, and left her in charge of his old, oh! ever so old mother, while he went out to make arrangements for the marriage feast.

Now Bopolûchî had such beautiful hair that it reached right down to her ankles, but the old mother hadn't a hair on her old bald head.

'Daughter!' said the old, ever so old. mother, as she was putting the bridal dress on Bopolûchî, 'how did you manage to get such beautiful hair?'

'Well,' replied Bopolûchî, 'my mother made it grow by pounding my head in the big mortar for husking rice. At every stroke of the pestle my hair grew longer and longer. I assure you it is a plan that never fails.'

'Perhaps it would make my hair grow!' said the old woman eagerly.

'Perhaps it would!' quoth cunning Bopolûchî.

So the old, ever so old mother put her head in the mortar, and Bopolûchî pounded away with such a will that the old lady died.

Then Bopolûchî dressed the dead body in the scarlet bridal dress, seated it on the low bridal chair, drew the veil well over the face, and put the spinning-wheel in front of it, so that when the robber came home he might think it was the bride. Then she put on the old mother's clothes, and seizing her own bundle, stepped out of the house as quickly as possible.

On her way home she met the robber, who was returning with a stolen millstone, to grind the corn for the wedding feast, on his head. She was dreadfully frightened, and slipped behind the hedge, so as not to be seen.

But the robber, not recognising her in the old mother's dress, thought she was some strange woman from a

neighbouring village, and so to avoid being seen he slipped behind the other hedge. Thus Bopolûchî reached home in safety.

Meanwhile, the robber, having come to his house, saw the figure in bridal scarlet sitting on the bridal chair, spinning, and of course thought it was Bopolûchî. So he called to her to help him down with the millstone, but she didn't answer. He called again, but still she didn't answer. Then he fell into a rage, and threw the millstone at her head. The figure toppled over, and lo and behold! it was not Bopolûchî at all, but his old, ever so old mother! Whereupon the robber wept, and beat his breast, thinking he had killed her; but when he discovered pretty Bopolûchî had run away, he became wild with rage, and determined to bring her back somehow.

Now Bopolûchî was convinced that the robber would try to carry her off, so every night she begged a new lodging in some friend's house, leaving her own little bed in her own little house quite empty, but after a month or so she had come to the end of her friends, and did not like to ask any of them to give her shelter a second time. So she determined to brave it out and sleep at home, whatever happened; but she took a bill-hook to bed with her. Sure enough, in the very middle of the night four men crept in, and each seizing a leg of the bed, lifted it up and walked off, the robber himself having hold of the leg close behind her head. Bopolûchî was wide awake, but pretended to be fast asleep, until she came to a wild deserted spot, where the thieves were off their guard; then she whipped out the bill-hook, and in a twinkling cut off the heads of the two thieves at the foot of the bed. Turning round quickly, she did the same to the other thief at the head, but the robber himself ran away in a terrible fright, and scrambled like a wild cat up a tree close by before she could reach him.

'Come down!' cried brave Bopolûchî, brandishing the bill-hook, 'and fight it out!'

But the robber would not come down; so Bopolûchî gathered all the sticks she could find, piled them round the tree, and set fire to them. Of course the tree caught fire also, and the robber, half stifled with the smoke, tried to jump down, and was killed.

After that, Bopolûchî went to the robber's house and carried off all the gold and silver, jewels and clothes, that were hidden there, coming back to the village so rich that she could marry any one she pleased. And that was the end of Bopolûchî's adventures.