

Bulgarian Hospitality

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Bulgarian

Intermediate

5 min read

Once upon a time, when the Lord had formed the world, he wished to see how his people lived; he came down from heaven first of all on the Balkan Mountains, took the form of a man with a long white beard and white clothes; took a staff in his hand, and went about the world in the Bulgarian land; he travelled much, a whole day long, over desolate mountains. In the evening he came to a village to pass the night. He went into the first house at the end of the village and sat down on the threshold, said nothing, but meditated by himself. The mistress was in her house doing some work, and did not see him. But now her husband came from the field, from his plough, espied the old man, was delighted, and said to him: 'Old man, you are very tired; you are a weary traveller. Come into the house; rest yourself, if it is but a poor one. I will entertain you with all that the Lord has given me—only say the word.'

The old man regarded him with cheerful eyes, went into the house and sat down. The man and his wife quickly rose up and prepared a hospitable meal according to what they possessed, and as nicely and as handsomely as they could, and placed it on the table. The couple ate of their homely meal, but the old man would not; he only smelt the homely banquet, said nothing, but watched how the two persons enjoyed themselves, and rejoiced. They urged him, they begged him. 'Old man, why don't you eat? You will remain hungry. Take, and taste, and try what you please. What we have is all here before you.'

The old man only said this: 'Eat you—eat; I am thinking of something.' When they had eaten their fill, they rose. The mistress went out to feed the child because it was crying. Then said the old man to her husband: 'Do you know what, master, if you wish to entertain me? I cannot eat everything, but I wish for baked human flesh. Kill your little son, wash him nicely, and place him whole on the frying-pan in the oven; only look out that your wife does not see you, for she will weep.'

He replied: 'Is this all that you want, old man? Why did you not tell me long before, that you might not have sat a hungry guest in the house? Did I not tell you that all was yours that the Lord had given me? Indeed, I love you exceedingly, old man; my heart tells me that you are good and worthy, and now you shall see; only have a little patience, till I get ready that which you desire.'

The man went out of doors, and his wife had begun to do some work, and had left her child to play by itself in the moonlight till it fell asleep, without knowing what was about to take place. Her husband stole the child, killed it with all haste, put it entire in the frying-pan, and shut it up in the oven, that its mother might not see it till it was cooked; he then went to the old man, sat down by him and conversed cheerfully with him. They had not talked long, when the old man became silent, sniffed with his nose, and said to the servant lad: 'Go, look at the baked meat; it smells nicely; perhaps it is cooked.'

The lad rose, went out, opened the oven to look at and take out the baked meat. But what did he see? He was amazed and frightened at the wonder; all the oven and all the house was glittering with the brightness of the child. The frying-pan and the child had become gold, and shone like the sun. The child was sitting in the frying-pan like a big boy—handsome, cheerful, bright, and well. On his head was a crown of pearls and precious stones; on the girdle at his waist was a sword. In his right hand he held a book of blessing; in his left hand he had a sheaf full of ears; and all this was shining more than fire, because it had all become gold.

He returned to tell the old man what a wonder had taken place, and to ask what was to be done; but the old man was no longer there; he had gone out in front of the house, and said to them: 'Fare ye well, and live as ye have done till now, honourably and contentedly. Your good hearts will have good from field and cattle, and blessing and peace upon your children and children's children from the Lord. He will receive you and entertain you in his heavenly house.' He then went away alone under cover of the night, no one knows whither.

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