



Fate

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Serbian

Intermediate
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There were two brothers living together in a house, one of whom did all the work, while the other did nothing but idle, and eat and drink what was ready at hand. And God gave them prosperity in everything—in cattle, in horses, in sheep, in swine, in bees, and in everything else. The one that worked one day began to think to himself: ‘Why should I work for that lazybones as well? It is better that we should separate, and that I should work for myself, and he do as he likes.’

So one day he said to his brother: ‘Brother, it isn’t right. I do all the work, and you don’t help in anything, but merely eat and drink what’s ready. I have made up my mind that we separate.’ The other began to dissuade him: ‘Don’t, brother; it is good for us to be tenants in common; you have everything in your hands, both your own and mine, and I am content whatever you do.’ But the first abode by his determination, so the second gave way, and said to him: ‘If it is so, take your own course; make the division yourself, as you know how.’ Then he divided everything in order, and took everything that was his before him. The do-nothing engaged a herdsman for his cattle, a horsekeeper for his horses, a shepherd for his sheep, a goatherd for his goats, a swineherd for his swine, a beeman for his bees, and said to them: ‘I leave all my property in your hands and God’s,’ and began to live at home as before.

The first took pains about his property himself as before, watched and overlooked, but saw no prosperity, but all loss. From day to day everything went worse, till he became so poverty-stricken, that he hadn’t shoes to his feet, but went barefoot. Then said he to himself: ‘I will go to my brother, and see how it is with him.’ He did so,

and as he went came to a flock of sheep in a meadow, and with the sheep there was no shepherd, but a very beautiful damsel was sitting there spinning golden thread. He addressed her: 'God help you!' and inquired whose the sheep were. She replied: 'The sheep belong to the person to whom I belong.' He asked her further: 'To whom do you belong?' She answered: 'I am your brother's luck.' He was put out, and said to her: 'And where is my luck?' The damsel answered him: 'Your luck is far from you.' 'But can I find it?' inquired he, and she replied:

'You can; go, seek for it.' When he heard this, and saw that his brother's sheep were good—so good, that they could not be better, he didn't care about going further to see other cattle, but went off straight to his brother. When his brother saw him, he had compassion on him, and began to weep: 'Where have you been so long a time?' Then, seeing him barehead and barefoot, he gave him at once a pair of boots and some money. Afterwards, when they had enjoyed each other's company for some days, the visitor rose up to go to his own house. When he got home, he took a wallet on his back, some bread in it, and a staff in his hand, and went into the world to look for his luck. As he travelled, he came to a large wood, and as he went through it, he saw a gray-haired old maid asleep under a bush, and reached out his staff to give her a push.

She barely raised herself up, and, hardly opening her eyes for the rheum, addressed him: 'Thank God that I fell asleep, for, if I had been awake, you wouldn't have obtained even that pair of boots.' Then he said to her: 'Who are you, that I shouldn't even have obtained this pair of boots?' She replied: 'I am your luck.' When he heard this, he began to beat his breast: 'If you are my luck, God slay you! Who gave you to me?' She quickly rejoined: 'Fate gave me to you.' He then inquired: 'And where is this Fate?' She answered: 'Go and look for him.' And that instant she disappeared. Then the man went on to look for Fate. As he journeyed, he came to a village, and saw in the village a large farmhouse, and in it a large fire, and said to himself: 'Here there is surely some merry-making or festival,' and went in. When he went in, on the fire was a large caldron, in which supper was cooking, and in front of the fire sat the master of the house. The traveller, on going into the house, addressed the master: 'Good-evening!'

The master replied: 'God give you prosperity!' and bade him sit down with him, and then began to ask him whence he came, and whither he was going. He related to him everything: how he had been a master, how he had become impoverished, and how he was now going to Fate to ask him why he was so poor. Then he inquired of the master of the house why he was preparing so large a quantity of food, and the master said to him: 'Well,

my brother, I am master here, and have enough of everything, but I cannot anyhow satisfy my people; it is quite as if a dragon were in their stomachs. You'll see, when we begin to sup, what they will do.' When they sat down to sup, everybody snatched and grabbed from everybody else, and that large caldron of food was empty in no time.

After supper, a maidservant came in, put all the bones in a heap, and threw them behind the stove; and he began to wonder why the young woman threw the bones behind the stove, till all at once out came two old poverty-stricken spectres, as dry as ghosts, and began to suck the bones. Then he asked the master of the house: 'What's this, brother, behind the stove?' He replied: 'Those, brother, are my father and mother; just as if they were fettered to this world, they will not quit it.' The next day, at his departure, the master of the house said to him: 'Brother, remember me, too, if anywhere you find Fate, and ask him what manner of misfortune it is that I cannot satisfy my people, and why my father and mother do not die.' He promised to ask him the question, took leave of him, and went on to look for Fate. As on he went, he came, after a long time, to another village, and begged at a certain house that they would take him in for a night's lodging. They did so, and asked him whither he was going; and he told them all in order, what it was, and how it was. Then they began to say to him: 'In God's name, brother, when you get there, ask him with regard to us too, why our cattle are not productive, but the contrary.'

He promised them to ask Fate the question, and the next day went on. As he went, he came to a stream of water, and began to shout: 'Water! water! carry me across.' The water asked him: 'Whither are you going?' He told it whither he was going. Then the water carried him across, and said to him: 'I pray you, brother, ask Fate why I have no offspring.' He promised the stream to ask the question, and then went on. He went on for a long time, and at last came to a wood, where he found a hermit, whom he asked whether he could tell him anything about Fate.

The hermit answered: 'Go over the hill yonder, and you will come right in front of his abode; but when you come into Fate's presence, do not say a word, but do exactly what he does, until he questions you himself.' The man thanked the hermit, and went over the hill. When he came to Fate's abode, there was something for him to see. It was just as if it were an emperor's palace; there were men-servants and maid-servants there; everything was in good order, and Fate himself was sitting at a golden dinner-table at supper, When the man saw this, he, too, sat down to table, and began to sup. After supper, Fate lay down to sleep, and he lay down

too. About midnight a terrible noise arose, and out of the noise a voice was heard: 'Fate! Fate! so many souls have been born to-day; assign them what you will.' Then Fate arose, and opened a chest with money in it, and began to throw nothing but ducats behind him, saying: 'As to me to-day, so to them for life!' When on the morrow day dawned, that large palace was no more, but instead of it a moderate-sized house; but in it again there was enough of everything.

At the approach of evening Fate sat down to supper; and he, too, sat down with him, but neither spoke a single word. After supper they lay down to sleep. About midnight a terrible noise began, and out of the noise was heard a voice: 'Fate! Fate! so many souls have been born to-day; assign them what you will.' Then Fate arose, and opened the money-chest; but there were not ducats in it, but silver coins, with an occasional ducat. Fate began to scatter the coins behind him, saying: 'As to me to-day, so to them for life.' When, on the morrow, day dawned, that house was no more, but instead of it there stood a smaller one. Thus did Fate every night, and his house became smaller every morning, till, finally, nothing remained of it but a little cottage. Fate took a mattock, and began to dig; the man, too, took a mattock and began to dig, and thus they dug all day. When it was eventide, Fate took a piece of bread, broke off half of it, and gave it to him. Thus they supped, and, after supper, lay down to sleep. About midnight, again, a terrible noise began, and out of the noise was heard a voice: 'Fate! Fate! so many souls have been born to-day; assign them what you will.' Then Fate arose, opened the chest, and began to scatter behind him nothing but bits of rag, and here and there a day-labourer's wage-penny, * shouting: 'As to me to-day, so to them for life.'

When he arose on the morrow, the cottage was transformed into a large palace, like that which had been there the first day. Then Fate asked him: 'Why have you come?' He detailed to him all his distress, and said that he had come to ask him why he gave him evil luck. Fate then said to him: 'You saw how the first night I scattered ducats, and what took place afterwards. As it was to me the night when anyone was born, so will it be to him for life. You were born on an unlucky night, you will be poor for life; but your brother I was born on a lucky night, and he will be lucky for life. But, as you have been so resolute, and have taken so much trouble, I will tell you how you may help yourself. Your brother has a daughter, Militza, who is lucky, just as her father is; adopt her, and, whatever you acquire, say that it is all hers.'

Then he thanked Fate, and said to him again: 'In such a village there is a wealthy peasant, who has enough of everything; but he is unlucky in this, that his people can never be satisfied: they eat up a caldron full of food at a

single meal, and even that is too little for them. And this peasant's father and mother are, as it were, fettered to this world; they are old and discoloured, and dried up like ghosts, but cannot die. He begged me, Fate, when I lodged with him for the night, to ask you why that was the case.' Then Fate replied: 'All that is because he does not honour his father and mother, throwing their food behind the stove; but, if he puts them in the best place at table, and if he gives them the first cup of brandy, and the first cup of wine, his servants would not eat half so much, and his parents' souls would be set at liberty.' After this he again questioned Fate: 'In such a village, when I spent the night in a house, the householder complained to me that his cattle were not productive, but the contrary, and he begged me to ask you why this was the case.' Fate replied: 'That is because on the festival of his name-day he slaughters the worst animals; but if he slaughtered the best he has, his cattle would all become productive.'

Then he asked him the question about the stream of water: 'Why should it be that that stream of water has no offspring?' Fate replied: 'Because it has never drowned a human being; but don't have any nonsense; don't tell it till it carries you across, for if you tell it, it will immediately drown you.' Then he thanked Fate, and went home. When he came to the water, the water asked him: 'What is the news from Fate?' He replied: 'Carry me over, and then I will tell you.' When the water had carried him over, he ran on a little, and, when he had got a little way off, turned and shouted to the water: 'Water! Water! you have never drowned a human being, therefore you have no offspring.' When the water heard that, it overflowed its banks, and after him; but he ran, and barely escaped. When he came to the man whose cattle were unproductive, he was impatiently waiting for him. 'What news, brother, in God's name? Have you asked Fate the question?' He replied: 'I have; and Fate says when you celebrate the festival of your name-day, you slaughter the worst animals; but if you slaughter the best you have, all your cattle will be productive.' When he heard this, he said to him: 'Stay, brother, with us; it isn't three days to my name-day, and, if it is really true, I will give you an apple.'

He stayed till the name-day. When the name-day arrived, the householder slaughtered his best ox, and from that time forth his cattle became productive. After this, the householder presented him with five head of cattle. He thanked him, and proceeded on his way. When he came to the village of the householder who had the insatiable servants, the householder was impatiently expecting him. 'How is it, brother, in God's name? What says Fate?' He replied: 'Fate says you do not honour your father and mother, but throw their food behind the stove for them to eat; if you put them in the best place at table, and give them the first cup of brandy, and the

first cup of wine, your people will not eat half as much, and your father and mother will be content.'

When the house-holder heard this, he told his wife, and she immediately washed and combed her father and mother in law, and put nice shoes on their feet; and, when evening came, the householder put them in the best place at table, and gave them the first cup of brandy and the first cup of wine. From that time forth the household could not eat half what they did before, and on the morrow both the father and the mother departed this life. Then the householder gave him two oxen; he thanked him, and went home. When he came to his place of abode, his acquaintances began to congratulate him, and ask him: 'Whose are these cattle?'

He replied to everybody: 'Brother, they are my niece Militza's.' When he got home he immediately went off to his brother, and began to beg and pray him: 'Give me, brother, your daughter Militza to be my daughter. You see that I have no one.' His brother replied: 'It is good, brother; Militza is yours.' He took Militza, and conducted her home, and afterwards acquired much, but said, with regard to everything, that it was Militza's. Once he went out into the field to go round some rye; the rye was beautiful; it could not be better. Thereupon a traveller happened to come up, and asked him: 'Whose is this rye?' He forgot himself, and said: 'Mine.' The moment he said that, the rye caught fire and began to burn. When he saw this, he ran after the man: 'Stop, brother! it is not mine; it belongs to Militza, my niece.' Then the fire in the rye went out, and he remained lucky with Militza.

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