



Madey

John Theophilus Naaké

Polish

Intermediate
8 min read

A merchant was once travelling through a dark, dense forest. At night he lost his way; he wandered about for a long time, and at last, unable to see in the darkness above and around, he fell into a bog and there helplessly remained. He began already to despair of his life, when suddenly an evil spirit, in human shape, appeared to him.

“Fear not,” said the evil spirit to the merchant, “I will help you out of this bog and show you the right way, on condition that you give me something that is in your home which you know not and which you have not seen.”

The merchant reflected a little; at last he accepted the proposal, not knowing that during his absence a beautiful boy had been born to him in his house. The evil spirit took the merchant out of the bog and showed him the way home. He made him sign a bond of the gift, once more reminded him of the agreement, and disappeared.

The merchant, on his return home, joyfully greeted his wife, from whom he had been separated so long; but the sight of his lovely boy, whom he had already promised to the evil spirit, made his heart bleed within him. The unhappy merchant often wept in secret, hiding his bitter tears even from his wife.

Meanwhile the child grew up. He was quiet, obedient, and willing to learn; when five years old he could read

and write. His poor father was almost broken-hearted at the thought of parting with such a son, whom he, alas! had unknowingly given over to destruction.

When the boy was seven years old he observed that his father, whenever he looked upon his rosy face, would sigh and shed tears. The little boy begged his father so often to tell him the reason of this emotion, that at last the merchant related all the story of the bond.

“Fear not, dear father,” said the little boy. “Heaven will help us. I will go to the evil spirit and bring back the bond.”

His father and mother wept bitterly at parting. They prayed for and blessed their little son, who, although so young and tender, was starting on such a long and dangerous journey. The boy, having made all necessary preparations, set out from home.

He walked long and far; at last he came to a thick, gloomy forest. In a secret cave in this forest lived a robber whose name was Madey. He had murdered his own father, and had spared the life of his mother only that she might prepare his food. He had no pity for the life of man; those he could capture he would murder without mercy. His mother, an old woman, would often hide strayed travellers in the cave, but Madey’s nose was so keen that he would scent strangers at once.

Seeking shelter from a storm, our little traveller accidentally entered the cave. The old woman, having compassion on his tender years, hid him in a narrow recess; but Madey, as soon as he came in, scented the little boy. The poor child was about to perish beneath the cruel blows of a club, when the robber, hearing where the boy was going, granted him his life on condition that he should see in the abode of the evil spirits the kind of punishment prepared for him, Madey, after death.

The boy left the cave early the following morning, and soon arrived at the gates of the evil spirit’s abode. He opened them easily by means of the holy water and holy images which he affixed upon the gate posts. The prince of the demons, alarmed at this intrusion, asked him at once what he wanted.

“The bond given for my soul by my father.”

The prince, wishing to get rid of him as soon as possible, ordered the bond to be given up. It was in the

possession of a lame spirit called Twardowski. Although the royal command was pressing, and Twardowski was urged to make haste by being sprinkled with holy water, which burnt him like fire, he was obstinate, and would not give up the bond.

At last the prince, tired of waiting, called out angrily,—

“Seize him and lay him on Madey’s bed.”

Twardowski, terrified even at the thought of such fearful torments, gave up the bond at once.

The boy went to see that dreadful bed. It was made of iron bars strewn over with sharp knives, large needles, and razors. Under it a fierce fire burned continually, while showers of burning brimstone dropped upon it from above.

The boy left the dreadful place and began his journey home. He walked one day, and he walked another, at last, on the third day, he arrived at the cave where Madey, gloomy and anxious, awaited his return. The boy told him all he had heard and seen. The robber was almost paralyzed with fear at the recital. Hoping to escape such a terrible punishment, he began seriously to repent of his many crimes.

They left the cave together. Madey stuck his murderous club in the ground, knelt down near it, and knowing that the boy was destined to become a priest, vowed that he would wait for him on that same spot until he should return a bishop.

Many years passed away before the once little boy came to be raised to the dignity of a bishop.

One day the bishop, passing through a dense, gloomy forest, smelt a sweet odour of apples. He asked some of his servants to find the tree, and to bring him some of the fruit. The servants soon returned from their search and informed the bishop that they had discovered the tree, which was full of apples, but that they could not get any of them, and that an old man was kneeling beside it.

The bishop went to the spot, and what was his surprise, when, in the old, grey-haired man, with a beard reaching to the ground, he recognised the desperate robber Madey!

The robber, full of repentance and sorrow for the past, entreated the bishop to hear his confession and grant

him absolution. His request was readily granted. The bishop's attendants saw with surprise that during the confession the apples on the tree, one after another, changed into snow-white doves, flew up, and disappeared in the skies. Soon there was only one apple left; it was the soul of Madey's father whom he had murdered; that terrible sin he could only bring himself to acknowledge at the last. As soon, however, as he had confessed it, the remaining apple also changed into a beautiful white dove and flew away to heaven.

The bishop prayed long and earnestly over the repentant sinner. When he had pronounced his absolution the body of Madey crumbled into dust.

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