

# *The Brownie, or House Spirit*

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*Intermediate*  
*9 min read*

At Behary lived a peasant whose name was Palichka. One day as he was walking to market at Kopidlno, he found in the field under a pear-tree a black hen, wet, trembling with cold, and crying. Palichka took the hen under his cloak, and having brought her home, put her behind the oven, so that she might dry herself, and then let her go into the yard among his other fowls.

At night, when everybody was asleep, the peasant heard a strange noise in his storeroom, and now and then a piercing voice, half human and half like that of a fowl, crying, "Master, I have brought you some potatoes!" Palichka jumped out of bed, rushed into the storeroom, and there saw a flaming hen and three heaps of potatoes; the hen was flying from heap to heap. "Fie, you unclean thing," cried the terrified peasant, and having violently shut the door he went to bed again; but he could not sleep from fear at the thought of what a terrible creature he had brought home. In the morning he removed all these potatoes to a dunghill.

On the following night Palichka again heard the same voice, crying, "Master, I have brought you some wheat, rye, and barley!" Palichka did not go to see what it was, but trembling with fear like a leaf, he prayed continually: "Deliver us from evil." In the morning he took up a spade and a besom, and having carefully swept the room, he removed all this corn away, so that not even a grain was left behind.

This event gave him a great deal of anxiety; he did not know what to do, and was greatly alarmed lest any of his neighbours should hear about it. But his neighbours soon knew all about the matter; they saw at night

something flying to Palichka's house, looking like a burning wisp of straw, and yet it did not set the house on fire; in the day-time they observed a black hen in the yard among the other fowls. Soon a report was spread in the village that gossip Palichka had sold himself to the demon. Some of the more sober of his neighbours shook their heads doubtfully, as from his youth they knew Palichka to be both pious and honest, and they agreed among themselves to go and speak to him about the rumour. Accordingly they called upon Palichka, and he told them candidly everything that had happened, and asked them to advise him what to do.

"My advice is to kill this monster," cried a young peasant, and having caught hold of a piece of wood he threw it at the black hen. But in the same moment the hen flew up on to his shoulders and began to beat him as if with a cane, and at every blow she cried, "I am Rarash! Rarash! Rarash!"[1]

Afterwards some of the neighbours advised Palichka to sell all he had and remove from thence, as Rarash would, doubtless, remain in the house. The peasant readily seized this idea, and searched for a buyer; but no one would buy a house with a Rarash in it. Palichka, however, was determined to get rid of Rarash at any price. Accordingly he sold all his corn, cattle, and all that he did not absolutely want, bought a new hut in a neighbouring village, and removed there. Having arrived for the last time with a cart and loaded it with sheep troughs, household utensils, harrows, and other implements, he set his straw-covered hut on fire; it stood alone and could not hurt any other building. Then he cracked his whip and was about to drive away; before doing so, however, he looked once more at his hut as it was burning, and said,—

"May you burn there, you unclean thing! I am sure to get something for the land at least."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed somebody behind him on the cart. Palichka looked round, and on the handle of a scythe the black hen was sitting; she flapped with her wings and began to sing,—

"We shall remove from here, we shall not stop here;  
We shall not stop here, we shall go away from here;  
We shall not stop here, we shall remove from here;  
We shall remove from here, somewhere else we shall steal."

Gossip Palichka felt like one thunderstruck. He really did not know what to do next. Then a thought occurred to him whether Rarash would not be persuaded to go away of his own accord if he would feed him well. Accordingly he asked his wife to give Rarash daily a dishful of fresh milk and three small loaves of wheaten bread. Rarash enjoyed this food immensely, and it did not seem at all likely that he would go away. One

evening, as Palichka's servant boy returned home from the field, he saw on the steps of the hut the three small loaves which the wife had put there for Rarash. Being hungry the boy took up one of the loaves and ate it.

"It is better that I should eat this bread than that goblin," he said to himself.

At that very moment Rarash jumped upon his back and screamed, "First loaf, second loaf! Vashek ate the third loaf!" And after every exclamation pecked him so dreadfully on the back that for a long time afterwards the boy had black and blue marks on his body. In the morning when Palichka got up and went to wake the boy he found him so dreadfully beaten that he could scarcely move. Having heard what had happened, Palichka went at once to Rarash and begged him to go away, as otherwise no man would be willing to serve in his house.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Rarash, and said, "Take me there, where you brought me from, and I shall not trouble you any longer."

The peasant at once put on his cloak and carried the hen back to the same pear-tree where he had found her. From that moment Rarash never troubled him any more.

II.

In a sheepfold at Libenice there was another Rarash, but there he was called Shetek. He looked like a little boy, only instead of nails he had claws on his fingers and toes. The farm labourers told many merry stories about him. Shetek was very fond of teasing dogs, cats, and turkeys; he also did a great deal of mischief to the farm servants, and whenever they did anything which they did not like their master to know, he was sure to expose them afterwards. On that account, especially, the farm servants hated him very much; they were, however, afraid to do anything to him, because he would be sure to revenge himself; moreover, the master would not allow him to be hurt, as during the whole of the time that Shetek stopped in the sheepfold, not one of the sheep sickened.

In winter Shetek loved to sit on the top of the oven and warm himself, and when the young women brought into the room husks in pails in order to pour hot water over them, he used to jump down from the oven into the pail screaming, "Now for the husks!" But one day he burned himself dreadfully. One of the young women had filled her pail with boiling hot water, sprinkled some husks on the top of it, and then came into the room as usual. "Now for the husks!" cried Shetek, and jumped into the pail; but in a moment he was out again, screaming and writhing with pain. The servants laughed so loudly that the windows shook in their frames.

Shetek never forgave the girl. One day, as she was walking over a ladder lying on the ground, he entangled her dress so much in it that the other servants were obliged to come to the girl's assistance, and it was a long time before they could disengage her from the ladder.

In summer-time the farm servants used to sleep in the open air. One night Shetek came to them, and having half climbed up a ladder that was standing near, he began to tease the dogs that were sleeping in the yard. He lifted up now one of his legs, now another, and continually called out to them,—

“One leg,—two legs! which of them would you like to bite?”

The dogs barked at him and almost got mad with fury. The men, too, became very angry with him for disturbing them in their sleep; so one of them got up, took up a bundle of straw, threw it at Shetek and knocked him down with it from the ladder. The dogs received Shetek rather warmly, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he escaped from them. The man knew that Shetek was sure to revenge himself; he therefore was on his guard and tried to avoid him. All this precaution, however, did not help him in the least. One day, as he was watching a flock of sheep in the meadow, he sat down on the grass behind a heap of hay. Suddenly he heard a rustling noise near, and before he had time to see what it was, the whole heap of hay was thrown over him and entangled in his hair. The man screamed for help, and the mowers ran to his assistance; but do what they would they could not disentangle the hay from among the hair, they were so closely interwoven one with the other. The man was obliged to have his head shaved. When some time afterwards he drove the sheep into the meadow and came to a wild pear-tree, Shetek, who was sitting on the top of it, mocked him and laughed, “Ha! ha! ha!”

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