

The Dwarf with the Long Beard

Fairy Tales Of The Slav Peasants And Herdsmen

Slavic

Intermediate
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In a far distant land there reigned a king, and he had an only daughter who was so very beautiful that no one in the whole kingdom could be compared to her. She was known as Princess Pietnotka, and the fame of her beauty spread far and wide. There were many princes among her suitors, but her choice fell upon Prince Dobrotek. She obtained her father's consent to their marriage, and then, attended by a numerous suite, set off with her lover for the church, having first, as was the custom, received her royal parent's blessing. Most of the princes who had been unsuccessful in their wooing of Pietnotka returned disappointed to their own kingdoms: but one of them, a dwarf only seven inches high, with an enormous hump on his back and a beard seven feet long, who was a powerful prince and magician, was so enraged that he determined to have his revenge. So he changed himself into a whirlwind and lay in wait to receive the princess. When the wedding procession was about to enter the church the air was suddenly filled with a blinding cloud of dust, and Pietnotka was borne up high as the highest clouds, and then right down to an underground palace. There the dwarf, for it was he who had worked this spell, disappeared, leaving her in a lifeless condition.

When she opened her eyes she found herself in such a magnificent apartment that she imagined some king must have run away with her. She got up and began to walk about, when lo! as if by some unseen hand the table was laden with gold and silver dishes, filled with cakes of every kind. They looked so tempting, that in

spite of her grief she could not resist tasting, and she continued to eat until she was more than satisfied. She returned to the sofa and lay down to rest, but being unable to sleep, she looked first at the door, and then at the lamp burning on the table, then at the door again, and then back to the lamp. Suddenly the door opened of itself, giving entrance to four negroes fully armed, and bearing a golden throne, upon which was seated the Dwarf with the Long Beard. He came close up to the sofa and attempted to kiss the princess, but she struck him such a blow in the face that a thousand stars swam before his eyes, and a thousand bells rang in his ears; upon which he gave such a shout, that the palace walls trembled. Yet his love for her was so great that he did his best not to show his anger, and turned away as if to leave her. But his feet became entangled in his long beard, and he fell down, dropping a cap he was carrying in his hand. Now this cap had the power of making its wearer invisible. The negroes hastened up to their master, and placing him on his throne bore him out.

Directly the princess found herself alone she jumped off the sofa, locked the door, and picking up the cap ran to a mirror to try it on and see how it suited her. Imagine her amazement when looking in the glass she saw—nothing at all! She took off the cap, and behold, she was there again as large as life. She soon found out what sort of cap it was, and rejoicing in the possession of such a marvel, put it on her head again and began to walk about the room. Soon the door was burst violently open, and the dwarf entered with his beard tied up. But he found neither the princess nor the cap, and so came to the conclusion that she had taken it. In a great rage he began to search high and low; he looked under all the furniture, behind the curtains, and even beneath the carpets, but it was all in vain. Meanwhile the princess, still invisible, had left the palace and run into the garden, which was very large and beautiful. There she lived at her ease, eating the delicious fruit, drinking water from the fountain, and enjoying the helpless fury of the dwarf, who sought her untiringly. Sometimes she would throw the fruit-stones in his face, or take off the cap and show herself for an instant: then she would put it on again, and laugh merrily at his rage.

One day, while playing this game, the cap caught in the branches of a gooseberry bush. The dwarf seeing this at once ran up, seized the princess in one hand and the cap in the other, and was about to carry both off when the sound of a war-trumpet was heard.

The dwarf trembled with rage and muttered a thousand curses. He breathed on the princess to send her to sleep, covered her with the invisible cap, and seizing a double-bladed sword, rose up in the air as high as the clouds, so that he might fall upon his assailant and kill him at one stroke. We shall now see with whom he had to deal.

After the hurricane had upset the wedding procession and carried off the princess, there arose a great tumult among those at court. The king, the princess's attendants, and Prince Dobrotek sought her in every direction, calling her by name, and making inquiries of every one they met. At last, the king in despair declared that if Prince Dobrotek did not bring back his daughter, he would destroy his kingdom and have him killed. And to the other princes present he promised that whosoever among them should bring Pietnotka back to him should have her for his wife and receive half of the kingdom. Whereupon they all mounted their horses without loss of time and dispersed in every direction.

Prince Dobrotek, overpowered with grief and dismay, travelled three days without eating, drinking, or sleeping. On the evening of the third day he was quite worn-out with fatigue, and stopping his horse in a field, got down to rest for a short time. Suddenly he heard cries, as of something in pain, and looking round saw an enormous owl tearing a hare with its claws. The prince laid hold of the first hard thing that came to his hand; he imagined it to be a stone, but it was really a skull, and aiming it at the owl, killed the bird with the first blow. The rescued hare ran up to him and gratefully licked his hands, after which it ran away: but the human skull spoke to him and said, "Prince Dobrotek, accept my grateful thanks for the good turn you have done me. I belonged to an unhappy man who took his own life, and for this crime of suicide I have been condemned to roll in the mud until I was the means of saving the life of one of God's creatures. I have been kicked about for seven hundred and seventy years, crumbling miserably on the earth, and without exciting the compassion of a single individual. You have been the means of setting me free by making use of me to save the life of that poor hare. In return for this kindness I will teach you how to call to your aid a most marvellous horse, who during my life belonged to me. He will be able to help you in a thousand ways, and when in need of him you have only to walk out on the moorland without once looking behind you, and to say:

'Dappled Horse with Mane of Gold,

Horse of Wonder! Come to me.

Walk not the earth, for I am told

You fly like birds o'er land and sea.'

Finish your work of mercy by burying me here, so that I may be at rest until the day of judgment. Then depart in peace and be of good cheer."

The prince dug a hole at the foot of a tree, and reverently buried the skull, repeating over it the prayers for the dead. Just as he finished he saw a small blue flame come out of the skull and fly towards heaven: it was the soul of the dead man on its way to the angels.

The prince made the sign of the cross and resumed his journey. When he had gone some way along the moorland he stopped, and without looking back tried the effect of the magic words, saying:

"Dappled Horse with Mane of Gold,

Horse of Wonder! Come to me.

Walk not the earth, for I am told

You fly like birds o'er land and sea."

Then amid flash of lightning and roll of thunder appeared the horse. A horse, do I say? Why, he was a miracle of wonder. He was light as air, with dappled coat and golden mane. Flames came from his nostrils and sparks from his eyes. Volumes of steam rolled from his mouth and clouds of smoke issued from his ears. He stopped before the prince, and said in a human voice, "What are your orders, Prince Dobrotek?"

"I am in great trouble," answered the prince, "and shall be glad if you can help me." Then he told all that had happened.

And the horse said, "Enter in at my left ear, and come out at my right."

The prince obeyed, and came out at the right ear clad in a suit of splendid armour. His gilded cuirass, his steel helmet inlaid with gold, and his sword and club made of him a complete warrior. Still more, he felt himself endowed with superhuman strength and bravery. When he stamped his foot and shouted the earth trembled and gave forth a sound like thunder, the very leaves fell from the trees.

“What must we do? Where are we to go?” he asked.

The horse replied, “Your bride, Princess Pietnotka, has been carried off by the Dwarf with the Long Beard, whose hump weighs two hundred and eighty pounds. This powerful magician must be defeated, but he lives a long way from here, and nothing can touch or wound him except the sharp smiting sword that belongs to his own brother, a monster with the head and eyes of a basilisk. We must first attack the brother.”

Prince Dobrotek leaped on to the dappled horse, which was covered with golden trappings, and they set off immediately, clearing mountains, penetrating forests, crossing rivers; and so light was the steed’s step that he galloped over the grass without bending a single blade, and along sandy roads without raising a grain of dust. At last they reached a vast plain, strewn with human bones. They stopped in front of a huge moving mountain, and the horse said:

“Prince, this moving mountain that you see before you is the head of the Monster with Basilisk Eyes, and the bones that whiten the ground are the skeletons of his victims, so beware of the eyes that deal death. The heat of the midday sun has made the giant sleep, and the sword with the never-failing blade lies there before him. Bend down and lie along my neck until we are near enough, then seize the sword and you have nothing more to fear. For, without the sword, not only will the monster be unable to harm you, but he himself will be completely at your mercy.”

The horse then noiselessly approached the huge creature, upon which the prince bent down, and quickly picked up the sword. Then, raising himself on his steed’s back, he gave a “Hurrah!” loud enough to wake the dead. The giant lifted his head, yawned, and turned his bloodthirsty eyes upon the prince; but seeing the sword in his hand he became quiet, and said, “Knight, is it weariness of life that brings you here?”

“Boast not,” replied the prince, “you are in my power. Your glance has already lost its magic charm, and you will soon have to die by this sword. But first tell me who you are.”

“It is true, prince, I am in your hands, but be generous, I deserve your pity. I am a knight of the race of giants,

and if it were not for the wickedness of my brother I should have lived in peace. He is the horrible dwarf with the great hump and the beard seven feet long. He was jealous of my fine figure, and tried to do me an injury. You must know that all his strength, which is extraordinary, lies in his beard, and it can only be cut off by the sword you hold in your hand. One day he came to me and said, 'Dear brother, I pray you help me to discover the sharp smiting sword that has been hidden in the earth by a magician. He is our enemy, and he alone can destroy us both.' Fool that I was, I believed him, and by means of a large oak tree, raked up the mountain and found the sword. Then we disputed as to which of us should have it, and at last my brother suggested that we should cease quarrelling and decide by lot. 'Let us each put an ear to the ground, and the sword shall belong to him who first hears the bells of yonder church,' said he. I placed my ear to the ground at once, and my brother treacherously cut off my head with the sword. My body, left unburied, became a great mountain, which is now overgrown with forests. As for my head, it is full of a life and strength proof against all dangers, and has remained here ever since to frighten all who attempt to take away the sword. Now, prince, I beg of you, use the sword to cut off the beard of my wicked brother; kill him, and return here to put an end to me: I shall die happy if I die avenged."

"That you shall be, and very soon, I promise you," replied his listener.

The prince bade the Dappled Horse with Golden Mane carry him to the kingdom of the Dwarf with the Long Beard. They reached the garden gate at the very moment when the dwarf had caught sight of Princess Pietnotka and was running after her. The war-trumpet, challenging him to fight, had obliged him to leave her, which he did, having first put on her head the invisible cap.

While the prince was awaiting the answer to his challenge he heard a great noise in the clouds, and looking up saw the dwarf preparing to aim at him from a great height. But he missed his aim and fell to the ground so heavily that his body was half buried in the earth. The prince seized him by the beard, which he at once cut off with the sharp smiting sword.

Then he fastened the dwarf to the saddle, put the beard in his helmet, and entered the palace. When the servants saw that he had really got possession of the terrible beard, they opened all the doors to give him entrance. Without losing a moment he began his search for Princess Pietnotka. For a long time he was unsuccessful, and was almost in despair when he came across her accidentally, and, without knowing it, knocked off the invisible cap. He saw his lovely bride sound asleep, and being unable to wake her he put the cap in his pocket, took her in his arms, and, mounting his steed, set off to return to the Monster with the Basilisk

Eyes. The giant swallowed the dwarf at one mouthful, and the prince cut the monster's head up into a thousand pieces, which he scattered all over the plain.

He then resumed his journey, and on coming to the moorland the dappled horse stopped short and said, "Prince, here for the present we must take leave of each other. You are not far from home, your own horse awaits you; but before leaving, enter in at my right ear and come out at my left."

The prince did so, and came out without his armour, and clad as when Pietnotka left him.

The dappled horse vanished, and Dobrotek whistled to his own horse, who ran up, quite pleased to see him again. They immediately set off for the king's palace.

But night came on before they reached the end of their journey.

The prince laid the sleeping maiden on the grass, and, covering her up carefully to keep her warm, he himself fell fast asleep. By chance, a knight, one of her suitors, passed that way. Seeing Dobrotek asleep he drew his sword and stabbed him; then he lifted the princess on his horse and soon reached the king's palace, where he addressed Pietnotka's father in these words: "Here is your daughter, whom I now claim as my wife, for it is I who have restored her to you. She was carried off by a terrible sorcerer who fought with me three days and three nights. But I conquered him, and I have brought you the princess safely back."

The king was overjoyed at seeing her again, but finding that his tenderest efforts were powerless to awake her, he wanted to know the reason of it.

"That I cannot tell you," replied the impostor; "you see her as I found her myself."

Meanwhile, poor Prince Dobrotek, seriously wounded, was slowly recovering consciousness, but he felt so weak that he could hardly utter these words:

"Come, Magic Horse with Mane of Gold,

Come, Dappled Horse, O come to me.

Fly like the birds as you did of old,

As flashes of lightning o'er land and sea."

Instantly a bright cloud appeared, and from the midst thereof stepped the magic horse. As he already knew all that had happened, he dashed off immediately to the Mountain of Eternal Life. Thence he drew the three kinds of water: the Water that gives Life, the Water that Cures, and the Water that Strengthens. Returning to the prince, he sprinkled him first with the Life-giving Water, and instantly the body, which had become cold, was warm again and the blood began to circulate. The Water that Cures healed the wound, and the Strength-giving Water had such an effect upon him that he opened his eyes and cried out, "Oh, how well I have slept."

"You were already sleeping the eternal sleep," replied the dappled horse. "One of your rivals stabbed you mortally, and carried off Pietnotka, whom he pretends to have rescued. But do not worry yourself, she still sleeps, and none can arouse her but you, and this you must do by touching her with the dwarf's beard. Go now, and be happy."

The brave steed disappeared in a whirlwind, and Prince Dobrotek proceeded on his way. On drawing near the capital he saw it surrounded by a large foreign army; part of it was already taken, and the inhabitants seemed to be begging for mercy. The prince put on his invisible cap, and began to strike right and left with the sharp smiting sword. With such fury did he attack the enemy that they fell dead on all sides, like felled trees. When he had thus destroyed the whole army he went, still invisible, into the palace, where he heard the king express the utmost astonishment that the enemy had retired without fighting.

"Where then is the brave warrior who has saved us?" said his majesty aloud.

Every one was silent, when Dobrotek took off his magic cap, and falling on his knees before the monarch, said: "It is I, my king and father, who have routed and destroyed the enemy. It is I who saved the princess, my bride. While on my way back with her I was treacherously killed by my rival, who has represented himself to you as her rescuer, but he has deceived you. Lead me to the princess, that I may awaken her."

On hearing these words the impostor ran away as quickly as possible, and Dobrotek approached the sleeping maiden. He just touched her brow with the dwarf's beard, upon which she opened her eyes, smiled, and seemed to ask where she was.

The king, overcome with joy, kissed her fondly, and the same evening she was married to the devoted Prince Dobrotek. The king himself led her to the altar, and to his son-in-law he gave half his kingdom. So splendid was the wedding banquet, that eye has never seen, nor ear ever heard of its equal.

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