



The Flying Carpet, the Invisible Cap, the Gold- Giving Ring and the Smiting Club

Fairy Tales Of The Slav Peasants And Herdsmen

Slavic

Intermediate
38 min read

In a cottage near the high-road, and close to the shores of a large lake, there once lived a widow, poor and old. She was very very poor, but her mother's heart was rich in pride in her son, who was the joy of her life. He was a handsome lad with an honest soul. He earned his living by fishing in the lake, and succeeded so well that neither he nor his mother were ever in want of their daily bread. Every one called him "the fisherman."

One evening at dusk he went down to the lake to throw in his nets, and standing on the shore with a new bucket in his hand, waited to put into it whatever fish it might please God to send him. In about a quarter of an hour or so he drew in his nets and took out two bream. These he threw into the bucket, and humming a merry song turned to go home. At that moment a traveller, poorly clad, with hair and beard white as the wings of a dove, spoke to him, saying, "Have pity on a feeble old man, obliged to lean on his stick, hungry and ragged. I

beg you, in Heaven's name, to give me either money or bread. The sun will soon set, and I who have eaten nothing to-day shall have to pass the night fasting, with the bare earth for a bed."

"My good old friend, I am sorry I have nothing about me to give you, but you see the black smoke curling up in the distance? That is our cottage, where my old mother is waiting for me to bring her some fish to cook for our supper. Now take these two bream to her, meanwhile I will return to the lake and throw in my nets again to see if I can catch something more. Thus, with God's help, we shall all three have enough for supper to-night and breakfast to-morrow morning."

While speaking the fisherman handed the fish to the old man, when, marvel of marvels! he melted into the rays of the setting sun and vanished, both he and the fish.

The fisherman, much astonished, rubbed his eyes and looked about on all sides. For a moment he felt afraid, but when he had crossed himself all terror left him and he went to draw in his nets by the light of the moon. And what do you think he found in them? It was neither a pike nor a trout, but a small fish with eyes of diamonds, fins of rainbow colour, and golden scales that shone and flashed like lightning.

When he had spread his nets on the beach the fish began to talk to him in the language of men.

"Do not kill me, young fisherman," it said, "but accept in exchange for my life this golden ring. Every time you put it on your finger repeat these words:

'I conjure thee, O ring, who gold can give,

In the name of the little fishling of gold,

For the good of man, that man may live,

And the honour of heaven, send, new or old,

Little or much, as may be my need,

Coins of the realm, let them fall like seed.'

After uttering each of these words, a shower of gold pieces will fall."

The fisherman gladly accepted the ring, and freeing the miraculous fish from the net he threw it back into the

water. As it fell, it shone in the air like a shooting star and then disappeared beneath the waves.

On his way back he said to himself, "My mother and I will go to bed hungry to-night, without our fried fish, but to-morrow, when I have made the golden coins gleam in our humble cottage, all sorts of good things will find their way there, and we shall live like lords."

But things turned out very differently, for the first thing he saw on opening the door was the table covered with a white cloth, and upon it a china soup-tureen in which lay the two bream freshly cooked.

"Where did you get those fish from, dear mother?"

"I do not know myself," replied she, "for I have neither cleaned them nor cooked them. Our table spread itself, the fish placed themselves upon it, and although they have been there an hour they do not get cold; any one might think they had just been taken off the fire. Come, let us eat them."

The widow and her son sat down, said grace, and after eating as much as they wanted went to bed.

Next morning, at breakfast time, the fisherman made the sign of the cross, and then put on the gold ring, at the same time repeating the words the fish had taught him:

"I conjure thee, O ring, who gold can give,

In the name of the little fishling of gold,

For the good of man, that man may live,

And the honour of heaven, send, new or old,

Little or much, as may be my need,

Coins of the realm, let them fall like seed."

When he had ceased speaking the room was filled with a blast of wind followed by flashes of lightning, then a hailstorm of gold pieces showered down and quite covered the table.

The chink of the money aroused his mother, who sat up in bed perfectly amazed.

"What is the meaning of this, my son? Am I awake or dreaming? or is it the work of the Evil One? Where did all

that money come from?”

“Fear not, mother, I wear a cross that charms away evil spirits. I have my work, so that you shall never want, and I have your heart, where for me there will ever be love to sweeten the disappointments and troubles of life. This gold that you see will drive poverty far away, and enable us to help others. Take these pieces, lock them up safely, and use them when in need. As for me, kiss me, and wish me good luck on my journey.”

“What! Is it possible that you want to leave me already? Why? and whither are you going?”

“I want to go, mother mine, to see the great city. When there, I mean to enrol myself in the national army. Thus the fisherman turned soldier will become the defender of his king, for the glory of his country and his mother.”

“Of a truth, my son, I have heard some talk about the king being in danger, and that our enemies are trying to take his crown from him. But why should you go? Stay at home rather, for alone and unnoticed among so many troops you will neither be able to help nor to hinder.”

“You are right, one man alone is a small thing, but by adding one grain to another the measure overflows. If all those who are capable of bearing arms will help the king, there is no doubt that he will soon overcome his enemies.”

“But a harmless fisherman like you! Of what use can you be in a battle?”

“The fisherman has, doubtless, a peaceable disposition, and he never boasts of his strength. But when the right moment comes he knows how to handle a sword, and how to water the land with the enemy’s blood. And the victorious king will, perhaps, reward me for my bravery by giving me some splendid castle, or a few acres of forest land, a suit of armour and a horse, or even the hand of his daughter in marriage.”

“If you feel like this,” answered she, “go, and may God bless you. May He cover you, dear child, with His grace as with a buckler, so that neither guns nor sabres shall do you harm. May He take you under His protection, so that you may return safe and sound to be a comfort to me; and at the end of my days may I rejoice in your happiness, and live near you as long as God in His wisdom shall allow.”

Then she gave him her blessing and kissed him tenderly, making the sign of the cross in the direction he was about to take.

So he departed, and after a few days' march reached the capital, thinking within himself how he might help the king most effectually.

The town was surrounded by a countless host who threatened to utterly destroy it unless the king would agree to pay a very large ransom.

The people crowded into the square, and stood before the palace gates listening to the herald's proclamation.

"Hear the king's will," said the herald; "listen, all ye faithful subjects, to the words he speaks to you by my mouth. Here are our deadly enemies, who have scattered our troops, and have come to besiege the capital of our kingdom. If we do not send them, by daybreak to-morrow, twenty-four waggons, each drawn by six horses and loaded with gold, they threaten to take the town and destroy it by fire and sword, and to deliver our land to the soldiers. It is certain that we cannot hold out any longer, and our royal treasure-house does not contain one-half the amount demanded. Therefore, through me our sovereign announces, that whosoever among you shall succeed, either in defeating our foes, or in providing the money needed for the ransom, him will he appoint his heir to the crown, and to him will he give his only daughter in marriage, a princess of marvellous beauty. Further, he shall receive half the kingdom in his own right."

When the fisherman heard these words he went to the king and said, "My sovereign and father, command that twenty-four waggons, each harnessed with twenty-four horses and provided with leathern bags, be brought into the courtyard; I will engage to fill them with gold, and that at once, before your eyes."

Then he left the palace, and standing in the middle of the large square, recited the words the fish had taught him.

These were followed by rumblings of thunder and flashes of lightning, and then by a perfect hurricane which sent down masses and showers of gold. In a few minutes the square was covered with a layer of gold so thick that, after loading the twenty-four waggons and filling a large half of the royal treasure-house, there was enough left to make handsome presents to all the king's officers and servants.

Next day the enemy returned to their own country laden with the heavy ransom they had demanded.

The king sent for the fisherman, and inviting him to partake of hydromel wine and sweetmeats, said, "You have to-day been the means of saving our capital from a great calamity, and shall, therefore, receive the reward which you have earned. My only daughter, a princess of great beauty, shall be your wife, and I will give you the half of my kingdom for a wedding present. I also appoint you my heir to the throne. But tell me, to whom am I indebted? What kingdom or land belongs to you? How is it that by a mere movement of the hand you were able to supply my enemies with such a quantity of gold?"

And the fisherman, simple-hearted and straightforward as a child, ignorant of the deceptions practised in court, answered frankly, "Sire, I belong to no royal or princely family, I am a simple fisherman and your loyal subject. I procure my gold by means of this magic ring, and at any time I can have as much as I want."

Then he told how his good fortune had come to him.

The king made no answer, but it hurt his royal dignity to think that he owed his safety to one of his own peasants, and that he had promised to make him his son-in-law.

That evening, after a luxurious supper, the fisherman, having taken a little more wine than usual, ventured to ask the king to present him to his bride. The king whispered a few words in the ear of the chamberlain of the court, and then went out.

The chamberlain took the fisherman to the top of the castle tower, and there said to him, "According to the customs of the court you should, before being introduced to the princess, send her by my hands some valuable jewel as a wedding gift."

"But I have nothing of value or beauty about me," replied he, "unless you offer the princess this golden ring, to which I owe all my good fortune, the princess herself, and the safety of her father."

The chamberlain took the ring, and opening the window of the tower, asked, "Fisherman, do you see the moon in the heavens?"

"I do."

"Very well, she shall be the witness of your betrothal. Now look down; do you see that precipice, and the deep

river shining in its depths.”

“I do.”

“Very well, it shall be your bridal couch.”

So saying the chamberlain threw him into the deep abyss, shut the window, and ran to tell the king that there was no longer a suitor for the hand of his daughter.

The fisherman, stunned by the force of his fall, reached the water quite senseless. When he came to himself and opened his eyes, he lay in a boat which at that moment was leaving the mouth of the river and entering the open sea.

The very old man, to whom he had given the bream, was guiding the vessel with an oar.

“My good old man, is it you? How did you manage to save me?” asked the astonished fisherman.

“I came to your assistance,” replied the old man, “because he who shows pity to others deserves their help when in need of it. But take the oar and row to whatever place you wish.”

And having thus spoken the mysterious old man disappeared. The fisherman crossed himself, and having looked round upon the royal palace sparkling with light he sighed deeply, and chanting the hymn “Under Thy Help,” put out to sea.

When the sun rose he saw some nets in the boat, and throwing them into the water caught some pike, which he sold in a town near the shore, and then continued his journey on foot.

Two or three months later, when crossing some open country, he heard cries for help which came from a hill near the forest. There he saw two little demons pulling each other’s hair. By the cut of their short waistcoats, by their tight pantaloons and three-cornered hats, he knew that they were inhabitants of the nether world, from which they must have escaped. He had no doubt about it, but being a good Christian he was not afraid, and accosted them boldly, saying, “Why do you ill-treat each other in this way? What is the meaning of it?”

“It means, that for many a long year we have both been working hard to entice a silly fellow down below. He was first tempted by the desire to learn something of sorcery, and he ended by becoming an accomplished scoundrel. After giving him time to commit a great many crimes and thus forfeit his soul, we handed him over

to safe keeping. Now we want to divide his property between us. He has left three things, which by every right belong to us. The first is a wonderful carpet. Whoever sits down upon it, and pronounces certain magic words, will be carried off at once, over forests and under clouds, never stopping until his destination is reached. The magic words are as follows:

‘Carpet, that of thyself through space takes flight,

O travel, thou airy car, both day and night

Till my desired haven comes in sight.’

The second piece of property is that club lying on the grass. After uttering some magic words, the club will immediately begin to hit so vigorously that a whole army may be crushed to pieces or dispersed. The words run thus:

‘Club, thou marvellous club, who knows

How to strike and smite my foes,

By thine own strength and in God’s name

O strike well home and strike again.’

The third piece of property is a cap that renders its wearer invisible. Now, my good man, you see our difficulty: there are but two of us, and we are fighting to decide how these three lots may be divided into two equal parts.”

“I can help you,” said the fisherman, “provided you will do as I tell you. Leave the three lots here just as they are—the carpet, the club, and the magic cap. I will roll a stone from the top of this hill to the bottom—whoever catches it first shall have two lots for his share. What do you say?”

“Agreed!” cried the demons, racing after the stone that rolled and bounded on its way down.

In the meantime the fisherman hastily put on the cap, seized the club, and sitting down on the carpet, repeated the magic formula without forgetting a single word.

He was already high up in the air when the demons returned carrying the stone and calling out to him to come and reward the winner.

“Come down and divide those things between us,” they cried after him.

The fisherman’s only answer was the magic address to his club. This enchanted weapon then fell upon them and struck so hard that the country round echoed to the sound thereof. In the midst of screams and cries and clouds of dust they escaped at last, and the club, of its own accord, came back and placed itself at the fisherman’s orders. He, in spite of the rapid motion, sat comfortably on the carpet with the cap under his arm and the club in his hand. Thus they flew over forests, under clouds, and so high that seen from the earth they looked like a tiny white cloud.

Within two or three days they stopped at the king’s capital. The fisherman, with his cap on, descended into the middle of the courtyard.

The whole place was in confusion and trouble, for the commander of the foreign army, encouraged by having so easily received such a large sum of money, had returned to the attack and again held the town in siege, declaring that he would destroy every house and slay all the inhabitants, not sparing even the king himself, unless he agreed to give him his only daughter in marriage.

The terrified citizens crowded to the palace and besought his majesty to do as they asked him, and so save them from such a fate. The king, standing on the balcony, addressed them thus: “Faithful and devoted people, listen to me. Nothing but a miracle can save us from this fearful calamity; yet it has happened that the most powerful assailants have been forced to ask mercy of the most feeble. I will never consent to the marriage of my only daughter with my most hated and cruel foe. Within a few moments my guards will be ready for combat, and I myself will lead them against the enemy. If there be any among you who can win the victory, to him will I give my only daughter in marriage, the half of my kingdom for her dowry, and the heirship to the throne.”

When he had finished speaking the fisherman ordered his club to fall on the foe, while the country round echoed and re-echoed to the blows by means of which it destroyed the besieging army. It was in vain that the brave commander shouted to his soldiers not to run away, for when he himself received three blows from the club he was obliged to make off as fast as possible.

When the club had destroyed or driven away into the desert all the troops it came back to its master; he, still

wearing the magic cap, and with his carpet folded up under his arm and his club in his hand, made his way to the king's apartment.

In the palace shouts of joy had succeeded the cries of fear which had been heard but a short while ago. Every one was happy, and every one congratulated the king upon his victory, as sudden and complete as it was unexpected. But the monarch, turning to his warriors, addressed them thus: "Victory! Let us rather return thanks to God. He who has won for us the victory has but to present himself and receive the reward he so richly deserves, that is, my beautiful daughter in marriage, the half of my kingdom, and the right of succession to my throne. These are the gifts that await this victorious hero. Where is he?"

They all stood silent and looked from one to the other. Then the fisherman, who had taken off his cap, appeared before the assembly and said, "Behold, it was I who destroyed your enemies, O king. This is the second time that I have been promised the hand of the princess in marriage, the half of the kingdom, and the right of succession to the throne."

The king, struck dumb with amazement, looked inquiringly at his chamberlain, then recovering his presence of mind he shook hands with the fisherman.

"Your good health, my friend. By what happy fortune do you return safe and sound to my court? The chamberlain told me that through your own carelessness you had fallen out of the tower window; in truth, we mourned you as dead."

"I should not have fallen out of the window if I had not been thrown down by your chamberlain; there is the traitor. I only escaped death through God's help, and I have just come to the palace in my air-car."

The king made a pretence of being angry with the guilty chamberlain, and ordered his guards to take him away to the donjon cell; then, with pretended friendship, he embraced the fisherman and led him to his own apartments. All the while he was thinking and thinking what he could do to get rid of him. The idea of having him, a mere peasant and one of his own subjects, for a son-in-law was most repugnant to him, and hurt his kingly pride. At last he said, "The chamberlain will most certainly be punished for his crime. As for you, who have twice been my saviour, you shall be my son-in-law. Now the customs observed at court demand that you should send your bride a wedding gift, a jewel, or some other trifle of value. When this has been observed I promise to give my blessing on the marriage, and may you both be happy and live long."

“I have no jewel worthy of the princess’s acceptance. I might have given her as much gold as she wished, but your chamberlain took my magic golden ring from me.”

“Before insisting upon its return something else might be done. I thoroughly appreciate the value of your marvellous flying carpet—why should not we both sit on it and make an excursion to the Valley of Diamonds? There we can obtain stones of the finest water, such as no one in the world has ever possessed. Afterwards we will return here with your wedding present for my daughter.”

The king then opened the window, and the fisherman, spreading out his carpet, repeated the magic words.

Thus they took flight into the air, and after travelling one or two hours began to descend at their destination. It was a valley surrounded on all sides by rocks so steep and so difficult of access, that, except by God’s special grace, no mortal man imprisoned there could possibly escape. The ground was strewn with diamonds of the finest quality. The king and fisherman found it easy to make a large collection, picking and choosing, gathering and arranging them upon the carpet. When they had put together all there was room for, the king sat down, and pointing to a large diamond shining at a little distance, said to the fisherman, “There is yet a more splendid one by the stream yonder; run, my son-in-law, and bring it here, it would be a pity to leave it.”

The man went for it, while the king, taking advantage of his absence to pronounce the magic words, seated himself on the carpet, which lifted itself up, and floating like an air-car above the forest and under the clouds, descended by one of the palace windows.

His joy knew no bounds, for he now found himself not only free from his enemies and rid of the embarrassing presence of the fisherman, but also the possessor of the richest and most beautiful collection of diamonds in the world;—by his orders they were put away in the caves of the royal treasure-house, and with them the magic ring and the flying carpet.

Meantime the fisherman had returned with the diamond, and had stood aghast to see the carpet vanishing away in the distance.

Wounded at the ingratitude and indignant at the perversity of a prince for whom he had done so much, he burst into tears.

And, indeed, he had good reason to weep. For he had but to look at the enormous height of the polished rocks

to be convinced of the impossibility of climbing them. The vegetation, too, was so scanty that it could only provide him with food for a very short time. He saw but two courses open to him: either to die from starvation, or to be devoured by the monstrous serpents that crawled about in great numbers. Night was now coming on, and the poor fellow was obliged to plan some way of escaping the frightful reptiles which were leaving their hiding-places. At last he climbed up a tree, the highest he could find, and there, with his magic cap on and his club in his hand, passed the night without even closing his eyes.

Next morning when the sun rose the serpents went back to their holes, and the fisherman got down from his tree feeling stiff with cold and very hungry. For some time he walked about the valley in search of food, turning over the diamonds now so useless to him. There he found a few worthless mushrooms, and with such poor food as berries and sorrel leaves, and the water of the valley stream for drink, he lived for some days.

One night when he went to sleep it happened that his cap came off and fell to the ground, whereupon all the reptiles of the place immediately gathered round him. Aroused by their hisses, he awoke to find himself surrounded on all sides and almost in reach of their stings. He immediately seized his club, and had scarcely begun to repeat the magic formula before the weapon set to work to destroy the snakes, while the rocks resounded right and left with the blows. It was as if the monsters were being covered with boiling water, and the noise they made was like that produced by a flock of birds overtaken by a storm. They roared and hissed and twisted themselves into a thousand knots, gradually disappearing one by one. Then the club returned of its own accord to the fisherman's hands, while he returned thanks to God for having delivered him from such a horrible death. At that moment there appeared upon the top of a steep rock his friend, the old man. Overcome with joy at the sight of him, the fisherman called out, "Save me! come to me, my divine protector."

The old man spread out his arms towards him, and having blessed him drew him up, saying, "Now you are free again, hasten to save your king, his daughter your bride, and their kingdom. After he had left you in the valley as food for serpents he was punished for his great crimes by the return of the enemy, who again laid siege to the capital. This happened at the very moment when he was surrounded by his guests, and was boasting of his possession of the air-car, the magic golden ring, and the rest of his evilly acquired riches.

"His foes had consulted Yaga, a wicked sorceress; she advised them to obtain the help of Kostey the magician, who promised his aid in carrying off the princess. When he came he fell in love with the beautiful maiden at first sight, and determined to marry her himself. In order to bring this about he threw the king, the courtiers, and all the inhabitants of the land into a heavy sleep. Then he bore off the princess to his own palace, where she

has been shut up and ill-treated because she refuses to have anything to do with him. His castle is situated at the very end of the world, to the west. There is nothing to hinder you from taking possession of your carpet and ring, they are hidden in the king's treasure-house. Then go with your cap and club and conquer Kostey, rescue the princess, and deliver the king and his subjects."

The fisherman would have thrown himself at the old man's feet to pour out his gratitude, but he suddenly vanished. So he thanked God for all His mercies, put on his invisible cap, and taking his club, made his way towards the capital.

At the end of three days he entered the royal city. All the inhabitants were sleeping the enchanted sleep, from which they were powerless to rouse themselves. The fisherman went straight to the royal treasure-house, took the magic ring and carpet, then seating himself upon the latter and repeating the magic words, away he went like a bird, over rustling forests and under clouds, floating across the blue sky.

After some days of travel he alighted in Kostey's courtyard. Without a moment's delay he folded up his carpet, put the magic cap on his head, and with club in hand entered Kostey's room. There, to his astonishment, stood the magician himself, admiring the wondrous beauty of the princess. For she was perfectly beautiful; eye had never seen nor ear heard of such loveliness. With a low bow full of pride and an ironical smile he was saying to her: "Beauteous princess, you have sworn a most solemn oath to marry none but that man who can solve your six riddles. It is in vain that I strive to guess them. Now there are only two courses open to you: either to release yourself from your vow, putting the riddles aside and consenting to be my wife; or to persist in your vow and thus deliver yourself up to my anger, which you will bitterly regret. I give you three minutes to decide."

Upon hearing these threats the fisherman trembled with rage, and in a low voice whispered the magic words to his club.

This good weapon did not wait for the order to be repeated, but with one bound came down full upon Kostey's forehead. Stunned for a moment by the violence of the blow, the terrible creature rolled upon the ground. Sparks like fireworks sprang from his eyes, and the noise as of a hundred mills seemed to go through his head. Any ordinary mortal would never have opened his eyes again, but Kostey was immortal.

Getting on his feet he pulled himself together, and tried to find out who had thus attacked him. Then the club began to hit him again, and the sound thereof was like unto blows on an empty vault. It seemed to the magician as if showers of boiling water were being poured upon him. He twisted himself about in awful

convulsions, and would have liked to bury himself in his palace walls and be turned to stone.

At last, crippled with wounds, he began to hiss like a serpent, and springing forwards breathed upon the princess, filling the air with the poisonous blast.

The maiden tottered and fell, as if dead. Kostey changed himself into a wreath of smoke, and floating out of the window, disappeared in a hurricane.

The fisherman, still invisible, carried the princess into the courtyard of the castle, hoping that the fresh air might restore her to consciousness. He laid her upon the grass, his heart throbbing with hope and fear, and waited anxiously. Suddenly a raven and his nestlings, attracted by the sight of a dead body, and not being able to see the fisherman, came by croaking. The parent bird said to his young ones:

“Come, children, sharpen claws and beak, krâk, krâk,

For here’s a feast not far to seek, krâk, krâk,

This young girl’s corse so white and sleek, krâk, krâk.”

One small bird at once settled down on the princess, but the fisherman seized it and took off his cap, so that he could be seen.

“Fisherman,” said the father raven, “let go my dear birdling and I will give you anything you want.”

“Then bring me some of the Life-Giving Water.”

The raven flew away and returned in about an hour, carrying in his beak a tiny bottle of the water. Then he again begged to have his nestling back.

“You shall have it as soon as I have proved that the water is of the right sort.”

So saying, he sprinkled the pale face of the princess. She sighed, opened her eyes, and blushing at the sight of a stranger, got up and said, “Where am I? Why, how soundly I have slept!”

“Lovely princess, your sleep might have lasted for ever.”

Then he told her his story, how he had been thrown into the river, abandoned in the Valley of Diamonds, and so on, relating at full length all the marvellous events that had taken place.

She listened attentively, then, thanking him for all he had done for her, placed her hand in his and said, "In the garden behind the palace is an apple-tree that bears golden fruit. A guzla that plays of its own accord hangs on its branches, and is guarded day and night by four negroes. Now the music from this guzla has the wonderful power of restoring health to invalids who listen to it, and happiness to those who are sad. That which is ugly becomes beautiful, and charms and enchantments of all kinds are broken and destroyed for ever."

The fisherman put on his invisible cap and went into the garden in search of the negroes. Before going up to them he addressed the magic words to his golden ring, and after a short thunderstorm a shower of gold covered the ground. The negroes, greedy of wealth, threw themselves upon it, snatching from each other handfuls of the golden rain. While thus engaged the fisherman unhooked the guzla from the branches and hurried off into the courtyard with it. There he unfolded his carpet, and sitting down upon it with the princess at his side, flew high up into the air. He had not forgotten to bring with him the cap, the club, and the ring; the princess took care of the guzla.

They floated across the blue sky, above the rustling forests and under the clouds, and in a few days arrived at the palace. There they descended, but the people still lay wrapped in the enchanted sleep, from which they seemed to have no power of awakening.

The silence of the tomb reigned around. Some of the officers were sitting, others standing, all motionless and rigid, and each one in the position he occupied when last awake. The king held a goblet filled with wine, for he had been giving a toast. The chamberlain had his throat half filled with a lying tale, which there had been no time to finish. One had the end of a joke upon his lips, another a dainty morsel between his teeth, or a tale ready cooked upon his tongue.

And it was the same in all the villages throughout the length and breadth of the land. All the inhabitants lay under the enchanted spell. The labourer held his whip in the air, for he had been about to strike his oxen. The harvesters with their sickles had stopped short in their work. The shepherds slept by their sheep in the middle of the road. The huntsman stood with the powder still alight on the pan of his gun. The birds, arrested in their flight, hung in mid-air. The animals in the woods were motionless. The water in the streams was still. Even the wind slept. Everywhere men had been overtaken in their occupations or amusements. It was a soundless land,

without voice or movement; on all sides calm, death, sleep.

The fisherman stood with the princess at his side in the banqueting-hall where slept the king and his guests. Taking the magic guzla from the maid, he pronounced these words:

“O guzla, play, and let thy sweetest harmonies resound
Through hall and cot, o’er hill and dale, and all the country round;
That by the power and beauty of thy heavenly tones and song
Awakened may these sleepers be who sleep too well, too long.”

When the first tones of music burst forth everything began to move and live again. The king finished proposing his toast. The chamberlain ended his tale. The guests continued to feast and enjoy themselves. The servants waited at their posts. In short, everything went on just as before, and as if nothing had happened to interrupt it.

And it was just the same in all the country round. Everything suddenly awoke to life. The labourer finished ploughing his furrow. The haymakers built up the hay in ricks. The reapers cut down the golden grain. The hunter’s gun went off and shot the duck. The trees rustled. The gardener went on with his work and his song. The rich, who thought only of enjoyment, entertained one another in luxury and splendour.

Now when the king caught sight of his daughter leaning on the fisherman’s arm he could hardly believe his own eyes, and it made him very angry. But the princess ran to him, and throwing herself in his arms, related all that he had accomplished. The monarch’s heart was softened, and he felt ashamed. With tears in his eyes he drew the fisherman towards him, and before the assembled company thanked him for having the third time saved his life.

“God has punished me for my ill-treatment of you,” said he. “Yet He is generous and forgives; I will fulfil all your wishes.”

He then added that the wedding feast should be held that very day, and that his only daughter would be married to the fisherman.

The princess was filled with gladness, and standing with her father’s arms round her, said, “I cannot, however,

break my word. When in Kostey's palace I made a vow to bestow my hand only on that man who should guess the six riddles I put to him. I am sure the heroic man, who has done so much, will not refuse to submit to this last trial for my sake."

To this the fisherman bowed a willing assent.

The first riddle was: "Without legs it walks. Without arms it strikes. Without life it moves continually."

"A clock," he answered promptly, and to the great satisfaction of the princess, to whom this good beginning seemed to presage a happy ending.

The second riddle ran thus: "Without being either bird, reptile, insect, or any animal whatsoever, it ensures the safety of the whole house."

"A bolt," said her lover.

"Good! Now this is the third: 'Who is that pedestrian who walks fully armed, seasons dishes, and in his sides has two darts? He swims across the water without the help of a boatman.'"

"A lobster."

The princess clapped her hands and begged him to guess the fourth.

"It runs, it moves along on two sides, it has but one eye, an overcoat of polished steel, and a tail of thread."

"A needle."

"Well guessed. Now listen to the fifth: 'It walks without feet, beckons without hands, and moves without a body.'"

"It must be a shadow."

"Exactly," said she, well pleased. "Now you have succeeded so well with these five you will soon guess the sixth: 'It has four feet, but is not an animal. It is provided with feathers and down, but is no bird. It has a body, and gives warmth, but is not alive.'"

"It is certainly a bed," exclaimed the fisherman.

The princess gave him her hand. They both knelt at the king's feet and received his fatherly blessing, after which he with a large wedding party accompanied them to the church. At the same time messengers were sent to bring the fisherman's mother to the palace.

The marvellous guzla played the sweetest music at the marriage feast, while the old king ate and drank and enjoyed himself, and danced like a madman. He treated his guests with so much kindness and generosity that to this very hour the happiness of those who were present is a thing to be talked about and envied.

Now you see what it is to love virtue and pursue it with energy and courage. For by so doing a mere peasant, a poor simple fisherman, married the most lovely and enchanting princess in the whole world. He received, besides, half the kingdom on his wedding day, and the right of succession to the throne after the old king's death.

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