



The Golden Spinster

A. H. Wratislaw

Hungarian

Intermediate

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Far away somewhere beyond the Red Sea, there was a certain young lord. When he had grown up in body and mind, he bethought himself that indeed it would not be a bad thing to look round him in the world and seek out a nice wife for himself, and a good mistress for his household. Well, as he determined, so he did. He went out into the world, but could not find such a one as he would have liked. At last he went somehow into the house of a widow, who had three daughters, all maidens. The two elder were as active as wasps for work, but the youngest, who was named Hanka, was like a leaden bird for everything that wanted doing.

When the young lord came to them at spinning time he was astounded. 'How is it,' thought he, 'that Hanka can be sleeping in the chimney-corner, while the other spinsters are hard at work at their tasks?' He said to their mother: 'But, old lady, tell me, why don't you make that one, too, take a distaff? She is quite a grown-up girl, and would amuse herself by work.' 'Ah! young sir,' replied the mother, 'I would allow her to spin with all my heart; I would fill her distaff myself; but what then? She is such a spinster, that by herself she would by morning spin up not only all our spinning materials, but all the thatch from the roof, and that into golden threads; nay, at last she would betake herself to my gray hairs; I am obliged, therefore, to give her a holiday.'

'If this be so,' said the delighted suitor, 'and if it is God's will, you can give her to me to wife. You see, I have a nice establishment—flax, hemp, whole heaps of the finer and commoner kinds of tow; she could spin away to her heart's content.' At such language the old woman did not take long for consideration, and Hanka woke from her slumbers. They brought the bridegroom expectant a handsome olive-coloured handkerchief out of

the clothes-chest, adorned him with periwinkles, and performed the marriage ceremony that very evening. The other spinsters were somewhat mortified at Hanka's good fortune, but finally were content at it, hoping that they, too, would get rings on their fingers now that the idle hand, as they nicknamed Hanka, had obtained a husband. The next day our young bridegroom ordered his horses to be harnessed, and when all was ready, placed the tearful bride beside him in a handsome carriage, gave his hand to his mother-in-law, called out 'Farewell!' to the bride's sisters, and they left the village at a gallop.

For better or worse! Poor Hanka sat by her youthful husband mournful and tearful, just as if the chickens had eaten up all her bread. He talked to her enough, but Hanka was as mute as a fish. 'What's the matter with you?' said he. 'Don't be frightened. At my house, indeed, there will be no going to sleep for you. I shall give you all that your heart desires. You will have flax, hemp, fine and coarse tow enough for the whole winter, and I have got in a store of apples for spittle.'

But our Hanka became more sorrowful the further they went. Thus they arrived in the evening at the young lord's castle, got down from the carriage, and, after supper, the future lady was conducted into a large room, in which, from top to bottom, lay nothing but spinning materials. 'Well,' said he, 'here you have distaff, spindle, and spindle-ring, and rosy apples and a few peas for spittle—spin away! If you spin all this, by morning, into golden threads, we shall be man and wife at once if not, I shall cause you to be put to death without further ado.' Thereupon the young lord went out and left the spinster to spin. When Hanka was left alone, she didn't seat herself under the distaff, for she didn't even know how to twirl the threads, but began sorrowfully to exclaim: 'Oh God! God! here I am come out to vile disgrace! Why did not my mother teach me to work and spin like my two sisters? I might then have reposed in peace at home; but, as it is, sinful creature that I am, I must perish miserably.'

As she was thus expressing her feelings, the wall suddenly opened, and a little mannikin stood before the terrified Hanka, with a red cap on his head and an apron girt round his waist; before him he pushed a little golden hand-cart. 'Why have you your eyes so tearful?' inquired he of Hanka. 'What has happened to you?' 'As if; sinful soul that I am, I should not weep,' said she; 'only think, they have ordered me to spin all these spinning materials into golden threads by morning, and if I don't do so, they will have me put to death without any ceremony. Oh God! God! what shall I do, forlorn in this strange world?' 'If that is all,' said the mannikin, 'don't be frightened. I will teach you to spin golden threads cleverly; but only on this condition, that I find you this time next year in this very place. Then, if you do not guess my honourable name, you will become my wife,

and I shall convey you away in this cart. But, if you guess it, I shall leave you in peace. But this I tell you: if you choose to hide yourself anywhere this time next year, and if you fly ever so far beneath the sky, I shall find you, and will wring your neck. Well, have you agreed to this?' It was not, sooth to say, very satisfactory to Hanka; but what could the poor thing do?

At length she bethought herself: 'Let it be left to God, whether I perish this way or that! I agree.' The mannikin, on hearing this, made three circuits round her with his golden cart, seated himself under the distaff, and repeating:

'Thus, Haniczka, thus!

Thus, Haniczka, thus!

Thus, Haniczka, thus!

taught and instructed her to spin golden threads. After this, as he came, so he departed, and the wall closed up of itself behind him. Our damsel, from that time forth a real golden spinster, sat under the distaff, and seeing how the spinning materials decreased and the golden threads increased, spun and spun away, and by morning had not only spun up all, but had had a good sleep into the bargain. In the morning, as soon as the young lord awoke, he dressed himself and went to visit the golden spinster. When he entered the room he was all but blinded by the glitter, and wouldn't even believe his eyes, that it was all gold. But when he had satisfied himself that so it was, he began to embrace the golden spinster, and declared her his true and lawful wife. Thus they lived in the fear of God, and if our young lord had previously loved his Haniczka for the golden spinning, he then loved her a thousand times more for the beautiful son that she in the meantime bore him.

But what? There's no footpath without an end, neither could the joy of our wedded pair endure for ever. Day passed after day, till finally the appointed time approached within a span. Now our Hanka began to be more sorrowful from moment to moment; her eyes were as red as if they were baked, and she did nothing but creep like a shadow from room to room. And, indeed, it was a serious thing for a young mother to have to lose all at once her good husband and her beautiful son!

Hitherto her poor husband knew nought about anything, and comforted his wife as well as he could; but she would not be comforted. When she bethought herself what a nasty dwarf she was going to obtain instead of her shapely husband, she all but dashed herself against the walls from excessive agony. At last she managed to overcome herself, and revealed everything to her husband as it had occurred to her on that first night. He

became, from horror, as pale as a whitewashed wall, and caused proclamation to be made throughout the whole district that, if anyone knew of such a dwarf, and should make known his real name, he would give him a piece of gold as large as his head. 'Ah! what a windfall such a piece of gold as that would be!' whispered neighbour to neighbour, and they dispersed on all sides, examined all corners, all but looked into the mouseholes, searched and searched as for a needle, but, after all, couldn't find anything out. Nobody knew and nobody had seen the dwarf, and as for his name, no living soul could guess it. Under such circumstances the last day arrived; nothing had been seen or heard of the mannikin, and our Hanka, with her boy at her breast, was wringing her hands at the prospect of losing her husband.

Her unhappy husband, whose eyes were almost exhausted from weeping, in order, at any rate, to escape from beholding the agony of his wife, took his gun on his shoulder, fastened his faithful hounds in a leash, and went out hunting. After hunting time—it was about the hour of afternoon luncheon—it began to lighten on all sides and in all directions, rain poured so that it would have been a shame to turn a dog out into the roads, and in this tempest all our young lord's servants sought shelter where they could, and got so lost that he remained with only one on a densely wooded unknown hill, and that as soaked and dripping as a rat. Where were they to seek shelter before the ever-increasing storm? where to dry themselves? where to obtain harbour for the night?

The unlucky pair, master and servant, looked round on all sides to see whether they couldn't espy a shepherd's hut or a cattle-shed; but where nothing is, there is nothing. Finally, when they had almost strained their eyes out of the sockets, they saw where, out of the hole of the side shaft of a mine, puffs of smoke were rolling, as from a limekiln. 'Go, lad,' said the young lord to the servant, 'look whence this smoke issues; there must be people there. Ask them whether they will give us lodging for the night.' The servant went off and returned in a jiffy with the intelligence that neither door, nor shed, nor people were there. 'Fie, you're only a duffer!' said the lord to his servant with chattering teeth. 'I'll go myself; you, for a punishment, shall drip and freeze.'

Well, the noble lord took the job in hand, but neither could he espy anything, save that in one place smoke kept continually issuing out of the side shaft. At last in disgust he said: 'Whatever devil on devil may bring, know I must whence all this smoke comes.' So he went to the hole itself, knelt beside it and peeped in. As he was thus peeping, he espied, somewhere under ground, where food was cooking in a kitchen, and covers were laid for two on a stone table. Round this table ran a little mannikin in a red cap with a golden hand-cart before him, and from time to time, after making the circuit, he sang:

'I've manufactured a golden spinster for the young lord,

She will try to guess my name to night;
If she guesses my name aright, I shall leave her;
If she guesses it not, I shall take her:
My name is Martynko Klyngas.'

And again he ran like mad round the table and shouted:

'I'm preparing nine dishes for supper,
I'll place her in a silken bed;
If she guesses,' etc.

The young lord wanted nothing more; he ran as fast as his legs could carry him to his servant, and, as it now cleared up a little, they were fortunate enough to find a path, by which they hastened home. He found his wife at home in agony, in misery, streaming with tears; for she thought she would not be able even to take leave of her husband, as he was so long away. 'Don't afflict yourself, my wife,' were the young lord's first words when he entered the room. 'I know what you require; his name is Martynko Klyngas.' And then he, without delay, recounted to her everything, where he had gone and what had happened to him. Hanka could scarcely keep on her feet for joy, embraced and kissed her husband, and betook herself joyfully into the room, in which she had spent the first night, to finish spinning the golden threads. At midnight the wall opened, and the mannikin with the red cap came in, as he had done that time last year, and running round her with the golden cart shouted with the utmost power of his lungs:

'If you guess my name, I leave you;
If you guess it not, I take you;
Only guess, guess away!'

'I'll have a try to guess,' said Hanka; 'your name is Martynko Klyngas.' As soon as she had uttered this, the little dwarf seized his cart, threw his cap on the ground, and departed as he had come; the wall closed, and Hanka breathed in peace. From that time forth she spun no more gold, and, indeed, neither was it necessary for her so to do, for they were rich enough. She and her husband lived happily together, their boy grew like a young tree by the water's side; and they bought a cow, and on the cow a bell, and here's an end to the tale I tell.'

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