

The Story of Gore-Gorinskoe

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Russian

Intermediate
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There once lived in a village two brothers, one of whom was rich, and the other poor. With the rich man everything went swimmingly, in everything he laid his hand to he found luck and bliss; but as for the poor man, slave and toil as he might, fortune flew away from him. The rich man, in a few years, so grew out of bounds that he went to live in the town, and built him the biggest house there, and settled down as a merchant; but the poor man got into such straits that sometimes he had not even a crust of bread in the house to feed a whole armful of children, small—smaller—smallest, who all cried together, and begged for something to eat and drink.

And the poor man began to repine at his fate, he began to lose heart, and his dishevelled head began to sink deeper between his shoulders. And he went to his rich brother in the town and said, “Help me! I am quite worn out.”

—“Why should I not?” replied the rich man. “We can well afford it, only you must come and work it out with me all this week.”

—“Willingly,” said the poor man; so he set to work, swept out the yard, curried the horses, and split up firewood. At the end of the week the rich brother gave him a *grisenka* in money and a large lump of bread. “Thanks even for that,” said the poor man, and was about to turn away homewards, when his brother’s conscience evidently pricked him, and he said, “Why dost thou slip off like that? Tomorrow is my name day; stay and feast with us.”

And the poor man stayed to his brother’s banquet. But, unfortunately for him, a great many rich guests assembled at his brother’s—men of renown; and these guests his brother served most zealously, bowing down low before them, and imploring them as a favour to be so good as to eat and drink their fill. But he forgot altogether about his poor brother, who could only look on from afar, and see all the good people eating and drinking, and enjoying themselves, and making merry.

At last the banquet was over, the guests arose, they began to thank the host and hostess, and the poor man also bowed to his very girdle. The guests also went home, and very merry they all were; they laughed, and joked, and sang songs all the way. And the poor man went home as hungry as ever, and he thought to himself, “Come, now, I will sing a song too, so that people may think that I too was not overlooked or passed over on my brother’s name day, but ate to surfeit, and drank myself drunk with the best of them.”

And so the peasant began singing a song, but suddenly his voice died away. He heard quite plainly that some one behind his back was imitating his song in a thin piping voice. He stopped short, and the voice stopped short; he went on singing, and again the voice imitated him. “Who is that singing? come forth!” shrieked the poor man, and he saw before him a monster, all shrivelled up and yellow, with scarcely any life in it, huddled up in rags, and girded about with the same vile rags, and its feet wound round with linden bast.

The peasant was quite petrified with horror, and he said to the monster, “Who art thou?”

—“I am Gore-Gorinskoe; I have compassion on thee; I will help thee to sing.”

—“Well, Gore, let us go together through the wide world arm in arm; I see that I shall find no other friends and kinsmen there.”

—“Let us go, then, master; I will never desert thee.”

—“And on what shall we go, then?”

—“I know not what you are going upon, but I will go upon you,” and flop! in an instant he was on the peasant’s shoulders. The peasant had not strength enough to shake him off. And so the peasant went on his way, carrying Woeful Woe on his shoulders, though he was scarce able to drag one leg after the other, and the monster was singing all the time, and beating time to it, and driving him along with his little stick. “I say, master, wouldst thou like me to teach thee my favourite song?”

I am Woe, the woefully woeful!

Girt about with linden bast rags,

Shod with beggars’ buskins, bark stript.

Live with me, then; live with Woe,

And sorrow never know.

If you say you have no money,

You can always raise it, honey;

Yet provide a hard-won penny

’Gainst the day thou’lt not have any.

And besides,” added Woe, “thou already hast this penny against an evil day, besides a crust of bread; let us, then, go on our way, and drink and be merry.” So they went on and on, and drank and drank, and so they got home. There sat the wife and all the children, without food, weeping, but Woe set the peasant a-dancing.

On the following day Woe began to sigh, and said, "My head aches from drinking!" and again he called upon the master to drink a thimbleful. "I have no money," said the peasant.

—"But didn't I tell thee you can always raise it, honey? Pawn your harrow and plough, sledge and cart, and let us drink; we'll have a rare time of it today, at any rate."

What could he do? The peasant could not rid himself of Woe, so painfully tight did he sit upon him by this time, so he let himself be dragged about by Woe, and drank and idled away the whole day. And on the next day Woe groaned still more, and even began howling, and said, "Come, let us saunter about; let us drink away everything and pawn it. Sell thyself into slavery, and so get money to drink with."

The peasant saw that ruin was approaching him, so he had resort to subtlety, and he said to Woeful Woe, "I have heard our old men say that a treasure was buried about here a long time ago, but it was buried beneath such heavy stones that my single strength would be quite unable to raise it; now, if only we could raise this treasure, darling little Woe, what a fine time of loafing and drinking we should have together!"

—"Come, then, and let us raise it; Woe has strength enough for everything." So they went all about the place, and they came to a very large and heavy stone; five peasants together could not have moved it from the spot, but our friend and Woe lifted it up at the first go. And lo! beneath the stone there was indeed a coffer dark and heavy, and at the very bottom of this coffer something was sparkling.

And the peasant said to Woe, "You just creep into the coffer and get out the gold, and I'll stand here and hold up the stone." So Woe crept into the coffer with great glee, and cried out, "Hie, master, here are riches incalculable! Twenty jars choke-full of gold, all standing one beside the other!" and he handed up to the peasant one of the jars.

The peasant took the jar into his lap, and, as at the same time he let the stone fall back into its old place, he shut up Woeful Woe in the coffer with all the gold. "Perish thou and thy riches with thee!" thought the peasant; "no good luck goes along with thee."

And he went home to his own, and with the money he got from the jar he bought wood, repaired his cottage, added live-stock to his possessions, and worked harder than ever, and he began to engage in trade, and it went

well with him. In a single year he grew so much richer, that in place of his hut he built him a large wooden house. And then he went to town to invite his brother and his wife to the house-warming. "What are you thinking of?" said his rich brother, with a scornful smile. "A little while ago you were naked, and had nothing to eat, and now you are giving house-warmings, and laying out banquets!"—"Well, at one time, certainly, I had nothing to eat, but now, thank God, I am no worse off than you. Come and see."

The next day the rich brother went out into the country to his poor brother, and there on the pebbly plain he saw wooden buildings, all new and lofty, such as not every town merchant can boast of. And the poor brother who dwelt on the pebbles fed the rich brother till he could eat no more, and made him drink his fill; and after that, when the strings of his tongue were loosened, he made a clean breast of it, and told his brother how he had grown so rich. Envy overcame the rich brother.

He thought to himself, "This brother of mine is a fool. Out of twenty kegs he only took one. With all that money Woe itself is not terrible. I'll go there myself, I'll take away the stone, take the money, and let Woe out from beneath the stone. Let him hound my brother to death if he likes." No sooner said than done. The rich man took leave of his brother, but, instead of going home, he went to the stone. He pulled and tugged at it, and managed at last to push it a little to one side, so as to be able to peep into the coffer, but before he could pull his head back again,

Woe had already skipped out, and was sitting on his neck. Our rich man felt the grievous burden on his shoulders, looked round, and saw the frightful monster bestriding him. And Woe shrieked in his ear, "A pretty fellow you are! You wanted to starve me to death in there, did you? You shall not shake me off again in a hurry, I warrant you. I'll never leave you again."—"Oh, senseless Woe!" cried the rich man, "indeed 'twas not I who placed you beneath that stone, and 'tis not me, the rich man, you should cleave to; go hence, and torment my brother."

But Woeful Woe would not listen to him. "No," it screeched, "you lie! You deceived me once, but you shan't do it a second time." And so the rich man carried Woe home with him, and all his wealth turned to dust and ashes. But the poor brother now lives in peace and plenty, and sings jesting ditties of Woe the outwitted.

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