

# *The Story of the Forty-First*

## *Brother*

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Ukrainian

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*Intermediate*

*7 min read*

There was once upon a time an old man who had forty-one sons. Now when this old man was at the point of death, he divided all he had among his sons, and gave to each of the forty a horse; but when he came to the forty-first he found he had no more horses left, so the forty-first brother had to be content with a foal. When their father was dead, the brothers said to each other, "Let us go to Friday and get married!"--But the eldest brother said, "No, Friday has only forty daughters, so one of us would be left without a bride."--Then the second brother said, "Let us go then to Wednesday--Wednesday has forty-one daughters, and so the whole lot of us can pair off with the whole lot of them."

So they went and chose their brides. The eldest brother took the eldest sister, and the youngest the youngest, till they were all suited. And the youngest brother of all said, "I'll take that little damsel who is sitting on the stove in the corner and has the nice kerchief in her hand." Then they all drank a bumper together to seal the bargain, and after that the forty-one bridegrooms and the forty-one brides laid them down to sleep side by side. But the youngest brother of all said to himself, "I will bring my foal into the room."

So he brought in the foal, and then went to his bedchamber and laid him down to sleep also. Now his bride lay

down with her kerchief in her hand, and he took a great fancy to it, and he begged and prayed her for it again and again, until at last she gave it to him. Now, when Wednesday thought that all the people were asleep, he went out into the courtyard to sharpen his sabre.

Then the foal said, "Oh, my dear little master, come here, come here!" He came, and the foal said to him, "Take off the night-dresses of the forty sleeping bridegrooms and put them on the forty sleeping brides, and put the night-dresses of the brides on the bridegrooms, for a great woe is nigh!"

And he did so. When Wednesday had sharpened his sabre he came into the room and began feeling for the stiff collars of the bridegrooms' night-dresses, and straightway cut off the forty heads above the collars. Then he carried off the heads of his forty daughters in a bunch (for the brides now had on the night-dresses of their bridegrooms), and went and lay down to sleep.

Then the foal said, "My dear little father! awake the bridegrooms, and we'll set off." So he awoke the bridegrooms and sent them on before, while he followed after on his own little nag. They trotted on and on, and at last the foal said to him, "Look behind, and see whether Wednesday is not pursuing." He looked round: "Yes, little brother," said he, "Wednesday is pursuing!"--"Shake thy kerchief then!" said the foal.

He shook his kerchief, and immediately a vast sea was between him and the pursuer. Then they went on and on till the foal said to him again, "Look behind, and see if Wednesday is still pursuing!"--He looked round. "Yes, little brother, he is pursuing!"--"Wave thy handkerchief on the left side!" said the foal. He waved it on the left side, and immediately between them and the pursuer stood a forest so thick that not even a little mouse could have squeezed through it. Then they went on still farther, till the foal said again, "Look behind, and see whether Wednesday is still pursuing!"--He looked behind, and there, sure enough, was Wednesday running after them, and he was not very far off either.--"Wave thy kerchief!" said the foal. He waved his kerchief, and immediately a steep mountain--oh, so steep!--lay betwixt them. They went on and on, until the foal said again, "Look behind, is Wednesday still pursuing?"--So he looked behind him and said, "No, now he is not there." Then they went on and on again, and soon they were not very far from home.

Then the youngest brother said, "You go home now, but I am going to seek a bride!" So he went on and on till he came to a place where lay a feather of the bird Zhar. "Look!" cried he, "what I've found!"--But the foal said to him, "Pick not up that feather, for it will bring thee evil as well as good!"--But his master said, "Why, I

should be a fool not to pick up a feather like that!" So he turned back and picked up the feather. Then he went on farther and farther, until he came to a clay hut. He went into this clay hut, and there sat an old woman. "Give me a night's lodging, granny!" said he.--"I have neither bed nor light to offer thee," said she.

Nevertheless he entered the hut and put the feather on the window-corner, and it lit up the whole hut. So he went to sleep. But the old woman ran off to the Tsar, and said to him, "A certain man has come to me and laid a certain feather on the window-sill, and it shines like fire!" Then the Tsar guessed that it was a feather of the bird Zhar, and said to his soldiers, "Go and fetch that man hither!" And the Tsar said to him, "Wilt thou enter my service?"--"Yes," he replied, "but you must give me all your keys." So the Tsar gave him all the keys and a hut of his own to live in besides. But one day the Tsar said to his servants, "Boil me now a vat of milk!"

So they boiled it. Then he took off his gold ring, and said to the man, "Thou didst get the feather of the bird Zhar, get me also this golden ring of mine out of the vat of boiling milk!"--"Bring hither, then, my faithful horse," said he, "that he may see his master plunge into the vat of boiling milk and die!"

So they brought his horse, and, taking off his clothes, he plunged into the vat, but as he did so the horse snorted so violently that all the boiling milk leaped up in the air and the man seized the ring and gave it back to the Tsar. Now when the Tsar saw that the man had come out of the vat younger and handsomer than ever, he said, "I'll try and fish up the ring in like manner."

So he flung his ring into the vat of boiling milk and plunged after it to get it. The people waited and waited and wondered and wondered that he was so long about it, and at last they drained off the milk and found the Tsar at the bottom of the vat boiled quite red. Then the man said, "Now, Tsaritsa, thou art mine and I am thine." And they lived together happily ever afterward.

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