

The Story of Unlucky Daniel

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Ukrainian

Intermediate
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There was once upon a time a youth called Unlucky Dan. Wherever he went, and whatever he did, and with whomsoever he served, nothing came of it: all his labour was like spilt water, he got no good from it. One day he took service with a new master. "I'll serve thee a whole year," said he, "for a piece of sown wheat-land." His master agreed, and he entered into his service, and at the same time he sowed his piece of wheat-land. His wheat shot up rapidly. When his master's wheat was in the stalk, his was already in the ear, and when his master's wheat was in the ear, his own wheat was already ripe. "I'll reap it to-morrow," thought he. The same night a cloud arose, the hail poured down, and destroyed his wheat altogether. Daniel fell a-weeping. "I'll go serve another master," he cried, "perhaps God will then prosper me!"

So he went to another master. "I'll serve thee for a whole year," said he, "if thou wilt give me that wild colt." So he stopped and served him, and by the end of the year he trained the wild colt so well that he made a carriage-horse out of it. "Oh-ho!" thought he, "I shall take away something with me this time!"

The same night the wolves made an inroad upon the stables and tore the horse to pieces. Daniel fell a-weeping. "I'll go to another master," said he, "perhaps I shall be luckier there." So he went to a third master, and on this master's tomb lay a large stone. Whence it came none knew, and it was so heavy that none could move it, though they tried for ages. "I'll serve thee a year," said he, "for that stone."

The master agreed, and he entered his service. Then a change came over the stone, and divers flowers began to grow upon it. On one side they were red, on the second side silver, and on the third side golden. "Oh-ho,"

thought Daniel, “that stone, at any rate, will soon be mine. Nobody can move it.”

But the next morning a thunderbolt descended and struck the stone, and shivered it to atoms. Then Daniel fell a-weeping, and lamented that God had given him nothing, though he had served for so many years. But the people said to him, “Listen now! thou that art so unlucky, why dost thou not go to the Tsar? He is the father of us all, and will therefore certainly care for thee!”

So he listened to them and went, and the Tsar gave him a place at his court. One day the Tsar said to him, “I marvel that thou art so unlucky, for do whatsoever thou wilt, thou art none the better for it. I would fain requite thee for all thy labours.”

Then he took and filled three barrels, the first with gold, and the second with coal, and the third with sand, and said to Daniel, “Look now! if thou dost pitch upon that which is filled with gold, thou shalt be a Tsar; if thou dost choose the one that is filled with coal, thou shalt be a blacksmith; but if thou dost pick out the one that is full of sand, why then thou art indeed hopelessly unlucky, and out of my tsardom thou must go straightway, yet I will give thee a horse and armor to take along with thee.”

So Daniel was brought to the place where were the three barrels, and went about them and felt and felt them one after the other. “This one is full of gold!” said he. They broke it open and it was full of sand. “Well,” said the Tsar, “I see that thou art hopelessly unlucky. Depart from my tsardom, for I have no need at all of such as thou.” Then he gave him a charger and armour, and the full equipment of a Cossack, and sent him away.

He went on and on for a whole day, he went on and on for a second day, and there was nothing to eat, either for his horse or himself. He went for a third day, and in the distance he saw a hay-cock. “That will do for my horse, at any rate,” thought he, “even if it is of no good to me.”

So he went up to it, and immediately it burst into flames. Daniel began to weep, when he heard a voice crying piteously, “Save me, save me! I am burning!”—“How can I save thee,” he cried, “when I myself cannot draw near?”—“Oh! give me thy weapon!” cried the voice, “and I’ll seize hold of it, and then thou canst pull me out.”

So he stretched forth his weapon, and drew forth a goodly serpent, such as is only known of in old folk-songs. And she said to him, “Since thou hast drawn me out, thou must also take me home.”—“How shall I carry thee?” asked he.—“Carry me on thy horse, and in whatsoever direction I turn my head and his, thither

go.”--So he took her upon his horse, and they went on and on till they came to a court so splendid that it was a delight to look at it.

Then she glided down from his charger and said, “Wait here, and I’ll soon be with thee again,” and with that she wriggled under the gate. He stood there and stood and waited and waited till he wept from sheer weariness; but, at last, she came out again in the shape of a lovely damsel in gorgeous raiment, and opened the gate for him. “Lead in thy horse,” said she, “and eat and rest awhile.” So they went into the courtyard, and in the midst of it stood two springs.

The lady drew out of one of these springs a little glass of water, and strewing a handful of oats beside it, said, “Fasten up thy horse here!”--“What!” thought he, “for these three days we have had naught to eat or drink, and now she mocks us with a handful of oats!”--Then they went together to the guest-chamber, and she gave him there a little glass of water and a small piece of wheaten bread.--“Why, what is this for a hungry man like me?” thought he.

But when he chanced to glance through the window, he saw that the whole courtyard was full of oats and water, and that his horse had already eaten its fill. Then he nibbled his little piece of wheaten bread and sipped his water, and his hunger was immediately satisfied. “Well,” said the lady, “hast thou eaten thy fill?”--“That I have,” he replied.--“Then lie down and rest awhile,” said she. And the next morning, when he rose up, she said to him, “Give me thy horse, thy armour, and thy raiment, and I’ll give thee mine in exchange.”--Then she gave him her shift and her weapon, and said, “This sword is of such a sort that, if thou do but wave it, all men will fall down before thee; and as for this shift, when once thou hast it on, none will be able to seize thee. And now go on thy way till thou come to an inn, and there they will tell thee that the Tsar of that land is seeking warriors. Go and offer thyself to him, and thou shalt marry his daughter, but tell her not the truth for seven years!” Then they took leave of each other, and he departed. He came to the inn, and there they asked him whence he came. And when they knew that he came from a strange land, they said to him, “A strange people has attacked our Tsar, and he cannot defend himself, for a mighty warrior has conquered his tsardom and carried off his daughter, and worries him to death.”--“Show me the way to your Tsar,” said Daniel. Then they showed him, and he went. When he came to the Tsar, he said to him, “I will subdue this strange land for thee. All the army I want is a couple of Cossacks, but they must be picked men.” Then the heralds went through the tsardom till they had found these two Cossacks, and Daniel went forth with them into the endless steppes, and

there he bade them lie down and sleep while he kept watch. And while they slept the army of the strange country came upon them, and cried to Daniel to turn back if he would escape destruction. And then they began to fire with their guns and cannons, and they fired so many balls that the bodies of the two Cossacks were quite covered by them. Then Daniel waved his sword and smote, and only those whom his blows did not reach escaped alive. So he vanquished them all, and conquered that strange land, and came back and married the Tsar's daughter, and they lived happily together.

But counsellors from the strange land whispered dark sayings in the ears of the Tsarivna. "What is this fellow that thou hast taken to thyself? Who is he, and whence? Find out for us wherein lies his strength, that we may destroy him and take thee away."--Then she began asking him, and he said to her, "Look now! all my strength is in these gloves." Then she waited till he was asleep, and drew them off him, and gave them to the people from the strange land. And the next day he went hunting, and the evil counsellors surrounded and shot at him with their darts, and beat him with the gloves; but it was all in vain.

Then he waved his sword, and whomsoever he struck fell to the ground, and he clapped them all in prison. But his wife caressed and wheedled him again, and said, "Nay, but tell me, wherein doth thy strength lie?"--"My strength, darling," said he, "lies in my boots." Then she drew off his boots while he slept, and gave them to his enemies. And they fell upon him again as he went out, but again he waved his sword, and as many as he struck fell to the ground, and he put them all in prison.

Then his wife wheedled and caressed him the third time. "Nay, but tell me, darling," quoth she, "wherein doth thy strength lie?" Then he was wearied with her beseeching, and said to her, "My strength lies in this sword of mine, and in my shirt, and so long as I have this shirt on, nobody can touch me." Then she caressed and fondled him, and said, "Thou shouldst take a bath, my darling, and well wash thyself. My father always did so."

So he let himself be persuaded, and no sooner had he undressed than she changed all his clothes for others, and gave his sword and his shirt to his enemies. Then he came out of his bath, and immediately they fell upon him, cut him to pieces, put him in a sack, placed him on his horse, and let the horse go where it would. So the horse went on and on, and wandered farther and farther, till it came to the old place where he had stayed with the Serpent Lady. And when his benefactress saw him, she said, "Why, if poor unlucky Daniel hasn't fallen into a scrape again."

And immediately she took him out of the sack, and fitted his pieces together, and washed them clean, and took healing water from one of the springs, and living water from the other, and sprinkled him all over, and he stood there sound and strong again. "Now, did I not bid thee tell not thy wife the truth for seven years?" said she, "and thou wouldst not take heed."

And he stood there, and spoke never a word. "Well, now, rest awhile," she continued, "for thou dost need it, and then I'll give thee something else." So the next day she gave him a chain, and said to him, "Listen! Go to that inn where thou didst go before, and early next morning, whilst thou art bathing, bid the innkeeper beat thee with all his might on the back with this chain, and so thou wilt get back to thy wife, but tell her not a word of what has happened." So he went to this same inn and passed the night there, and, on the morrow, he called the innkeeper, and said to him, "Look now! the first time I dip my head in the water, beat me about the back with this chain as hard as thou canst."

So the innkeeper waited till he had ducked his head under the water, and then he thrashed him with the chain, whereupon he turned into a horse so beautiful that it was a delight to look upon it. The innkeeper was so glad, so glad. "So I've got rid of one guest only to get another one," thought he. He lost no time in taking the horse to the fair, and offered it for sale, and among those who saw it was the Tsar himself. "What dost thou ask for it?" said the Tsar. -- "I ask five thousand roubles." Then the Tsar counted down the money and took the horse away. When he got to his court, he made a great to-do about his beautiful horse, and cried to his daughter, "Come and see, dear little heart, what a fine horse I have bought."

Then she came forth to look at it; but the moment she saw it, she cried, "That horse will be my ruin. Thou must kill it on the spot." -- "Nay, dear little heart! how can I do such a thing?" said the Tsar. -- "Slay it thou must, and slay it thou shalt!" cried the Tsarivna. So they sent for a knife, and began sharpening it, when one of the

maidens of the court took pity on the horse, and cried, "Oh, my good, my darling horse, so lovely as thou art, and yet to kill thee!" But the horse neighed and went to her, and said, "Look now! take the first drop of blood which flows from me, and bury it in the garden."

Then they slew the horse, but the maiden did as she was told, and took the drop of blood and buried it in the garden. And from this drop of blood there sprang up a cherry-tree; and its first leaf was golden, and its second leaf was of richer colour still, and its third leaf was yet another colour, and every leaf upon it was different to the others. One day the Tsar went out walking in his garden, and when he saw this cherry-tree he fell in love with it, and praised it to his daughter. "Look!" said he, "what a beauteous cherry-tree we have in our garden! Who can tell whence it sprung?"--But the moment the Tsarivna saw it, she cried, "That tree will be my ruin! Thou must cut it down."--"Nay!" said he, "how can I cut down the fairest ornament of my garden?"--"Down it must come, and down it shall come!" replied the Tsarivna.

Then they sent for an axe and made ready to cut it down, but the damsel came running up, and said, "Oh, darling little cherry-tree, darling little cherry-tree, so fair thou art! From a horse hast thou sprung, and now they will fell thee before thou hast lived a day!"--"Never mind," said the cherry-tree; "take the first chip that falls from me, and throw it into the water."--Then they cut down the cherry-tree; but the girl did as she was bidden, and threw the first chip from the cherry-tree into the water, and out of it swam a drake so beautiful that it was a delight to look upon it.

Then the Tsar went a-hunting, and saw it swimming in the water, and it was so close that he could touch it with his hand. The Tsar took off his clothes and plunged into the water after it, and it enticed him farther and farther away from the shore. Then the drake swam toward the spot where the Tsar had left his clothes, and when it came up to them it changed into a man and put them on, and behold! the man was Daniel.

Then he called to the Tsar: "Swim hither, swim hither!" The Tsar swam up, but when he swam ashore Daniel met and killed him, and after that he went back to court in the Tsar's clothes. Then all the courtiers hailed him as the Tsar, but he said, "Where is that damsel who was here just now?" -- They brought her instantly before him. "Well," said he to her, "thou hast been a second mother to me, and now thou shalt be my second wife!" So he lived with her and was happy, but he caused his first wife to be tied to the tails of wild horses and torn to pieces in the endless steppes.

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