



Woe Bogotir

Verra Xenophontova Kalamatiano De Blumenthal

Russian

Easy
10 min read

In a small village—do not ask me where; in Russia, anyway—there lived two brothers; one of them was rich, the other poor. The rich brother had good luck in everything he undertook, was always successful, and had profit out of every venture. The poor brother, in spite of all his trouble and all his work, had none whatever.

The rich brother became still richer, moved into a large town, bought a big house, and was a merchant among merchants. The poor brother became very poor, so poor that very often there was no crust even in the “izba,” the peasant’s log cabin, and the children—all forlorn, miserable little things—cried for food.

The poor man lost patience and complained bitterly of his ill luck. He had no more courage and his head dropped heavily on his breast. One day he decided to call upon his wealthy brother for aid. He went and said to him:

“Be good, help me, for I am almost without strength.”

“Why not?” answered the rich man. “We can do such things as that. There is wealth enough; but look here, there is also plenty of work to be done. Stay around the house for a while and work for me.”

“All right,” consented the poor fellow, and at once began to work. Now he was cleaning the big yard, now grooming horses, now bringing water from the well or splitting wood. One week passed, two weeks passed. The rich brother gave him twenty and five copecks, which means only thirteen cents. He also gave him a loaf of

black rye bread.

“Many thanks,” said the poor brother, humbly, and was ready to leave for his miserable home. Evidently the conscience of the rich brother smote him, so he called his brother back.

“Why so prompt?” he said; “to-morrow is my birthday; stay to the banquet with us.”

The poor fellow remained. But even on such a pleasant occasion the unlucky one had no luck. His rich brother was too busy receiving his numerous friends and admirers, all of whom came to tell him how they loved him and what a good man he was. The rich merchant thanked his guests for their love, and bowing low begged his dear guests to eat, drink, and enjoy themselves. There was no time left for the poor brother, and he was overlooked entirely while he sat timidly in a corner, quite forgotten and unnoticed. He had nothing to eat, nothing to drink. But when the crowd was ready to say good-bye, before going away, the bright, light-hearted guests bowed to their host and told him many lovely things, and the poor brother did exactly like them. He bowed even lower than they did and expressed more thanks than they. The guests went home singing in their new “telegi,” the peasants’ carts. The poor brother, hungry and very sad, walked along in silence, and the idea came to his mind:

“What if I also tried to sing a cheerful song? The people would believe that I, too, have had a pleasant time at my brother’s house and that I am going home happy like them.”

The good fellow began his song, began—and almost fainted away, for he heard quite distinctly some one behind his back, keeping tune with him in a shrill voice. He stopped. The voice stopped, too. He sang, and the voice continued again.

“Who is there? Come out at once!” shouted the poor man, beside himself. Ha! the monster appeared, lank and yellow, almost a skeleton, covered with rags. The poor fellow was afraid, but had the courage to make the sign of the cross and ask: “Who art thou?”

“I? I am Bitter Woe. I am one of the Russian heroes, Woe Bogotir. I pity all weak people. I pity thee, too, and want to help thee along.”

“All right, Bitter Woe; let us walk together arm in arm. I presume there are no other friends for me in this world.”

“Let us ride, good man,” laughed the monster. “I will be thy faithful companion.”

“Thanks, but on what shall we ride?”

“I do not know on what thou shalt ride, but I, I shall ride on thee,” and Woe jumped on the shoulders of the unlucky man. The poor fellow had no strength to throw him off, so he crawled along his way, the long, hard way, with Woe on his shoulders. He could hardly walk, yet Woe was singing, whistling, and switching him all the time.

“Why so sad, master?” Woe would ask, when the poor man sighed. “Listen to me, I want to teach thee a song, my beloved little song:

“I am Woe, the brave,

I am Woe, the bold;

He who lives with me

Has his griefs controlled,

And when money is lacking

I'll find him gold.

Attention, master, thou hast twenty-five copecks; let us go and buy some wine; let us have a jolly good time.”

The poor man obeyed. They went and spent all in drink. After this the unlucky fellow, with the faithful Woe on his shoulders, came home. His wife was sad, his little children were hungry and in tears, but he, under the influence of Woe and wine, danced and sang.

On the next day Woe began to sigh and said:

“I have a drunken headache. Let us drink more.”

“I have no money,” answered the poor man.

“Hast thou forgotten my little song? Let us trade the harrow, the plow, the sledge, the telega for money, and let us have a good time.”

“All right.”

The poor, weak man had no courage to refuse, and Woe Bogotir became his master and ruler. They went to a kabak and spent everything; drank, sang, and had a good time.

On the next day Woe sighed again and said to the peasant:

“Let us drink; let us have a jolly time; let us sell or trade everything left, even ourselves.”

Then the fellow understood that his ruin was near and decided to deceive the sorrowful Woe, so he said:

“I once heard the old people say that behind the village, near the dark forest, there is buried a treasure, yes, a great treasure, but it is buried under a large, heavy stone, too heavy a stone for one man to move. If we could only remove that stone, thou and I, Woe Bogotir, could have a good time and plenty to drink.”

“Let us hasten!” screamed Woe; “the Bitter Woe is strong enough to do harder things than to move stones.”

They went a roundabout way behind the village and saw the great big stone, such a heavy stone that five or six strong peasants could never begin to move it. But our poor fellow with his faithful Woe Bogotir removed it at once. They looked inside. Under the stone there was a pit, a dark, deep pit. At the bottom of that pit something was twinkling. The peasant said to Woe:

“Thou bold Woe, jump in, throw the gold out to me and I will hold the stone.”

Woe jumped in and laughed out loud.

“I declare, master,” he screamed, “there is no end of gold! There are twenty and more pots filled with it,” and Woe handed one pot to the poor man, who took the pot, hastily hid it under his blouse, and slipped the heavy stone into its place. So Bitter Woe remained in the deep pit and the peasant thought to himself, “Now there is the right place for my comrade, for with such a friend, even gold would taste bitter.”

The crafty fellow made the sign of the cross and hurried home. He became quite a new man, courageous, sober, and industrious; bought a grove and some cattle; remodeled the izba, and even started a trade. And very

successful he was, too. Within a year he earned much money, and in place of the old hut built a fine, new log cabin.

One bright day he went into town to ask his rich brother, with his wife and children, to do him the favor of coming to a feast which was to be given in the new home.

“That’s a joke!” exclaimed the rich brother. “Without a ruble in thy pockets, stupid fellow! Thou evidently desirest to imitate rich people,” and then the rich brother laughed and laughed at him. But at the same time he got very anxious to know how it was with his poor brother, so he went without delay to the new place. When he arrived there he could not believe his eyes. His poor brother seemed to be quite rich, perhaps richer than himself. Everything bespoke wealth and care. The host treated his brother and the brother’s family most kindly and was very hospitable. They had good things to eat and plenty of honey to drink, and all became talkative. The brother who had been poor related everything about Woe, how he decided to deceive him and how, free from such a burden, he was getting to be a very happy man.

The rich man grew eager and thought:

“Is he a fool? Out of so many pots, to take only one! Fool and nothing but fool! If one has money, even the Bitter Woe is not too bad.”

So at once he decided to go in search of the stone, to remove it, to take the treasure, the whole treasure, and to send Woe Bogotir back to his brother.

No sooner thought than done. The rich brother said good-bye and went away, but did not go to his wealthy home. No, he hurried to the stone. He had to toil hard with the heavy stone, but finally moved it just a little, and had not time to look inside when the hidden Bogotir had jumped out and onto his shoulders.

The rich man felt a burden, oh, what a heavy burden! looked around and perceived the hideous monster. He heard this monster whisper in his ear:

“Thou art bright! Thou didst want to let me perish in that pit? Now, dearest, thou wilt not get rid of me; now we shall always be together.”

“Stupid Woe,” began the rich man; “it was not I who hid thee under the stone; it was my brother; go to him.”

But no, Woe would not go. The monster laughed and laughed.

“All the same, all the same,” he answered to the rich man. “Let us remain dear companions.”

The rich man went home under the heavy burden of the misery-giving Woe. His wealth was soon lost, but his brother, who knew how to get rid of Woe, was prosperous and is prosperous to this day.

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