

The Fiend

By Unknown

In a certain country there lived an old couple who had a daughter called Marusia (Mary). In their village it was customary to celebrate the feast of St. Andrew the First-Called (November 30). The girls used to assemble in some cottage, bake *pampushki*,¹ and enjoy themselves for a whole week, or even longer. Well, the girls met together once when this festival arrived, and brewed and baked what was wanted. In the evening came the lads with the music, bringing liquor with them, and dancing and revelry commenced. All the girls danced, well, but Marusia the best of all. After a while there came into the cottage such a fine fellow! Marry, come up! regular blood and milk, and smartly and richly dressed.

‘Hail, fair maidens!’ says he.

‘Hail, good youth!’ say they.

‘You’re merry-making?’

‘Be so good as to join us.’

Thereupon he pulled out of his pocket a purse full of gold, ordered liquor, nuts, gingerbread. All was ready in a trice, and he began treating the lads and lasses, giving each a share. Then he took to dancing. Why, it was a treat to look at him Marusia struck his fancy more than anyone else; so he stuck close to her. The time came for going home.

‘Marusia,’ says he, ‘come and see me off’

She went to see him off

‘Marusia, sweetheart!’ says he, ‘would you like me to marry you?’

‘If you like to marry me, I will gladly marry you. But where do you come from?’

‘From such and such a place. I’m clerk at a merchant’s.’

‘Then they bade each other farewell and separated. When Marusia got home, her mother asked her

‘Well, daughter! have you enjoyed yourself?’

‘Yes, mother. But I’ve something pleasant to tell you besides. There was a lad there from the neighbourhood, good-looking and with lots of money, and he promised to marry me.’

‘Harkye, Marusia! When you go to where the girls are tomorrow, take a ball of thread with you, make a noose in it, and, when you are going to see him off, throw it over one of his buttons, and quietly unroll the ball; then, by means of the thread, you will be able to find out where he lives.’

Next day Marusia went to the gathering, and took a ball of thread with her. The youth came again.

‘Good evening, Marusia!’ said he.

‘Good evening!’ said she.

Games began and dances. Even more than before did he stick to Marusia, not a step would he budge from her. The time came for going home.

‘Come and see me off Marusia!’ says the stranger.

¹ Cakes of unleavened flour flavoured with garlic.

She went out into the street, and while she was taking leave of him she quietly dropped the noose over one of his buttons. He went his way, but she remained where she was, unrolling the ball. When she had unrolled the whole of it, she ran after the thread to find out where her betrothed lived. At first the thread followed the road, then it stretched across hedges and ditches, and led Marusia towards the church and right up to the porch. Marusia tried the door; it was locked. She went round the church, found a ladder, set it against a window, and climbed up it to see what was going on inside. Having got into the church, she looked—and saw her betrothed standing beside a grave and devouring a dead body—for a corpse had been left for that night in the church.

She wanted to get down the ladder quietly, but her fright prevented her from taking proper heed, and she made a little noise. Then she ran home—almost beside herself, fancying all the time she was being pursued. She was all but dead before she got in. Next morning her mother asked her:

‘Well, Marusia! did you see the youth?’

I saw him, mother,’ she replied. But what else she had seen she did not tell.

In the morning Marusia was sitting, considering whether she would go to the gathering or not.

‘Go,’ said her mother. ‘Amuse yourself while you’re young!’

So she went to the gathering; the Fiend² was there already. Games, fun, dancing, began anew; the girls knew nothing of what had happened. When they began to separate and go homewards:

‘Come, Marusia!’ says the Evil One, ‘see me off.’

She was afraid, and didn’t stir. Then all the other girls opened out upon her.

‘What are you thinking about? Have you grown so bashful, forsooth? Go and see the good lad off.’

There was no help for it. Out she went, not knowing what would come of it. As soon as they got into the street he began questioning her:

‘You were in the church last night?’

‘No.’

‘And saw what I was doing there?’

‘No.’

‘Very well! To-morrow your father will die!’

Having said this, he disappeared.

Marusia returned home grave and sad. When she woke up in the morning, her father lay dead!

They wept and wailed over him, and laid him in the coffin. In the evening her mother went off to the priest’s, but Marusia remained at home. At last she became afraid of being alone in the house. ‘Suppose I go to my friends,’ she thought. So she went, and found the Evil One there.

‘Good evening, Marusia! why arn’t you merry?’ asked the girls.

‘How can I be merry? My father is dead!’

‘Oh! poor thing!’

They all grieved for her. Even the Accursed One himself grieved; just as if it hadn’t all been his own doing. By and by they began saying farewell and going home.

‘Marusia,’ says he, ‘see me off.’

² The *Nechistoi*, or unclean. (*Chisty* = clean, pure, &c.)

She didn't want to.

'What are you thinking of, child?' insist the girls. 'What are you afraid of? Go and see him off.'

So she went to see him off. They passed out into the street.

'Tell me, Marusia,' says he; 'were you in the church?'

'No.'

'Did you see what I was doing?'

'No.'

'Very well! To-morrow your mother will die.'

He spoke and disappeared. Marusia returned home sadder than ever. The night went by next morning, when she awoke, her mother lay dead! She cried all day long; but when the sun set, and it grew dark around, Marusia became afraid of being left alone; so she went to her companions.

'Why whatever's the matter with you? you're clean out of countenance!'³ say the girls.

'How am I likely to be cheerful? Yesterday my father died, and to-day my mother.'

'Poor thing! Poor unhappy girl!' they all exclaim sympathisingly.

Well, the time came to say good-bye. 'See me off, Marusia,' says the Fiend. So she went out to see him off.

'Tell me; were you in the church?'

'No.'

'And saw what I was doing?'

'No.'

'Very well! To-morrow evening you will die yourself!'

Marusia spent the night with her friends; in the morning she got up and considered what she should do. She bethought herself that she had a grandmother—an old, very old woman, who had become blind from length of years. 'Suppose I go and ask her advice,' she said, and then went off to her grandmother's.

'Good day, granny!' says she.

'Good day, granddaughter! What news is there with you? How are your father and mother?'

'They are dead, granny,' replied the girl, and then told her all that had happened.

The old woman listened, and said:

'Oh dear me! my poor unhappy child! Go quickly to the priest, and ask him this favour—that if you die, your body shall not be taken out of the house through the doorway, but that the ground shall be dug away from under the threshold, and that you shall be dragged out through that opening. And also beg that you may be buried at a crossway, at a spot where four roads meet.'

Marusia went to the priest, wept bitterly, and made him promise to do everything according to her grandmother's instructions. Then she returned home, bought a coffin, lay down in it, and straightway expired.

Well, they told the priest, and he buried, first her father and mother, and then Marusia herself. Her body was passed underneath the threshold and buried at a crossway.

Soon afterwards a seigneur's son happened to drive past Marusia's grave. On that grave he saw growing a wondrous flower, such a one as he had never seen before. Said the young seigneur to his servant:

³ Literally, 'on thee no face is to be seen.'

‘Go and pluck up that flower by the roots. We’ll take it home and put it in a flower-pot. Perhaps it will blossom there.’

Well, they dug up the flower, took it home, put it in a glazed flower-pot, and set it in a window. The flower began to grow larger and more beautiful. One night the servant hadn’t gone to sleep somehow, and he happened to be looking at the window, when he saw a wondrous thing take place. All of a sudden the flower began to tremble, then it fell from its stem to the ground and turned into a lovely maiden. The flower was beautiful, but the maiden was more beautiful still. She wandered from room to room, got herself various things to eat and drink, ate and drank, then stamped upon the ground and became a flower as before, mounted to the window, and resumed her place upon the stem.

Next day the servant told the young seigneur of the wonders which he had seen during the night.

‘Ah, brother!’ said the youth, ‘why didn’t you wake me? To-night we’ll both keep watch together.’

The night came; they slept not, but watched. Exactly at twelve o’clock the blossom began to shake, flew from place to place, and then fell to the ground, and the beautiful maiden appeared, got herself things to eat and drink, and sat down to supper. The young seigneur rushed forward and seized her by her white hands. Impossible was it for him sufficiently to look at her, to gaze on her beauty!

Next morning he said to his father and mother, ‘Please allow me to get married. I’ve found myself a bride.’

His parents gave their consent. As for Marusia, she said

‘Only on this condition will I marry you—that for four years I need not go to church.’

‘Very good,’ said he.

Well, they were married, and they lived together one year, two years, and had a son. But one day they had visitors at their house, who enjoyed themselves, and drank, and began bragging about their wives. This one’s wife was handsome; that one’s was handsomer still.

‘You may say what you like,’ says the host, ‘but a handsomer wife than mine does not exist in the whole world!’

Handsome, yes!’ reply the guests, ‘but a heathen.’

‘How so?’

‘Why, she never goes to church.’

Her husband found these observations distasteful. He waited till Sunday, and then told his wife to get dressed for church.

‘I don’t care what you may say,’ says he. ‘Go and get ready directly.’

Well, they got ready, and went to church. The husband went in—didn’t see anything particular. But when she looked round—there was the Fiend sitting at a window.

Ha! here you are at last!’ he cried. ‘Remember old times. Were you in the church that night?’

‘No.’

‘And did you see what I was doing there?’

‘No.’

‘Very well, to-morrow both your husband and your son will die.’

Marusia rushed straight out of the church and away to her grandmother. The old woman gave her two phials, the one full of holy water, the other of the water of life, and

told her what she was to do. Next day both Marusia's husband and her son died. Then the Fiend came flying to her and asked:

'Tell me; were you in the church?'

'I was.'

'And did you see what I was doing?'

'You were eating a corpse.'

She spoke, and splashed the holy water over him; in a moment he turned into mere dust and ashes, which blew to the winds. Afterwards she sprinkled her husband and her boy with the water of life: straightway they revived. And from that time forward they knew neither sorrow nor separation, but they all lived together long and happily.'