

The Awful Drunkard

By Unknown

Once there was an old man who was such an awful drunkard as passes all description. Well, one day he went to a kabak, intoxicated himself with liquor, and then went staggering home blind drunk. Now his way happened to lie across a river. When he came to the river, he didn't stop long to consider, but kicked off his boots, hung them round his neck, and walked into the water. Scarcely had he got half-way across when he tripped over a stone, tumbled into the water—and there was an end of him.

Now, he left a son called Petrusha. When Peter saw that his father had disappeared and left no trace behind, he took the matter greatly to heart for a time, he wept for awhile, he had a service performed for the repose of his father's soul, and he began to act as head of the family. One Sunday he went to church to pray to God. As he passed along the road a woman was pounding away in front of him. She walked and walked, stumbled over a stone, and began swearing at it, saying, 'What devil shoved you under my feet?'

Hearing these words, Petrusha said:

'Good day, aunt! whither away?'

'To church, my dear, to pray to God.'

'But isn't this sinful conduct of yours? You're going to church, to pray to God, and yet you think about the Evil One; your foot stumbles and you throw the fault on the Devil!'

Well, he went to church and then returned home. He walked and walked, and suddenly, goodness knows whence, there appeared before him a fine-looking man, who saluted him and said:

'Thanks, Petrusha, for your good word'

'Who are you, and why do you thank me?' asks Petrusha.

'I am the Devil. I thank you because, when that woman stumbled, and scolded me without a cause, you said a good word for me.' Then he began to entreat him, saying, 'Come and pay me a visit, Petrusha. How I will reward you to be sure! With silver and with gold, with everything will I endow you.'

'Very good,' says Petrusha, 'I'll come.'

Having told him all about the road he was to take, the Devil straightway disappeared, and Petrusha returned home.

Next day Petrusha set off on his visit to the Devil. He walked and walked, for three whole days did he walk, and then he reached a great forest, dark and dense—impossible even to see the sky from within it! And in that forest there stood a rich palace. Well, he entered the palace, and a fair maiden caught sight of him. She had been stolen from a certain village by the evil spirits. And when she caught sight of him she cried:

'Whatever have you come here for, good youth? here devils abide, they will tear you to pieces.'

Petrusha told her how and why he had made his appearance in that palace.

'Well now, mind this,' says the fair maiden; 'the Devil will begin giving you silver and gold. Don't take any of it, but ask him to give you the very wretched horse which the evil spirits use for fetching wood and water. That horse is your father. When he came out of

the kabak drunk, and fell into the water, the devils immediately seized him and made him their hack, and now they use him for fetching wood and water.'

Presently there appeared the gallant who had invited Petrusha, and began to regale him with all kinds of meat and drink. And when the time came for Petrusha to be going homewards, 'Come,' said the Devil, 'I will provide you with money and with a capital horse, so that you will speedily get home.'

'I don't want anything,' replied Petrusha. Only, if you wish to make me a present, give me that sorry jade which you use for carrying wood and water.'

'What good will that be to you? If you ride it home quickly, I expect it will die!'

'No matter, let me have it. I won't take any other.'

So the Devil gave him that sorry jade. Petrusha took it by the bridle and led it away. As soon as he reached the gates, there appeared the fair maiden, and asked

'Have you got the horse?'

'I have.'

'Well then, good youth, when you get nigh to your village, take off your cross, trace a circle three times about this horse, and hang the cross round its neck.'

Petrusha took leave of her and went his way. When he came nigh to his village he did everything exactly as the maiden had instructed him. He took off his copper cross, traced a circle three times about the horse, and hung the cross round its neck. And immediately the horse was no longer there, but in its place there stood before Petrusha his own father. The son looked upon the father, burst into tears, and led him to his cottage; and for three days the old man remained without speaking, unable to make use of his tongue. And after that they lived happily and in all prosperity. The old man entirely gave up drinking, and to his very last day never took so much as a single drop of spirits.'