

# The Smith and the Demon

By Unknown

Once upon a time there was a Smith, and he had one son, a sharp, smart, six-year-old boy. One day the old man went to church, and as he stood before a picture of the Last Judgment he saw a Demon painted there—such a terrible one! black, with horns and a tail.

‘O my!’ says he to himself. ‘Suppose I get just such another painted for the smithy. So he hired an artist, and ordered him to paint on the door of the smithy exactly such another demon as he had seen in the church. The artist painted it. Thenceforward the old man, every time he entered the smithy, always looked at the Demon and said, ‘Good morning, fellow-countryman!, And then he would hay the fire in the furnace and begin his work.

Well, the Smith lived in good accord with the Demon for some ten years. Then he fell ill and died. His son succeeded to his place as head of the household, and took the smithy into his own hands. But he was not disposed to show attention to the Demon as the old man had done. When he went into the smithy in the morning, he never said ‘Good morrow’ to him; instead of offering him a kindly word, he took the biggest hammer he had handy, and thumped the Demon with it three times right on the forehead, and then he would go to his work. And when one of God’s holy days came round, he would go to church and offer each saint a taper; but he would go up to the Demon and spit in his face. Thus three years went by, he all the while favouring the Evil One every morning either with a spitting or with a hammering. The Demon endured it and endured it, and at last found it pass all endurance. It was too much for him.

‘I’ve had quite enough of this insolence from him!’ thinks he. ‘Suppose I make use of a little diplomacy, and play him some sort of a trick!’

So the Demon took the form of a youth, and went to the smithy.

‘Good day, uncle!’ says he.

‘Good day!’

‘What should you say, uncle, to taking me as an apprentice? At all events, I could carry fuel for you and blow the bellows.’

The Smith liked the idea. ‘Why shouldn’t I?’ he replied. ‘Two are better than one.’

The Demon began to learn his trade; at the end of a month he knew more about smith’s work than his master did himself, was able to do everything that his master couldn’t do. It was a real pleasure to look at him! There’s no describing how satisfied his master was with him, how fond he got of him. Sometimes the master didn’t go into the smithy at all himself but trusted entirely to his journeyman, who had complete charge of everything.

Well, it happened one day that the master was not at home, and the journeyman was left all by himself in the smithy. Presently he saw an old lady driving along the street in her carriage, whereupon he popped his head out of doors and began shouting:

‘Heigh, sirs! Be so good as to step in here! We’ve opened a new business here; we turn old folks into young ones.’

Out of her carriage jumped the lady in a trice, and ran into the smithy.

‘What’s that you’re bragging about? Do you mean to say it’s true? Can you really do it?’ she asked the youth.

‘We haven’t got to learn our business!’ answered the Demon. ‘If I hadn’t been able to do it, I wouldn’t have invited people to try.’

‘And how much does it cost?’ asked the lady.

‘Five hundred roubles altogether.’

‘Well, then, there’s your money; make a young woman of me.’

The Demon took the money; then he sent the lady’s coach-man into the village.

‘Go,’ says he, ‘and bring me here two buckets full of milk.’

After that he took a pair of tongs, caught hold of the lady by the feet, flung her into the furnace, and burnt her up; nothing was left of her but her bare bones.

When the buckets of milk were brought, he emptied them into a large tub, then he collected all the bones and flung them into the milk. Just fancy! at the end of about three minutes the lady emerged from the milk—alive, and young, and beautiful!

Well, she got into her carriage and drove home. There she went straight to her husband, and he stared hard at her, but didn’t know she was his wife.

‘What are you staring at?’ says the lady. ‘I’m young and elegant, you see, and I don’t want to have an old husband! Be off at once to the smithy, and get them to make you young; if you don’t, I won’t so much as acknowledge you!’

There was no help for it; off set the seigneur. But by that time the Smith had returned home, amid had gone into the smithy. He looked about; the journeyman wasn’t to be seen. He searched and searched, he enquired and enquired, never a thing came of it; not even a trace of the youth could be found. He took to his work by himself, and was hammering away, when at that moment up drove the seigneur, and walked straight into the smithy.

‘Make a young man of me,’ says he.

‘Are you in your right mind, Basin? How can one make a young man of you?’

‘Come now! you know all about that.’

‘I know nothing of the kind.’

‘You lie, you scoundrel! Since you made my old woman young, make me young too; otherwise, there will be no hiving with her for me.’

‘Why I havemu’t so much as seen your good lady.’

‘Your journeyman saw her, anti that’s just the same thing. If he knew how to do the job, surely you, an old hand, must have learnt how to do it long ago. Come now, set to work at once. If you don’t, it will be the worse for you. I’ll have you rubbed down with a birch-tree towel.’

The Smith was compelled to try his hand at transforming the seigneur. He held a private conversation with the coachman as to how his journeyman had set to work with the lady, and what he had done to her, and then hue thought:

‘So be it! I’ll do the same. If I fall on my feet, good; if I don’t, well, I must suffer all the same!’

So he set to work at once, stripped the seigneur naked, laid hold of him by the legs with the tongs, popped him into the furnace, and began blowing the bellows. After he had burnt him to a cinder, he collected his remains, flung them into the milk, and then waited to see how soon a youthful seigneur would jump out of it. He waited one hour, two hours. But nothing came of it. He made a search in the tub. There was nothing in it but bones, and those charred ones.

Just then the lady sent messengers to the smithy, to ask whether the seigneur would soon be ready. The poor Smith had to reply that the seigneur was no more.

When the lady heard that the Smith had only turned her husband into a cinder, instead of making him young, she was tremendously angry, and she called together her trusty servants, and ordered them to drag him to the gallows. No sooner said than done. Her servants ran to the Smith's house, laid hold of him, tied his hands together, and dragged him off to the gallows. All of a sudden there came up with them the youngster who used to live with the Smith as his journeyman, who asked him.

'Where are they taking you, master?'

'They're going to hang me,' replied the Smith, and straightaway related all that had happened to him.

'Well, uncle!' said the Demon, 'swear that you will never strike me with your hammer, but that you will pay use the same respect your father always paid, and the seigneur shall be alive, and young too, in a trice.'

The Smith began promising and swearing that he would never again lift his hammer against the Demon, but would always pay him every attention. Thereupon the journeyman hastened to the smithy, and shortly afterwards came back again, bringing the seigneur with him, and crying to the servants

'Hold! Hold! Don't hang him! Here's your master!'

Then they immediately untied the cords, and let the Smith go free.

From that time forward the Smith gave up spitting at the Demon and striking him with his hammer. The journeyman disappeared, and was never seen again. But the seigneur and his lady entered upon a prosperous course of life, and if they haven't died, they're living still.'