

The Soldier and the Vampire

A certain soldier was allowed to go home on furlough. Well, he walked and walked, and after a time he began to draw near to his native village. Not far off from that village lived a miller in his mill. In old times the Soldier had been very intimate with him: why shouldn't he go and see his friend? He went. The Miller received him cordially, and at once brought out liquor; and the two began drinking, and chattering about their ways and doings. All this took place towards nightfall, and the Soldier stopped so long at the Miller's that it grew quite dark.

When he proposed to start for his village, his host exclaimed:

'Spend the night here, trooper! It's very late now, and perhaps you might run into mischief.'

'How so?'

'God is punishing us! A terrible warlock has died among us, and by night he rises from his grave, wanders through the village, and does such things as bring fear upon the very boldest! How could even you help being afraid of him?'

'Not a bit of it! A soldier is a man who belongs to the crown, and "crown property cannot be drowned in water nor burnt in fire." I'll be off: I'm tremendously anxious to see my people as soon as possible.'

Off he set. His road lay in front of a graveyard. On one of the graves he saw a great fire blazing. 'What's that?' thinks he. 'Let's have a look.' When he drew near, he saw that the Warlock was sitting by the fire, sewing boots.

'Hail, brother!' calls out the Soldier.

The Warlock looked up and said:

'What have you come here for?'

'Why, I wanted to see what you're doing.'

The Warlock threw his work aside and invited the Soldier to a wedding.

'Come along, brother,' says he, 'let's enjoy ourselves. There's a wedding going on in the village.'

'Come along!' says the Soldier.

They came to where the wedding was; there they were given drink, and treated with the utmost hospitality. The Warlock drank and drank, revelled and revelled, and then grew angry. He chased all the guests and relatives out of the house, threw the wedded pair into a slumber, took out two phials and an awl, pierced the hands of the bride and bridegroom with the awl, and began drawing off their blood. Having done this, he said to the Soldier:

'Now let's be off.'

Well, they went off. On the way the Soldier said:

'Tell me; why did you draw off their blood in those phials?'

'Why, in order that the bride and bridegroom might die. Tomorrow morning no one will be able to wake them. I alone know how to bring them back to life.'

'How's that managed?'

‘The bride and bridegroom must have cuts made in their heels, and some of their own blood must then be poured back into those wounds. I’ve got the bridegroom’s blood stowed away in my right-hand pocket, and the bride’s in my left.’

The Soldier listened to this without letting a single word escape him. Then the Warlock began boasting again.

‘Whatever I wish,’ says he, ‘that I can do!’

‘I suppose it’s quite impossible to get the better of you?’ says the Soldier.

‘Why impossible? If any one were to make a pyre of aspen boughs, a hundred loads of them, and were to burn me on that pyre, then he’d be able to get the better of me. Only he’d have to look out sharp in burning me; for snakes and worms and different kinds of reptiles would creep out of my inside, and crows and magpies and jackdaws would come flying up. All these must be caught and flung on the pyre. If so much as a single maggot were to escape, then there’d be no help for it; in that maggot I should slip away!’

The Soldier listened to all this and did not forget it. He and the Warlock talked and talked, and at last they arrived at the grave.

‘Well, brother,’ said the Warlock, ‘now I’ll tear you to pieces. Otherwise you’d be telling all this.’

‘What are you talking about? Don’t you deceive yourself; I serve God and the Emperor.’

The Warlock gnashed his teeth, howled aloud, and sprang at the Soldier—who drew his sword and began laying about him with sweeping blows. They struggled and struggled; the Soldier was all but at the end of his strength. ‘Ah!’ thinks he, ‘I’m a lost man—and all for nothing!’ Suddenly the cocks began to crow. The Warlock fell lifeless to the ground.

The Soldier took the phials of blood out of the Warlock’s pockets, and went on to the house of his own people. When he had got there, and had exchanged greetings with his relatives, they said:

‘Did you see any disturbance, Soldier?’

‘No, I saw none.’

‘There now! Why we’ve a terrible piece of work going on in the village. A Warlock has taken to haunting it!’

After talking awhile, they lay down to sleep. Next morning the Soldier awoke, and began asking:

‘I’m told you’ve got a wedding going on somewhere here?’

‘There was a wedding in the house of a rich moujik,’ replied his relatives, ‘but the bride and bridegroom have died this very night—what from, nobody knows.’

‘Where does this moujik live?’

They showed him the house. Thither he went without speaking a word. When he got there, he found the whole family in tears.

‘What are you mourning about?’ says he.

‘Such and such is the state of things, Soldier,’ say they.

‘I can bring your young people to life again. What will you give me if I do?’

‘Take what you like, even were it half of what we’ve got!’

The Soldier did as the Warlock had instructed him, and brought the young people back to life. Instead of weeping there began to be happiness and rejoicing; the Soldier was hospitably treated and well rewarded. Then—left about, face! off he marched to the Starosta, and told him to call the peasants together and to get ready a hundred loads of

aspen wood. Well, they took the wood into the graveyard, dragged the Warlock out of his grave, placed him on the pyre, and set it alight—the people all standing round in a circle with brooms, shovels, and fire-irons. The pyre became wrapped in flames, the Warlock began to burn. His corpse burst, and out of it crept snakes, worms, and all sorts of reptiles, and up came flying crows, magpies, and jackdaws. The peasants knocked them down and flung them into the fire, not allowing so much as a single maggot to creep away! And so the Warlock was thoroughly consumed, and the Soldier collected his ashes and strewed them to the winds. From that time forth there was peace in the village.

The Soldier received the thanks of the whole community.

He stayed at home some time, enjoying himself thoroughly. Then he went back to the Tsar's service with money in his pocket. When he had served his time, he retired from the army, and began to live at his ease.