

# The Miser

By Unknown

There once was a rich merchant named Marko—a stingier fellow never lived! One day he went out for a stroll. As he went along the road he saw a beggar—an old man, who sat there asking for alms—‘Please to give, O ye Orthodox, for Christ’s sake!’

Marko the Rich passed by. Just at that time there came um behind him a poor moujik, who felt sorry for the beggar, and gave him a copeck. The rich man seemed to feel ashamed, for he stopped and said to the moujik

‘Harkye, neighbour, lend me a copeck. I want to give that poor man something, but I’ve no small change.’

The moujik gave him one, amid asked when he should come for his money. ‘Come tomorrow,’ was the reply. Well, next day the poor man went to the rich man’s to get his copeck. He entered his spacious court-yard and asked

‘Is Marko the Rich at home?’

‘Yes. What do you want?’ replied Marko.

‘I’ve come for my copeck.’

‘Ah, brother! come again. Really I’ve no change just now.’

The poor man made his bow and went away.

‘I’ll come to-morrow,’ said he.

On the morrow he came again, but it was just the same story as before.

‘I haven’t a single copper. If you like to change me a note for a hundred—No? well then come again in a fortnight.’

At the end of the fortnight the poor man came again, but Marko the Rich saw him from the window, and said to his wife

‘Harkye, wife! I’ll strip myself naked and lie down under the holy pictures. Cover me up with a cloth, and sit down and cry, just as you would over a corpse. When the moujik comes for his money, tell him I died this morning.’

Well, the wife did everything exactly as her husband directed her. While she was sitting there drowned in bitter tears, the moujik came into the room.

‘What do you want?’ says she.

‘The money Marko the Rich owes me,’ answers the poor man.

‘Ah, moujik, Marko the Rich has wished us farewell; he’s only just dead.’

‘The kingdom of heaven be his! If you’ll allow me, mistress, in return for my copeck I’ll do him a last service—just give his mortal remains a wash.

So saying he laid hold of a pot full of boiling water and began pouring its scalding contents over Marko the Rich. Marko, his brows knit, his legs contorted, was scarcely able to hold out.

‘Writhe away or not as you please,’ thought the poor man, ‘but pay me my copeck!’

When he had washed the body, and laid it out properly, he said:

‘Now then, mistress, buy a coffin and have it taken into the church; I’ll go and read psalms over it.’

So Marko the Rich was put in a coffin and taken into the church, amid the moujik began reading psalms over him. The darkness of night came on. All of a sudden a

window opened, and a party of robbers crept through it into the church. The moujik hid himself behind the altar. As soon as the robbers had come in they began dividing their booty, and after everything else was shared there remained over and above a golden sabre—each one laid hold of it for himself, no one would give up his claim to it. Out jumped the poor man, crying:

‘What’s the good of disputing that way? Let the sabre belong to him who will cut this corpse’s head off!’

Up jumped Marko the Rich like a madman. The robbers were frightened out of their wits, flung away their spoil, and scampered off.

‘Here, Moujik,’ says Marko, ‘let’s divide the money.’

They divided it equally between them: each of the shares was a large one.

‘But how about the copeck?’ asks the poor man.

‘Ah, brother!’ replies Marko, ‘surely you can see I’ve got no change!’

And so Marko the Rich never paid the copeck after all.