# The Golden Spinning-Wheel: The Story of King Dobromil and the Good Dobrunka

There was once a poor woman who had twin daughters. The girls were exactly alike in face and feature but utterly different in disposition. Dobrunka was kind, industrious, obedient, and everything a good girl ought to be. Zloboha, her sister, was spiteful, disobedient, lazy, and proud. In fact, she had just about as many faults as a person could have. Yet strange to say the mother loved Zloboha much better and made everything easy for her.They lived in a cottage a few miles from town. The cottage stood by itself in a little clearing in the woods. Hardly any one ever passed it except occasionally some man who had lost his way in the woods.The mother put her favorite, Zloboha, out to service so that she might learn city ways, but she kept Dobrunka at home to do the housework and take care of the garden. Dobrunka always began the day by feeding the goats, then she prepared the breakfast, swept the kitchen, and when everything else was done she sat down at her spinning wheel and spun.She seldom benefited from the yarn she spun so carefully, for her mother always sold it in town and spent the money on clothes for Zloboha. Yet Dobrunka loved her mother although she never had a kind word or a kind look from her the whole day long. She always obeyed her mother instantly and without a frown and no one ever heard her complain about all the work she had to do.One day when her mother was going to town Dobrunka went part of the way with her, carrying her yarn wrapped up in a kerchief.“Now see that you’re not lazy while I’m away,” her mother said, crossly.“You know, mother, you never have to nag at me. Today when I finish the housework, I’ll spin so industriously that you’ll be more than satisfied when you get home.”She handed her yarn to her mother and went back to the cottage. Then when she had put the kitchen in order, she sat down to her wheel and began to spin. Dobrunka had a pretty voice, as pretty as any of the song-birds in the forest, and always when she was alone she sang. So today as she sat spinning she sang all the songs she knew, one after the other.Suddenly she heard outside the trample of a horse. “Some one is coming,” she thought to herself, “someone who has lost his way in the woods. I’ll go see.”She got up from her wheel and peeped out through the small window. A young man was just dismounting from a spirited horse.“Oh,” thought Dobrunka to herself, “what a handsome young lord he is! How well his leather coat fits him! How well his cap with its white feather looks on his black hair! Ah, he is tying his horse and is coming in. I must slip back to my spinning.”The next moment the young man opened the door and stepped into the kitchen. All this happened a long time ago, you see, when there were no locks or bars on the doors, and there didn’t have to be because nothing was ever stolen.“Good day to you, my girl,” the young man said to Dobrunka.“Good day, sir,” Dobrunka answered. “What is it, sir, you want?”“Will you please get me a little water. I’m very thirsty.”“Certainly,” Dobrunka said. “Won’t you sit down while I’m getting it?”She ran off, got the pitcher, rinsed it out, and drew some fresh water from the well.“I wish I could give you something better, sir.”“Nothing could taste better than this,” he said, handing her back the empty pitcher. “See, I have taken it all.”Dobrunka put the pitcher away and the young man, while her back was turned, slipped a leather bag, full of money, into the bed.“I thank you for the drink,” he said, as he rose to go. “I’ll come again tomorrow if you’ll let me.”“Come if you want to,” Dobrunka said, modestly.He took her hand, held it a moment, then leaped upon his horse and galloped off.Dobrunka sat down again to her wheel and tried to work, but her mind wandered. The image of the young man kept rising before her eyes and I have to confess that, for an expert spinner, she broke her thread pretty often.Her mother came home in the evening full of praises of Zloboha, who, she said, was growing prettier day by day. Everybody in town admired her and she was fast learning city ways and city manners. It was Zloboha this and Zloboha that for hours.Finally the old woman remarked: “They say there was a great hunting party out today. Did you hear anything of it?”“Oh, yes,” Dobrunka said. “I forgot to tell you that a young huntsman stopped here to ask for a drink. He was handsomely dressed in leather. You know once when I was in town with you we saw a whole company of men in leather coats with white feathers in their caps. No doubt this young man belonged to the hunting party. When he had his drink, he jumped on his horse and rode off.”Dobrunka forgot to mention that he had taken her hand in parting and promised to come back next day.When Dobrunka was preparing the bed for the night, the bag of money fell out. In great surprise she picked it up and handed it to her mother.The old woman looked at her sharply.“Dobrunka, who gave you all this money?”“Nobody gave it to me, mother. Perhaps the huntsman slipped it into the bed. I don’t know where else it could have come from.”The old woman emptied the bag on the table. They were all gold pieces.“Good heavens, so much!” she murmured in amazement. “He must be a very rich young lord! Perhaps he saw how poor we were and thought to do a kind deed. May God grant him happiness!”She gathered the money together and hid it in the chest.Usually when Dobrunka went to bed after her day’s work she fell asleep at once, but tonight she lay awake thinking of the handsome young rider. When she did at last fall asleep it was to dream of him. He was a powerful young lord, it seemed to her, in her dream. He lived in a great palace and she, Dobrunka, was his wife. She thought that they were giving a fine banquet to which all the nobles in the land had been invited. She and her husband arose from the table and went together into another room. He was about to put his arms about her and embrace her when suddenly a black cat sprang between them and buried its claws in Dobrunka’s breast. Her heart’s blood spurted out and stained her white dress. She cried out in fright and pain and the cry awoke her.“What a strange dream,” she thought to herself. “I wonder what it means. It began so beautifully but the cruel cat spoiled it all. I fear it bodes something ill.”In the morning when she got up, she was still thinking of it.On other mornings it didn’t take Dobrunka long to dress but this morning she was very slow. She shook out her fresh skirt again and again. She had the greatest trouble in putting on her bodice just right. She spent much time on her hair, into which she plaited the red ribbon that she usually kept for holidays. When at last she was dressed and ready to go about her household duties she looked very fresh and sweet.As midday came, she found it hard to sit still at her wheel, but kept jumping up on any pretext whatever to run outdoors a moment to see if the young horseman was in sight.At last she did see him at a distance and, oh, how she hurried back to her stool so that he would never think that she was watching for him.He rode into the yard, tied his horse, and came into the cottage.“Good day, Dobrunka,” he said, speaking very gently and very respectfully.Dobrunka’s heart was beating so fast that she feared it would jump out of her body. Her mother was in the woods gathering fagots, so she was again alone with him. She managed to return his greeting and to ask him to sit down. Then she went back to her spinning.The young man came over to her and took her hand.“How did you sleep, Dobrunka?”“Very well, sir.”“Did you dream?”“Yes, I had a very strange dream.”“Tell me about it. I can explain dreams very well.”“But I can’t tell this dream to you,” Dobrunka said.“Why not?”“Because it’s about you.”“That’s the very reason you ought to tell me,” the young man said.He urged her and begged her until at last Dobrunka did tell him the dream.“Well now,” he said, “that dream of yours except the part about the cat can be realized easily enough.”Dobrunka laughed. “How could I ever become a fine lady?”“By marrying me,” the young man said.Dobrunka blushed. “Now, sir, you are joking.”“No, Dobrunka, this is no joke. I really mean it. I came back this morning to ask you to marry me. Will you?”Dobrunka was too surprised to speak, but when the young man took her hand she did not withdraw it.Just then the old woman came in. The young man greeted her and without any delay declared his intentions. He said he loved Dobrunka and wished to make her his wife and that all he and Dobrunka were waiting for was the mother’s consent.“I have my own house,” he added, “and am well able to take care of a wife. And for you too, dear mother, there will always be room in my house and at my table.”The old woman listened to all he had to say and then very promptly gave her blessing.“Then, my dear one,” the young man said to Dobrunka, “go back to your spinning and when you have spun enough for your wedding shift, I shall come for you.”He kissed her, gave his hand to her mother, and, springing on his horse, rode away.From that time the old woman treated Dobrunka more kindly. She even went so far as to spend on Dobrunka a little of the money the young man had given them, but most of it, of course, went for clothes for Zloboha.But in those happy days Dobrunka wasn’t worrying about anything as unimportant as money. She sat at her wheel and spun away thinking all the while of her fine young lover. Time sped quickly and before she knew it she had spun enough for her wedding shift.The very day she was finished her lover came. She heard the trample of his horse and ran out to meet him.“Have you spun enough for your wedding shift?” he asked her as he took her to his heart.“Yes,” Dobrunka said, “I have.”“Then you can ride away with me this moment.”“This moment!” Dobrunka gasped. “Why so quickly?”“It has to be, my dear one. Tomorrow I go off to war and want you to take my place at home. Then when I come back you’ll be there to greet me as my wife.”“But what will my mother say to this?”“She will have to consent.”They went into the cottage and spoke to the old woman. She was far from pleased with this arrangement, for she had worked out a very different plan in her mind. But what could she do? A rich young bridegroom always has his own way. So she hid her disappointment with a false smile and gave them her blessing.Then the young man said to her: “Get your things together, mother, and follow Dobrunka, for I don’t want her to be lonely while I’m gone. When you get to the city, go to the palace and ask for Dobromil. The people there will tell you where to go.”Dobrunka with tears streaming down her cheeks bid her mother good-by. Dobromil lifted her to the saddle in front of him and away they went like the wind.The town was in great excitement. There was much hurrying to and fro as the troops were being put in readiness for the morrow. A crowd had gathered at the palace gates and as a young man came galloping up, holding in front of him a lady lovely as the day, the shout went up:“Here he is! Here he is!”The people in the courtyard took up the cry and as Dobromil rode through the gate all of them with one voice shouted out:“Long live our beautiful queen! Long live our noble king!”Dobrunka was struck with amazement.“Are you really the king, Dobromil?” she asked, looking into his proud and happy face.“Yes,” he said. “Aren’t you glad that I am?”“I love you,” Dobrunka said, “and so whatever you are makes no difference to me. But why did you deceive me?”“I did not deceive you. I told you that your dream would be realized if you took me for your husband.”In those early times marriage was a simple affair. When a man and woman loved each other and their parents consented to their union, they were looked upon as married. So Dobromil now was able to present Dobrunka to his people as his wife.There was great rejoicing, music played, and there was feasting and drinking in the banquet hall until dawn. The next day the young husband kissed his lovely bride farewell and rode off to war.Left alone the young queen strayed through the magnificent palace like a lost lamb. She would have felt more at home rambling through the woods and awaiting the return of her husband in a little cottage than here where she was a lonely stranger. Yet she was not a stranger long, for within half a day she had won every heart by her sweetness and goodness.The next day she sent for her mother and the old woman soon arrived bringing with her Dobrunka’s spinning wheel. So now there was no more excuse for loneliness.Dobrunka supposed that her mother would be made very happy to find what good fortune had befallen her daughter. The old woman pretended she was, but in her heart she was furious that a king had married Dobrunka and not Zloboha.After a few days she said, very artfully, to Dobrunka: “I know, my dear daughter, that you think your sister, Zloboha, was not always kind to you in times past. She’s sorry now and I want you to forgive her and invite her here to the palace.”“I should have asked her before this,” said Dobrunka, “but I didn’t suppose she wanted to come. If you wish it, we’ll go for her at once.”“Yes, dear daughter, I do wish it.”So the queen ordered the carriage and off they went to fetch Zloboha. When they came to the edge of the woods they alighted and ordered the coachman to await them there. They went on afoot to the cottage where Zloboha was expecting them.Zloboha came running out to meet them. She threw her arms about her sister’s neck and kissed her and wished her happiness. Then the wicked sister and the wicked mother led poor unsuspecting Dobrunka into the house. Once inside Zloboha took a knife that she had ready and struck Dobrunka. Then they cut off Dobrunka’s hands and feet, gouged out her eyes, and hid her poor mutilated body in the woods. Zloboha and her mother wrapped up the hands and the feet and the eyes to carry them back with them to the palace because they believed that it would be easier for them to deceive the king if they had with them something that had belonged to Dobrunka.Then Zloboha put on Dobrunka’s clothes and she and her mother rode back to town in the carriage and nobody could tell that she wasn’t Dobrunka. In the palace the attendants soon whispered to each other that their mistress was kinder to them at first, but they suspected nothing.In the meantime poor Dobrunka, who was not quite dead, had been found by a hermit and carried by him to a cave. She awoke to feel a kind hand soothing her wounds and putting some reviving drops between her lips. Of course, she could not see who it was, for she had no eyes. As she regained consciousness she remembered what had happened and began bitterly to upbraid her unnatural mother and her cruel sister.“Be quiet. Do not complain,” a low voice said. “All will yet be well.”“How can all be well,” wept poor Dobrunka, “when I have no eyes and no feet and no hands? I shall never again see the bright sun and the green woods. I shall never again hold in my arms my beloved Dobromil. Nor shall I be able to spin fine flax for his shirts! Oh, what did I ever do to you, wicked mother, or to you, cruel sister, that you have done this to me?”The hermit went to the entrance of the cave and called three times. Soon a boy came running in answer to the call.“Wait here till I come back,” the hermit said.He returned in a short time with a golden spinning wheel in his arms. He said to the boy:“My son, take this spinning wheel to town to the king’s palace. Sit down in the courtyard near the gate and if any one asks you for how much you will sell the wheel, say: ‘For two eyes.’ Unless you are offered two eyes for it bring it back.”The boy took the spinning wheel and carried it to town as the hermit directed. He went to the palace and sat down in the courtyard near the gate, just as Zloboha and her mother were returning from a walk.“Look, mother!” Zloboha cried. “What a gorgeous spinning wheel! I could spin on that myself! Wait. I’ll ask whether it’s for sale.”She went over to the boy and asked him would he sell the spinning wheel.“Yes,” he said, “if I get what I want.”“What do you want?”“I want two eyes.”“Two eyes?”“Yes, two eyes. My father told me to accept nothing for it but two eyes. So I can’t sell it for money.”The longer Zloboha looked at the spinning wheel the more beautiful it seemed to her and the more she wanted it. Suddenly she remembered Dobrunka’s eyes that she had hidden away.“Mother,” she said, “as a queen I ought to have something no one else has. When the king comes home he will want me to spin, and just think how lovely I should look sitting at this golden wheel. Now we’ve got those eyes of Dobrunka’s. Let us exchange them for the golden spinning wheel. We’ll still have the hands and feet.”The mother, who was as foolish as the daughter, agreed. So Zloboha got the eyes and gave them to the boy for the spinning wheel.The boy hurried back to the forest and handed the eyes to the hermit. The old man took them and gently put them into place. Instantly Dobrunka could see.The first thing she saw was the old hermit himself with his tall spare figure and long white beard. The last rays of the setting sun shone through the opening of the cave and lighted up his grave and gentle face. He looked to Dobrunka like one of God’s own saints.“How can I ever repay you?” she said, “for all your loving kindness? Oh, that I could cover your hands with kisses!”“Be quiet, my child,” the old man said. “If you are patient all will yet be well.”He went out and soon returned with some delicious fruit on a wooden plate. This he carried over to the bed of leaves and moss upon which Dobrunka was lying and with his own hands he fed Dobrunka as a mother would feed her helpless child. Then he gave her a drink from a wooden cup.Early the next morning the hermit again called three times and the boy came running at once. This time the hermit handed him a golden distaff and said:“Take this distaff and go to the palace. Sit down in the courtyard near the gate. If any one asks you what you want for the distaff, say two feet and don’t exchange it for anything else.”Zloboha was standing at a window of the palace looking down into the courtyard when she saw the boy with a golden distaff.“Mother!” she cried. “Come and see! There’s that boy again sitting near the gate and this time he has a golden distaff!”Mother and daughter at once went out to question the boy.“What do you want for the distaff?” Zloboha asked.“Two feet,” the boy said.“Two feet?”“Yes, two feet.”“Tell me, what will your father do with two feet?”“I don’t know. I never ask my father what he does with anything. But whatever he tells me to do, I do. That is why I can’t exchange the distaff for anything but two feet.”“Listen, mother,” Zloboha said, “now that I have a golden spinning wheel, I ought to have a golden distaff to go with it. You know we have those two feet of Dobrunka’s hidden away. What if I gave them to the boy? We shall still have Dobrunka’s hands.”“Well, do as you please,” the old woman said.So Zloboha went and got Dobrunka’s feet, wrapped them up, and gave them to the boy in exchange for the distaff. Delighted with her bargain, Zloboha went to her chamber and the boy hurried back to the forest.He gave the feet to the hermit and the old man carried them at once inside the cave. Then he rubbed Dobrunka’s wounds with some healing salve and stuck on the feet. Dobrunka wanted to jump up from the couch and walk but the old man restrained her.“Lie quiet where you are until you are all well and then I’ll let you get up.”Dobrunka knew that whatever the old hermit said was for her good, so she rested as he ordered.On the third morning the hermit called the boy and gave him a golden spindle.“Go to the palace again,” he said, “and today offer this spindle for sale. If any one asks you what you want for the spindle, say two hands. Don’t accept anything else.”The boy took the golden spindle and when he reached the palace and sat down in the courtyard near the gate, Zloboha ran up to him at once.“What do you want for that spindle?” she asked.“Two hands,” the boy said.“It’s a strange thing you won’t sell anything for money.”“I have to ask what my father tells me to ask.”Zloboha was in a quandary. She wanted the golden spindle, for it was very beautiful. It would go well with the spinning wheel and would be something to be proud of. Yet she didn’t want to be left without anything that had belonged to Dobrunka.“But really, mother,” she whined, “I don’t see why I have to keep something of Dobrunka’s so that Dobromil will love me as he loved her. I’m sure I’m as pretty as Dobrunka ever was.”“Well,” said the old woman, “it would be better if you kept them. I’ve often heard that’s a good way to guard a man’s love. However, do as you like.”For a moment Zloboha was undecided. Then, tossing her head, she ran and got the hands and gave them to the boy.Zloboha took the spindle and, delighted with her bargain, carried it into her chamber where she had the wheel and distaff. The old woman was a little troubled, for she feared Zloboha had acted foolishly. But Zloboha, confident of her beauty and her ability to charm the king, only laughed at her.As soon as the boy had delivered the hands to the hermit, the old man carried them into the cave. Then he anointed the wounds on Dobrunka’s arms with the same healing salve that he used before, and stuck on the hands.As soon as Dobrunka could move them she jumped up from the couch and, falling at the hermit’s feet, she kissed the hands that had been so good to her.“A thousand thanks to you, my benefactor!” she cried with tears of joy in her eyes. “I can never repay you, I know that, but ask of me anything I can do and I’ll do it.”“I ask nothing,” the old man said, gently raising her to her feet. “What I did for you I would do for any one. I only did my duty. So say no more about it. And now, my child, farewell. You are to stay here until some one comes for you. Have no concern for food. I shall send you what you need.”Dobrunka wanted to say something to him, but he disappeared and she never saw him again.Now she was able to run out of the cave and look once more upon God’s green world. Now for the first time in her life she knew what it meant to be strong and well. She threw herself on the ground and kissed it. She hugged the slender birches and danced around them, simply bursting with love for every living thing. She reached out longing hands towards the town and would probably have gone there running all the distance but she remembered the words of the old hermit and knew that she must stay where she was.Meanwhile strange things were happening at the palace. Messengers brought word that the king was returning from war and there was great rejoicing on every side. The king’s own household was particularly happy, for service under the new mistress was growing more unpleasant every day. As for Zloboha and her mother, it must be confessed that they were a little frightened over the outcome of their plot.Finally the king arrived. Zloboha with smiling face went to meet him. He took her to his heart with great tenderness and from that moment Zloboha had no fear that he would recognize her.A great feast was at once prepared, for the king had brought home with him many of his nobles to rest and make merry after the hardships of war.Zloboha as she sat at Dobromil’s side could not take her eyes off him. The handsome young soldier caught her fancy and she was rejoiced that she had put Dobrunka out of the way.When they finished feasting, Dobromil asked her: “What have you been doing all this time, my dear Dobrunka? I’m sure you’ve been spinning.”“That’s true, my dear husband,” Zloboha said in a flattering tone. “My old spinning wheel got broken, so I bought a new one, a lovely golden one.”“You must show me it at once,” the king said, and he took Zloboha’s arm and led her away.He went with her to her chamber where she had the golden spinning wheel and she took it out and showed it to him. Dobromil admired it greatly.“Sit down, Dobrunka,” he said, “and spin. I should like to see you again at the distaff.”Zloboha at once sat down behind the wheel. She put her foot to the treadle and started the wheel. Instantly the wheel sang out and this is what it sang:“Master, master, don’t believe her!She’s a cruel and base deceiver!She is not your own sweet wife!She destroyed Dobrunka’s life!”Zloboha sat stunned and motionless while the king looked wildly about to see where the song came from.When he could see nothing, he told her to spin some more. Trembling, she obeyed. Hardly had she put her foot to the treadle when the voice again sang out:“Master, master, don’t believe her!She’s a cruel and base deceiver!She has killed her sister goodAnd hid her body in the wood!”Beside herself with fright, Zloboha wanted to flee the spinning wheel, but Dobromil restrained her. Suddenly her face grew so hideous with fear that Dobromil saw she was not his own gentle Dobrunka. With a rough hand he forced her back to the stool and in a stern voice ordered her to spin.Again she turned the fatal wheel and then for the third time the voice sang out:“Master, master, haste away!To the wood without delay!In a cave your wife, restored,Yearns for you, her own true lord!”At those words Dobromil released Zloboha and ran like mad out of the chamber and down into the courtyard where he ordered his swiftest horse to be saddled instantly. The attendants, frightened by his appearance, lost no time and almost at once Dobromil was on his horse and flying over hill and dale so fast that the horse’s hoofs scarcely touched the earth.When he reached the forest he did not know where to look for the cave. He rode straight into the wood until a white doe crossed his path. Then the horse in fright plunged to one side and pushed through bushes and undergrowth to the base of a big rock. Dobromil dismounted and tied the horse to a tree.He climbed the rock and there he saw something white gleaming among the trees. He crept forward cautiously and suddenly found himself in front of a cave. Imagine then his joy, when he enters and finds his own dear wife Dobrunka.As he kisses her and looks into her sweet gentle face he says: “Where were my eyes that I was deceived for an instant by your wicked sister?”“What have you heard about my sister?” asked Dobrunka, who as yet knew nothing of the magic spinning wheel.So the king told her all that had happened and she in turn told him what had befallen her.“And from the time the hermit disappeared,” she said in conclusion, “the little boy has brought me food every day.”They sat down on the grass and together they ate some fruit from the wooden plate. When they rose to go they took the wooden plate and the cup away with them as keepsakes.Dobromil seated his wife in front of him on the horse and sped homewards with her. All his people were at the palace gate waiting to tell him what had happened in his absence.It seems that the devil himself had come and before their very eyes had carried off his wife and mother-in-law. They looked at each other in amazement as Dobromil rode up with what seemed to be the same wife whom the devil had so recently carried off.Dobromil explained to them what had happened and with one voice they called down punishment on the head of the wicked sister.The golden spinning wheel had vanished. So Dobrunka hunted out her old one and set to work at once to spin for her husband’s shirts. No one in the kingdom had such fine shirts as Dobromil and no one was happier.

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