# The Vampire and St Michael

Once upon a time in a certain village there lived two neighbours; one was rich, very rich, and the other so poor that he had nothing in the world but a little hut, and that was tumbling about his ears. At length things came to such a pass with the poor man that he had nothing to eat, and could get work nowhere. Full of grief, he bethought him what he should do. He thought and thought, and at last he said, “Look ye, wife! I’ll go to my rich neighbour. Perchance he will lend me a silver rouble; that, at any rate, will be enough to buy bread with.” So he went.He came to the rich man. “Good health to my lord!” cried he.––“Good health!”––“I have come on an errand to thee, dear little master!”––“What may thine errand be?” inquired the rich man.––“Alas! would to God that I had no need to say it. It has come to such a pass with us that there’s not a crust of bread nor a farthing of money in the house. So I have come to thee, dear little master; lend us but a silver rouble and we will be ever thankful to thee, and I’ll work myself old to pay it back.”––“But who will stand surety for thee?” asked the rich man.––“I know not if any man will, I am so poor. Yet, perchance, God and St Michael will be my sureties,” and he pointed at the ikon in the corner. Then the ikon of St Michael spoke to the rich man from the niche and said, “Come now! lend it him, and put it down to my account. God will repay thee!”––“Well,” said the rich man, “I’ll lend it to thee.” So he lent it, and the poor man thanked him and returned to his home full of joy.But the rich man was not content that God should give him back his loan by blessing him in his flocks and herds, and in his children, and in his health, and in the blessed fruits of the earth. He waited and waited for the poor man to come and pay him back his rouble, and at last he went to seek him. “Thou son of a dog,” he shouted, before the house, “why hast thou not brought me back my money? Thou knowest how to borrow, but thou forgettest to repay!” Then the wife of the poor man burst into tears. “He would repay thee indeed if he were in this world,” said she, “but lo now! he died but a little while ago!” The rich man snarled at her and departed, but when he got home he said to the ikon, “A pretty surety thou art!” Then he took St Michael down from the niche, dug out his eyes, and began beating him.He beat St Michael again and again, and at last he flung him into a puddle and trampled on him. “I’ll give it thee for standing me surety so scurvily,” said he. While he was thus abusing St Michael, a young fellow about twenty years old came along that way, and said to him, “What art thou doing, my father?”––“I am beating him because he stood surety and has played me false. He took upon himself the repayment of a silver rouble, which I lent to the son of a pig, who has since gone away and died. That is why I am beating him now.”––“Beat him not, my father! I’ll give thee a silver rouble, but do thou give me this holy image!”––“Take him if thou wilt, but see that thou bring me the silver rouble first.”Then the young man ran home and said to his father, “Dad, give me a silver rouble!”––“Wherefore, my son?”––“I would buy a holy image,” said he, and he told his father how he had seen that heathen beating St Michael.––“Nay, my son, whence shall we who are poor find a silver rouble to give to him who is so rich?”––“Nay, but give it me, dad!” and he begged and prayed till he got it. Then he ran back as quickly as he could, paid the silver rouble to the rich man, and got the holy image. He washed it clean and placed it in the midst of sweet-smelling flowers. And so they lived on as before.Now this youth had three uncles, rich merchants, who sold all manner of merchandise, and went in ships to foreign lands, where they sold their goods and made their gains. One day, when his uncles were again making ready to depart into foreign lands, he said to them, “Take me with you!”––“Why shouldst thou go?” said they; “we have wares to sell, but what hast thou?”––“Yet take me,” said he.––“But thou hast nothing.”––“I will make me laths and boards and take them with me,” said he.––His uncles laughed at him for imagining such wares as these, but he begged and prayed them till they were wearied. “Well, come,” they said, “though there is naught for thee to do; only take not much of these wares of thine with thee, for our ships are already full.”––Then he made him laths and boards, put them on board the ship, took St Michael with him, and they departed.They went on and on. They sailed a short distance and they sailed a long distance, till at last they came to another tsardom and another empire. And the Tsar of this tsardom had an only daughter, so lovely that the like of her is neither to be imagined nor divined in God’s fair world, neither may it be told in tales. Now this Tsarivna one day went down to the river to bathe, and plunged into the water without first crossing herself, whereupon the Evil Spirit took possession of her. The Tsarivna got out of the water, and straightway fell ill of so terrible a disease that it may not be told of. Do what they would––and the wise men and the wise women did their utmost––it was of no avail. In a few days she grew worse and died. Then the Tsar, her father, made a proclamation that people should come and read the prayers for the dead over her dead body, and so exorcise the evil spirit, and whosoever delivered her was to have half his power and half his tsardom.And the people came in crowds––but none of them could read the prayers for the dead over her, it was impossible. Every evening a man went into the church, and every morning they swept out his bones, for there was naught else of him remaining. And the Tsar was very wrath. “All my people will be devoured,” cried he. And he commanded that all the foreign merchants passing through his realm should be made to read prayers for the dead over his daughter’s body. “And if they will not read,” said he, “they shall not depart from my kingdom.”So the foreign merchants went one by one. In the evening a merchant was shut up in the church, and in the early morning they came and found and swept away his bones. At last it came to the turn of the young man’s uncles to read the prayers for the dead in the church. They wept and lamented and cried, “We are lost! we are lost! Heaven help us!” Then the eldest uncle said to the lad, “Listen, good simpleton! It has now come to my turn to read prayers over the Tsarivna. Do thou go in my stead and pass the night in the church, and I’ll give thee all my ship.”––“Nay, but,” said the simpleton, “what if she tear me to pieces too? I won’t go!”––But then St Michael said to him, “Go and fear not! Stand in the very middle of the church, fenced round about with thy laths and boards, and take with thee a basket full of pears. When she rushes at thee, take and scatter the pears, and it will take her till cockcrow to pick them all up. But do thou go on reading thy prayers all the time, and look not up, whatever she may do.”When night came, he took up his laths and boards and a basket of pears, and went to the church. He entrenched himself behind his boards, stood there and began to read. At dead of night there was a rustling and a rattling. O Lord! what was that? There was a shaking of the bier––bang! bang!––and the Tsarivna arose from her coffin and came straight toward him. She leaped upon the boards and made a grab at him and fell back. Then she leaped at him again, and again she fell back. Then he took his basket and scattered the pears. All through the church they rolled, she after them, and she tried to pick them up till cockcrow, and at the very first “Cock-a-doodle-doo!” she got into her bier again and lay still.When God’s bright day dawned, the people came to clean out the church and sweep away his bones; but there he was reading his prayers, and the rumour of it went through the town and they were all filled with joy.Next night it was the turn of the second uncle, and he began to beg and pray, “Go thou, simpleton, in my stead! Look now, thou hast already passed a night there, thou mayst very well pass another, and I’ll give thee all my ship.”––But he said, “I won’t go, I am afraid.”––But then St Michael said to him again, “Fear not, but go! Fence thee all about with thy boards, and take with thee a basket of nuts. When she rushes at thee, scatter thy nuts, and the nuts will go rolling all about the church, and it will take her till cockcrow to gather them all up. But do thou go on reading thy prayers, nor look thou up, whatever may happen.”And he did so. He took his boards and the basket of nuts, and went to the church at nightfall and read. A little after midnight there was a rustling and an uproar, and the whole church shook. Then came a fumbling round about the coffin––bang! bang!––up she started, and made straight for him. She leaped and plunged, she very nearly got through the boards. She hissed, like seething pitch, and her eyes glared at him like coals of fire, but it was of no use. He read on and on, and didn’t once look at her. Besides, he scattered his nuts, and she went after them and tried to pick them all up till cockcrow. And at the first “Cock-a-doodle-doo!” she leaped into her coffin again and pulled down the lid. In the morning the people came to sweep away his bones, and lo! they found him alive.The next night he had to go again in the third uncle’s stead. Then he sat down and cried and wailed, “Alas, alas! what shall I do? ’Twere better I had never been born!”––But St Michael said to him, “Weep not, ’twill all end happily. Fence thyself about with thy boards, sprinkle thyself all about with holy water, incense thyself with holy incense, and take me with thee. She shall not have thee. And the moment she leaves her coffin, do thou jump quickly into it. And whatever she may say to thee, and however she may implore thee, let her not get into it again until she says to thee, ‘My consort!’”So he went. There he stood in the middle of the church, fenced himself about with his boards, strewed consecrated poppy-seed around him, incensed himself with holy incense, and read and read. About the middle of the night a tempest arose outside, and there was a rustling and a roaring, a hissing and a wailing. The church shook, the altar candelabra were thrown down, the holy images fell on their faces. O Lord, how awful! Then came a bang! bang! from the coffin, and again the Tsarivna started up. She left her coffin and fluttered about the church. She rushed at the boards and made a snatch at him, and fell back; she rushed at him again, and again she fell back. She foamed at the mouth, and her fury every instant grew worse and worse. She dashed herself about, and darted madly from one corner of the church to the other, seeking him everywhere. But he skipped into the coffin, with the image of St Michael by his side. She ran all over the church seeking him. “He was here––and now he is not here!” cried she. Then she ran farther on, felt all about her, and cried again, “He was here––and now he’s not here!” At last she sprang up to the coffin, and there he was. Then she began to beg and pray him, “Come down, come down! I’ll try and catch thee no more, only come down, come down!” But he only prayed to God, and answered her never a word. Then the cock crew once, “Cock-a-doodle-doo!”––“Alas! come down, come down, my consort!” cried she. Then he came down, and they both fell on their knees and began praying to God, and wept sore and gave thanks to God because He had had mercy on them both.And at dawn of day crowds of people, with the Tsar at the head of them, came to the church. “Shall we find him reading prayers, or shall we only find his bones?” said they. And lo! there they both were on their knees praying fervently to God. Then the Tsar rejoiced greatly, and embraced both him and her. After that they had a grand service in the church, and sprinkled her with holy water, and baptized her again, and the unclean spirit departed from her. Then the Tsar gave the young man half his power and half his kingdom, but the merchants departed in their ships, with their nephew on board.They lived together, and time went on and the young man still remained a bachelor, and was so handsome that words cannot describe it. But the Tsar lived alone with his daughter. She, however, grew sadder and sadder, and was no longer like her former self, so sorrowful was she. And the Tsar asked her, saying, “Wherefore art thou so sorrowful?”––“I am not sorrowful, father,” said she. But the Tsar watched her, and saw that she was sorrowful, and there was no help for it. Then he asked her again, “Art thou ill?”––“Nay, dear dad,” said she. “I myself know not what is the matter with me.”And so it went on, till the Tsar dreamt a dream, and in this dream it was said to him, “Thy daughter grieves because she loves so much the youth who drove the unclean spirit out of her.” Then the Tsar asked her, “Dost thou love this youth?”––And she answered, “I do, dear father.”––“Then why didst thou not tell me before, my daughter?” said he. Then he sent for his heyducks and commanded them, saying, “Go this instant to such and such a kingdom, and there ye will find the youth who cured my daughter; bring him to me.” Then they went on and on until they found him, and he took just the same laths and boards that he had had before, and went with them. The Tsar met him, and bought all his boards, and when they split them in pieces, lo! they were full of precious stones. Then the Tsar took him to his own house and gave him his daughter. And they lived right merrily together.

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