

The Carriage from Another World

In a certain village there once lived two neighbours. One was rich but the other knew only hard work and poverty. Well, one day before harvest the poor man had no seed left to plant. His hungry children cried and begged for food till he felt at his wit's end. The poor man went to see the rich man. He found him sitting under a pear tree in the orchard, enjoying a roasted stuffed piglet.

“Neighbour, do lend me a little seed and I'll repay you,” said the poor man, bowing at the feet of the rich man.

The rich man glanced at the poor man, licked his greasy fingers and replied, “If you agree to my suggestions, then maybe I'll give you some seed.” Now in those days there was a law by which the money lender had the right to do whatever he pleased with the debtor.

“Very well,” the poor man consented.

The rich man smiled saying, “No, I'll not tell you today. I'll tell you tomorrow.” He gave the neighbour some seed and once more seated himself before the roasted pig.

The next day, early in the morning the poor man went to hear the decision.

“Get into this sack,” ordered the rich man.

The poor man had to climb into the sack. The rich man tied him up, heaved the sack onto his shoulders and carried it off to the river. Even though the way wasn't far the rich man tired very quickly.

“I can't carry this by myself,” he thought. “I'll go and get my mate to help me.” And he left the burden by the road. The poor man was sitting in the sack when suddenly he heard something rattling on the road. He started to yell.

“Oh, oh, good people! I can’t read or write, and they want to elect me as governor of the province.”

But just then a judge was riding by with fine horses and a new carriage. “What are you jabbering about there?” said the judge.

The poor man repeated, “I can’t read or write, and they want to elect me as governor of the province.

“Well,” thought the judge. “The world has never seen such a case, that a tramp should suddenly become a governor. No, I won’t allow it to happen.” He rolled down from the carriage and, breathing hard, ran up to the sack, saying, “Come now, repeat once more what you said.”

“Well sir, I’m saying that whoever sits in this sack till evening will become governor. An order just came from the emperor.”

“Hold on, friend,” the voice of the judge changed. “Couldn’t we change places with you? You certainly don’t know anything about state affairs. Besides, I’ll give you one hundred gold coins.”

The judge untied the sack and so that the man wouldn’t change his mind, he quickly climbed inside. The poor man took the gold coins, tied up the judge very tightly and said, “Now sir, sit quietly and wait until they seat you in the governor’s chair!” Then he himself took a seat in the carriage and drove away into town.

Soon the rich man came along leading his mate. They seized the sack and carried it off to the river.

“It seems to me that this sack has become heavier,” complained the rich man in surprise. As for the judge, he kept silent, fearing that the deception would be discovered.

The men dragged the sack to the river swung it round and threw it into the water.

“Well, thank God there is one less beggar in the village,” the rich man started to laugh. “I’ll take over his villa.” And they hurried off to the tavern. No one knows how long they stayed there but finally they came out and embraced each other when the sun was setting. Suddenly they saw a carriage going by and who was in it? The poor man! But no one could recognize him. He wore a new overcoat, handsome boots and a sheep-skin cap tilted on one side of his head. Their eyes bulged out with wonder.

“And where did you come from?” asked the rich man.

“From the other world,” was the reply. And the poor man didn’t even blink an eye. “They gave me these sacred horses and this carriage. They clothed and fed me, and even loaded me with gifts for the children, as you can see.”

“The rich men exchanged glances. “Hold on, neighbour,” they said to the poor man. “and do they reward everyone there?”

“Oho, I should say so—and more,” the poor man began to laugh. “Granny Orishka, who was buried yesterday, is driving a whole carriage of gold, somewhere in the rear.”

“And how can one find the road there?” the two rich men almost trembled.

“Take the same road on which you sent me. Only do not delay because others will be ready to snatch everything down to the last crumb.”

The poor man gave a loud cry and left the drunk rich men in the middle of the road. They remained on the spot and then walking one behind the other they rushed toward the river.

“You climb in first, mate,” said the rich man, “because you know how to swim.” His friend undressed and climbed into the water. He had just waded out a bit from the bank when he fell

into a deep hole and began to pray. But soon he understood this was no jesting matter and suddenly started to shout, “Mate, it’s the end of my course!”

But it seemed to the rich man he was calling out, “Mate, I’ll tend to the horse!” So he shouted, “Hold him tight!” I’ll help you fight!” He then fell headlong into the river and the water made a long gurgling sound.

As for the poor man, from that time on he began to enjoy life, like a real human being. To tell you the truth, I wasn’t there, but I heard the story from the old people.