

## Thomas with a Heart

Once upon a time, in the dead of night, an old woman walked through a certain village. She was all dressed in white, with a big sack over her shoulders. She stumbled along holding a stick before her, searching for the road, as though she were blind. Right in front of her darted another old woman, black as coal, all dressed in torn and shabby rags, also with a sack on her shoulders.

“Greetings, Fortune,” Said the woman in black.

“Greetings, Misfortune,” replied the woman in white

“And where are you plodding along?” asked Misfortune.

“I am going to the home of Ivan’s widow, not far from the green. Speaking confidentially, God is sending her a little baby boy, so I want to give him some little gift.”

“Well, take me along with you. I can see even in the darkness and I can lead you there. You are blind and will certainly dash yourself against the hedge or fall into the ditch.”

“Very well, good sister, lead on. You might as well visit him because he’ll have to meet you some day.”

“It’s very plain,” said Misfortune, “there is no one who will escape my hands unless, of course, he dies right after birth.”

“But this has not been fated for the son of Ivan,” said Fortune. “The poor widow has six small children and this is to be her seventh. It will be born after the father’s death. That means it will surely live.”

“Ho, ho, ho, Fortune,” laughed Misfortune, “you talk as if you had slept in my den on a pillow of thorns for three months.”

“That’s as it may be,” answered Fortune. “I already know what I am speaking about. But look, we’re near the house already.”

“So we are,” said Misfortune, and both women passed through the house, without opening the door.

Greetings, Ivan’s widow,” said Fortune.

And the widow, just having borne a son without help, was puttering about the stove, heating water for the baby’s bath. She was a strong, husky woman.

“God has sent you to me, dear guests!” said she. “Do sit down,” she added.

“No, poor soul. You ought to lie down and we’ll look after you. Don’t be afraid. We know what God has fated to people and we won’t do you any harm.”

Ivan’s wife lay down on her bed. Misfortune sat at her head and chased away the dreams from her eyes, as in the summertime and old granny will shoo away flies from a child’s face. Fortune, in the meantime, pattered about the stove and got the bath ready for the baby. She drew out a couple of napkins from her sack and took the child from his mother in order to give him a bath. “Wait a bit, Fortune,” said Misfortune suddenly. “I also must give something to my godchild Thomas for his bath.” And rummaging for a long time in her sack, she drew from it a small coin full of holes and wrapped in about ten layers of rags. She looked at the coin and even smelt it, then threw it into the bath.

“Thank you,” said Fortune and, sneezing three times at the water, she placed the baby in it.

“What should I give him?” Fortune mused, bathing the baby.

“Promise him a beautiful wife,” said Misfortune.

“That’s fine, but a beautiful wife is a great worry,” answered Fortune.

“Well then, give him lots of money,” said Misfortune.

“To have a lot of money is like riding on a swift horse: you can break your head,” thoughtfully answered Fortune.

“Well then, make him a fine gentleman,” replied Misfortune.

“In such a case you would have to freeze his heart,” answered Fortune.

“No one can please you!” remarked Misfortune. “Why, then, don’t you just give him a big, warm heart!”

So she did.