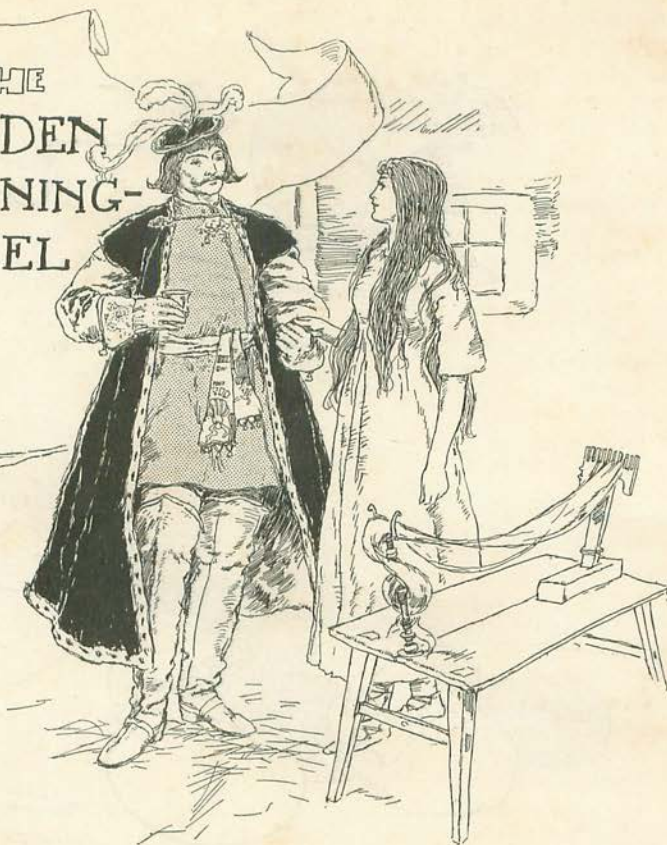


# THE GOLDEN SPINNING- WHEEL

A SLAVONIC  
STORY FOR  
CHILDREN.

FROM THE  
FRENCH OF  
XAVIER MARMIER.



CERTAIN poor widow had twin-daughters, who in appearance resembled one another so closely that no one could distinguish between them. But although alike in face and figure, in character they differed widely. The one, whose name was Dobrounka, was intelligent and industrious, gentle and good; the other, named Zloboda, was, on the contrary, idle, vain, untruthful, and altogether wicked. The latter, nevertheless, was the favourite of her mother, who sought to gratify her every whim.

The widow's hut stood in the middle of a forest. Seldom did anyone pass this spot, so far removed from the town. To the town, however, the widow took her beloved Zloboda, and placed her in an excellent situation.

Dobrounka remained at home. Her days were full of work. She rose early, fed the goat, prepared the morning meal, tidied the room, then sat down to her spinning-wheel, at which she worked for the rest of the day. Her mother carried the fine thread which she

spun to sell in the town, and would frequently buy with the proceeds a present for Zloboda. Poor Dobrounka received nothing. In spite of this injustice, the girl loved her mother, and never complained.

One day, when she was alone in the hut, seated before her wheel, and, according to her custom, singing while she worked, she heard the approaching tramp of a horse.

Going to the window, she beheld, mounted upon a spirited steed, a young man attired in a cloak of fur, and wearing upon his head a velvet hat ornamented with white feathers.

"What a noble-looking gentleman!" thought Dobrounka. "Why! he has dismounted! He is coming here! I will go and see what he wants."

But the stranger had already opened the door, for at that time bolts and bars did not exist, and theft was unknown.

"Accept my salutations!" said the young man. "I am very thirsty. Can you give me a glass of water?"

"Certainly, sir! In one moment," replied Dobrounka. "Pray be seated."



She took a pitcher, ran to the spring, and returned, saying, as she handed the water to her guest: "I am sorry that I have nothing better to offer you."

"Thank you!" cried the gentleman, "I desire nothing better than this."

After drinking, he gave back the glass to Dobrounka, and, unperceived by her, contrived to slip a purse filled with gold pieces beneath the pillow of the bed.

"What delicious water!" he said. "Will you permit me to visit you again to-morrow?"

"Willingly," answered Dobrounka, "if you care to do so."

He shook hands with her, remounted his horse, and rode away.

The girl went back to her wheel. But her head was full of the handsome cavalier, and several times in her abstraction she broke her thread.

In the evening, her mother returned from the town. She was loud in her praises of Zloboda, who, said she, grew more beautiful every day. She inquired whether Dobrounka had seen anyone, as she understood that there had been a grand hunt in the forest.

"I have seen," replied Dobrounka, "a fine gentleman in a fur cloak and plumed hat; he, no doubt, was one of the hunting-party. He asked me very politely for a drink of water, and after he had drunk it he rode away."

She omitted to say that he had pressed her hand in his, and that he was coming again the next day.

A few moments later, in preparing her bed, she dislodged the purse left by the visitor. It fell to the ground.

"What is that?" called out the old woman, sharply. "Who gave you this?"

"No one. Maybe it was hidden there by the gentleman I told you of. How generous of him!"

The widow, who opened the purse, now exclaimed, in a transport of joy:—

"Gold! gold! The gift of a wealthy nobleman, who, seeing our poverty, wished to aid us. Heaven bless him!"

She gathered up the glittering coins, which she had poured out upon the table, and replaced them in the purse, which she then put carefully away in a trunk.

That night Dobrounka had a strange dream. She thought that she was in a magnificent castle, seated at a splendid table, with a marriage-crown upon her head. Yet at the same time she was pursued by a horrible monster, which dug its claws into her heart.

In the morning she rose, haunted still by

her dream, and dressed herself with more than usual care. Her gown, of some blue stuff, was simple, but perfectly neat. She wore in her hair the rose-coloured ribbons which she reserved for festivals, and tied a silk apron around her waist. Thus attired, she made a charming picture.

Towards midday, the horseman made his appearance. Having greeted Dobrounka, he sat down.

"Have you slept well?" asked he.

"Yes, except for a dream that troubles me still."

"Tell it me."

Dobrounka told her dream.

"With the omission of the frightful beast which tormented you so cruelly, this dream might easily become a reality. Will you marry me?"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the blushing Dobrounka; "a poor girl like me! You cannot mean it!"

"I am speaking quite seriously. I came here to-day on purpose to make this proposal."

As he spoke, he held out his hand, in which the young girl, with modest hesitation, laid her own.

At this moment the old woman entered the hut. The young man greeted her courteously, explained his wishes, and asked her blessing.

"I have inherited," he said, "a fairly large fortune, and have a house of my own in which you could live with us. Please give me your daughter!"

The widow gave her consent.

"Now," said the lover, turning towards Dobrounka, "work away industriously, and as soon as you have got your wedding-dress ready, I will come and fetch you."

With these words he embraced her, and left the hut.

After this, the widow treated Dobrounka with greater consideration. But she still cared much more for the wicked Zloboda, for whom she bought no end of finery with the money left by Dobrounka's wealthy suitor. This, however, did not trouble Dobrounka in the least; all her energies were concentrated upon her work, which she naturally wished to finish in the shortest possible time.

On the very day that she finished it, her *fiancé* appeared.

"Is all ready?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Then you can come with me at once?"

"Why so soon?"



"It must be so. To-morrow I have to join the army, and I should like to marry before I go, and to install you in my house, in order that I may have the exquisite happiness of finding you there upon my return. Let us go and tell your mother."

It was with secret chagrin that the widow heard of the impatient young man's determination, for she had a different plan in her mind. But it was impossible openly to oppose the wishes of such a son-in-law as this.

"Make your mind easy about your daughter," he said; "and when you feel inclined to come and see her, inquire for her at the Prince's castle. Anyone will tell you where to find her."

So saying, he took the half-reluctant Dobrounka by the hand, set her upon his horse, and the two rode away.

In the Prince's castle there was a great stir of soldiers, and his servants were looking out for him. His appearance was the signal for joyous shouts of welcome.

"Long live our Prince!" they cried. "Long live our Princess!"

The cheers were redoubled when the Prince led his fair bride into the castle court. Dobrounka seemed stupefied.

"Are you the Prince, then?" she asked.

"I am. Are you sorry for that?"

"I care not of what rank you are. But why have you deceived me?"

"I did not deceive you. I told you that your dream might come true."

There was a grand wedding. The Prince presented his wife to his vassals, and on the following morning he bade her adieu, and started to join the Imperial army.

Dobrounka felt quite lost in this large and splendid mansion. She would have preferred to await her husband's return in her lonely forest-hut. In a short time, however, she overcame her shyness, and had soon won the heart of everyone in the palace.

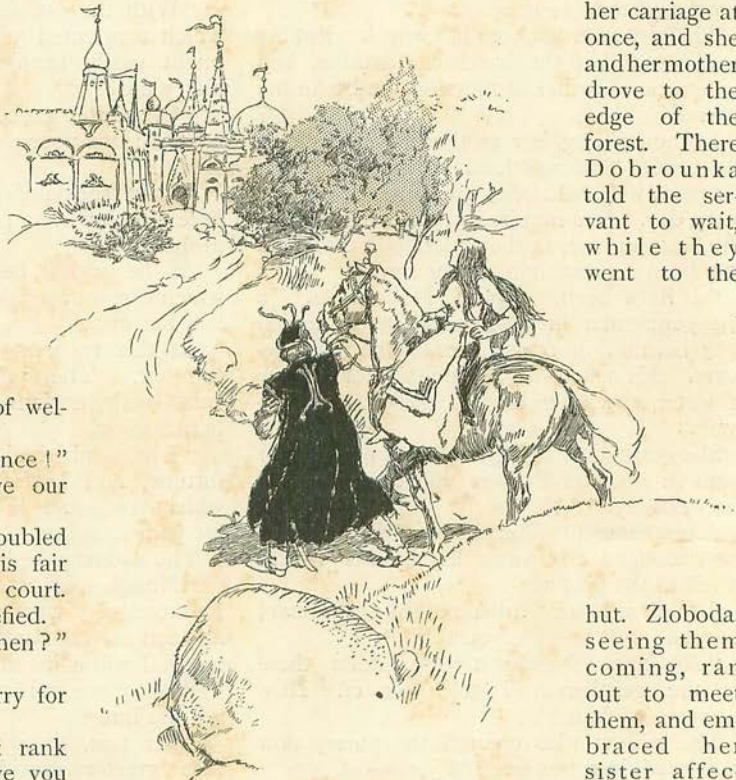
Several days after the Prince's departure,

Dobrounka sent for her mother, asking her to bring her wheel. She thought that her mother would rejoice over her brilliant match, but in this Dobrounka was mistaken. The widow loved only Zloboda, and was planning how she could transfer her sister's good fortune to her.

One day the old woman said to Dobrounka: "I know that your sister has behaved badly towards you. But she is penitent, so pardon her. Go to see her, and invite her to stay with you."

"Most willingly!" assented the unsuspecting Princess; "let us go and find her."

She ordered her carriage at once, and she and her mother drove to the edge of the forest. There Dobrounka told the servant to wait, while they went to the



"THE PRINCE'S CASTLE."

hut. Zloboda, seeing them coming, ran out to meet them, and embraced her sister affectionately. As soon, however,

as they came indoors, the two cruel women laid violent hands upon poor Dobrounka, and Zloboda thrust a dagger into her bosom. They proceeded next to pluck out her eyes and cut off her hands and feet. These they wrapped in a cloth, then dragged the mutilated body into the wood. Zloboda, having dressed herself in her sister's beautiful clothes, accompanied her mother to the castle, where everyone took her for Dobrounka, although marvelling at the apparent sudden change in her temper.



Strange to say, Dobrounka was not dead. Soon she recovered consciousness, and it seemed to her that a gentle hand poured a reviving cordial into her mouth. She recalled all that had passed, and groaned aloud as she thought of her barbarous mother and sister.

"Be calm," said then a compassionate voice. "Do not complain: all will yet end well."

"Alas!" was the reply, "what will become of me? I shall never see again the light of day, never again give my hand to my dear husband, never again be able to walk!"

He who had spoken was one of the old genii of the forest. Calling a child, he placed in his hands a golden spinning-wheel, and said to him:—

"Take this wheel to the Prince's castle. If anyone there should inquire the price of it, say that you will sell it for two eyes, and for nothing else."

The child went, as he had been told. Zloboda caught sight of him and his wheel as she and her mother were starting for a walk.

"Oh, look!" exclaimed the younger woman, "what a ravishing spinning-wheel! I have a good mind to buy it."

She approached the child, and inquired:

"What would you take for that wheel?"

"Two eyes," was the reply.

"Two eyes? What a droll idea!"

"Such were the instructions of my father."

Zloboda looked long at the wheel, and the longer she looked the more charming she found it. She remembered that she had still in her possession the two eyes of her sister. She fetched them, and gave them to the child in exchange for the wheel.

The little child carried the eyes into the forest, and the good genius with delicate skill replaced them in Dobrounka's eye-sockets.

"Ah, joy!" cried she. "I behold again the sky, the trees, the green earth!"

Then her eyes rested upon the old genius. "It is you," said she, "to whom I owe this

happiness. Would that I could take your hand and carry it to my lips!"

"Be calm," returned the genius, "and wait."

On the following day, the child took to the castle a golden bobbin, for which he asked two feet.

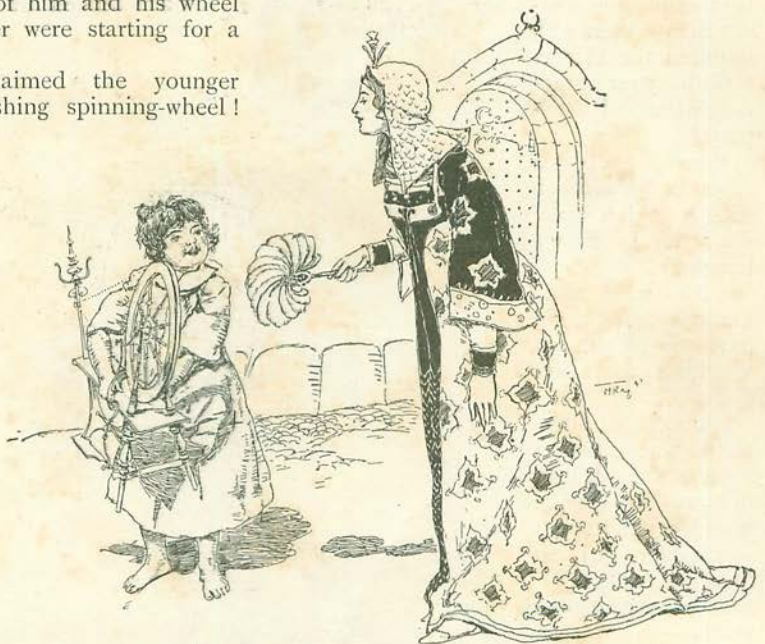
Zloboda could not resist this new temptation, and gave him the two pretty little feet of her unhappy sister.

The genius fitted them upon Dobrounka's legs, and anointed them with a magic balm. But when, in her joyful excitement, she attempted to rise, her kind physician prevented her.

"No, no!" said he, "do not move yet. Wait until you are completely cured."

The next day, the faithful messenger returned to the castle with a golden distaff, the price of which was two hands.

"I positively *must* have this distaff!" said Zloboda, and so she parted with her sister's hands.



"WHAT WOULD YOU TAKE FOR THAT WHEEL?"

Dobrounka had now recovered all her faculties, and, thanks to the care of the powerful genius, was more beautiful than ever.

"Is there nothing that I can do to show my gratitude? Do tell me!" she said to him.

But he replied:—

"You owe me nothing; I merely did my



duty. Remain near this grotto until someone comes to you. Wait patiently yet a little longer; I will look after your interests."

With these words he disappeared. Dobrounka, full of joy, ran around the grotto. She embraced the trees, she culled the flowers, she turned many a wistful glance in the direction of her palace-home. But she did not dare to disobey her old friend by returning thither.

Meanwhile, joyful tidings had reached the castle. The Prince was coming back, and his arrival was eagerly looked for by his servants, who had had a hard time of it with Zloboda. When he made his appearance, Zloboda rushed into his arms, and he, believing her to be his dear wife, embraced her fondly.

"How have you been employing yourself in my absence?" inquired the Prince. "With your spinning-wheel, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Zloboda, "with a superb golden wheel which I have bought."

"Show it me. Let me once again have the pleasure of watching your deft fingers."

Zloboda sat down to the wheel, but as soon as she put it in motion, a strange sound came from it—the voice of an invisible being, pronouncing these words:—

"Trust her not, my lord, for she is false and cruel. She

is not your true wife; this woman has murdered *her*!"

Zloboda stopped as if thunderstruck. The Prince, after vainly looking about for the speaker, ordered her to resume her occupation.

As the wheel revolved, the mysterious voice was heard again:—

"My lord, trust her not, for she is cruel and false. She has slain her sister and dragged her into the forest."

When Zloboda heard this, she jumped up and tried to fly. The Prince forced her to re-seat herself at the wheel.

This time the wheel said:—

"Mount your good steed, my lord, hasten to the forest, and seek the grotto. There you will find your wife, who is waiting and longing for you."

In an instant the Prince had precipitated himself into the court-yard, thrown himself into the saddle, and was off at the top of his speed.

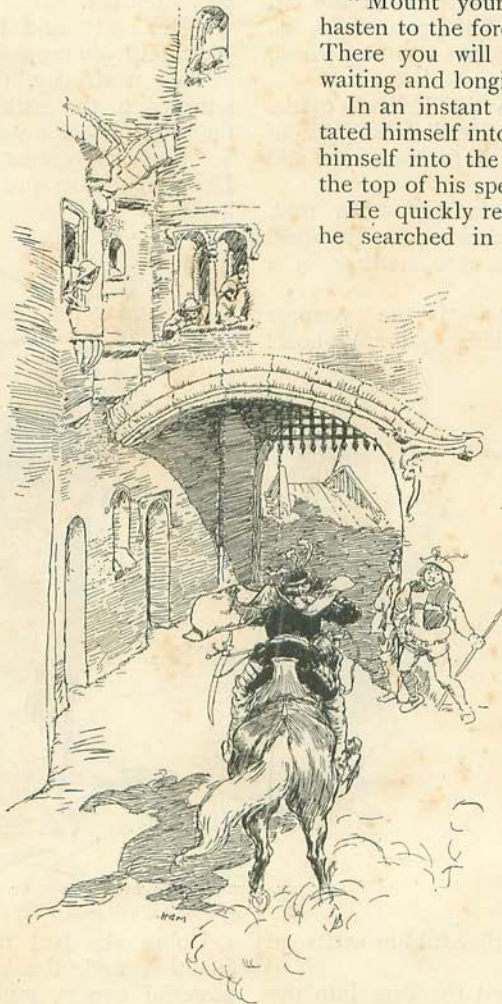
He quickly reached the forest, where he searched in all directions for the

grotto. Suddenly he saw a white hind, which fled before him. Following the animal, he came to a rock in which was a crevice, and in this crevice he found his beloved Dobrounka.

Throwing himself into her outstretched arms, he asked her pardon for having mistaken her wicked sister for herself for one single moment.

They returned together to the castle. Zloboda and her mother were punished according to their deserts.

Dobrounka was a blessing to all around her, and lived most happily with her noble husband.



"THE PRINCE WAS OFF AT THE TOP OF HIS SPEED."