

The Coffin-Lid

By Unknown

A moujik was driving along one night with a load of pots. His horse grew tired, and all of a sudden it came to a stand-still alongside of a graveyard. The moujik unharnessed his horse and set it free to graze; meanwhile he laid himself down on one of the graves. But somehow he didn't go to sleep.

He remained lying there some time. Suddenly the grave began to open beneath him: he felt the movement and sprang to his feet. The grave opened, and out of it came a corpse—wrapped in a white shroud, and holding a coffin-lid—came out and ran to the church, laid the coffin-lid at the door, and then set off for the village.

The moujik was a daring fellow. He picked up the coffin-lid and remained standing beside his cart, waiting to see what would happen. After a short delay the dead man came back, and was going to snatch up his coffin-lid—but it was not to be seen. Then the corpse began to track it out, traced it up to the moujik, and said:

'Give me my lid: if you don't, I'll tear you to bits!'

'And my hatchet, how about that?' answers the moujik. 'Why, it's I who'll be chopping you into small pieces!'

'Do give it back to me, good man!' begs the corpse.

'I'll give it when you tell me where you've been and what you've done.'

'Well, I've been in the village, and there I've killed a couple of youngsters.'

'Well then, now tell me how they can be brought back to life.'

The corpse reluctantly made answer:

'Cut off the left skirt of my shroud, and take it with you. When you come into the house where the youngsters were killed, pour some live coals into a pot and put the piece of the shroud in with them, and then lock the door. The lads will be revived by the smoke immediately.'

The moujik cut off the left skirt of the shroud, and gave up the coffin-lid. The corpse went to its grave—the grave opened. But just as the dead man was descending into it, all of a sudden the cocks began to crow, and he hadn't time to get properly covered over. One end of the coffin-lid remained sticking out of the ground.

The moujik saw all this and made a note of it. The day began to dawn; he harnessed his horse and drove into the village. In one of the houses he heard cries and wailing. In he went—there lay two dead lads.

'Don't cry,' says he, 'I can bring them to life!'

'Do bring them to life, kinsman,' say their relatives. 'We'll give you half of all we possess.'

The moujik did everything as the corpse had instructed him, and the lads came back to life. Their relatives were delighted, but they immediately seized the moujik and bound him with cords, saying:

'No, no, trickster! We'll hand you over to the authorities. Since you knew how to bring them back to life, maybe it was you who killed them!'

'What are you thinking about, true believers! Have the fear of God before your eyes!' cried the moujik.

Then he told them everything that had happened to him during the night. Well, they spread the news through the village the whole population assembled and swarmed into the graveyard. They found out the grave from which the dead man had come out, they tore it open, and they drove an aspen stake right into the heart of the corpse, so that it might no more rise up and slay. But they rewarded the moujik richly, and sent him away home with great honour.