Folk Tale No. 258

In a certain kingdom there lived an old man with his old wife in great poverty. Not long after, the old woman died. It was a bitter, frosty winter outside. The old man went around to the neighbors and acquaintances, asking them to help him dig a grave for the old woman; but the neighbors and acquaintances, knowing his great poverty, all flatly refused. The old man went to the priest, and in their village the priest was extremely greedy and unscrupulous. "Do me the favor," he says, "father, of burying the old woman." — "Have you any money to pay for the funeral? Come on, my friend, pay in advance!" — "There's no sin in hiding anything from you: I don't have a single kopeck in the house! Just wait a little, I'll earn some — I'll pay you back with interest, I give you my word — I'll pay!"

The priest didn't want to even listen to the old man's words: "If you have no money, don't you dare come here!" — "What can I do," thinks the old man, "I'll go to the cemetery, dig a grave somehow and bury the old woman myself." So he took an axe and a shovel and went to the cemetery; he arrived and began to prepare the grave: he chopped off the frozen earth on top with the axe, and then took up the shovel, dug and dug and dug up a little pot, looked — and it was filled to the brim with gold coins, gleaming like fire! The old man rejoiced greatly: "Glory to thee, O Lord! Now there's enough to bury and to memorialize the old woman." He didn't dig the grave any further, took the pot of gold and carried it home.

Well, with money it's a known thing — everything went like clockwork! Immediately kind people were found: they dug the grave and made a coffin; the old man sent his daughter-in-law to buy wine and food and various snacks — everything that should be at a memorial feast, and he himself took a gold coin in his hand and dragged himself off to the priest again. He had only just come through the door when the priest pounced on him: "I told you plainly, old codger, not to come without money, and here you are climbing in again!" — "Don't be angry, father!" begs the old man. "Here's a gold coin for you — bury my old woman, I'll never forget your kindness!" The priest took the money and doesn't know how to receive the old man, where to seat him, what words to soften him with: "Well, old fellow, rest assured, everything will be done." The old man bowed and went home, and the priest and the priest's wife began talking about him: "Just look, the old devil! They say: poor, poor! And he shelled out a gold coin. I've buried many notable deceased in my time, but I never received so much from anyone..."

The priest gathered with the whole church staff and buried the old woman properly. After the funeral the old man invites him to his house to memorialize the

deceased. So they came into the cottage, sat down at the table, and lo and behold — there was wine, and food, and various snacks, everything in abundance! The guest sits there, eating for three, eyeing other people's goods. The guests finished their meal and began to go home, and the priest got up too. The old man went to see him off, and just as they stepped out into the yard — the priest sees that there's no one else around — and began to interrogate the old man: "Listen, my friend! Confess to me, leave not a single sin on your soul — it's the same as before God as before me: how did you manage to get rich so quickly? You were a poor peasant, and now look, where did it all come from! Confess, my friend! Whose soul did you destroy, whom did you rob?" — "What are you saying, father! I confess to you in all truth: I didn't steal, didn't rob, didn't kill anyone; the treasure came into my hands by itself!" And he told how the whole thing happened.

When the priest heard these words, he literally trembled with greed; he went home, does nothing — and thinks day and night: "Such a wretched little peasant, and he got such a fortune in money. How can I now contrive and wheedle the pot of gold out of him?" He told this to the priest's wife; the two of them held counsel together and came up with a plan. "Listen, wife! Don't we have a goat?" — "We do." — "Well, good! Let's wait for night and work the matter as it should be done." Late in the evening the priest dragged a goat into the cottage, slaughtered it and skinned it — with everything, both horns and beard; immediately he pulled the goat skin over himself and says to the priest's wife: "Take, wife, a needle and thread; sew it all around the skin so it won't fall off." The priest's wife took a thick needle and coarse thread and sewed him up in the goat skin.

So in the dead of night the priest went straight to the old man's cottage, came up under the window and began knocking and scratching. The old man heard the noise, jumped up and asks: "Who's there?" — "The devil!.." — "This is a holy place!" — the peasant yelled and began making the sign of the cross and saying prayers. "Listen, old man!" says the priest. "Whether you pray or cross yourself, you won't escape me; better give me back my pot of money; otherwise I'll deal with you! Look, I took pity on your grief, showed you the treasure — I thought: you'll take a little for the funeral, but you grabbed it all!"

The old man looked out the window — goat horns with a beard sticking out: the unclean one himself! "Never mind him, money and all!" thinks the old man. "I lived without money before, and I'll manage without them afterwards!" He took the pot of gold, carried it outside, threw it on the ground, and himself quickly back into the cottage. The priest grabbed the pot of money and ran home at full speed. He returned. "Well," he says, "the money is in our hands! Here, wife, hide it far away

and take a sharp knife, cut the threads and take off this goat skin from me before anyone sees."

The priest's wife took the knife and began to cut the threads along the seam — and blood began to flow, and he howled: "Wife! It hurts, don't cut! Wife! It hurts, don't cut!" She starts to rip at another spot — the same thing! All around the goat skin had grown to his body. No matter what they did, no matter what they tried, and they even brought the money back to the old man — no, nothing helped; the goat skin remained on the priest. Of course, the Lord punished him for his great greed!