

A Horsey Name

By Anton Chekhov

MAJOR-GENERAL BULDEEFF was suffering from toothache. He had rinsed his mouth with vodka and cognac; applied tobacco ashes, opium, turpentine, and kerosene to the aching tooth; rubbed his cheek with iodine, and put cotton wool soaked with alcohol into his ears, but all these remedies had either failed to relieve him or else had made him sick. The dentist was sent for. He picked at his tooth and prescribed quinine, but this did not help the general. Buldeeff met the suggestion that the tooth should be pulled with refusal. Every one in the house, his wife, his children, the servants, even Petka, the scullery boy, suggested some remedy. Among others his steward, Ivan Evceitch came to him, and advised him to try a conjuror.

"Your Excellency," said he, "ten years ago an exciseman lived in this county whose name was Jacob. He was a first-class conjuror for the toothache. He used simply to turn toward the window and spit, and the pain would go in a minute. That was his gift."

"Where is he now?"

"After he was dismissed from the revenue service, he went to live in Saratoff with his mother-in-law. He makes his living off nothing but teeth now. If any one has a toothache, he sends for him to cure it. The Saratoff people have him come to their houses, but he cures people in other cities by telegraph. Send him a telegram, your Excellency, say: 'I, God's servant Alexei, have the toothache. I want you to cure me.' You can send him his fee by mail."

"Stuff and nonsense! Humbug!"

"Just try it, your Excellency! He is fond of vodka, it is true, and is living with some German woman instead of his wife, and he uses terrible language, but he is a remarkable wonder worker."

"Do send him a telegram, Alexel!" begged the general's wife. "You don't believe in conjuring, I know, but I have tried it. Why not send him the message, even if you don't believe it will do you any good? It can't kill you!"

"Very well, then," Buldeeff consented. "I would willingly send a telegram to the devil, let alone to an exciseman. Ouch! I can't stand this! Come, where does your conjuror live? What is his name?"

The general sat down at his desk, and took up a pen. "He is known to every dog in Saratoff," said the steward. "Just address the telegram to Mr. Jacob-- Jacob--"

"Well?"

"Jacob--Jacob--what? I can't remember his surname. Jacob--darn it, what is his surname? I thought of it as I was coming along. Wait a minute!"

Ivan raised his eyes to the ceiling, and moved his lips. Buldeeff and his wife waited impatiently for him to remember the name.

"Well then, what is it? Think harder."

"Just a minute! Jacob--Jacob--I can't remember it! It's a common name too, something to do with a horse. Is it Mayres? No it isn't Mayres-- Wait a bit, is it Colt? No, it isn't Colt. I know perfectly well it's a horsey name, but it has absolutely gone out of my head!"

"It isn't Filley?"

"No, no--wait a jiffy. Maresfield, Maresden-- Farrier--Harrier--"

"That's a doggy name, not a horsey one. Is it Foley?"

"No, no, it isn't Foley. Just a second--Horseman-- Horsey--Hackney. No, it isn't any of those."

"Then how am I to send that telegram? Think a little harder!"

"One moment! Carter--Coltsford--Shafter--"

"Shaftsbury?" suggested the general's wife.

"No, no--Wheeler--no, that isn't it! I've forgotten it!"

"Then why on earth did you come pestering me with your advice, if you couldn't remember the man's name?" stormed the general. "Get out of here!"

Ivan went slowly out, and the general clutched his cheek, and went rushing through the house.

"Ouch! Oh Lord!" he howled. "Oh, mother! Ouch! I'm as blind as a bat!"

The steward went into the garden, and, raising his eyes to heaven, tried to remember the exciseman's name.

"Hunt--Hunter--Huntley. No, that's wrong! Cobb--Cobden--Dobbins--Maresly--"

Shortly afterward, the steward was again summoned by his master. "Well, have you thought of it?" asked the general.

"No, not yet, your Excellency!" "Is it Barnes?" asked the general. "Is it Palfrey, by any chance?"

Every one in the house began madly to invent names. Horses of every possible age, breed, and sex were considered; their names, hoofs, and harness were all thought of. People were frantically walking up and down in the house, garden, servants' quarters, and kitchen, all scratching their heads, and searching for the right name.

Suddenly the steward was sent for again. "Is it Herder?" they asked him. "Hocker? Hyde? Groome?"

"No, no, no," answered Ivan, and, casting up his eyes, he went on thinking aloud.

"Steed--Charger--Horsely--Harness--" "Papa!" cried a voice from the nursery. "Tracey! Bitter!"

The whole farm was now in an uproar. The impatient, agonised general promised five roubles to any one who would think of the right name, and a perfect mob began to follow Ivan Evceitch about.

"Bayley!" They cried to him. "Trotter! Hackett!"

Evening came at last, and still the name had not been found. The household went to bed without sending the telegram.

The general did not sleep a wink, but walked, groaning, up and down his room. At three o'clock in the morning he went out into the yard and tapped at the steward's window.

"It isn't Gelder, is it?" he asked almost in tears.

"No, not Gelder, your Excellency," answered Ivan, sighing apologetically.

"Perhaps it isn't a horsey name at all? Perhaps it is something entirely different?"

"No, no, upon my word, it's a horsey name, your Excellency, I remember that perfectly."

"What an abominable memory you have, brother! That name is worth more than anything on earth to me now! I'm in agony!"

Next morning the general sent for the dentist again.

"I'll have it out!" he cried. "I can't stand this any longer!"

The dentist came and pulled out the aching tooth. The pain at once subsided, and the general grew quieter. Having done his work and received his fee, the dentist climbed into his gig, and drove away. In the field outside the front gate he met Ivan. The steward was standing by the roadside plunged in thought, with his eyes fixed on the ground at his feet. Judging from the deep wrinkles that furrowed his brow, he was painfully racking his brains over something, and was muttering to himself:

"Dunn--Sadler--Buckle--Coachman--"

"Hello, Ivan!" cried the doctor driving up. "Won't you sell me a load of hay? I have been buying mine from the peasants lately, but it's no good."

Ivan glared dully at the doctor, smiled vaguely, and without answering a word threw up his arms, and rushed toward the house as if a mad dog were after him.

"I've thought of the name, your Excellency!" he shrieked with delight, bursting into the general's study. "I've thought of it, thanks to the doctor. Hayes! Hayes is the exciseman's name! Hayes, your Honour! Send a telegram to Hayes!"

"Slow-coach!" said the general contemptuously, snapping his fingers at him. "I don't need your horsey name now! Slow-coach!"