

# Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's story is for intermediate learners. The name of the story is *The Rabbit Man*. You can find a transcript of the episode at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/RabbitMan](https://EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/RabbitMan). That's [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/RabbitMan](https://EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/RabbitMan). There, you can also download the episode as a PDF.

Today's story is a Ukrainian folk tale. I adapted a Ukrainian story because I have a lot of listeners in Ukraine, and I want to express my solidarity with people who are suffering from the war. **Solidarity** is when you feel connected to another group of people, because you share common ideals or interests. Obviously, I cannot know how it feels to live through a war, but I want to show my love and support for my Ukrainian listeners, as well as all my listeners who have been negatively affected by war.

Originally, I was going to talk a lot more in today's episode about the war, but I realised that it's not really my place. For one, in order to avoid getting too stressed, I don't read the news very often. So I am sure many of you listening know much more about the situation in Ukraine than I do. But also, I'm not the one who should be spreading information about the war, as I'm not directly affected by it.

Whatever the case, I want to thank all of you for continuing to support me, even when things are difficult in your life.

To all my listeners outside of Ukraine, I encourage you to donate to charities to support people affected by the war. I was going to suggest some charities, but it seems like most of them are national rather than international. I donated to ReactAid, a UK charity which delivers medical supplies, food, water and other essential items to people in need in Ukraine. I encourage you to research local charities which you think are doing good work, or donate to your national branch of an organisation such as the Red Cross or Unicef.

Thank you for giving, and once again, I stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

OK, I'll just explain some words that are in today's story.

A **peasant** is a person who lives in the countryside and works on a farm. Peasants are usually poor and have to farm food to survive. In Europe, when we hear the word 'peasant' we think of the Medieval era, but there are still parts of the world today where many people live as peasants, and can't easily go to school or find other work.

When you are very, very hungry, you are **starving**. If you have no food for several days, you will start to starve. If someone starves for long enough, they will die. Most of us have never really been starving before, fortunately.

A **manor house** is a large kind of house. In the past, manors were houses that people owned, rather than just lived in – lords lived in manors and peasants worked for them. Now, we usually use 'manor' to refer to these old houses.

Your **forefather** is your ancestor, a relative who lived a long time before you. Some people are very interested in genealogy, the study of family history, and do lots of research to find out who their forefathers were. However, for groups of people who have moved around a lot, or people whose forefathers were peasants or slaves, it can be very difficult to find information on who they were.

Your duty is what you have to do, your task or mission. If you **shirk your duty**, you don't do it. For example, the duty of a president is to lead their country, but if something bad

happens and the president's life is in danger, they may shirk their duty and run away to another country. We often talk about soldiers shirking their duty in war. Of course, it is important to remember that we don't usually get to choose our duty!

**Interest** is money that is added to debt over time. For example, if you take out a loan of one thousand pounds – you are a thousand pounds in debt – and the interest rate is 1%, then after one year your debt will be one thousand and ten pounds. You can also collect interest on savings, money you put aside in the bank. However, these interest rates tend to be a lot lower...

A **hare** is an animal like a rabbit, but hares are much bigger than rabbits. Hares also have longer ears than rabbits.

**Grazing** is when animals eat grass. Certain animals, such as cows and sheep, graze for many hours a day. Farmers graze their animals so that they can get enough food.

The **lira** is a Ukrainian instrument. It's similar to an instrument called a hurdy-gurdy. Until I wrote this story, I didn't know what a hurdy-gurdy was. I just knew that it had a funny name! Anyway, liras and hurdy-gurdies are similar to violins, but instead of playing the strings with a bow, you turn a wheel at the end and then use your other hand to press buttons. Liras were traditionally played in Ukraine by lirnyky. Lirnyky were blind musicians who travelled the country, playing religious and epic music on their liras. They even had their own secret language.

When you **strangle** someone, you put your hands around their neck and press down so that they stop getting air, so that they suffocate. If you strangle someone for a long time, they will die. Do not try this at home!

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OK, so listen and enjoy!

## The Rabbit Man

Once upon a time, there was a **peasant** called Heorhiy who lived happily alone. He had his own land, his own food and his own company, and if he got lonely, he sang himself a song. Life was hard, but he did not **starve** and he was happy.

Until one day, a rich man who lived in a **manor house** nearby came and **knocked on his door**.

'Heorhiy Glibovych!' said the rich man, smiling like a jewel. 'The time has come to pay your family debt.'

Heorhiy did not understand. 'What family debt? Neither my father nor my mother ever mentioned such a thing.'

The rich man let out a noise of surprise. 'But Heorhiy, how can it be? For the story of your family's debt has passed down through *my* house for generations. What shame,' he said, shaking his head. 'Not only did your **forefather shirk his duty** of payment, but your father shirked his duty of telling you of it.'

'My forefathers were good men,' said Heorhiy. 'Now, if you don't mind, my goat needs to be fed.'

He tried to close the door, but the rich man caught it with his foot. Suddenly, his eyebrows lowered, and his eyes shone darkly.

'Heorhiy Glibovych,' he said coolly. 'I must remind you that you are in my debt.'

Heorhiy saw now that there were some men behind the rich man, holding large bats. They were thick men who had grown on milk and meat every day. Heorhiy let go of the door. He did not even know this man's name.

'You see, your forefather, seven generations ago, stole an apple from my tree. Now, my forefather was a generous man, so he made an offer: if the thief worked in his fields for three weeks, then he would forget anything had ever happened. The man refused, and so my forefather made a different offer: the thief could be in debt to him – this was a very expensive apple, the kind that is used to make the finest wine, I should add. Your forefather agreed, and so the debt has been passed down from generation to generation, collecting **interest** every year.

'I must admit, I am quite surprised you had not heard of it. I thought your family's huge debt would be common news in the area around here.'

Of course, the rich man did not tell him the truth: that Heorhiy's ancestor had been starving, that the master of the manor house had *offered* him an apple, and then asked for payment afterwards, and that, when he had proposed the debt to him, the poor farmer had said, 'Write down whatever you like, but I will never pay for that apple.'

Heorhiy **gulped**, as if he could taste the apple on his tongue.

'How much interest has collected?' he said quietly.

The rich man casually said the number and Heorhiy felt his stomach tighten, like a starving man who has just found his goat killed.

'Naturally, I am not a cruel man,' said the master of the manor house. 'I will make the same offer to you as my forefather did to yours. You may come and work off the debt. Based on the interest that will be... three years of work.'

Heorhiy's heart sank. But what could he do? He had not a single coin to pay the man with, and if he died without paying the debt, it might go to the other people in the village.

He **sighed**. 'I agree to your deal.'

'Good.' The rich man **clicked his fingers**.

The master's men came in and quickly carried Heorhiy out of the building. He didn't even have time to say goodbye to his goat before he was carried to the manor house.

For the next three years, Heorhiy worked hard, never shirking his duty or showing up late to work. He made the rich man a lot of money, and when the three years were coming to their end, the rich man thought, 'I can't lose this man. Unlike the other peasants, he works like his life depends on it. And I suppose it does. How can I keep him here longer...?'

The next day, the master came to Heorhiy and said, 'Heorhiy Glibovych, I have a new task for you. Take these **hares** and **graze** them for me, so that they go fat and delicious. But if you lose them, you will be in serious trouble...'

Heorhiy was tired from his years of work, so all he could do was nod and take the hares. But when he took them to the field to graze, the hares ran away, disappearing like water pouring through his hands.

'Oh no!' he cried. 'I have lost the master's hares. I'm sure he chose those hares because he knew they would run away, and he'll want to keep me working here longer... Argh, I would rather starve.'

Just then, an old man came wandering through the field, carrying a pack on his back. He was blind, so Heorhiy said hello to him, and the old man asked him why he sounded so sad.

When Heorhiy explained his situation, the old man took a beautiful instrument out of his pack.

'This is a magic **lira**,' he explained. 'Play it, and see what happens.'

So the peasant sat on a rock and tried to play the instrument. He had never held a musical instrument before, and it took him a long time to figure it out. He almost gave up, but when he finally produced a sound, it was beautiful, like a stream running through a clear valley, and the hares immediately ran back to him.

'Oh, thank you!' cried Heorhiy. But the old man was gone.

When the peasant returned to the manor, the master counted up his hares and was shocked to find all ten of them there. The next day, he sent Heorhiy out again, but asked his wife to go after him.

'Wear a disguise and find out how he is keeping those hares so close.'

So the wife dressed herself up in common clothes. Usually, she wore fine silks and heavy makeup, so just by wearing normal clothes, she looked like a completely different person.

She found Heorhiy sitting on a rock, singing to himself.

'Peasant!' she said, and then remembered that she was disguised as a common woman. 'I mean, er, young man. What are you doing here?'

'I am grazing my hares,' he replied, looking at her strangely.

'Well? Where are they?'

So Heorhiy pulled out his lira and played it, and all the hares came running to him. They danced around his feet, and he stroked one of their heads.

'Impressive,' said the woman. 'For a pea— I mean, for a handsome young man like you.'

'Handsome? Thank you.'

Heorhiy tried to return to his playing, but the woman said, 'I would like to buy one.'

'Sorry. They're not for sale.'

'I'll pay a hundred roubles,' she said, pulling a bag of gold out of her pocket.

Heorhiy looked at her for a while, as if he was considering it, and then said, 'No. I won't sell to you.'

'Please, I'll pay *anything!*' she said, taking his arm. It was much thicker than she expected – not with fat, but with muscle.

Heorhiy **sighed**. 'Well, I suppose I *might* sell one of them, but only to someone who kissed me. And that's on top of the hundred roubles.'

'Done,' said the woman, and before he could realise what was happening, she had grabbed his cheeks and kissed him. Then she dropped the bag of money on the ground, picked up a hare and ran away.

'Miss, wait!' cried Heorhiy. 'Don't hold the hare so tight. You'll **strangle** him.'

So she held the hare gently. It sat calmly in her arms, until suddenly, just when she was reaching the manor house, it jumped out of her hands and ran away. What she didn't know was that Heorhiy had waited, and played his music to call the hare back to him.

The wife explained to her husband what had happened, although she didn't mention the kiss, and the next day he sent her out again, this time disguised as a man. She wore a moustache made of goat's hair, but it looked ridiculous, and she tried to do a low, strong voice and ended up coughing.

‘My price is the same as yesterday, miss,’ said Heorhiy, clearly seeing it was her. ‘If you want to take my hare away from his grazing, you’ll have to feed me a kiss. And a hundred roubles, of course.’

So once again, the woman kissed him, and this time they kissed for quite a while, although the goat’s hair moustache made it very uncomfortable. Heorhiy warned her about holding the hare too tight, because they were *such* easy creatures to strangle, and once again he called the hare back with his magic lira when she was halfway home.

The woman wasn’t thinking very clearly about what she was doing. So far, it was just a lot of fun, and she thought her stupid husband would keep sending her out, day after day, to buy hares from the peasant.

But she underestimated his love of money and cheap workers, so the next day, the master himself went to the field, disguised as a woman. His disguise was even worse than his wife’s, but Heorhiy acted as if he were a charming young lady.

‘They are such beautiful animals, aren’t they?’ said Heorhiy, picking up a hare and showing its long, soft ears. ‘My master gave them to me to graze, and I have been looking after them so carefully.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said the master. ‘How wonderful. I would like to own one myself. Now, how much do I have to pay you to buy one?’

‘The price is a hundred roubles. But there’s something you must do first before I will sell to you. I ask it of everyone, you see. Every time.’

‘And what is that, young man?’

‘Oh, I don’t think you’d be interested. You’re too pretty to be interested in a poor peasant like me.’

The master smiled sweetly. ‘Absolutely not. You’re so *handsome*.’

‘Alright, then,’ said Heorhiy, smiling. ‘You have to kiss me.’

The master froze as he realised what the man was saying. He made a **strangled noise** and jumped so high in the air that his ridiculous disguise fell off. Then he ran back to the manor house shouting, ‘Wife! Wiiiife! What have you been up to?’

Heorhiy laughed until his sides were sore, and then he said, ‘Come on, my hares. We’re not needed here anymore.’

It was the last day of Heorhiy’s contract, and he was free to go. His debt had been paid, interest and all. So he took the two hundred roubles he had won from the master’s wife and went travelling. In every town he went to, the people thought he was just another poor, uneducated peasant, but when he played his lira and the hares came to dance around him, they all clapped and gave him money.

Soon, his name spread through the land, and people saw him coming and cried, ‘Look, it’s the rabbit man!’

When the hares realised this, they were not happy, and they bit anyone who called them rabbits and not hares. But ‘the rabbit man’ sounded better than ‘the hare man’, so people continued to make the mistake, and soon half of Ukraine had felt the angry bites of Heorhiy’s hares.

## THE END

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