

GENNADIY LOGINOV



**MAN WITH
HORNS**

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Аннотация

What would a man do if he woke up one morning and suddenly found horns on his head? Yes, seriously speaking. There could be different versions of the event but we must admit that everyone would be as confused as the main character of this story. However, the real shock came to him later – when the initially ridiculous situation took an unexpected turn...

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Man with Horns

Waking up one morning, Baron D`Fect discovered horns on his head: they were wide and branched, and weighed him so much that clearly prevented him from getting out of bed. Not to mention other troubles as torn pillows and sheets, a broken headboard and a tattered tapestry on a scratched wall.

Any attempt to move was faced with a mass of obvious inconveniences that significantly limited the mobility of Monsieur Baron.

«Mon Dieu!» the unfortunate man snivelled, grimacing anxiously and resentfully. He touched the base of the horns and began to shake in a silent hysteria; tears dripped down his cheeks. Since such matters had never interested him, Monsieur Baron didn't possess in-depth knowledge of horns and their varieties. But, to the best of his moderate understanding, he was aware that usually horns are specific projections related to skin, just like hair or nails, although in some cases extensions of a skull are presented by layers of bone substance, and then they are called antlers. For example, deer antlers are very sensitive, because they contain nerves and blood vessels. And, if memory served him right, there were also horns with a bone core inside, covered with a thick layer of keratinized skin.

«Well, it seems it happens: then you visit a salon and now you are a mouflon,» D’Fect said with melancholy longing in his voice, despite the fact that his horns looked more like deer antlers than mutton horns. However, at the moment, Monsieur Baron didn’t care about nuances. Still not fully recovering from the sudden trouble which promised to transform in serious headache (speaking both literally and figuratively), he soon regained his former clarity of mind and started to build an action plan for the nearest future.

Obviously, if he had never managed to get out of bed on his own, he would have been forced to call the servants. But at the same time, he would rather agree to beheading than appearing before someone – provided that the executioner would cut the head off without looking. On the other hand – even if Baron rose from his bed by himself, he would still have to meet the servants sooner or later, so it was foolish to delay the inevitable. Baron realized the fact, and yet he decided to treat his own weakness with respect, allowing himself to take time.

Of course, he could lock himself in the room, forbid anyone to go inside and order the servants to leave food trays at the door. But anyway, everyone would inevitably have questions: you might have some quirks, but that would be extremely strange. If he declared that he was unwell (and this would be fully consistent

with the truth, considering circumstances), the servants would immediately call the doctor, informing all his friends, relatives, heirs, acquaintances, business partners, the entire local elite, his secretary and God knows who else. He could refuse to let someone inside, but in any case, at some point, his worried friends and relatives would order the servants to break the door, presenting the baron to the world in all the horror of his shame.

However, even if the baron convinced everyone to leave him alone, and remained forever in his sleeping quarters, picking up food trays only after the servants left, could he call this existence a normal life? Of course, a considerable number of criminals are sitting in disgusting casemates and prisons, hospitals are crowded with people dying from terrible and painful diseases, the bodies of heroes turn into bloodied meat on the battlefields, and, presumably, these men experience far more inconvenience and suffering. Perhaps they would have agreed to swap places with the baron without hesitation, if they had such an opportunity. Still, this fact didn't comfort him.

Naturally, he was neither a hero, or a genius, or a particularly zealous Catholic, or a particularly ardent philanthropist, he was not distinguished by a brilliant mind or outstanding skills and talents. But at the same time, he wasn't some kind of rascal or scoundrel, and in these days the fact spoke for itself. He also wasn't a simpleton or a shallow man without any virtues and

his own opinion. Therefore, the prospect of spending the rest of his days locked up in this room for such completely absurd and insulting reason didn't attract him at all.

So, it was necessary not only to call the servants immediately but also order them to call the doctor immediately. Of course, the servants would have to take an oath to remain silent, while the healer was bound by the indestructible Hippocratic Oath anyway. But clearly, it was so only in theory: in fact, not every barber would resist the temptation to announce that King Midas had donkey ears, despite any oaths and assurances. On the other hand, such an unprecedented case could motivate the doctor to convene a council of physicians in order to examine the phenomenon, acting in the interests of global science and, first of all, medicine. This unusual disease would be named after the baron, but such an honor seemed more than doubtful to him. He thought of this as an indelible disgrace for his whole kin for all time.

But wait – what is «the kin» we are talking about? What self-respecting woman in her right mind and full possession of her senses would marry such an ugly freak? And even if he could find some quite reckless lady, attracted by D'Fect's title and legacy, how would he lead her to the sacred altar under sidelong glances and the shower of mockery? How exactly would they dance the waltz at the royal ball? With disgust, she will share a bed with him...

But once again – what is «the royal ball» we can talk about? How could he just walk down the street with such an appearance? What kind of headgear could be worn over these disgusting horns? Would any umbrella be able to hide them? What carriage could he board with them? Which door could he squeeze through? Surely, any horse would run away in horror, barely seeing his new look. Would they let him in a church and how he would fit in a confessional?

Naturally, the idea of cutting horns off with a saw was the first of those that came to Monsieur Baron's elk-like head, but apparently, such action could be fraught with a certain risk to life and health. At least, it would be rash to conduct such an operation without proper medical research.

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