
SELECTED NARTÆ TALES

Translated by Walter MAY



WYRYZMÆG'S NAMELESS SON

(A Song in Praise of Wyryzmæg the Nart)

Disasters and famine came upon the Narts, and they were not able to leave their homes. Once, those, who still had strength went to the meeting-place, they fell down with weakness there. *Wyryzmæg* the Nart was sitting on a stone bench. He was wearing his large fur coat. Suddenly a bitch emerged from somewhere and started jumping over everybody who was lying recumbent there, and even licked the beards of some of them. A liar, *Syrdon*, also happened to appear from somewhere, and, on seeing a dog jumping over people back and forth, he burst out sobbing and said:

'Ah, the Narts! It would have been better if you had perished. Whatever you could have eaten and drunk, you don't possess any more. Only lousy ones remain of the Narts, and they have their beards licked by a bitch. May a man who could feed you appear among you.'

On hearing this, old *Wyryzmæg* became angry, rose to his feet and went home. There he flung himself in his golden armchair with elbow-rests and it crushed under him. His wife *Satana* addressed him and said:

'What are you doing, old devil? What are you frantic about?'

Then old *Wyryzmæg* told her:

'How can I not be frantic? I swear by your dead folks, that son of a bitch *Syrdon* enraged me to death. At the meeting place he said: 'Narts, you are dead. Only scum remain, and now a bitch is licking your beards. I wish there turned up among you a man, who could feed you!'

Satana told *Wyryzmæg*:

'Don't be angry. Of the sacrificial offerings, I was left seven times seven legs of mutton, seven times seven cheese-pies and seven times seven full jugs of rong.'

Wyryzmæg went out and ordered a herald to announce to the Narts: 'Hey, Narts! *Wyryzmæg* calls you. Whoever can walk, come; whoever can crawl on his limbs, crawl up.'

Having heard this announcement, the next day the Narts gathered at *Wyryzmæg*'s. He made them sit at the table with food and drink. Having treated them for five days, *Wyryzmæg* told the squad:

'The brave, I would like to have a look at the vicinity. Maybe somebody has settled near the Nart's village, but we are not aware of it. I'll go and take a look around!'

Satana replied to this:

'Old man, why do you break up your get-together? Why are you leaving?'

But he did not obey her and said:

'I'd like to have my bow and arrows', he rose and put on his long fur coat. About to leave, with a bow and arrows in his hands, he turned to the squad and said:

'Don't break up your get-together until I return, and I shall take a look at the outside world!'

Wyryzmæg went out and sat on a pile of wood. He took out his magic mirror and started looking in all directions. At this moment, an eagle came down on him, plunged its claws into his body, took him up, and carried him away. The eagle put him down on a black rock in the Black Sea, *Wyryzmæg* looked around and started screaming:

'What shall I do, and how? What a misfortune has happened to me!'

Then a dim light appeared from under the rock. *Wyryzmæg* saw it and wanted to go there. He started praying to God:

'God of the Gods! My Great Lord! If you have created me for some purpose, don't let me drown in this water!'

Then *Wyryzmæg* went under the rock and approached a house. Coming to the threshold, he started speaking:

'Will you let a guest in, hosts?'

There was a woman with a boy in the house. The woman said: 'Any guest is God's man. Is it possible not to welcome him?' and she showed him in.

A little later the woman said:

'We have a guest, boys', and at once the house was full of youths. Then the woman told them:

'Boys, it is necessary to kill a lamb for the guest. Go and get the yellow ram!'

The boys went and brought the yellow ram, killed and skinned it, and put the whole carcass in a cauldron. When it was cooked up, they took it out and put the whole carcass on the table in front of *Wryzmæg* without cutting it. They put it so that the ribs were underneath. The Narts had a custom of praying with a dagger in their hands. So, *Wryzmæg* began searching for the ribs with the spike of his dagger. Having found it, he prayed, and having prayed, he handed the ribs to a boy. The boy ran up to him gladly, but he ran carelessly, impaled his heart on the dagger spike and died. When he died, *Wryzmæg* began mourning him, so that he could neither eat, nor drink.

But the woman said to him:

'Good man, why don't you eat anything? The boy is dead – it was the will of God. He can't be revived. Eat something.'

Then he ate a little against his will. After that he rose up and said:

'Good night!'

The woman rose and told him:

'Stay here tonight, good guest! Tomorrow you will go', and she didn't let him leave. She made a bed for him, put him in it, and took the dead boy in the living room for the night.

In the morning, when the dawn broke, *Wryzmæg* went up the rock and sat there. And again the same eagle came down from somewhere plunged its claws into him, brought him up, and at the very moment when it was taking *Wryzmæg* from the pile of wood, it put him down there again.

The people who lived below the water were water-sprites, his wife *Satana's* relatives. And the boy whom he killed was his own son. When *Satana* visited her relatives, she gave birth to a boy and left the child there, so that *Wryzmæg* didn't know about it.

After the eagle had brought him back home and put him down on the pile of wood, *Wryzmæg* entered his house, sat down at the head of the table and told the Narts:

'The brave! Shall I tell you old or new tales?'

They said:

'We have already heard old tales. So, tell us new ones.'

Then he told them how he sat on a pile of wood, how he was taken off by an eagle and put down on a black rock in the Black Sea, how he went under the

rock to the bottom of the water, how he entered a house there, how the hosts cooked a ram for him, how the whole ram was put in front of him on the table, how he picked the ribs with the spike of his dagger, how, during his prayer, a boy ran up to him joyfully, how the boy ran against his dagger spike and died, how he spent a night there and in the morning went up on the rock again, how the eagle picked him up from there and brought him to the pile of wood again – all this he told them in detail.

Then *Satana* started scratching her face with her nails and tearing her hair, saying:

‘Ah, old devil! You’ve reached even my secret depository!’ (What else could she do?)

Then *Wyryzmæg* told the squad:

‘The brave! Whatever is everyone’s lot may bring him joy, like his mother’s milk. Now go home!’

And the people went to their homes.

The boy who was killed by *Wyryzmæg* spent several days in grave and then started grieving and said to himself:

‘Disasters and famine came upon the Narts, and my death did not bring my father *Wyryzmæg* any good.’ And he went to *Barastyr*, the Sovereign of the Dead and begged him: ‘Let me out to see my father *Wyryzmæg*. I’ll help him to get some property.’

But the latter didn’t let him go, saying:

‘If I let you go, all the dead will follow you.’

The boy replied to this:

‘I shall find a means to keep them from following me, myself.’

Then *Barastyr* allowed him to leave for a nine-day term. The boy shod his horse with the shoes backwards and set out. The gate-guard knew that he was on leave by *Barastyr* and let him out. Then the dead rose and told the guard: ‘Let us follow him.’

But the guard told them that the boy hadn’t left: ‘Look at his trails – are they trails of an out-rider?’

They looked, saw that the trails were directed in, and went back.

The boy came over to *Wyryzmæg* the Nart’s house and shouted:

‘*Wyryzmæg* the Nart, come out to me!’

Wyryzmæg heard him and said:

‘What is this noise all about? Who comes ‘round in such a weather?’

He came out and saw a little boy sitting on a little horse, who then to him: ‘I want to travel with you. I won’t go further without you.’

Wyryzmæg told him:

'Hey, you, son of a dog! Your horse is no bigger than a hare, and you are the size of a pommel. Where do you want to go with me? You are kidding and mocking at me. Think of my age. Aren't you ashamed?' And he got angry, but the boy told him meekly:

'I won't let you alone, *Wyryzmæg*, unless you take me somewhere.'

They agreed to meet the following day in a meadow called *Æmxicxæren Baræg-bærc*, and the little rider returned to where he belonged. And *Wyryzmæg* went to his wife *Satana* and told her what the boy wanted from him, and said that he didn't like it. *Satana* said:

'Don't be afraid, old man, I'll find a means to keep you both from going there.' She went to the top of the tower with three honey pies and a jug of rong, and prayed from there: 'God of the Gods, my Great Lord! If you have created me for some purpose, send us tonight snow from the eternal glacier.'

And it started snowing, and it snowed from dusk till dawn, and only the top of the tower was not covered with snow. In the morning, when *Wyryzmæg* looked out, his anxiety calmed, and he said:

'I am not going any more.' And he didn't.

When *Wyryzmæg* didn't come to the appointed place at the appointed hour, the boy came to his door and shouted. *Wyryzmæg* came out and the boy asked:

'How has it happened that you haven't kept your word?'

Wyryzmæg replied:

'Where am I going in such weather? Am I supposed to sweep snow with my beard?'

The boy said to this:

'Leave that to me, I'll find a way. You just follow in my trail.' What was left for *Wyryzmæg* to do? He went home and said:

'The ill-fated rider wouldn't leave me alone. I'll go.' He got ready in no time, despite his age, climbed upon his skewbald mare and followed the boy.

The boy rides in front; the steam coming out of his horse's nostrils makes the snow in the field melt around him. And *Wyryzmæg* follows him on dry ground. Having ridden rather far, the boy asks:

'Good *Wyryzmæg*! Which country is left undefeated by you?'

The latter replied:

'I haven't found a way to cross the Black Sea. This is why the lands of Turk and Turk are left undefeated by me.'

Saying, 'then, let's go there,' the boy led *Wyryzmæg*. Having ridden rather a long way again, the boy said: 'I'll go forward to prepare a place for you.' And he went to sleep in the meadow called *Æmxicxæren Baræg-bærc*.

When *Wyryzmæg* approached, the boy got up, helped *Wyryzmæg* to climb down, hobbled his horse and said:

'Now you sleep a little, and I will keep an eye on your horse!'

When *Wryzmag* woke up, he said:

'I think it's time to have a bite.' He took out the food he had with him and called the boy: 'Come and have something.' But the boy didn't take a single helping, saying: 'I don't have time to eat.'

They set out and when they arrived at the seashore, the boy made a tent of deer skins and a bed of doe skins, and told *Wryzmag*:

'Wait for me here. Today is Friday. Next Friday I'll come here.'

He climbed upon his horse and went to the land beyond the sea – the land of Terk and Turk, which was guarded by a wolf with an iron muzzle, a crow with an iron beak and a stallion with an iron snout. The boy killed the iron-muzzled wolf, the iron-beaked crow, climbed upon the iron-snouted stallion, let his horse go in a herd and took the herd of Terk and Turk to another side of their village. Then he returned to Terk and Turk and told them:

'Hey, Terk and Turk! Your herd has gone. Come, try to catch it!'

At that time Terk and Turk were sitting at table. They did not believe his words.

'What dog, what ass would dare to take our herd away?' They said. 'It is guarded by an iron-muzzled wolf, an iron-beaked crow and an iron-snouted stallion.'

Since they did not believe him, the boy rode closer to them and repeated: 'The herd has been taken away.'

But they said: 'The newcomer must be looking for food and drink. Servants, help him down and give him something to eat and drink!'

The servants obeyed the order and invited the boy. Then he hastily jumped down the horse, ate and drank a little. After this, he took an ear of the iron-muzzled wolf and the head of the iron-beaked crow from his pocket and threw them on the table of Terk and Turk.

'If you still don't believe me even now,' he said, 'I shall ride your iron-snouted stallion.'

He ran out, climbed upon the steed, stroke it and rode off.

The boy was only half-way to the herd, when he met an old woman, carrying water. She told him:

'May I eat your disease, and may I die instead of your soul! Listen to me. I had six sons, all of them like wild deer. Five are dead now. They were killed in a battle, being in the vanguard. I know what will happen now. My last son will be the first to catch up with you. I know your father and mother, I was their guest. So, for my sake, don't touch my son. Just scratch his skin and push him aside the road, but don't kill him.'

To be sure of the boy, the woman gave him her breast to suck.

The squad chased the boy. And the son of the woman was the first to catch up with him. The little boy told him:

'Do me a favour, leave me alone. I am bound in an oath to your mother.'

But the latter said:

'I swear by my mother and my father, that I shall not let you go.'

Then the boy turned his steed towards him, scratched him, and pushed him off the road. But the old woman's son rushed up and continued chasing the boy. Then the little boy asked him again:

'Look at your God and let me go. Don't make me break my oath.'

The old woman's son told the boy:

'Whoever gives an oath to a woman, is a woman himself. You want to take the herd away, but I shall not permit you.'

There was no way out, and the boy turned his steed around again. With the words 'Your sin be with you,' he wounded the old woman's son, threw him half-dead on the road, shouted at the herd and drove it to the other shore of the sea. There he met *Wyryzmæg* and said:

'Divide up the herd, *Wyryzmæg*.'

But the latter said:

'You divide them up yourself.'

The boy started dividing the herd into three parts. *Wyryzmæg* thought to himself: 'Apparently, one of the three parts belongs to him, another one he may take as a chief, and one part he will give to me. Then what will the Narts think of me?' Thinking thus, he grieved.

Meanwhile, the boy finished dividing the herd and said:

'Take your share, *Wyryzmæg*.'

But he replied:

'With the Narts, the older don't take their share. According to our custom, you take your share.'

The boy took one share and said to *Wyryzmæg*:

'This is your share as the share of the senior.' He took another share. 'This is your own share.' He took the third one.

'And this is my share for you.'

Of the whole herd, he only took one white ox and told *Wyryzmæg*:

'Eat this ox at my funeral feast.' And he revealed himself to *Wyryzmæg*. 'I am the boy who ran against the dagger and died, when you spent a night at the *Donbettyrs*.' I requested *Barastyr* to allow me to see you. Now my time has come, I must go away. But don't leave me without a funeral feast. Until now people have not found my name. Good luck to you,' he told *Wyryzmæg* and walked away. *Wyryzmæg* shouted at the herd, and on coming to *Satana*, he said:

'I have travelled for a week with the boy, whose joy was your joy, whom you could never get tired of looking at.'

Satana left *Wyryzmæg*, and ran after the boy. When she started to catch up with him, she wailed:

'Ah, you, the one whom I can never get tired of looking at! He whose joy is my joy! Don't be so greedy, look at me, turn your face to me!'

But the boy's term on the earth was coming to its end, the sun was setting and he was hurrying to his nether world. So, he only exclaimed:

'I don't have any more time.'

Seeing this, *Satana* said:

'He won't look at me.' And the poor woman prayed: 'God of the Gods! My Great Lord! If you can read a mother's heart, make the small Sun of the dead appear in the mountains.' – And the small Sun of the dead appeared in the mountains.

Meanwhile the boy leaned over the gate to the land of the dead and cast a glance at *Satana*. She saw the flaps of his dress and then his face. She threw her ring to him, the boy caught it on his finger and took the ring to the dead with him. *Satana* returned home and prepared a funeral feast with the white ox. They say that, since that time, people began to make funeral feasts. This is what *Wyryzmæg* travel was said to have been like. But I do not know anything about its trustworthiness. I shall tell you only one thing: like we never saw anything of this, may you never see either illness or madness. Whatever is due to me for the tale, give to the brave.