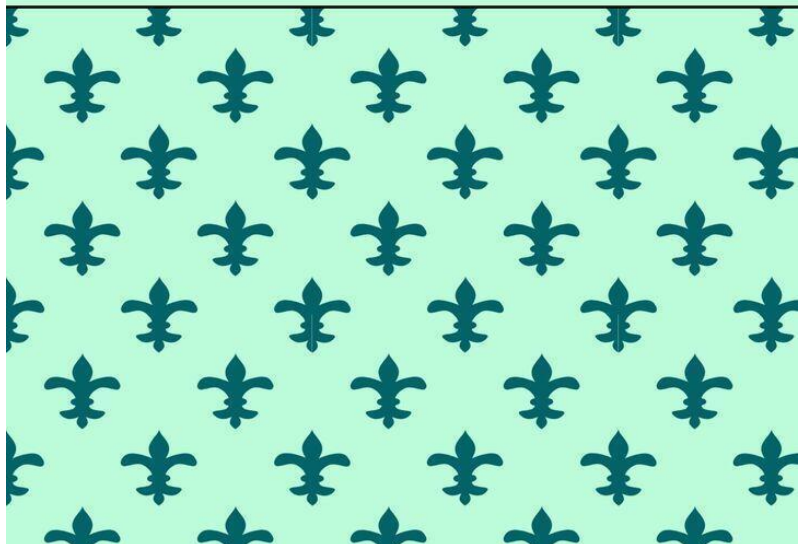


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Viktor Nikitin

*The World
of Russian Fairy
Tales (Book V)*



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The World of Russian
Fairy Tales (Book V)

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Аннотация

This fifth volume presents nine traditional Russian folk tales retold in clear English. The stories combine everyday life with the supernatural, featuring peasants, merchants, demons, witches, and miraculous events. Themes of justice, greed, faith, and human folly run throughout. Preserving the spirit of oral storytelling, the collection offers both moral insight and imaginative narrative.

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THE FOX-PHYSICIAN.

There once was an old couple. The old man planted a cabbage-head in the cellar under the floor of his cottage; the old woman planted one in the ash-hole. The old woman's cabbage, in the ash-hole, withered away entirely; but the old man's grew and grew, grew up to the floor. The old man took his hatchet and cut a hole in the floor above the cabbage. The cabbage went on growing again; grew, grew right up to the ceiling. Again the old man took his hatchet and cut a hole in the ceiling above the cabbage. The cabbage grew and grew, grew right up to the sky. How was the old man to get a look at the head of the cabbage? He began climbing up the cabbage-stalk, climbed and climbed, climbed and climbed, climbed right up to the sky, cut a hole in the sky,

and crept through. There he sees a mill standing. The mill gives a turn — out come a pie and a cake with a pot of stewed grain on top.

The old man ate his fill, drank his fill, and then lay down to sleep. When he had slept enough he slid down to earth again, and cried:

«Old woman! why, old woman! how one does live up in heaven! There's a mill there — every time it turns, out come a pie and a cake, with a pot of kasha on top!»

«How can I get there, old man?»

«Slip into this sack, old woman. I'll carry you up.»

The old woman thought a bit, and then got into the sack. The old man took the sack in his teeth, and began climbing up to heaven. He climbed and climbed, long did he climb. The old woman got tired of waiting and asked:

«Is it much farther, old man?»

«We've half the way to go still.»

Again he climbed and climbed, climbed and climbed. A second time the old woman asked:

«Is it much farther, old man?»

The old man was just beginning to say: «Not much farther — » when the sack slipped from between his teeth, and the old woman fell to the ground and was smashed all to pieces. The old man slid down the cabbage-stalk and picked up the sack. But it had nothing in it but bones, and those broken very small. The old man went out of his house and wept bitterly.

Presently a fox met him.

«What are you crying about, old man?»

«How can I help crying? My old woman is smashed to pieces.»

«Hold your noise! I'll cure her.»

The old man fell at the fox's feet.

«Only cure her! I'll pay whatever is wanted.»

«Well, then, heat the bath-room, carry the old woman there along with a bag of oatmeal and a pot of butter, and then stand outside the door; but don't look inside.»

The old man heated the bath-room, carried in what was wanted, and stood outside at the door. But the fox went into the bath-room, shut the door, and began washing the old woman's remains; washed and washed, and kept looking about her all the time.

«How's my old woman getting on?» asked the old man.

«Beginning to stir!» replied the fox, who then ate up the old woman, collected her bones and piled them up in a corner, and set to work to knead a hasty pudding.

The old man waited and waited. Presently he asked;

«How's my old woman getting on?»

«Resting a bit!» cried the fox, as she gobbled up the hasty pudding.

When she had finished it she cried:

«Old man! open the door wide.»

He opened it, and the fox sprang out of the bath-room and ran off home. The old man went into the bath-room and looked

about him. Nothing was to be seen but the old woman's bones under the bench — and those picked so clean! As for the oatmeal and the butter, they had all been eaten up. So the old man was left alone and in poverty.

THE FIDDLER IN HELL.

There was a certain moujik who had three sons. His life was a prosperous one, and he laid by money enough to fill two pots. The one he buried in his corn-kiln, the other under the gate of his farmyard. Well, the moujik died, and never said a word about the money to any one. One day there was a festival in the village. A fiddler was on his way to the revel when, all of a sudden, he sank into the earth — sank right through and tumbled into hell, lighting exactly there where the rich moujik was being tormented.

«Hail, friend!» says the Fiddler.

«It's an ill wind that's brought you hither!» answers the moujik; «this is hell, and in hell here I sit.»

«What was it brought you here, uncle?»

«It was money! I had much money: I gave none to the poor, two pots of it did I bury underground. See now, they are going to torment me, to beat me with sticks, to tear me with nails.»

«Whatever shall I do?» cried the Fiddler. «Perhaps they'll take to torturing me too!»

«If you go and sit on the stove behind the chimney-pipe, and don't eat anything for three years — then you will remain safe.»

The Fiddler hid behind the stove-pipe. Then came fiends, and

they began to beat the rich moujik, reviling him the while, and saying:

«There's for thee, O rich man. Pots of money didst thou bury but thou couldst not hide them. There didst thou bury them that we might not be able to keep watch over them. At the gate people are always riding about, the horses crush our heads with their hoofs, and in the corn-kiln we get beaten with flails.»

As soon as the fiends had gone away the moujik said to the Fiddler:

«If you get out of here, tell my children to dig up the money — one pot is buried at the gate, and the other in the corn-kiln — and to distribute it among the poor.»

Afterwards there came a whole roomful of evil ones, and they asked the rich moujik:

«What have you got here that smells so Russian?»

«You have been in Russia and brought away a Russian smell with you,» replied the moujik.

«How could that be?» they said. Then they began looking, they found the Fiddler, and they shouted:

«Ha, ha, ha! Here's a Fiddler.»

They pulled him off the stove, and set him to work fiddling. He played three years, though it seemed to him only three days. Then he got tired and said:

«Here's a wonder! After playing a whole evening I used always to find all my fiddle-strings snapped. But now, though I've been playing for three whole days, they are all sound. May the Lord

grant us his blessing!»

No sooner had he uttered these words than every one of the strings snapped.

«There now, brothers!» says the Fiddler, «you can see for yourselves. The strings are snapped; I've nothing to play on!»

«Wait a bit!» said one of the fiends. «I've got two hanks of catgut; I'll fetch them for you.»

He ran off and fetched them. The Fiddler took the strings, screwed them up, and again uttered the words:

«May the Lord grant us his blessing!»

In a moment snap went both hanks.

«No, brothers!» said the Fiddler, «your strings don't suit me. I've got some of my own at home; by your leave I'll go for them.»

The fiends wouldn't let him go. «You wouldn't come back,» they say.

«Well, if you won't trust me, send some one with me as an escort.»

The fiends chose one of their number, and sent him with the Fiddler. The Fiddler got back to the village. There he could hear that, in the farthest cottage, a wedding was being celebrated.

«Let's go to the wedding!» he cried.

«Come along!» said the fiend.

They entered the cottage. Everyone there recognized the Fiddler and cried:

«Where have you been hiding these three years?»

«I have been in the other world!» he replied.

They sat there and enjoyed themselves for some time. Then the fiend beckoned to the Fiddler, saying, «It's time to be off!» But the Fiddler replied: «Wait a little longer! Let me fiddle away a bit and cheer up the young people.» And so they remained sitting there till the cocks began to crow. Then the fiend disappeared.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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