



# **FOLK TALES FROM THE RUSSIAN**

**VERRA DE BLUMENTHAL**

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**FOLK TALES FROM THE  
RUSSIAN**

**BY  
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No sooner thought than done. The rich brother said good-by and went away, but did not go to his wealthy home. No, he hurried to the stone. He had to toil hard with the heavy stone, but finally moved it just a little, and had not time to look inside when the hidden Bogotir had jumped out and onto his shoulders.

The rich man felt a burden, oh, what a heavy burden! looked around and perceived the hideous monster. He heard this monster whisper in his ear:

"Thou art bright! Thou didst want to let me perish in that pit? Now, dearest, thou wilt not get rid of me; now we shall always be together."

"Stupid Woe," began the rich man; "it was not I who hid thee under the stone; it was my brother; go to him."

But no, Woe would not go. The monster laughed and laughed.

"All the same, all the same," he answered to the rich man. "Let us remain dear companions."

The rich man went home under the heavy burden of the misery-giving Woe. His wealth was soon lost, but his brother, who knew how to get rid of Woe, was prosperous and is prosperous to this day.

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## BABA YAGA

*[Baba, a peasant woman, or grandmother; granny. Yaga, witch. Baba Yaga, therefore, is the familiar "Grandmother Witch."]*

SOMEWHERE, I cannot tell you exactly where, but certainly in vast Russia, there lived a peasant with his wife and they had twins — a son and daughter. One day the wife died and the husband mourned over her very sincerely for a long time. One year passed, and two years, and even longer. But there is no order in a house without a woman, and a day came when the man thought, "If I marry again possibly it would turn out all right." And so he did, and had children by his second wife.

The stepmother was envious of the stepson and daughter and began to use them hardly. She scolded them without any reason, sent them away from home as often as she wished, and gave them scarcely enough to eat. Finally she wanted to get rid of them altogether. Do you know what it means to allow a wicked thought to enter one's heart?

The wicked thought grows all the time like a poisonous plant and slowly kills the good thoughts. A wicked feeling was growing in the stepmother's heart, and she determined to send the children to the witch, thinking sure enough that they would never return.

"Dear children," she said to the orphans, "go to my grandmother who lives in the forest in a hut on hen's feet. You will do everything she wants you to, and she will give you sweet things to eat and you will be happy."

The orphans started out. But instead of going to the witch, the sister, a bright little girl, took her brother by the hand and ran to their own old, old grandmother and told her all about their going to the forest.

"Oh, my poor darlings!" said the good old grandmother, pitying the children, "my heart aches for you, but it is not in my power to help you. You have to go not to a loving grandmother, but to a wicked witch. Now listen to me, my darlings," she continued; "I will give you a hint: Be kind and good to every

one; do not speak ill words to any one; do not despise helping the weakest, and always hope that for you, too, there will be the needed help."

The good old grandmother gave the children some delicious fresh milk to drink and to each a big slice of ham. She also gave them some cookies—there are cookies everywhere—and when the children departed she stood looking after them a long, long time.

The obedient children arrived at the forest and, oh, wonder! there stood a hut, and what a curious one! It stood on tiny hen's feet, and at the top was a rooster's head. With their shrill, childish voices they called out loud:

"Izboushka, Izboushka!<sup>19</sup> turn thy back to the forest and thy front to us!"

The hut did as they commanded. The two orphans looked inside and saw the witch resting there, her head near the threshold, one foot in one corner, the other foot in another corner, and her knees quite close to the ridge pole.

"Fou, Fou, Fou!" exclaimed the witch; "I feel the Russian spirit."

The children were afraid, and stood close, very close together, but in spite of their fear they said very politely:

"Ho, grandmother, our stepmother sent us to thee to serve thee."

"All right; I am not opposed to keeping you, children. If you satisfy all my wishes I shall reward you; if not, I shall eat you up."

Without any delay the witch ordered the girl to spin the thread, and the boy, her brother, to carry water in a sieve to fill a big tub. The poor orphan girl wept at her spinning-wheel and wiped away her bitter tears. At once all around her appeared small mice squeaking and saying:

"Sweet girl, do not cry. Give us cookies and we will help thee."

The little girl willingly did so.

"Now," gratefully squeaked the mice, "go and find the black cat. He is very hungry; give him a slice of ham and he will help thee."

<sup>19</sup> *Izba*, a hut. *Izboushka*, a tiny hut.

The girl speedily went in search of the cat and saw her brother in great distress about the tub, so many times he had filled the sieve, yet the tub was still dry. The little birds passed, flying near by, and chirped to the children:

"Kind-hearted little children, give us some crumbs and we will advise you."

The orphans gave the birds some crumbs and the grateful birds chirped again:

"Some clay and water, children dear!"

Then away they flew through the air.

The children understood the hint, spat in the sieve, plastered it up with clay and rilled the tub in a very short time. Then they both returned to the hut and on the threshold met the black cat. They generously gave him some of the good ham which their good grandmother had given them, petted him and asked:

"Dear Kitty-cat, black and pretty, tell us what to do in order to get away from thy mistress, the witch?"

"Well," very seriously answered the cat, "I will give you a towel and a comb and then you must run away. When you hear the witch running after you, drop the towel behind your back and a large river will appear in place of the towel.

If you hear her once more, throw down the comb and in place of the comb there will appear a dark wood. This wood will protect you from the wicked witch, my mistress."

Baba Yaga came home just then.

"Is it not wonderful?" she thought; "everything is exactly right."

"Well," she said to the children, "today you were brave and smart; let us see to-morrow. Your work will be more difficult and I hope I shall eat you up."

The poor orphans went to bed, not to a warm bed prepared by loving hands, but on the straw in a cold corner. Nearly scared to death from fear, they lay there, afraid to talk, afraid even to breathe. The next morning the

witch ordered all the linen to be woven and a large supply of firewood to be brought from the forest.

The children took the towel and comb and ran away as fast as their feet could possibly carry them. The dogs were after them, but they threw them the cookies that were left; the gates did not open themselves, but the children smoothed them with oil; the birch tree near the path almost scratched their eyes out, but the gentle girl fastened a pretty ribbon to it. So they went farther and farther and ran out of the dark forest into the wide, sunny fields.

The cat sat down by the loom and tore the thread to pieces, doing it with delight. Baba Yaga returned.

"Where are the children?" she shouted, and began to beat the cat. "Why hast thou let them go, thou treacherous cat? Why hast thou not scratched their faces?"

The cat answered: "Well, it was because I have served thee so many years and thou hast never given me a bite, while the dear children gave me some good ham."

The witch scolded the dogs, the gates, and the birch tree near the path.

"Well," barked the dogs, "thou certainly art our mistress, but thou hast never done us a favor, and the orphans were kind to us."

The gates replied:

"We were always ready to obey thee, but thou didst neglect us, and the dear children smoothed us with oil."

The birch tree lisped with its leaves, "Thou hast never put a simple thread over my branches and the little darlings adorned them with a pretty ribbon."

Baba Yaga understood that there was no help and started to follow the children herself. In her great hurry she forgot to look for the towel and the comb, but jumped astride a broom and was off. The children heard her coming and threw the towel behind them. At once a river, wide and blue,

appeared and watered the field. Baba Yaga hopped along the shore until she finally found a shallow place and crossed it.

Again the children heard her hurry after them and so they threw down the comb. This time a forest appeared, a dark and dusky forest in which the roots were interwoven, the branches matted together, and the tree-tops touching each other. The witch tried very hard to pass through, but in vain, and so, very, very angry, she returned home.

The orphans rushed to their father, told him all about their great distress, and thus concluded their pitiful story:

"Ah, father dear, why dost thou love us less than our brothers and sisters?"

The father was touched and became angry. He sent the wicked stepmother away and lived a new life with his good children. From that time he watched over their happiness and never neglected them any more.

How do I know this story is true? Why, one was there who told me about it.

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## DIMIAN THE PEASANT

NOT long ago, or perchance very long ago, I do not know for sure, there lived in a village, some place in Russia, a peasant—a moujik. And this peasant was a stubborn and a quick-tempered fellow, and his name was Dimian.

He was harsh by nature, this Dimian, and wanted everything to go his own way. If any one talked or acted against him, Dimian's fists were soon prepared for answer.

Sometimes, for instance, he would invite one of his neighbors and treat his guest with fine things to eat and to drink. And the neighbor in order to maintain the old custom would pretend to refuse. Dimian would at once begin the dispute: "Thou must obey thy host!" Once it happened that a shrewd fellow called on him. Our moujik Dimian covered the table with the very best he had and rejoiced over the good time he foresaw.

The fellow guest speedily ate everything up. Dimian was rather amazed, but brought out his kaftan.

"Take off thy sheepskin," said he to the guest; "put on my new kaftan."

In proposing it he thought within himself:

"I will bet that this time he will not dare accept; then I will teach him a lesson."

But the fellow quickly put on the new kaftan, tightened it with the belt, shook his curly head and answered:

"Have my thanks, uncle, for thy gift. How could I dare not take it? Why, one must obey his host's bidding."

Dimian's temper was rising, and he wanted at any rate to have his own way. But what to do? He hastened to the stable, brought out his best horse, and said to his guest:

"Thou art welcome to all my belongings," and within himself he thought,  
"He certainly will refuse this time, and then my turn will come."

But the fellow did not refuse, and smilingly answered:

"In thy house thou art the ruler," and quickly he jumped on the horse's back  
and shouted to Dimian, the peasant:

"Farewell, master! no one pushed thee into the trap but thyself," and with  
these words the fellow was off.

Dimian looked after him and shook his head.

"Well, I struck a snag," said he.

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## THE GOLDEN MOUNTAIN

ONCE upon a time a merchant's son had too much fun spending money, and the day came when he saw himself ruined; he had nothing to eat, nothing to drink. He took a shovel and went to the market place to see if perchance somebody would hire him as a worker.

A rich, proud merchant, worth many, many thousands, came along in a gilded carriage. All the fellows at the market place, as soon as they perceived him, rushed away and hid themselves in the corners. Only one remained, and this one was our merchant's son.

"Dost thou look for work, good fellow? Let me hire thee," the very rich merchant said to him.

"So be it; that's what I came here for."

"And thy price?"

"A hundred rubles a day will be sufficient for me."

"Why so much?"

"If too much, go and look for some one else; plenty of people were around and when they saw thee coming, all of them rushed away."

"All right. To-morrow come to the landing place."

The next day, early in the morning, our merchant's son arrived at the landing; the very rich merchant was already there waiting.

They boarded a ship and went to sea. For quite a long time they journeyed, and finally they perceived an island. Upon that island there were high mountains, and near the shore something seemed to be in flames.

"Yonder is something like fire," said the merchant's son.

"No, it is my golden palace."











"Indeed I am," answered the girl, almost out of breath from cold.

And the Frost, cheerful and bright, kept crackling in the branches until the air became icy, but the good-natured girl kept repeating:

"I am very comfortable, dear Father Frost."

But the Frost, however, knew all about the weakness of human beings; he knew very well that few of them are really good and kind; but he knew no one of them even could struggle too long against the power of Frost, the king of winter. The kindness of the gentle girl charmed old Frost so much that he made the decision to treat her differently from others, and gave her a large heavy trunk filled with many beautiful, beautiful things. He gave her a rich "schouba"<sup>20</sup> lined with precious furs; he gave her silk quilts— light like feathers and warm as a mother's lap. What a rich girl she became and how many magnificent garments she received! And besides all, old Frost gave her a blue "sarafan"<sup>21</sup> ornamented with silver and pearls.

When the young girl put it on she became such a beautiful maiden that even the sun smiled at her.

The stepmother was in the kitchen busy baking pancakes for the meal which it is the custom to give to the priests and friends after the usual service for the dead.

"Now, old man," said the wife to the husband, " go down to the wide fields and bring the body of thy daughter; we will bury her."

The old man went off. And the little dog in the corner wagged his tail and said:

"Bow-wow! bow-wow! the old man's daughter is on her way home, beautiful and happy as never before, and the old woman's daughter is wicked as ever before."

"Keep still, stupid beast!" shouted the stepmother, and struck the little dog.

<sup>20</sup> *Schouba*, a large fur-lined cloak.

<sup>21</sup> *Sarafan*, the Russian national costume for women.



