

Russian Folk-Tales/The Potter

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THE POTTER

ONCE a potter was journeying on his road with his goods and dozed off. The Tsar Iván [Vasilgevich](#) came driving by in his carriage and said, "Peace be to you!"

The potter looked up and said, "I thank you very much and wish you the same."

"Have you been asleep?"

"Yes, my lord. Do not fear a man who sings songs; but fear a man who slumbers!"

"You are a bold fellow, potter: I have seen very few such, and I like them. Coachman, slower! Potter, tell me, have you been long at your trade?"

"Ever since my youth, and I am now middle-aged."

"Can you keep your children with it?"

"Yes, I do not sow, nor plough, nor mow, nor reap, and no frosts can do me any harm."

"Right, potter; but there are still misfortunes left in the world."

"Yes, I know three of them."

"What are the three?"

"The first is an evil neighbour, the second an evil wife, and the third a weak understanding."

"Yet now, tell me which is the worst of these evils?"

"The evil neighbour can be escaped; So can the evil wife if one has children enough, but the weak intellect can never be got rid of."

"Yes, that is true, potter; you are a sensible fellow. Listen! You suit me and I suit you. When there are geese flying over Russia, will you pluck a feather out of them or let them fly by in peace?"

"If it suit me, I should let them fly by as they should; otherwise I should pluck them bald."

"Potter, hold in your horse a little while I look at your stock."

The potter stopped and displayed his goods.

"Can you make any such for me?"

"How many?"

"Ten cart-loads."

"How long will you require?"

"One month."

"In a fortnight I can bring them into the town. I suit you and you suit me."

"Thank you, potter."

"Will you be in the city when I bring the goods?"

"Yes, I shall be there as the merchant's guest."

So the Tsar drove into the city and ordered that at all his feasts the plates should be neither of silver nor of pewter, nor of copper nor of wood, but only of clay. The potter carried out the Tsar's orders and brought his goods into the city. A *boyár* rode up to the potter and said to him: "God be with you, potter."

"Thank you, your honour."

"Sell me all your goods."

"I cannot; they are already sold."

"What does that matter? Take my money for it; you will be doing no wrong, as long as you have received no orders for the work. What do you want?"

"I want every plate filled with money."

"Listen, potter—that is too much."

"Very well, then: one filled with money and two empty. Do you agree?"

So they agreed at that: "You suit me and I suit you."

They filled up the plates and again emptied them, and they went on filling plates until there was not any money left: but there were ever so many plates over. The *boyár* saw he was getting the worst of the bargain and sent for more money from the house. So they piled the plates higher still, but all the money vanished, and still all the goods had not been used up.

"What is to be done, potter? Why are you so greedy?"

"There is nothing to be done."

"I have a very high esteem for you, potter, but do you know what?"

"Do you carry me in to the courtyard, and I will give you the goods and the money back as well."

So the *boyár* hesitated: he was very sorry to lose his money and for himself, but he could not help himself, and so they agreed. They unharnessed the horse, and the peasant sat in the carriage and the *boyár* walked on. The potter sang a song, and the *boyár* drew it along, drew it along. "How far must I take you in front of that courtyard?"

The potter went on singing joyously and said, "In front of the house, at the very top of the carriage."

When he reached the palace he stood up erect and sang, joyously.

The Tsar heard him singing and ran to the flight of steps, and recognised the potter. "Ha! welcome, potter!"

"Thank you, your honour."

"What are you travelling with?"

"With folly."

"Now, you fine potter, you have known how to sell your goods. *boyár*, take off your gay costume and your boots; and you, potter, take off your *kaftán* and your bast shoes. Put the peasant's smock on, *boyár*, and you, potter, put on the *boyár's* robes. You have sold your goods very finely, potter; you have done very little, and you have won much. But as for you, *boyár*, you were not able to keep your rank. Now, potter, were there any geese flying over Russia? Did you pluck a feather out of them, or did you leave them in peace?"

"No, I plucked them bald."



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