

The Fox-Physician

By Unknown

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 mill¹ 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 *kaska* 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.'

¹ Mill-stones, or a hand-mill.

The old man heated the bath-room, carried in what was wanted, and stood outside at the door. But the fox went into the bathroom, 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.