



# THE STRAW BULL-CALF

Ukrainian Folk  
Tale





Once upon a time there lived an Old Man and an Old Woman. The Old Man distilled tar, while the Old Woman sat at home and spun thread.

One day the Old Woman went after the Old Man: "Old Man, make me a bull-calf of straw," she nagged. "Make me a bull-calf of straw and smear it with tar!"

"What nonsense! What do you want with a calf of straw?"

"Just you make it. I know what I want it for."

He couldn't talk her out of it, so the Old Man went ahead and made a bull-calf of straw and smeared it with tar.

In the morning the Old Woman took along some hemp and the straw bull-calf to a pasture. She seated herself beside a mound and began to spin, repeating the while:



“Graze on grass, my pretty calf, while I sit and spin some thread!”

She kept spinning until she dozed off.

Meanwhile a bear ran out of the dark forest, out of the dark woods, and ran into the bull-calf.

“Who are you?” he growled. “Tell me quick!”

“I’m a bull-calf, and I’m small, made of straw and smeared with tar.”

“If you’re made of straw and smeared with tar,” said the bear, “give me some tar to patch my torn side!”

The bull-calf was silent, so the bear sank his teeth into him to tear some tar away. He kept tearing and tearing at him until his teeth got quite

stuck and he couldn't get them free. He jerked this way and that, but nothing doing! So he dragged that bull-calf goodness knows how far away.

When the Old Woman awoke, she found the bull-calf gone.

"Woe is me!" she cried. "Where is my bull-calf? Perhaps he has gone home already."

She grabbed up her spinning and ran home. In the yard she looked—and there was a bear dragging her bull-calf around the place.





“Old Man, come out!” she called. “Our bull-calf has brought home a bear!”

The Old Man ran out, tore the bear loose and threw him into the cellar.

Long before dawn the next day the Old Woman again took her spinning and the bull-calf to the pasture. She seated herself beside a mound, spun thread and kept intoning:

“Graze on grass, my pretty calf, while I sit and spin some thread!”



She kept spinning until she dozed off. Meanwhile a grey wolf ran out of the dark forest, out of the dark woods, and ran up to the bull-calf:

“Who are you? Tell me quick!”

“I’m a bull-calf, and I’m small, made of straw and smeared with tar.”

“If you are smeared with tar,” said the wolf, “give me some to patch my side where the dogs have torn my hide.”

“Go ahead, take it!”

The wolf at once sank his teeth into the bull-calf's side, intending to tear some tar off for himself. He sank his fangs in, but he couldn't get them out. He kept backing off, dragging the bull-calf with him. Oh, he had a time with it!

When the Old Woman awoke, the bull-calf was nowhere to be seen.

"He has probably gone home," she thought, and went to the house.

There she saw the wolf dragging the bull-calf around. She ran and told the Old Man, who threw the wolf, too, into the cellar.







On the third day the Old Woman took the bull-calf to pasture again. She seated herself beside a mound and fell asleep. A fox ran up.

“Who are you?” asked the fox.

“I’m a bull-calf, and I’m small, made of straw and smeared with tar.”

“Give me some tar to patch up my side, dear fellow. Cursed hounds almost tore the hide off me.”

“Take it!”

The fox too sank his teeth in and couldn’t get them out. The Old Woman told the Old Man, and he threw the fox into the cellar as well.



After that they also caught a fleet-footed hare. When there was a whole collection of animals, the Old Man seated himself over the hatch in the cellar and began to whet his knife.

“Old Man, why are you sharpening your knife?” asked the bear.

“To skin you with, and make winter coats out of your hide for the Old Woman and myself.”

“Please don’t butcher me, dear Old Man. Let me go and I’ll bring you loads of honey.”

“See that you do!”



And he set the bear free.

Then he sat over the hatch again and continued whetting his knife.

The wolf asked him:

“Why are you sharpening the knife, Old Man?”

“To take off your hide and make myself a warm cap for the winter.”

“Please don’t butcher me, dear Old Man, and I’ll drive a whole flock of sheep into your yard.”

“Don’t fail, now!”

And he let the wolf go.



He sat down and began to whet his knife again. The fox stuck his sly muzzle out and asked:

“Tell me, Old Man, if you please, why are you sharpening the knife?”

“Fox fur is fine for a fur collar and trimming,” he replied, “and I intend to take yours.”

“Dear Old Man, don’t take my hide off and I’ll bring you geese and hens galore.”

“See that you do!” And he turned the fox loose.

Only the hare remained. The Old Man kept on whetting his knife. The hare asked him why, and

he answered: "The fur of a hare is soft and warm. I'll make myself a pair of mittens and a fur cap for winter."

"Please don't kill me, dear Old Man, and I'll bring you ribbons and earrings and fine necklaces, only let me go free!"

The Old Man released him as well.

They slept the night through, and in the morning just before dawn there was a rat-tat-tat at the door. The Old Woman woke up:



“Old Man!” she cried. “Old Man, something’s knocking on our door, go and see what it is!”

The Old Man opened the door—and there was the bear with a whole hive of honey. The Old Man put the honey away and had just got into bed again, when there was another rap! rap! at the door. He went out and found that the wolf had driven a whole flock of sheep into the yard. Soon after that the fox brought geese and chickens and fowl of all sorts. And the hare fetched a pile of ribbons, earrings and fine necklaces.

The Old Man was glad, and the Old Woman was glad.







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