

## THE WIZARD AND THE HOPPING POT

There was once a kindly old wizard who used his magic generously and wisely for the benefit of his neighbors. Rather than reveal the true source of his power, he pretended that his potions, charms, and antidotes sprang ready-made from the little cauldron he called his lucky cooking pot. From miles around, people came to him with their troubles, and the wizard was pleased to give his pot a stir, and put things right.

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\*\* THE TALES OF \*\*  
\* FREDIE THE BARD \*

This well-beloved wizard lived to a goodly age, then died, leaving all his chattels to his only son. This son was of a very different disposition to his gentle father. Those who could not work magic were, to the son's mind, worthless, and he had often quarreled with his father's habit of dispensing magical aid to their neighbors.

Upon the father's death, the son found hidden inside the old cooking pot a small package bearing his name. He opened it, hoping for gold, but found instead a soft, thick slipper, much too small to wear, and with no pair. A fragment of parchment within the slipper bore the words "In the fond hope, my son, that you will never need it."

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The son cursed his father's age-softened mind, then threw the slipper back into the cauldron, resolving to use it henceforth as a rubbish pail.

That very night a peasant woman knocked on the front door.

"My granddaughter is afflicted by a crop of warts, sir," she told him. "Your father used to mix a special poultice in that old cooking pot —"

"Begone!" cried the son. "What care I for your brat's warts?"

And he slammed the door in the old woman's face.

At once there came a loud clanging and banging from his kitchen. The wizard lit his

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wand and opened the door, and there, to his amazement, he saw his father's old cooking pot: It had sprouted a single foot of brass, and was hopping on the spot in the middle of the floor, making a fearful noise upon the flagstones. The wizard approached it in wonder, but fell back hurriedly when he saw that the whole of the pot's surface was covered in warts.

"Disgusting object!" he cried, and he tried firstly to Vanish the pot, then to clean it by magic, and finally to force it out of the house. None of his spells worked, however, and he was unable to prevent the pot hopping after him out of the kitchen, and then following him up to bed, clanging and banging loudly on every wooden stair.

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The wizard could not sleep all night for the banging of the warty old pot by his bedside, and next morning the pot insisted upon hopping after him to the breakfast table. *Clang clang* went the brass-footed pot, and the wizard had not even started his porridge when there came another knock on the door.

An old man stood on the doorstep.

"Tis my old donkey, sir," he explained.

"Lost, she is, or stolen, and without her I cannot take my wares to market, and my family will go hungry tonight."

"And I am hungry now!" roared the wizard, and he slammed the door upon the old man.

*Clang clang* went the cooking pot's single brass foot upon the floor, but now its

\*\* THE TAILS OF \*\*  
\* BIDDIE THE BARD \*

clamor was mixed with the brays of a donkey and human groans of hunger, echoing from the depths of the pot.

"Be still. Be silent!" shrieked the wizard, but not all his magical powers could quieten the warty pot, which hopped at his heels all day, braying and groaning and clanging, no matter where he went or what he did.

That evening there came a third knock upon the door, and there on the threshold stood a young woman sobbing as though her heart would break.

"My baby is grievously ill," she said. "Won't you please help us? Your father bade me come if troubled —"

But the wizard slammed the door on her.

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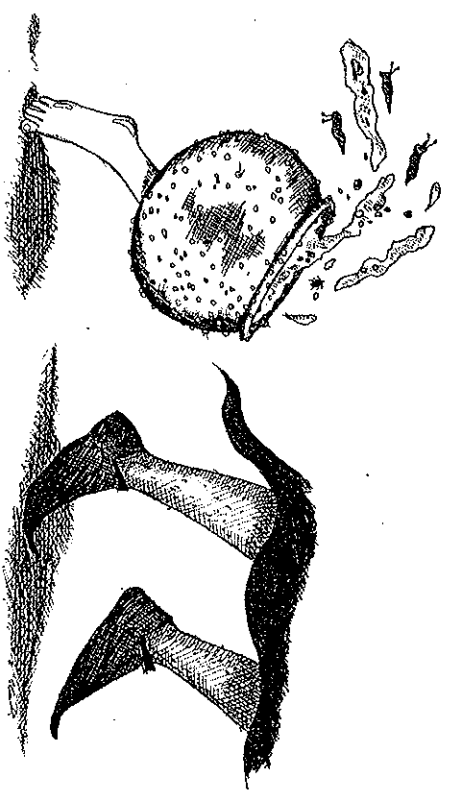
And now the tormenting pot filled to the brim with salt water, and slopped tears all over the floor as it hopped, and brayed, and groaned, and sprouted more warts.

Though no more villagers came to seek help at the wizard's cottage for the rest of the week, the pot kept him informed of their many ills. Within a few days it was not only braying and groaning and slopping and hopping and sprouting warts, it was also choking and retching, crying like a baby, whining like a dog, and spewing out bad cheese and sour milk and a plague of hungry slugs.

The wizard could not sleep or eat with the pot beside him, but the pot refused to leave, and he could not silence it or force it to be still.

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\* THE TAILS OF  
\* REDDIE THE BARD \*\*

At last the wizard could bear it no more. "Bring me all your problems, all your troubles, and your woes!" he screamed, fleeing into the night, with the pot hopping behind him along the road into the village. "Come! Let me cure you, mend you, and comfort you! I have my father's cooking pot, and I shall make you well!"



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And with the foul pot still bounding along behind him, he ran up the street, casting spells in every direction.

Inside one house the little girl's warts vanished as she slept; the lost donkey was summoned from a distant briar patch and set down softly in its stable; the sick baby was doused in dittany and woke, well and rosy. At every house of sickness and sorrow the wizard did his best, and gradually the cooking pot beside him stopped groaning and retching, and became quiet, shiny, and clean.

"Well, Pot?" asked the trembling wizard as the sun began to rise.

The pot burped out the single slipper he had thrown into it, and permitted him to fit it onto

\*\* THE TAIRS OF \*\*  
\* BRIDIE THE BARD \*

the brass foot. Together, they set off back to the wizard's house, the pot's footstep muffled at last. But from that day forward, the wizard helped the villagers, like his father before him, lest the pot cast off its slipper, and begin to hop once more.

