Sit-down-sit

Sat Siden-posiden on a bench for ninety years.

A beard grew from Siden down to the floor. Kittens played with it. Children plucked hairs from it for fishing lines.

Siden sat and sang.

And his song was short—only two words.

"I siiit, I loook!.."

Whatever anyone did—bad or good—he kept up his own refrain:

"I siiit—I loook!.."

And his voice was so penetrating to the soul that whoever did evil felt worse from his song, while whoever did good felt sweetly comforted.

Once a merchant drove past the hut, and a wheel broke off his carriage.

The merchant climbed out of the carriage and entered the hut.

He did not cross himself; he did not remove his hat.

But Siden-posiden sat and sang:

"I siiit—I loook!.."

"It's none of your business," said the merchant, "so sit there if you have no legs!"

"I siiit—I loook!.."

"Fine—look then!.."

The peasant sat at the table, ordered the travel pantry brought, took out half a flask of vodka from it, demanded sour cabbage for a snack, and began drinking from a silver goblet.

But Siden-posiden kept to his own:

"I siiit, I loook!.."

"Oh, you gray devil!" cursed the merchant. "'I sit—I look'—I spit on you! I drink vodka and I will keep drinking! Who is to command me?!.."

The merchant drank ten goblets.

He became tipsy.

"I want," he said, "the girls to dance. Drive them, gather the whole village!"

The peasant in whose house posiden lived was poor and, naturally, glad that the merchant was carousing. He thought there would be profit... In an instant, he ran where needed and gathered everyone. The hut filled completely with people.

The merchant revelled—rubles enough to dam a river! He threw them here and there. The lads and lasses got drunk. Shameful things began.

They bawled indecent songs, and the soldier's wife Arina stripped off everything and, as her mother bore her, glided through the hut like a white swan.

With hands and feet she performed such feats that the merchant even broke into a sweat, so seized was he.

But Siden-posiden:

"I siiit—I loook!.."

"Get him out of here!" roared the merchant. "What jests is he making?"

Everyone fell silent—they stood, not knowing what to do.

"Why do you stand—are you afraid, perhaps?"

The merchant approached posiden and grabbed him by the beard.

Everyone gasped.

But posiden kept to his own:

"I siiit—I loook!.."

"You'll look now at me," turned crimson the merchant, "I'll give you a whipping!"

And he began shaking posiden by the beard.

"Well, will you be quiet?"

"I siiit—I loook!.."

"Oh you dog, take this then, you old crock!"

The merchant swung—but he could not strike posiden: his arm hung limp like a whip.

The merchant tried to feel it with his left hand—and the same happened to that one too.

"I am turning to stone," he cried, "ah, I am turning to stone!"

And indeed, he turned gray, fell to the floor. Everyone looked: what a wonder? Instead of the merchant lay a gray stone resembling a man.

Everyone understood—posiden had punished the merchant justly. They dragged the stone outside and threw it from the hill into the river!

Later they returned to the hut and saw: posiden was walking.

"The old man has risen. What wonders!.."

"I waited for whom I needed; now it is time to rise!" And posiden laughed, his face brightened.