

THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OF THE RUSSIAN STORY BOOK, BY RICHARD WILSON

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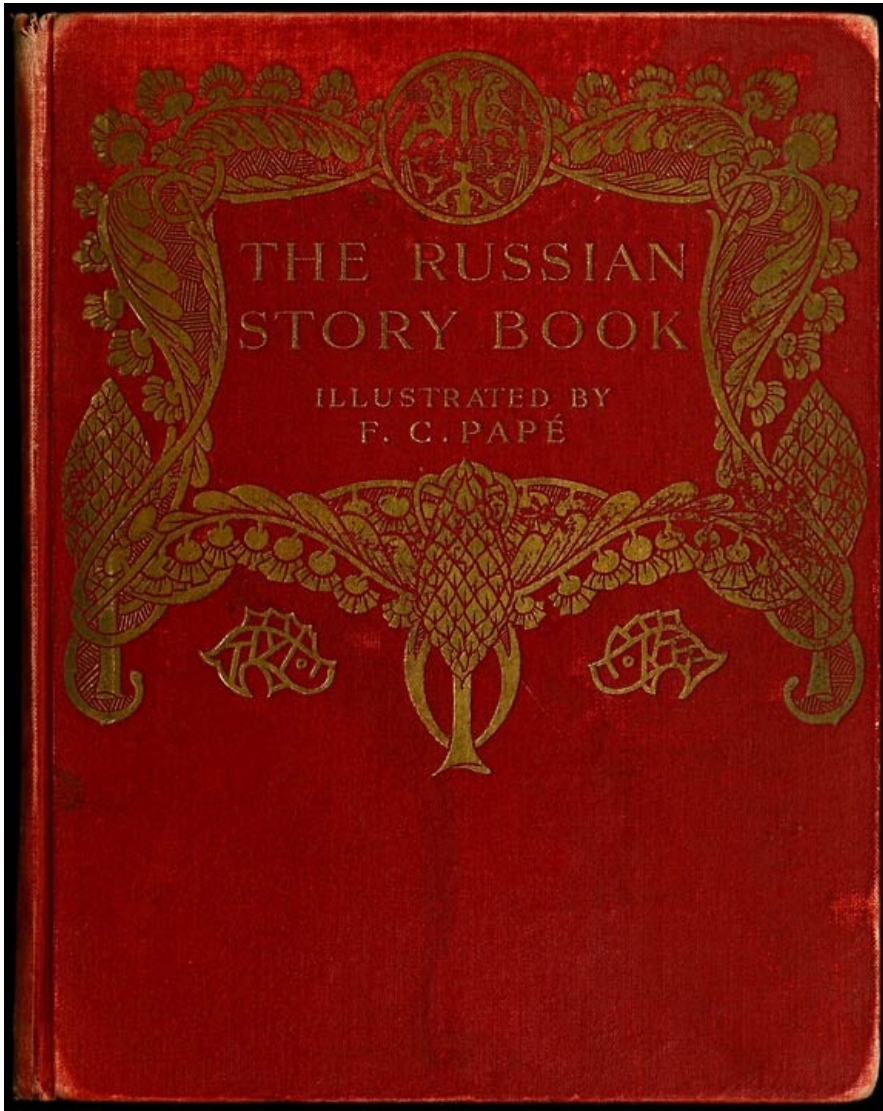
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RUSSIAN STORY
BOOK ***



The Ingle Nook Series

THE RUSSIAN STORY BOOK



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TORONTO



Falcon the Hunter (p. 64)

THE
RUSSIAN STORY BOOK

CONTAINING TALES FROM THE SONG-CYCLES
OF KIEV AND NOVGOROD AND OTHER
EARLY SOURCES

RETOLD BY
RICHARD WILSON
AUTHOR OF "THE INDIAN STORY BOOK"

WITH SIXTEEN COLOURED PLATES AND
LINE ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS BY
FRANK C. PAPÉ

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1916

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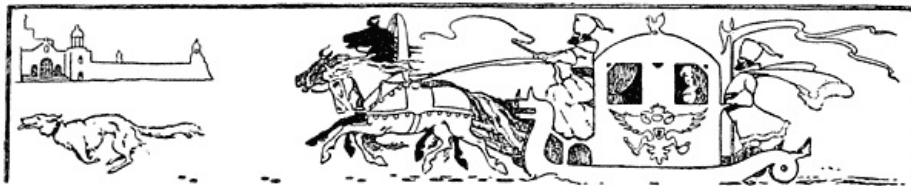
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PREFACE

I have gone right into the heart of "Holy Russia," to Kiev and Novgorod and the borders of the Caspian, in an endeavour to show by means of some of the early legends the ideals and point of view of the Russian nation while it was in the process of being made. The stories of the song-cycles of Kiev and Novgorod tell of a barbaric, though not a barbarian, world, full of high colour and spirited action, of the knock-down blow followed quickly by the hand of friendship freely extended to pick up the fallen foeman—if indeed he has had the hardihood to survive.

The land of Vladimir and Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck is a Christian land, with the Christianity of the Greek Church, and it is before all else an Easter land, where the Christian Festival of the Resurrection means infinitely more than it can ever do in countries which are not ice-bound for several winter months. The country is, moreover, an outpost of Christianity towards the East—uninfluenced by Renaissance or Reformation—and must therefore have developed interesting characteristics entirely different from those of Western lands. I think that such characteristics are clearly shown in these stories, but I must leave those of my older readers who are interested in this matter to find them out and to discover the Arthur, Guinevere and Galahad of Russia; for my first concern is to tell a tale which will please healthy-minded boys and girls in their early teens.

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This book might have been written by a Russian who thoroughly understands our language, or by an English author who has spent the best part of a lifetime in studying Russia and the Russians, illustrated by a native artist, and decorated by a Russian designer. When such a volume does appear, it will have a great interest for me. Meanwhile, I submit that there is some artistic unity, also, in a volume of Russian stories, written by an Englishman, illustrated by an English artist, and decorated by an English designer, the whole production being for an

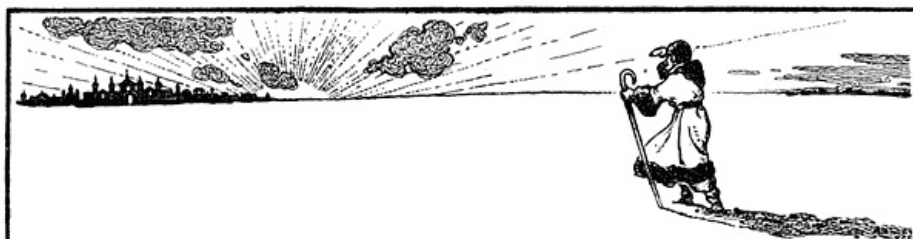
English child.

One cannot delve far into these folk-lore records without becoming indebted to Miss I. F. Hapgood's English renderings from the collections of Kirshá Danilóv, P. B. Kirýeevsky, A. T. Gillferding, Rybnikof, P. A. Bezsónof and others, published in New York in 1885; to J. Curtin's literal translations from the *Naródníya Rússyika Shazki* of A. N. Afanásieva; to W. R. S. Ralston's books on Russian folk-song and fable; and to the writings of the Hon. Maurice Baring and Mr. Stephen Graham. To all of these I desire to express my indebtedness for help and guidance, though the responsibility for the telling and interpretation of the tales is entirely my own. If this little collection makes the British child more sympathetic towards Russia and helps it to understand the Russian people to a small degree its purpose will have been achieved.

R. W.

HAMPSTEAD, 1915.

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*At the fountain which burst forth beneath
the hoofs of Cloudfall, fierce Bears still come
to quaff the waters and gain heroic strength.*

*At the fountain which burst forth beneath the hoofs of Cloudfall,
fierce Bears still come to quaff the waters and gain heroic strength.*



ILYA AND CLOUDFALL

For thirty years Ilya sat upon the stove in his mother's cottage, for he was a helpless cripple without arms or legs, and really of no use to any one, either in the house or out of it. But when these quiet years were past and over, Ilya came to his own, as you shall see.

One summer day his father and mother took down the wooden rakes and went out into the sunny meadow round which the tall pines stood to help to make the hay; and Ilya was left alone in the cottage with his thoughts.

All at once he heard a deep voice at the door which said, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." "Amen," responded Ilya at once, and three wayfarers entered after bowing at the threshold. They were old and venerable, and Ilya knew them at once to be singers of holy psalms, who never lacked food and drink among the peasants whose lives they cheered. So, when they asked him for something to drink, he spoke gently to them, partly, however, because he feared the result of their displeasure.

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"Venerable masters," he said, "whatever is within the house is yours, but, to my sorrow, I cannot rise to wait upon you." Then the holy men looked steadily at him, and before their steadfast gaze Ilya's eyes fell in humility as before the Holy Cross; and as he looked downwards they said to him, "Arise and wash yourself, for you shall be able to walk and to wait upon us."

Somehow, Ilya seemed to obey them in spite of himself. He got down from the stove and walked with the legs of a full-grown man of mighty stature. Then stretching out his brawny arms he took the cup, filled it with the drink of the rye, and offered it to the holy guests on bended knee. They took it from him, drank one after the other, and gave it to him again, saying, "Drink in your turn, Ilya." The young man obeyed without a word, and then awaited the further pleasure of the visitors.

"Ilya, son of weakness," they said, "how is it with your strength?"

"I thank you with reverence, venerable sirs," he replied, bowing low before them, "my strength is now such as could surely move the earth."

The old men turned from him and regarded each other with a look of wisdom so pure and clear and like a shaft of brightest sunlight that Ilya's eyes sought the earthen floor of the cottage once again.

Then one of the guests, who seemed to be the leader, said in a quiet voice of authority, "Give us to drink once more," and Ilya obeyed without question. "Drink now yourself, Ilya," they said, and he did so.

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"Ilya, son of weakness," they said, "how is it now with your strength?"

"I thank you with reverence, venerable sirs," he said, "my strength is great, but only half the strength I had."

"That is well," said the old men; "if it were greater, then moist Mother Earth would be too frail to bear you."

Then the old men told Ilya to go out into the summer sunlight, and he walked out of the cottage for the first time, followed by his deliverers; and there, standing in the light, the young man received his blessing and his charge.

"Ilya, son of strength," they said, "it is God Himself who has redeemed you from weakness. Therefore you are bound to defend the faith of Christ against all

unbelievers, however bold and daring they may be, remembering always that it is not written that you should come to your death in battle.

“In the whole white world there is none stronger than you except Svyatogor, whom you will meet before long. Avoid conflict with him, and him alone; do not spend your strength on the soil or the meadow or the forest, but set out without delay for the royal city of Kiev.”

Having spoken these words, the old men vanished, and Ilya did not see either how or where they went. He only knew that he stood alone in the light of the sun, and he stretched out his great arms as if he had just awakened from a long refreshing sleep. [16]

Then the young giant went to seek his father and mother, and found them resting in the shade of the pine trees by the side of the meadow. The whole company was asleep, and taking up one of their axes, Ilya began to hew at the trunks of the pines. It is a matter for wonder that the sound of the crashing trunks which was soon heard did not immediately awake the sleepers, for the young man laid about him lustily during the space of an hour, and at the end of that time had felled a small wood about the extent of a field; which is really not so very marvellous after all, seeing that he had been storing up strength for thirty years. When he had finished this work he drove all the axes lying near the sleepers into a tree-stump with a quiet laugh. “Ah,” he said to himself, “they must ask me for these axes if they wish to use them again.”

After a while the young man’s parents and their labourers awoke from sleep, for by his tree-felling Ilya had taken away the shade, and the hot sunlight was now beating full upon their faces. With blinking eyes they looked around, and when they saw the fallen timber and the axes deeply embedded in the stump of a tree, they began somewhat slowly to be filled with very great wonder, and said to one another, “Who has done this?”

Then Ilya came out of the forest where he had been hiding and enjoying their awakening. The men were now trying in vain to draw out the axes, and he took them easily from the stump, and handed them to the wondering servants without a word being spoken on either side; for the labourers were too much dazed to break the silence by speech. [17]

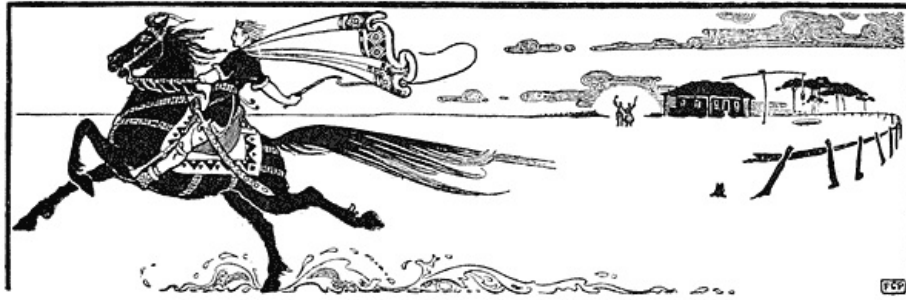
For a few moments the father and mother gazed at the tall young man, the eyes of the former dwelling upon his stature, his strong limbs, and his mighty shoulders, while the mother gazed steadfastly at the face of her son, which was radiant with a wonderful light. Then, clasping his hands and closing his eyes, the old man gave thanks to God that he should be the father of so splendid a workman; but Ilya showed no sign of continuing in his peasant’s task, for with a low bow of reverence to his parents, he strode away without a word across the open plain.

His mother watched him go in silence, and then she bowed her head as before the Holy Cross; for the light which she had seen in the young man’s eyes never shone in the eyes of a woodman or of one content to spend the summer day making hay in the pine-encircled meadow.

Now, as Ilya went on his way he saw a peasant walking heavily across a field, leading a shaggy brown foal, and, in spite of his manhood, this was the first foal that Ilya had ever seen. He suddenly felt a great desire to have this shaggy steed for himself, and having money in his pocket—though how it had got there he could not tell—he soon made the purchase. He paid little attention to the price asked by the greedy, crafty peasant, which was large enough as a plain matter of horse-dealing, for Ilya was no bargain driver. [18]

“Now,” he said to himself, as he patted the shaggy mane of the little horse, “I must take three months to make this brown foal into a charger; so for that time, at least, I must dwell at home.” He therefore turned back to his father’s cottage, and, to the quiet delight of his mother, lived there for the time he had appointed. Ilya did not think out his plans for himself at this time, but had a curious feeling that his way was being made plain before him without his will.

The foal was at once tied up in the beast-stall in his father’s stable, and fed on the finest white Turkish wheat to the great surprise of the old man, who, however, made no remark, for the strange things now happening in his household were rather too much for him. When the shaggy brown foal had been fed for three months in this careful and very extravagant way, Ilya left it for three nights in the garden so that the Powers of Heaven might anoint it with three successive dews. After this, he made a trial of the horse, which was now very strong and frisky, and found that it had become a truly heroic charger, capable of trotting and galloping, and while full of fire and spirit, obedient to its



ILYA MEETS SVYATOGOR AND PARTS WITH HIM

Ilya rose early one morning, dressed himself in his best, and respectfully informed his parents that he wished to leave his home. The old people, who now felt that it would be very unwise, as well as useless, to interfere in the proceedings of their wonderful son, gave him their blessing. His father then went off to his duties with a grunt, and his mother turned to her cooking on the stove with a sigh; for the stove always reminded her of the cripple boy who had been of no use to any one.

Meanwhile Ilya had saddled his good steed Cloudfall, and in a short time had ridden far across the open plain. As night was falling he came to a large tent of fair white linen which had been set up near a spreading oak tree. Peeping into this pavilion, he saw a huge bed with the skins turned down, the pillow smoothed, and everything ready for rest. So he fastened Cloudfall to the oak, crept into the bed, and fell into a deep slumber which lasted for three days and three nights.

On the third day of the sleep of Ilya, Cloudfall raised his head from his grazing and pricked up his ears, for out of the north came a noise like an earthquake. Moist Mother Earth rocked from side to side, the tall pines shook and staggered as if they were about to fall headlong, and the water of the river suddenly heaved and then overflowed its banks. Roused by the sound, the intelligent animal beat loudly with his hoof upon the earth in the hope of rousing Ilya; but the young man slept the sleep of a tired child.

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Then Cloudfall put his head through the opening of the tent and snouted above the storm in the speech of Holy Russia, "Ho, ho! Ilya, do you sleep there and take your ease, unmindful of the great misfortune that threatens to o'erwhelm you? The hero Svyatogor is coming to his pavilion where you lodge unasked. Loose me, and let me take to the open plain, and as for yourself, climb up at once into the tall oak tree on the top of yonder hillock."

It would have been *too* wonderful if Ilya had slept when this strange voice sounded in his ear. Up he sprang, fresh from his slumber and wide awake at once, as every young and healthy person must be who has slept well, loosed the thong which bound Cloudfall to the oak, and climbed without further delay into the branches of the tree on the hillock.

When he looked down, he saw Svyatogor for the first time, and there could be no doubt that he was a hero. He was taller than the trees of the wood, and his flowing locks seemed to be somewhat confused with the flying clouds. Upon his broad shoulder he carried a casket of crystal, and when he drew near to the pavilion by the first oak tree, he stooped and set it gently upon the ground and opened it with a key of gold.

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The crystal door swung back without a sound, and out stepped the wife of the hero. In all the white world no beauty like this had ever been seen or told. She was tall and stately, but she stepped as daintily as a white hind. Her eyes were clear and steady as those of the falcon, her eyebrows were as black as a starless night, and the whiteness of her skin dazzled the eyes of Ilya in his oak.

As soon as she had stepped out from the crystal casket, she prepared the table for her lord, spreading upon it a cloth of lawn with drawn thread-work as white as Russia in winter, and placing upon it sweetmeats of various kinds. Then she stepped back to her crystal casket and brought out a flagon, wondrously

fashioned, containing mead, whose strength assailed the nostrils of Ilya in his oak on the hillock with a power which passed right through him. In a few moments she sat down with her husband, and the two ate and drank while the laughter of the hero shook the trunk of Ilya's oak and the gentle murmur of his fair companion's merriment rustled the leaves in a tender whisper.

When Svyatogor had eaten well and drunk better, he went into the pavilion, lay down on the broad bed and fell fast asleep. But his beautiful wife roamed about in the open plain, singing softly to herself; and as she walked about she happened to look up, and saw Ilya, who was gazing at her so steadfastly that he seemed to be nothing but eyes.

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"Come down," cried the hero's wife; "come down, good and stately youth. Come down out of the damp oak, or I will tell my husband that you have been unkind to me." Now it was not in Ilya's nature to be unkind to any one, so without further words he slipped nimbly down the trunk of the oak; and as soon as he touched the lap of moist Mother Earth, the woman popped him into the pocket of the sleeping hero, and by so doing roused the latter from his heavy sleep.

The hero stretched himself, yawned, and sat up blinking, for he was not so young as Ilya, and therefore did not wake so readily. Then he arose, placed his wife in the crystal casket, locked it with the golden key, mounted upon his horse, and took his way towards the Holy Mountains.

As the hero rode onward his horse began to bend at the knees and then to stumble, whereupon Svyatogor beat him soundly with a silken whip. The animal stopped short, turned his head and said to his master in a human voice, "I was proud enough to carry a hero and his heroic wife, casket and all, but when I am obliged to add another hero to my load, it is not surprising if I stumble."



"Come down," cried the hero's wife'

Svyatogor looked round, and for the first time was aware of his bulging pocket. A little further investigation showed him that he was carrying a fine young man with broad shoulders, on which was set the unmistakable head of a hero. In a moment he had drawn Ilya from his deep pocket and was holding him aloft while he questioned him with knitted brows.

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"Whence come you, young man?" he cried, and at the sound of that terrible voice the mountains shook, the forests waved, and the river found that its usual channel was not steady enough to contain it, while it occurred to Ilya that it would be best to tell the truth. So he said boldly enough, though his position could scarcely be described as dignified:

"It was the noble lady in the crystal casket who bade me come down from the oak, and who placed me in the pocket of your hero-ship." Then the youth's eyes were filled with terror, for a fierce frown suddenly creased the brows of Svyatogor, who turned in his saddle, after having seated Ilya before him, and hurled the crystal casket into the rushing, rocking stream.

"Lie there, faithless one," he shouted; "it was surely of little avail to take you out locked up in a glass case if you were to speak to the first goodly young man you meet." Then with a huge gesture of disgust he urged on his steed and took his way along the side of a rocky mountain, talking pleasantly to Ilya as if nothing had happened out of the ordinary. He asked the young man about his parents, his home, and the dearest wish of his heart, which he found was to meet himself, the famous hero Svyatogor.

"Yes, I am he," said the rider as lightly as his huge size permitted, "and I would gladly come among you people of Holy Russia, but moist Mother Earth is too soft to bear me up, and I am forced to ride on the rocky crags and high precipices of the great mountains which are strong enough to bear the weight of myself and my steed. I will take you with me to the Holy Mountains, for you are a young man after my own heart." And as they rode onward he told Ilya how a hero lived and how he did the deeds which roused the wonder and the fear of all men.

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Suddenly Svyatogor said to Ilya, "When we come to my home, I will present you to my father. But before you meet him you must take care to heat a piece of iron in the stove, and when he comes with outstretched hand to greet you, take further care not to place your hand within his own, but let him grasp the heated iron."

Ilya promised to follow the instructions of his friend, and before long they came across the craggy peaks to the Holy Mountains, and on the summit of one of them Ilya saw a wonderful palace of white stone. The hero rode forward to the gateway, where he was met by his aged father, whose beard swept his knees like a snow-drift. "Welcome, my dear child," said the old man, to whose tenderness the giant on the mighty steed was still a loving youngster. "Welcome, and thrice welcome! Have you been far afield?"

"I have been in Holy Russia, my father," was the reply. "And what saw you in Holy Russia?" asked the old man. "Nothing but melting snow and moist land," said Svyatogor, "too moist indeed for the feet of my steed. But stay, I did meet with some one of note, and I have brought him with me."

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The old man quickly raised his head, but the movement was merely one of habit, for his eyes were sightless. Sadly he dropped his chin once more upon his breast, and said, "Bring to me the hero of Holy Russia that I may greet him."

In the meantime Ilya had found a piece of iron, and having also found a furnace near the gate-way, he quickly made the iron red-hot. Then he grasped the glowing metal in his hand and went forward to greet the blind father of his friend. The old man held out his hand, but Ilya did not clasp it. He placed in its palm the red-hot iron which the old man grasped as if it had been the hand of a friend returned after a long journey. As he felt its burning glow he said, "Thy hands are the hands of a hero, O Ilya, son of strength. Now you are indeed worthy to become the younger brother of Svyatogor. Come within the palace of white stone and rest until the call comes, which comes to all true men of deeds, to sally forth upon yet another journey of adventure."

So Ilya and his elder brother went into the palace of white stone and rested as long as they could, which was not really long, for one morning the sun shone and each found the other at the gate looking with longing eyes upon the world.

Now as he looked outward, Ilya saw to his surprise and pleasure that a horse was feeding near the outer wall of the palace of white stone. He looked more closely and found to his great delight that it was none other than his own good steed Cloudfall. Quickly he ran to the horse and gaily he greeted it, and before long he was mounted upon its back and racing to and fro over the moist grass before the palace of white stone. As he reached the gate for the third time, he found Svyatogor mounted also, and ready to set out with him in search of adventure. Then they rode out along the ridge of the Holy Mountains, and before long they came to a great casket with a lid lying by its side, and upon the lid was written the inscription, "This casket shall fit him for whom it has been hewn

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from the rock.”

The inscription was a plain invitation to one of adventurous spirit, and in a moment Ilya had leapt from his horse and lay at full length within the casket. But it was too long and too wide for him, and he rose saying, “It is not for me that this casket was hewn from the rock.”

“The casket was meant for me,” said Svyatogor, quietly stepping into it and lying down. His words were true enough, for his heroic body fitted it as if he had been measured for it. “Take the cover, Ilya,” he said, “and lay it over me.” But his younger brother had no desire to perform an entombment of this kind and he said:

“I will not lift the cover, elder brother, and shut you up in such a manner. Surely you would amuse yourself with what is to me a jest of the poorest kind, if you would prepare for your burial in this way!”

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Svyatogor spoke not a word, but reaching forth his hands lifted the lid and covered the casket with it. Then he tried to raise it again, but found that it was easier to get into such a casket than to get out of it. He strove with all his mighty strength to lift the lid, but even this was of no avail, and he cried out through an aperture which still remained between the cover and the side of the casket, “Alas, my brother! It is clear that Fate, who is stronger than heroes, has entangled me at last. I cannot raise the lid. Try to lift it and live to say that you have rescued the prince of heroes.”

Ilya thereupon put forth all his strength but, strong as he was, he could not raise the lid. “Take my great battle-sword,” said Svyatogor, “and strike a blow across the cover.” Ilya grasped the sword, which his brother had unbuckled, before he lay down, but was not able to raise it from the earth, so great was its weight. “I cannot lift it,” he said in disgust and despair, “to say nothing of wielding it.” “Bend down to this rift,” replied his elder brother, “that I may breathe upon you with my heroic breath.” Ilya obeyed the command, and when Svyatogor had breathed warmly upon him, he felt new strength rise within him, so that he was three times the man he had been.

He was now able to raise the sword and struck the lid of the casket a mighty blow, so that all the Holy Mountains re-echoed with the sound. Sparks of flame leapt from the lid of the casket, and an iron ridge was formed upon the stone in the path of that tremendous stroke, so as to strengthen the cover rather than weaken it.

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“I stifle, younger brother,” cried the imprisoned hero. “Try the effect of another blow upon the lid of the fatal casket.” Then Ilya smote the cover lengthwise, and the sound of the blow re-echoed more loudly among the Holy Mountains; but the only effect was to raise another ridge of iron upon the lid. Again the imprisoned hero spoke imploringly.

“I die, little brother. Bend down again so that I may breathe once more upon you, and this time give you *all* my heroic strength.”

Then Ilya spoke, and as the words came from his lips he felt as if a voice within him framed them in despite of his own desires.

“My strength is enough, elder brother; if I had more, then moist Mother Earth would not be able to bear me.”

“You have done well, younger brother,” said the voice of Svyatogor, “in that you have disobeyed my last command. Had I breathed upon you again, it would have been with the breath of death. And now, farewell! Take my great battle-sword, which you have fairly won, but tether my good steed to my iron-bound tomb. None but Svyatogor may ride that horse.”

Then Svyatogor spoke no more, and stooping to the crevice Ilya was no longer able to hear the whisper of his breathing. So he bound the good steed to the casket, girt the great battle-sword about his waist, and rode forth upon Cloudfall into the open plain. But as he turned away, he saw the tears of the imprisoned Svyatogor flowing in a crystal stream through the crevice in the iron-bound casket on the lonely hills.

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ILYA AND NIGHTINGALE THE ROBBER

This is the story of the first of the nightingales, those sweet singers of the evening, each of whom, as the old books tell with certainty, sprang from a poppy seed. And the sower of the first seeds of the blood-red poppy was Ilya the Old Cossáck, who rode the shaggy bay steed Cloudfall.

As for Cloudfall, the shaggy bay steed, it is well that you should try to picture him to yourselves. He had a mane of very great length, and a tail ten times as long as his mane, while the shaggy hair of his rough coat was of three colours or tints. He wore a bridle of leather plaited so as to be of enormous strength, twelve saddle-cloths and twelve felts (so cold it was in Holy Russia), and over these coverings a strong leather saddle bound with metal. He had twelve girths made of finest silk, not for display and youthful vanity, but for strength and easiness of movement. His stirrups were of engraved steel brought from Damascus, where the good sword blades are marked with strange devices; the buckles were of bronze which moist Mother Earth is not able to rust, and which no amount of hard wear can in the least affect. Such was Cloudfall the shaggy bay steed of Ilya the Old Cossáck.

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One Easter morning Ilya took his way to church to greet his risen Master; and as

he stood before the altar in the warm glow which lighted up the sanctuary, he vowed a mighty vow, "I will sing at High Mass on this very Easter Day in the royal town of Kiev, and I will go to Kiev by the straight way."

For a few moments Ilya stood in deep silence before the altar, as if pausing to gather strength. Then he vowed a second vow, and it was to this effect—as he took the straight way to the royal town of Kiev he would not stain his hand, nor yet the blade of his good keen sword with the blood of the accursed Tatars, the enemies of Holy Russia. A second time he stood in deep silence, as if pausing to gather still more strength. Then he vowed a third vow with his hand upon his mace of steel, and it was to the effect that though he would go by the straight way he would not make use of his fiery darts.

After a third space of silence Ilya left the church and came into the courtyard, where his shaggy bay steed Cloudfall was awaiting him to take the heroic journey to the city of Prince Vladimir, the Royal Sun of Kiev. A few wondering peasants saw Ilya as he strode across the courtyard, but as soon as he was mounted upon Cloudfall they saw him no more, so swift was the movement of the shaggy bay steed. Their eyes tried to follow his flight—for it was no gallop—but they seemed to see only a smoke-wreath upon the open plain, or a swift movement like that of a swirl of snow across the wind-swept steppe. [37]

Over the grass skimmed Cloudfall, and over the lakes and rivers, while his long tail streamed behind him like that of a comet in the midnight sky; high above the lofty forests he soared, even above the oaks which had stood there since the days before history dawned, yet he kept lower than the drifting clouds; from mountain summit to mountain summit he sprang, and in leaping along the low hill-ranges he missed many of the tops in his flight; and wherever his hoofs fell, springs of water gushed forth from the rock, but when he alighted on the open plain smoke rose beneath his hoofs, wavered for a moment, and then ascended in a steady column towards the clouds. It was a ride or a flight to be remembered for all time, and Ilya himself was not forgetful of this. For he stopped his shaggy bay steed near a forest, felled two mighty trees with his mace, and erected a rough cross on which he carved with his keen sword the following inscription: "Ilya the Old Cossack rides to Royal Kiev on his first heroic quest." Then he went again upon his wonderful way.

Now when he drew near to the city of Chernigof, he saw before him a great host of Tatars, the enemies of Holy Russia, marshalled under three princes, each of whom commanded forty thousand men. From their crowd of warlike steeds there arose a cloud of steam so dense that it hid the sun by day and the moon by night. When Ilya saw this great host before him he remembered his vows, leapt quickly to the earth, and knelt at the right foot of Cloudfall. [38]

"Lend me your aid, my shaggy bay steed," he said, and the intelligent animal bowed his head in reply, after which he raised it and sniffed the air with quivering nostril. For a moment Ilya left his side to wrench from moist Mother Earth a ring-barked oak which he bound to the left stirrup of his shaggy bay steed. Then he tore up another tree by the roots, and mounting Cloudfall began to brandish it in his right hand. "Any man can vow a vow," he said grimly, "even before the high altar, but not every man can keep his vow when he has made it; and my vow was to shed no blood with my keen sword nor yet to use my fiery darts."

By this time Cloudfall was again passing through the air swifter than a falcon in its flight, though his progress was somewhat stayed when he reached the outer rim of the watching host. Ilya brandished his oak, and bringing it down with one mighty blow after another cleared a path through the host as a hurricane makes a lane through a forest. Through the pathway Cloudfall passed, alighting upon the earth again and again, and leaving wherever he touched the host a heap of prostrate warriors. So did Ilya the Old Cossack pass through the great host of Tatars, the enemies of Holy Russia.

When the hero came to the gates of Chernigof he found them strongly barred, and a keen watch kept against the armies of the Tatars, who were reported to be advancing upon the city. The wall was lofty and broad, but not too high for Cloudfall, who leapt over it with ease, to the great astonishment of the guards and of the leaders who stood on one of the towers in earnest council. Ilya alighted in the broad courtyard of the church, and entering the holy place found the citizens assembled for prayer, which they hoped might avert the approaching calamity or fortify them for the endurance of a cruel death. [39]

Then Ilya stood forth amongst them and said boldly, "Ye traders of Chernigof, and citizens all, why do you pray when the time is come for action? Why do you meet together to bid farewell to the white world with all its joys?" Then one of the merchants, who was very richly dressed, explained to Ilya, as if he were

quite ignorant of outside affairs, how the city was at that moment besieged by the Tatars. Ilya made a slight gesture of impatience and disgust, "Go out," he said, "upon the broad wall of your famous city, and look towards the open steppe."

Then some of the men and a few of the bolder maidens went out upon the ramparts, and in the place where the Tatar banners had stood like a forest, the accursed foes lay in great heaps of slain. Upon this the men of the city bowed themselves before Ilya and begged for the honour of his name. They also besought him to stay with them and be their Tsar, and that he would accept at their hands a bowl of pure red gold, another of shining silver, and a third of fine seed pearls. "Nay, I ask no gifts from you," said Ilya, "though I may possibly have earned them, nor will I stay to be your Tsar. Go on with your lives as of old, my brothers, but grant the favour of showing me the straight way to Kiev town."

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Again they bowed before him, and one of them, speaking for the others, said, "It is twice as far by the circling path as it is by the straight way, but you must take the longer journey, for athwart the straight way lie three barriers; and the road is so lonely that the grey wolf and the black raven avoid it, for it is deserted even by the dead. The first mighty barrier is a range of lofty mountains; the second is a rushing river of enormous breadth, bordered by the Black Morass; and the third is Nightingale the Robber.

"His enormous nest is built upon the tops of seven oaks which saw the dawn of history. When he whistles like a nightingale, roars like a lion, and hisses like a serpent, the trees bow themselves to the earth, the green leaves wither, and both horse and rider fall to the ground as if they were dead."

This was enough to stir the soul of the heroic Ilya, who forthwith mounted his shaggy bay steed Cloudfall, and rode out upon the straight way. In due time he came to the lofty mountain range; but this barrier was not likely to prove insurmountable to the shaggy bay steed which soared above it like an eagle in its flight. Then they came to the broad rushing river with the Black Morass by its margin, and Ilya, dismounting, wrenched great oak trees from the trembling grasp of moist Mother Earth and flung them before him with one hand while he led Cloudfall over these bridges which he had made with the other. Soon they came to the broad water, and when Ilya had mounted, the shaggy bay steed cleared its rushing current in a single leap.

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At last they came to the third barrier, no less than Nightingale the Robber, who was known also as the Magic Bird. As Ilya drew near to his oak trees, Nightingale thrust his head out of the nest and sent forth tongues of flame and showers of sparks from his mouth and nostrils; but this terrible sight had no effect upon the stout heart of the heroic Ilya. Nightingale the Robber therefore began to sing like a bird, varying this entertainment with the roar of a lion and the spiteful hiss of a dragon; and at last the combination of sounds was too much even for Cloudfall. The shaggy bay steed began to tremble with great violence, and then fell upon his knees, whereupon Ilya proceeded to beat him without mercy.

"You grass-bag," he cried in his anger, "you wolf-carrion, have you never passed through a gloomy forest and heard the song of a bird, the roar of a wild beast, and the hiss of a serpent? See how easily I shall overcome the Magic Bird!"

Then Ilya went up to a willow tree that overhung a brook, broke off a twig, and fitted it to his bow, in order that he might keep his vow to abstain from using his fiery darts. And as he drew his bow-string he cried, "Fly, dart, fly! Pierce the left eye of Nightingale the Robber, and come out at his right ear."

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Swish! went the magic dart. Cloudfall rose to his feet, and Nightingale the Robber fell from his nest in the old oaks and dumped down upon the lap of moist Mother Earth like an enormous sack of wheat. Then Ilya the Old Cossák lifted the pestilent thief from the ground by his yellow curling hair, bound him securely to his stirrup, and went on his way once more.

By and by they came to the palace of the Magic Bird, where he used to retire with his spoils which he had won in the forest. It was built on seven pillars, and had a courtyard surrounded by an iron paling on each spike of which was the head of a luckless hero, for many brave men had tried to do the deed which Ilya was now performing. Round about the house were the greenest of gardens with loveliest flowers of every hue, and in the midst of these gardens was an orchard with heavily laden fruit trees. From the latticed casements of the palace looked forth the children of the Magic Bird, and when they saw Ilya approaching on his shaggy bay steed they cried out together, "See, Mother, here comes our Father leading a man at his stirrup. Shall we have the captive for dinner?"



'Nightingale the Robber fell from his nest in the old oaks'

But Elena, one of the children of the Magic Bird, had only one eye and therefore was a witch; and when she looked out from her own particular latticed casement she saw what had really happened and spoke the truth. "Nay, children," she cried, "it is Ilya the Old Cossáck on his shaggy bay steed Cloudfall, and he rides towards us, bringing our Father as a prisoner."

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"Crick! Crock! Crack!" cried the children in a croaking chorus; "we will at once change ourselves into ravens and rend that peasant hero in pieces with our beaks of iron. Then shall the fragments of his white body be scattered on the bosom of moist Mother Earth." But Nightingale the Robber, who was not yet dead, shouted out a command that no harm was to be done to Ilya the Old Cossáck. This order, however, had no effect upon the one-eyed daughter, who ran quickly into the courtyard, tore up a heavy steel beam from the threshold, and raising it aloft, hurled it at Ilya with all her strength.

So fierce was the attack of the one-eyed witch-daughter of Nightingale the Robber, that even Ilya, whose saddle-seat was so secure, wavered for a moment, and it was only with great difficulty and much skill that he was able to avoid the full force of the angry blow. Then he leapt lightly from his shaggy bay steed and, remembering his vow, raised his right foot and caught the witch with the full force of his outstretched toe. Up she went into the air, higher than the height of a great cathedral, higher than the cross upon its topmost dome, and then she fell down with a bony rattle against the rear wall of the courtyard, and her skin burst with a sharp crack.

"Fools all!" shouted Nightingale the Robber. "Fools now and always! Fetch from the cellar a heaped-up waggon-load of red gold, another of white silver, and a third of fine seed pearls. Give all these treasures to Ilya the Old Cossáck, and to Cloudfall, his shaggy bay steed, and see if these fine gifts will not induce him to set me free in a trice. Ha, ha!"

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But Nightingale the Robber chuckled too soon, for Ilya said in a voice that showed no doubtfulness, "If I should plant my lofty spear in the bosom of moist Mother Earth, and if you were to heap up about it red gold, white silver, and fine seed pearls until not even the sharp tip of it could be seen, yet would I not set

you free, Nightingale the Robber, you pestilent thief and father of stealing. You shall come with me forthwith to the glorious town of Kiev, and there you shall receive such forgiveness as you deserve.”

Then Ilya mounted Cloudfall once more, and the shaggy bay steed began to prance while Nightingale the Robber began to dance; and thus prancing and dancing they came to Kiev, the city of Prince Vladimir.

When they arrived the Prince was in the cathedral, and hearing this, Ilya went at once to the sacred courtyard, where he fastened Cloudfall to a golden ring in a tall carven pillar, and said to him, “Keep watch and ward upon Nightingale the Robber, Cloudfall, my faithful shaggy bay steed, and see that he escapes not from my stirrup of damascened steel.” Then to the Magic Bird he spoke, “Presume not, Nightingale the Robber, to depart from the side of my good charger, for there is no place in all the white world where you will be hidden from my searching.”

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Then in fulfilment of his first vow Ilya went to the church for the Easter mass; and when he saw Prince Vladimir among the worshippers, he made obeisance to him, but not before he had devoutly crossed himself and done reverence to North, South, East, and West. When the mass had been celebrated, Prince Vladimir sent to summon the stranger hero to his Easter feast; and obedient to the invitation which was really a command, Ilya went to the royal palace, where the Prince asked him to which horde and country he belonged, and who were his parents.

“Sire,” said Ilya, “I am the honourable son of honourable parents who reap their own meadow to feed their own beasts in their own farm, surrounded by the pine forest of Murom. Now as I greeted my Risen Lord at matins this morning, I vowed to come hither by the straight way, *and I came.*”

The speaker ceased, and the group of heroes, warriors, notabilities, and fair ladies who stood near the Prince stared at him in unbelieving astonishment.

“Good youth,” said Prince Vladimir, “you are fair to look upon, but none the less you must be a son of the Father of Lies. Why, the straight way has been lost for thirty years, and all men know of it is that athwart it lie great barriers. There are in the plains great hordes of accursed Tatars, the enemies of Holy Russia; then there is a broad rushing river bordered by the Black Morass; and, last of all, among the shining birches, on the top of seven great oaks which saw the dawn of history, is raised the nest of Nightingale the Robber. Moreover, that Magic Bird hath nine strong sons and eight ugly daughters, of whom one has only a single eye, and is therefore a witch. Now Nightingale the Robber hath permitted neither horse nor man to pass by him for thirty years.”

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“Nay, sire,” said Ilya with perfect calm, “I did indeed come by the straight way, and Nightingale the Robber now sitteth as a prisoner securely bound within the sacred court of the holy temple, where all who thieve must be bound hand and foot.”

Now the astonishment and curiosity which fell upon the company at this announcement was so great that it overcame the hunger of the lords and ladies, who forgot also their courtly dignity as they scrambled out from the palace to see the wonder, or at least to test the truth of Ilya’s words. But Prince Vladimir and Princess Apraxia went out slowly upon the railed balcony.

And there they saw the wonder for themselves—Nightingale the Robber sitting securely bound to the steel stirrup of Cloudfall, the shaggy bay steed, with one eye fixed on Kiev city and the other on far-distant Chernigof, according to the habit he had acquired when awaiting the sallies of champions from those two cities within the security of his lofty nest.

Then said Prince Vladimir, full of wonder mixed with curiosity, “Whistle, Nightingale the Robber, roar like a lion, and hiss like a serpent.” But the Magic Bird replied with a strange smile which had a long way to travel across his face from eye to eye. “I am not *your* prisoner, Prince Vladimir, and do not eat from *your* bountiful hand. However, bring me a bowl of wine, for I am plaguily thirsty, and then we shall see what will happen.”

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“Give him a bowl of green wine,” said Ilya to the waiting attendants, “a large bowl, capable of accommodating a bucket and a half. And bring a large cake of fine wheat flour, for the mouth of the Magic Bird is parched, and his whistle, roar, and hiss will not be worth hearing if he is not refreshed.”

Then Vladimir himself came forward bringing three large bowls, one of green wine, the drink of princes, a second of vodka, the drink of peasants, and a third

of sweet mead, the drink of fair ladies; and Nightingale the Robber drained each of the bowls at a draught. Thereupon Ilya commanded the Magic Bird to whistle, roar and hiss, but to do so under his breath lest harm should come to the royal party, of whom the ladies were now preparing to hide behind the gentlemen, while the gentlemen were trying to persuade the ladies that it was very uncourtly to stand *before* such peerless beauties.

Then that wicked pestilent thief began to smile from one eye to the other, and it seemed as if a stormy gleam of light passed across the open steppe from Chernigof to Kiev; and out of malice of which his black heart was full, he gave his entertainment at full strength. [48]

At the sounds which he made all the ancient palaces in the royal city cracked, tottered, and tumbled to the ground; the new palaces rocked, and only kept their upright position with a great effort. The roofs of all the poorer houses moved from their places and fell into the streets, while the walls remained, for they were of a tumble-down character in their ordinary state, and not knowing which way to fall decided to remain as they were. Moist Mother Earth quivered like a man with the ague, the horses of the heroes stampeded from the palace stables, the beautiful young ladies hid themselves in corners, and the gay youths were so terrified that they ran into *other* corners far away, where, of course, they could not comfort them. Ilya leaned over the balcony and caught up Prince Vladimir under one arm and the Princess Apraxia under the other in order to protect them; yet the Prince fell into a swoon from which he did not emerge for three hours.

Then said Ilya, son of strength, in the mightiness of his wrath, "For this base deed of thine, Nightingale the Robber, thou shalt die!"

"Spare a few of his family," pleaded Prince Vladimir, who had now recovered, and who had never been of a vindictive disposition. "Spare me myself," begged the Magic Bird, "and you shall have all my money to build a monastery."

"Nay," said Ilya, "I will sweep away his pestilent brood and scatter his bones to the winds. As for his ill-gotten gold, no monastery would stand or receive a blessing which was built with it." [49]

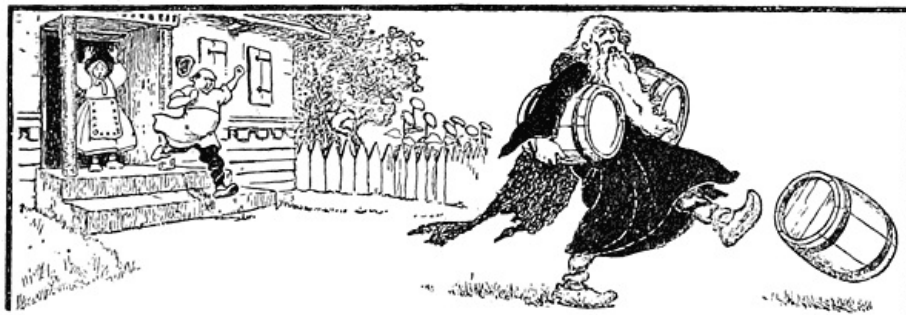
Thereupon he took Nightingale the Robber in his strong white hands and led him far out upon the open plain. There he fitted a burning arrow to his stout bow, for his vow no longer held him, seeing that he had come to Kiev by the straight way, and shot the fiery dart into the black breast of the Magic Bird. After that he struck off his pestilent head and scattered his bones to the winds. Then he sought out his family and scattered their bones to the winds also, and mounting Cloudfall, his shaggy bay steed, he went once more to Prince Vladimir.

By this time the royal company had somewhat recovered their composure, and in order to hide their confusion were busily conversing about the day before yesterday. When Ilya arrived they were seated at the white tables eating savoury viands from the board and drinking green wine and sweet mead; and they complimented Ilya very prettily, as soon as he had washed himself. When the feast was over, the Prince gave the hero the supreme honour of ever henceforth styling himself Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck, for it was reckoned the highest honour that a hero should take his title from the land on which he was born, especially if it was owned by his father; and Ilya, being a true gentleman, valued this distinction infinitely higher than a heaped-up waggon-load of red gold, another of white silver, and a third of fine seed pearls. [50]

As for those bones of the Magic Bird which were scattered to the winds, as they fell to earth they became seeds of the blood-red poppy, from the flowers of which came the first sweet whistling nightingales who know nothing of the roar of the lion or the hiss of the serpent.



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ILYA AND FALCON THE HUNTER

One day Ilya rode his shaggy bay steed Cloudfall across the open steppe; and as he went slowly onward he was thinking deeply, for he had performed many deeds of the greatest valour, and was now wondering greatly what he should do next.

"I have visited many lands," he said in a brooding voice, "and have seen many strange people, but for a long time I have not visited Kiev, where I took Nightingale the Robber as a prisoner firmly bound to my stirrup of bright steel. I will go now to Kiev once more, so that I may see what is happening in the household of Prince Vladimir."

Raising his head and smiling quietly like a man filled with a secret purpose, he gave Cloudfall the rein, and before he could say "SVYATOGOR" he was in the city of Kiev, where it was told him by a cook whom he met hurrying across the street that Prince Vladimir was holding a merry feast.

Ilya at once tethered Cloudfall to the carven pillar in the cathedral court and took his way on foot to the banquet-hall of Prince Vladimir, which he entered without invitation, knowing that all wayfarers were welcome to the board of the hospitable Prince.

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As soon as he had passed the threshold, Ilya bowed to North, South, East, and West, and then to Prince Vladimir and Princess Apraxia in particular, thinking that the royal couple would surely have a clear remembrance of all the wonderful things that had taken place on his last visit to their town. But neither the Prince nor the Princess knew him again, and it was as a perfect stranger that Vladimir addressed him.

"What is your name and to which horde do you belong?" he asked; "and have you

any title of degree?"

"Fair Sun Vladimir," said Ilya, who was secretly taken aback at his reception, but determined not to show it, "I am called Nikita from beyond the Forest."

"Welcome, my brave and merry little fellow," said the Prince with great heartiness; "sit down at our board and eat and drink freely. You will find a little room at the lower end of yonder table. I am sorry there is not more room, but your sharp eyes will see at once that I feast to-day a noble company of princes, statesmen, wealthy merchants, and bold warrior-maids as well as sixty great Russian heroes whose adventures have been many."

Now Ilya of Murom the Old Cossák did not relish the tone of the Prince's speech, and felt it a deep humiliation that the conqueror of Nightingale the Robber should break the royal bread at the lower end of the table. His anger rose, and raising his head he cried:

"Fair Sun Vladimir, do you think to place me among the crows while you feast with the eagles? Nay! I will not eat bread with those beneath my degree."

Such a speech from a man who had made no claim to higher rank than that of Nikita from beyond the Forest, who was clearly a nobody, roused in turn the anger of the Prince. He sprang nimbly to his feet, his face as black as a thunder-cloud, and roared like a crowded den of wild beasts:

"Ho, there, ye mighty heroes of Holy Russia! Will you hear yourselves classed with carrion crows? Seize the stranger, but take care that three of you hold each arm, hale him to the courtyard and strike off his head." Then there was a great commotion, and the cooks began to wring their hands, for they knew that if they did not keep the food hot while the quarrel was proceeding, the Prince would need new cooks on the following day.

Three heroes grasped the right arm of Ilya and three heroes grasped his left arm. He waved his right hand and three heroes fell breathless to the floor of red brick; then he waved his left hand and three heroes fell on top of them. Thereupon Vladimir roared out a command that twelve fresh heroes should seize him, but these champions fared like their fellows. Then twelve more rose before him and six more behind; and these met the same fate as the rest.

Meanwhile the cooks had been able to snatch away the dishes from beneath the nose of the angry Prince and were now hurrying away to place them in the ovens. Then they heaved in unison such a sigh of relief that the fire burned as brightly as it burns upon a frosty night.

Ilya strode forth from the banquet-hall and the anger burned fiercely within his breast. When he reached the courtyard he turned about and fitted an arrow to his bow. As he drew the cord he whispered to the shaft, "Fly, my dart, about the princely towers and strike off the spires and crosses of gold from the royal palace." Off went the arrow, but it did not travel by a straight road. It made a circuitous tour of the pinnacles and domes of the stately building, and as it went on its way spire after spire and cross after cross tumbled down upon the pavement. Ilya gathered up these golden trophies, went to the tavern in the market-place and ordered the landlord to bring out his best green wine, for which he would pay with the royal spires and crosses. Then he stood in the doorway and invited all the loafers of the market-place to come and drink the health of Prince Vladimir, who had been good enough, as he grimly remarked, to provide the means of drinking it.

For once the loafers hesitated to lift the green wine to their lips. "What will the Prince do to us in the morning," they asked, "when he finds that we have drunk up all his golden spires and crosses?"

"Drink, my men," said Ilya. "To-morrow I myself will reign as Prince in Kiev town, and ye shall be my chiefs." Then they drank and drank again; but Ilya of Murom did not put the bowl to his lips in such company, for he merely meant to use these men in his determination to win respect and ample apology from the Prince.

In the meantime Prince Vladimir sat at the board with the hungry revellers about him; but he was so deeply wrapped in thought that he did not even notice that the cooks had taken away the dishes. "Who is this who has come to town?" he asked moodily. Then a young nobleman, whose name was Nikitich, sprang to his nimble feet and said, "I have met all the mighty heroes of Holy Russia save one, and that one is Ilya of Murom, who, I have heard, will not die in battle. This wonderful visitor is no Nikita from beyond the Forest. It must be none other than Ilya of Murom the Old Cossák. I fear, my Prince, with all respect to your

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Highness, that you did not know how to pay worthy honour to your guest either at his coming or his going."

The Prince's face lighted up, for the young nobleman who had spoken was the only man in the whole of the company who could read and write, and on that account was privileged to speak his mind when his fellows feared for their heads. "Whom shall we send," asked Prince Vladimir, "to invite the hero to our banquet?" (At these words some of the cooks hurried off to prepare fresh food.) "My royal chamberlain will not know how to address him, and my chief page is like a peacock—only fit to strut about in the sun among the women. Go you, Nikitich, for you can read and write and therefore have supernatural wisdom. Bow down before him, with your forehead upon moist Mother Earth, and invite him by his name and title thrice repeated to honour us with his presence at a worshipful feast.

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"Say that I did not, to my lasting sorrow, recognise him when I placed him at the lower end of the board, but that now I entreat him to honour us with his truly remarkable presence. Tell him that I bear no ill-will for what has passed, and that instead of sitting at the lower end of the board—though there is now more room in that quarter—he shall sit in the great corner near to the Princess Apraxia herself."

Now Nikitich, having learnt to read and write, did not act upon rash impulse, but stood for a few moments looking supernaturally wise and weighed the matter with the utmost circumspection. "Shall I go?" he asked himself. "It may mean sudden death for me at the hands of Ilya. On the other hand, it will certainly mean slow death at the hands of Prince Vladimir if I do not obey. Perhaps I had better go." Then with a low bow to the Prince and another to the Princess, he left the banquet-hall with the step of resolution.

In a few moments he came to the tavern where he saw Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack sitting grimly watching the loafers while they drank the health of Prince Vladimir. "It will be better," said Nikitich to himself, "if I come upon him from behind, for then I shall be able to deliver my message without being put in deadly fear by his eyes of terror." So he approached Ilya from behind as he sat there and, placing his hands upon the hero's mighty shoulders, told him all that Prince Vladimir had said; but being able to read and write, and therefore full of supernatural wisdom, he missed out the sentence about the Prince bearing no ill-will for what had passed.

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Had he been able to watch the face of Ilya as he spoke the Prince's message, Nikitich would have seen a bright gleam of laughter steal into the terrible eyes of the Old Cossack. But when the speech was over, Ilya did not turn his head. "It is well for you, young Nikitich," he said grimly, "that you come upon me from behind. If you had approached me from before, your body would have been dust and ashes before now. Go at once and deliver to Prince Vladimir the following message in answer to his own:

"Let strict orders be issued to all the inn-keepers of Kiev and Chernigof that they invite all who care to come to quaff green wine at the expense of Prince Vladimir; and for those who care not for green wine let vodka, the drink of the peasants, be provided; while those who love neither shall drink sweet mead beloved of fair ladies and their squires. By this all men shall know that Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack who led captive Nightingale the Robber is now come to town. Let the Prince also prepare an honourable banquet and reserve the great corner near the high table for me.

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"Otherwise," continued Ilya, at last turning his head and fixing his heroic eyes on the young man of supernatural wisdom who could both read and write, "otherwise——" But the ambassador of Prince Vladimir did not stay to enquire what would happen. The sight of Ilya's countenance was enough for him, and only the drunken loafers heard the completion of the hero's threat—"the Prince shall reign in Kiev no longer than to-morrow's morn."

Then quickly, quickly, very very quickly, and with lightning speed, ran the wise young man to Prince Vladimir, and quickly, quickly, very very quickly, and with lightning speed, were the "requests" of Ilya complied with. Great crowds drew to the tavern, though they came not to drink but to see the Old Cossack. They were however disappointed, for Ilya had gone, post-haste upon the heels of the envoy, to take his place at the banquet, taking his invitation for granted. But being a true gentleman, he bowed on entering the hall to the North, South, East, and West, and then in particular to Prince Vladimir and Princess Apraxia.

Vladimir rose quickly to his feet and cried with hands extended, "Ho, there, Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack. Here is a place for you beside me, in the great corner near the stove. Or if it please you to sit elsewhere it shall be as you will." So Ilya

sat in the great corner, and before long the cooks and the serving men were passing to and fro like a whirlwind.

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Now, as they sat at meat and as the wine pails freely passed, there happened a very great wonder; for Prince Vladimir turned to pledge Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck, and behold! he no longer sat in the great corner. The Prince rubbed his eyes in astonishment, but the Princess, with a somewhat scornful smile, told him to look for Ilya under the banquet table. Then they looked, but Ilya was not there. So the Prince sent out messengers upon the broad road which ran for forty furlongs to the city of Galich; but Ilya was not upon the broad road, and the only man they met was an old pilgrim who was making his way slowly and painfully to Kiev town. His smock was tattered with use, and a ragged girdle was bound about his waist. His cap was heavy with moisture, his feet were covered with rotten straw, and he leaned so heavily upon a crooked staff that the moist earth squirted out beneath his step.

The ancient pilgrim entered the town and went to the chief inn, where he asked courteously enough for a pail and a half of green wine. "You old grey dog," said the inn-keeper, "we do not trust such as you, nor can we give you green wine without your money." Then the old man took from his neck a cross of gold, wonderfully chased, of great weight, and clearly of as great antiquity. "Take this cross in payment," he said, but not one of the men dared to handle it. Then seeing that the old man was faint for want, the peasants about the place gave each a kopeck that he might have his wine; and when it was brought to him he drank it in a draught and a half and at a breath and a half. Having done this, he climbed upon the stove, lay down as if he were in his mother's cottage, and fell fast asleep.

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Very early in the morning, as the warm red sun arose, the old pilgrim descended from the stove, went down to the cellars, burst open the door with his foot, took a cask of wine under each arm and rolled a third before him with his right great toe. So he came out to the green meadow and then into the market-place, where he shouted out, in a voice wonderfully strong for so aged a pilgrim, "Ho, ye peasants of the village, come to the old man's feast." By this time, however, the men from the tavern were upon him; but though there were many of them they could not take the wine from the old man, so they went to make their complaint to Prince Vladimir.

"Bring him before me," said the royal judge, and they did so. Then the ancient pilgrim raised his eyes, and by means of the smile in the depths of them Vladimir knew him for Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck.

"Plague upon my love of fun," said Ilya, "but these thick-headed varlets are easily imposed upon. Let me pay them for my fun and, Prince, give me work worthy of a hero."

"The time demands a hero's help," said Prince Vladimir, "for my royal city goes in fear by day and passes sleepless nights in terror for Falcon the Hunter, who rides the heavens and can pass over the loftiest barriers to hurl his fiery darts upon every golden pinnacle which rears upward to the sky. Make a barrier, Ilya, upon the road by which he comes, and check him, if you can, with fiery shafts from your magic bow."

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Then Ilya's eyes gleamed with pleasure, and he called for six of the mightiest heroes to help him to form a barrier in the path of Falcon the Hunter; and among the six was Nikitch, the young man of supernatural wisdom who could both read and write, as well as Vaska Longskirt, who was very brave but hampered in his fighting by his voluminous coat in which he defied the white world. The seven made a strong barrier on the road by which Falcon the Hunter took his flight, so strong that no horseman ever so swift could gallop by, nor wayfarer circumvent it; no wild beast could break it, and if a ravening eagle or carrion crow soared above it the fiery darts of Ilya brought it down in a shower of feathers and a rain of blood. "Surely," said Princess Apraxia, whose bright eyes always closed involuntarily as Falcon the Hunter was seen riding upon the clouds, "we shall be safe from the horror that stalks in the darkness by reason of the barrier of Ilya of Murom."

But late that night young Falcon the Hunter passed by, leaping from one low black cloud to another, and with a dazzling smile scorning the barrier of the seven heroes. In the early dawn Ilya went forth and traced the footsteps of his black horse—a blasted pine tree with its heart scorched to charcoal, a tall tower, and several golden pinnacles of the royal pavilion lying upon the bosom of moist Mother Earth. He went back to his brother heroes. "While we slept until the white dawn," he cried in a loud voice, "Falcon the Hunter swept by in his malignity. What a barrier is this of ours! What a fortress! Let us arm ourselves, my friends, and go out upon the steppe to seek this rash intruder whose

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malignant glance causes the Princess Apraxia to close her eyes in fear." Then they sat down in a circle to hold a wise council, having no immediate fear of Falcon the Hunter, who never came to the city of many golden pinnacles while the sun shone broadly upon it.

"Whom shall we send against Falcon the Hunter?" asked Ilya, who did not intend to go himself until the others had failed. "It is of little use sending Vaska Longskirt, for he will get entangled in the tails of his coat. Nikitich must go, and if he finds that Falcon the Hunter is a Russian he shall swear eternal brotherhood with him on behalf of all of us. But if he finds he is an infidel he shall challenge him to mortal combat."

Then Nikitich sprang to his nimble feet, saddled and mounted his good steed, and rode forth to the place where a great river met the dark-grey sea. As he looked along the straight road he saw a rider before him who sat upon his horse with the assurance of youth and victory. His black steed was full of mettle and fresh from the untamed steppe. At each leap he covered a furlong, and the marks which the hoofs of his horse made upon the bosom of moist Mother Earth were as large as a ram or a full-grown sheep. Flames flashed from the mouth of the steed, lighting up the heavy clouds which hung over the dark-grey sea, sparks of blue fire showered from his nostrils, and from his erected ears smoke curled in tiny wreaths which quivered and then vanished in mid-air. The helmet on the head of the hero glowed like fire, and blue rays of light darted from ornaments on his doublet, from his pointed spurs and his stirrups of bright steel. At his left stirrup ran a swift grey-hound, and a fire-eating dragon was chained to the right which sang and whistled with a strange music as the horse and its rider passed on towards the dark-grey sea. From shoulder to shoulder hopped the clear-eyed bird from which Falcon the Hunter took his name, and as it passed it plucked at the long yellow locks of the rider, which streamed upon his shoulders like tongues of living flame.

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The knight sat easily upon the back of his strange steed, and as he rode he amused himself by hurling his bright steel mace towards the lowering clouds which hung threatening over the dark-grey sea. It flashed across the cloudy barrier, making a bright reflection in the heaving water, and then returned obedient to the hand of Falcon the Hunter without touching either sea or land in its flight. As he played, Falcon the Hunter spoke to his wonderful mace: "Lightly as I now whirl this mace aloft, even so lightly will I twirl Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack."

Then Nikitich called out, "Ho, there, Falcon the Hunter! Have you no fear of our barrier?"

Falcon replied over his shoulder, "'Tis not for youths even of supernatural wisdom to pursue me in the open plain. It is high time that you were hiding from me in the deep depths of a feather-bed."

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When Falcon the Hunter spoke, the waters of the sea were troubled, flecks of foam appeared upon the deep, and the shallows were choked with sand. The charger of Nikitich trembled sorely and fell down upon its knees, while its rider sank upon the bosom of moist Mother Earth, where he lay as if in a trance for the space of three full hours. When he awoke, the sun was shining brightly, the waves upon the ocean danced in glee, and the tumbled rack of grey clouds on the horizon was all dispersed and scattered. But Falcon the Hunter was no longer to be seen, for with all his terrors he was afraid of the jolly sun with his broad and welcoming smile.

Nikitich now mounted his charger and rode off at once to report to Ilya the Old Cossack. The old man listened quietly and then said with a sigh, "I grow old, and yet there is none coming after me to take my place." Then he saddled his good charger Cloudfall and sprang upon his back without making any use of the stirrups. On the saddle-strap hung his war club, mighty in weight; on his left hip rested his sharp sword and in his hand he held his silken whip; but for this encounter he placed most reliance upon the fiery darts in the quiver upon his broad back and in the strength of his mighty bow. Thus armed he rode forth into the darkness of the mountains, where he found Falcon the Hunter leaping from summit to summit and rousing the cavernous echoes with his fear-compelling voice. But neither the flashing flames nor the rolling angry accents struck terror to the heart of Ilya, for with a quick movement he shifted his quiver, which was open at both ends, so that the points of the darts pointed heavenwards, and from these points streamed a blue radiance which enveloped the form of the hero like a protecting halo.

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Above the noise of the voice of Falcon the Hunter was heard the voice of the heroic Ilya. "Ho there!" he cried, "Thief, dog, braggart! Why have you passed our barrier without doing reverence to me or asking my leave?" When the

Hunter heard this challenge he turned and rode at Ilya, and for a moment, though only for a moment, the heart of the hero died within him. But with a tightening of the strap of that wonderful quiver, so that even in the fight his fiery darts should point heavenwards, he rushed into the fray. First they fought with their maces until these snapped short at the hilt, but neither fighter was wounded in the least. Then their swords flashed fire until both were splintered, but still neither fighter was wounded in the least. Next they fought with their spears until both were shattered, and even yet neither fighter was wounded in the least. Last of all they lighted down upon the ground and fought hand to hand.

All day they fought, till stormy even, till black midnight, till the grey dawn, and so they did the second day, and likewise the third. Then Ilya waved his right hand, and his left foot slipped from under him. Down he fell like a stack of hay, but as he fell he was able to move his quiver so that the fiery darts with their streaming blue fire pointed directly heavenwards. As he lay there Falcon the Hunter planted himself upon his breast and struck at him with a flashing dagger of steel. But the blow fell upon the upturned points of those wonderful darts and spent itself on the broad bosom of moist Mother Earth.

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“See!” cried Ilya with a grim laugh. “It was foretold of me that I should not die in battle. Oh, brave good youth, tell me from what horde you come and who were your parents.”

“It is time,” growled Falcon the Hunter, “that you should shave your head and go to a monastery.” At this taunt the heart of Ilya grew hot and his blood, still youthful, boiled within him. With a mighty blow of his fist he struck Falcon on his black breast, hurling him skywards, though not so high as the heavy clouds which lowered above the heroic fight. When the Hunter fell once more, Ilya sprang to his nimble feet and sat in his turn upon the breast of his enemy.

“Tell me now, good youth,” he said, “the name of thy land, thy horde, and thy father.”

“When I sat upon thy breast,” growled Falcon the Hunter, “I did not enquire of thee thy land, thy horde, and thy parentage, for these things concern not me, the enemy of all mankind. And if I sat upon it again I would pierce your bosom, pluck out your heart and examine it in mere curiosity, and then scatter the fragments of your white body over the plain, to be torn by the grey wolf and picked by the black crows.”

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Then Ilya asked his enemy no more questions but drew forth his shining dagger of steel; and at the sight of this gleaming weapon the heart of Falcon the Hunter sank within his breast and he gave the answer required of him:

“I come from far across the sea, from the palace of grey stone where the sun has no power to enter, and my mother was the warrior-queen Zlatigorka. The name of my father I do not know. When I left the palace of grey stone my mother, who now is gentle, told me to meet Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack if I could, and having met him to dismount from my horse and do reverence to him, touching my forehead upon the bosom of moist Mother Earth.”

Then the fierce eyes of Ilya grew soft with compassion, and his mind went back to the far-off day when he crossed the deep-blue sea in the strength of his manhood to see the palace of grey stone and to talk with the warrior-queen who ruled there; for he had vowed that he would win the love of that brave Princess and take her as his bride. Now, being a hero, and the maiden a right worthy mate for him, he could not hope, nor would he care, to win the Princess except he had first proved that he was stronger than she; and for a long time the two had striven day after day until at times their hearts were sick of the eternal conflict, yet neither could bring it to an end. Then at last the warrior-queen had weakened and had yielded, and had found more joy in yielding than in conquest; and Ilya had given her his golden ring set with a ruby red as a flaming heart, while she had given him a wondrous cross of gold to wear upon his heroic breast; and the two had lived in the palace of grey stone until a son was born to them and the fighting queen had forgotten her weapons and her warrior strength in her motherhood. Then Ilya had been called away on one of his many quests, and the boy had grown up without his heroic guidance—to become a scourge to his gentle mother and to all mankind. And as he thought on these matters, the heart of Ilya was saddened beyond measure, and stooping over Falcon the Hunter he took him by his white hands, kissed his lips and called him his son, weeping greatly as he looked upon him. Then raising his hands he blessed him and said:

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“Ride, my son, to the margin of the waters, and then cross the grey sea until you come to the palace of grey stone and to your lady mother who lives only in her memories. Greet her lovingly from me, and say that Ilya of Murom the Old

Cossáck keeps her ever in his golden heart.”

Then Falcon the Hunter rose to his feet and prepared to do his father’s bidding. But when he came to the porch of the palace of grey stone these were the words he uttered:

“Ho, there, bold and evil woman! Come forth! Was it indeed the son of a peasant whom you gave me for a father?”

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Then his mother came out upon the porch, and though her face was grey with double grief and she stooped as if she needed the strong arm of a brave man about her shoulders, the undutiful son struck at her with his flashing sword and she fell dead upon the pavement.

Even this piteous sight did not touch the cold and fiery heart of Falcon the Hunter, who shouted out so that the walls of the palace of grey stone rang again, “I go now to give the old peasant, Ilya of Murom, to speedy death.” Thereupon he crossed the grey sea over which the angry clouds were lowering, mounted his charger, and rode quickly towards the fair white linen pavilion of Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck.

Lifting the curtain of the tent, he found his father sleeping and hurled a burning shaft at him; but it struck the wondrous cross of gleaming gold which Ilya wore upon his heroic breast and glanced harmlessly aside, though the mighty blow roused the hero from his slumber. He leapt from his couch, seized his undutiful son by his yellow curls, and laid him lifeless upon the plain. So Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck freed the people of Holy Russia from their fear of Falcon the Hunter, the enemy of all mankind.



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THE ADVENTURE OF THE BURNING WHITE STONE

Ilya of Murom rode Cloudfall across the open steppe. For nigh three hundred years he had ridden, and he wondered at the youthfulness of his heart which constant danger had kept fresh and young. "Ah, old age, old age! Thou hast chased and overtaken even Cloudfall in the open steppe, and like a bleached raven hast alighted on my head—but not on my arm." Then with a youthful gesture he flung out his sword arm, tightened the girth of Cloudfall and gave the rein to the shaggy bay steed.

Away went Cloudfall like the wind, and Ilya as he sat upon him was like the falcon clear. There was no need of bridge or ferryman for this heroic traveller, for good Cloudfall leapt over shining lake and rushing river, quivering bog and reedy swamp. And as they rode they came to a place where three roads met, and there stood a burning white stone on which was inscribed: "*He who rides to the right shall gain great wealth; he who rides to the left shall gain a wife; he who rides straight forward shall gain his death.*" Then Ilya of Murom the Old Cossák halted and stood still with his head bowed in an attitude of the deepest thought.

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"I am an old man," he said to himself, "and have all the wealth I need, for it wearies me to count it. Why should an old man wish for a wife? I will take the straight road though Death should sit athwart it." Then he added, lifting his head with the light of unquenched youth still in his eyes, "It may be that Death and I shall come to grips in one more great adventure."

Then the youthful Old Cossák rode onward for leagues and leagues until at last he entered a gloomy forest into which he advanced for some distance, and then met a band of forty thousand robbers who cast eighty thousand envious eyes (save one, for the chief had lost an eye in a battle) upon the goodly proportions and intelligent appearance of Cloudfall the shaggy bay steed. "In all our lives," they said one to another, "we have never seen such a horse. Halt then, good youth, halt, thou hero of Holy Russia!" And they would have forced him to halt but Ilya said:

"Ho, ye robber horde! Why kill an old man and rob him? I have no money in my wallet save five hundred roubles. The cross of gold upon my breast is worth only five hundred—to any one of *your* company—my cloak of sables about three thousand, my cap and my sandals about five hundred each, my bridle, set with precious stones, about a thousand. My saddle, bordered with eagle feathers,—I hunted that eagle over the blue sea on the way to the palace of grey stone—is priceless and therefore of no value to any of your company. Between the ears of Cloudfall and under his eyes are clear stones of purest jacinth, but he wears these, not for youthful vanity, but because they help him to see for thirty miles on all sides as he bounds across the open steppe. As for my faithful shaggy bay steed Cloudfall, he is worth nothing at all, except to me. Here then is my inventory. Value me I pray you for yourselves."

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The robber leaders jeered as they replied, "Thou art old and talkative, Cossák. Since we took to roaming across the white world, we have never met with such a fool. Why, thou art so foolish that thou hast told us all the clear truth. Seize the old man, my brothers."

But as the robbers advanced upon him, Ilya of Murom drew a fiery dart from his quiver, and fixing it to his terrible bow shot at a tree to his right hand which was the grandmother of all the oaks. The mighty trunk was shivered into fragments, and the earth was ploughed up round about by the force of that tremendous blow, at the sound of which all the robbers fell flat upon the earth, where they lay for the space of five hours before they recovered themselves. And when they arose again to an erect posture the leader said:

"Good youth, noble hero of Holy Russia! Enter thou into comradeship with us. Take from our goodly store whatever pleases you of golden treasure, embroidered cloth, horses and cattle." But Ilya laughed the jolly laugh of the adventurer to whom goods and gear, however rich, are a trouble and a burden. "Ah, brothers, my brave foes," he said, "I have no wish to be troubled with guarding treasure, feeding horses, and tending cows and sheep. I must ride and ride ever onward across the open steppe and leave the guarding of treasure to shop-keepers and merchants who live in towns behind bolts and bars."

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Then Ilya of Murom turned Cloudfall in his tracks, and came again to the burning white stone, from which he erased the inscription and wrote in its place:

I, Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack, have ridden straight forward and have not gained my death.

Once more the aged hero with the heart of youth rode out into the open steppe, turning this time to the left. He rode onward for three hundred miles and then came to a smooth meadow as green as an emerald stone, and upon this meadow stood a wonder of wonders. It was too small to be called a city and too large to be called a village. It was, in truth, a beautiful palace of white stone with roofs of shining gold and strange three-cornered towers.

Ilya drew rein before the golden gateway, whereupon there came forth upon the green sward forty beautiful maidens, who walked proudly behind Princess Zenira the All Fair. Ilya dismounted and bowed low, whereupon the beautiful Princess took him by his white hands, kissed him on the lips, and invited him to a feast in the banquet-hall of the palace of white stone. "I have travelled far in Holy Russia," said Ilya of Murom, "but I have never seen such a fair palace or such beautiful ladies." The maidens bowed their heads, like ears of corn before a gentle breeze, and the Princess led the hero within the palace.

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When they came to the banquet-hall, Ilya bowed to North, South, East, and West, and especially to the Princess Zenira, who placed him at the table of fair white oak in the big corner and brought him food of the best with sweet mead to drink. "Do not eat or drink of these things until you are satisfied, good youth," she said gently, "for there is more to come." But Ilya looked at her as she spoke, and looked at her again, and for a third time he scanned her face and found it beautiful with the beauty of the newly-fallen snow on the wide steppe when the moon rises; that was the beauty of the Princess Zenira. Then Ilya's eyes fell once more upon the fair white oak of the table and he said, speaking as one who knows his meaning, "I have ridden for three hundred miles and my hunger and thirst are as heroic as my steed." So he ate and drank his fill.

Then as his head seemed to droop upon his breast, though in reality he was more wide awake than ever, the Princess Zenira led him to a rich warm chamber at one side of which stood a broad bed of yew wood and ivory with pillows of the softest down.

"Here you will rest as on the lap of your mother," said the fair Princess, "but I advise you to lie near to the brick wall which is warm from the stove beneath." "Nay," said the hero, "I will lie upon the outer edge for I often rise in the night to see for myself that Cloudfall is well stabled." Then without more ado, he seized the fair Princess Zenira by the middle and flung her upon the bed of yew wood against the wall.

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And behold the bed of yew with pillows of softest down was false, for it turned on a pivot when the weight was cast upon the side nearer to the brick wall, and the fair Princess was hurled down into her dungeon, forty fathoms deep. Then Ilya turned and left the chamber, and coming out into the courtyard said in the voice of him who must be obeyed: "Give me the keys of gold which unlock the doors of the dungeon and show me the way to the dark vaults beneath this palace of white stone." So they pointed out the way, and he found it choked with yellow sand and barred with huge logs of wood.

He had really no need of keys of gold, silver, iron, or steel; for in the strength of his heroic anger he tore the locks asunder with his hands and forced back the doors with his heels until they burst from their frames. Then came forth from the dungeons forty Tsars and Tsareviches, forty kings and princes, with their eldest sons, together with Nikitich the youth of supernatural wisdom, who could both read and write, but whose wonderful learning had not made him proof against the wiles of Princess Zenira although her beauty was only that of the newly-fallen snow upon the steppe illumined by the cold rays of the rising moon.

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'It was clear that her fascination still worked upon the hearts of the prisoners'

There stood this great company, blinking their eyes in the light and looking very foolish, and as they hummed and ha'ed and wondered how to explain themselves, the fair Princess Zenira, as beautiful as ever, came round a corner of the dark passage, and her moonlight beauty lit up the darkness of the dungeon. In spite of all their experiences it was clear that her fascination still worked upon the hearts of the prisoners, and seeing this Ilya cried in a voice which shook the vaults until they re-echoed again and again, "Tsars, to your tsardoms; kings, to your kingdoms; Nikitich, to my side; and, being delivered, say a prayer for Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck."

In a few moments the whole company with the exception of Nikitich was racing pell-mell across the emerald meadow, and having dismissed the youth of supernatural wisdom, Ilya advanced sternly upon the fair Princess Zenira. He took her by her lily-white hands and bound her to three Cossáck ponies fresh from the farthest steppe. Then he drove them apart and turned his head that he might not see the end of that white witch; and he divided her treasure among the prisoners, sending each man's share to his kingdom, and gave the fair white palace to the flames.

Once more Ilya returned to the burning white stone, crossed out the old inscription and wrote yet another which ran:

I, Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck, have ridden to the left and have not gained a wife

"I will go now," said Ilya, "upon the last road, where wealth is to be won." So he rode again over the open steppe, and came at length to a green meadow where deep pits were dug, and then to a dark and gloomy forest in which there was a mountain cave filled with fair red gold, white silver, and fine seed pearls; and above the entrance to the cave, in the face of the smooth rock, were carved the words,

"This treasure will fall to Ilya of Murom."

For seven days Ilya sat wondering what he should do to dispose of the treasure. Then he arose and went to the nearest town, where he hired builders and carpenters, architects and workers in metal. These men he set to work to build a fair cathedral on the place where the gloomy forest had stood, and when the glorious building was completed, he instituted church singing and the sound of bells, for in these things his soul delighted. When this work had been finished—and it occupied a fair space of time—Ilya returned to Kiev city, where the courteous Prince Vladimir asked him where he had been.

Sitting down in the great corner near the stove, the old man smiled gently, stretched his feet to the blaze, and told the Prince the Adventure of the Three Roads and of the Burning White Stone. Then he yawned and went to bed in the peace of accomplishment.

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HOW QUIET DUNAI HAD BROUGHT THE PRINCESS APRAXIA TO KIEV

The tale of the wedding of Vladimir and the Princess Apraxia was one which was often told after a banquet; and here it is:

Quiet Dunai was a great traveller, and one who loved to move without turbulence, leisurely and at his chosen ease. From land to land he wandered, both seeing and observing, across the green and open steppe in summer, but resting in the winter within whatever palace of fair white stone he could find a seat in the great corner and hearers who would listen quietly to his traveller's tales.

At last he came to the kingdom of Lithuania, where in the palace of the monarch he served for three years as equerry with the care of the King's horses and chargers; for three more years he served as Grand Steward with the oversight of the great banquets with which the King honoured his nobles; for three more years he served as Groom of the Chambers, and knew all the King's mind. And during all these years he loved, at times somewhat turbulently but yet on the whole quietly and devotedly and faithfully and hopefully, the Princess Nastasya, who in her turn favoured him silently and kept him ever in her golden heart.

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Now, on a certain day, the King of Lithuania made a great feast and invited all his nobles to share his hospitality. Quiet Dunai was very busy with the preparations for the banquet, and on one of his many visits to the King's apartments he happened to meet, quite by accident, the Princess Nastasya. She looked at him quietly and said:

"Go not to this banquet, quiet Dunai, for there will be much eating and more drinking, and when the boasting time comes near the end of the feast you will brag of me."

"I know you will, Dunai," she added gently, and Dunai looked at her quietly, feeling in his heart that what she said could not be denied. "Then they will set upon you, Dunai, and you will lose your head." Hereupon the Princess sighed gently and looked down at the point of her golden slipper. But Dunai, quiet as he was, had no mind to avoid the feast, and declared his intention of being present; and the Princess turned and left him humming a light song which seemed to have lost its merriment.

The feast was held, and when the guests had eaten well and drunk better, then came the boasting time, when quiet Dunai took his turn with the rest, telling of his far wanderings, of the King's favour and rewards, and of how the beautiful young Princess Nastasya kept him ever in her golden heart. Then the King grew very angry and cried out:



'Then the Princess ran with her feet all bare out into the open corridor'

"Ho, there, ye headsmen, seize quiet Dunai by his white hands, lead him out upon the open steppe and chop off his turbulent head."

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Without delay the pitiless headsmen bore down upon Dunai and seized him by the shoulders. "I go without help from you," he said quietly as he shook them off; "but as you lead me to the open steppe see that we pass by the window of the Princess Nastasya, who keeps me ever in her golden heart."

Then there happened a great wonder, and yet it was no wonder at all. Before they had reached the window of the Princess, Dunai said quietly, "Sleepest thou, Nastasya? Wakest thou not? Lo, they are leading Dunai to the open steppe to cut off his loving head."

Now the Princess lay sleeping when the whisper rustled through her casement and woke her very gently. Without delay she rose from her couch and put on a loose robe of fair white linen. But she had no time to fasten round it a girdle of gold, or to bind up her flowing tresses, before she heard the voice of Dunai once more, this time in tones of thunder, "Sleepest thou, Nastasya? Wakest thou not? Lo, they are leading Dunai to the open steppe to cut off his loving head."

Then the Princess ran with her feet all bare out into the open corridor, from which she could see the prisoner and his guards, and stretching out her little hands in piteous entreaty she cried:

"Ho, there, ye pitiless headsmen! Take what treasure you desire, but when you come to the open steppe set free quiet Dunai that he may wander once again. And take back to the King the head of some prisoner who has paid for his crimes with his death—some one, any one except quiet Dunai."

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Then the headsmen made signs to the Princess that they would obey her, and the group passed out to the open steppe where quiet Dunai was set free and wandered on as he had done before he became the officer of the King of Lithuania and loved the Princess Nastasya. On he went, quietly watching until he came to Kiev town, where he went to the inn and entered into conversation with men of the place. From these fellows he learnt that Prince Vladimir was holding a great feast, and that his guests were eating the white swan and drinking green

wine of priceless value.

As it happened, just at that moment the boasting time had come. One man bragged of his horse, another of his valour, a third of his sharp sword, a fourth of his young wife, and a wise man who had not drunk so well, of the goodness of his father and the tenderness of his mother. In time, Prince Vladimir grew weary of their boasting and stood up among them, whereupon all their voices were hushed.

"Boast not, my brothers," he said with a show of impatience. "Glory not in your horses, your great deeds, your golden treasures. Have not I red gold, white silver, and fine seed pearls in great abundance? But in one matter most of you outstrip me. For ye have wives loving and beautiful, while I, your Prince, am still unwed. Is there no Princess who is my mate, and who will wed with me? She must be like a goddess in stature and like a goddess in the perfection of her beauty, of delicate grace, and stately of gait like the peacock. There must be a faint flush in her face like unto the white hare, while her eyes must be falcon clear and full of light. Yellow hair must she have, with eyebrows of blackest sable, and her speech must be entrancing. Then, having found her, I shall have one beside me with whom I may think my deepest thoughts and take counsel, and to whom ye mighty princes, heroes, and all Kiev may pay homage as your queen."

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Then all the guests grew silent, and for a long time no man spoke a word; and as often as the eye of Vladimir sought out one man, he took pains to hide himself behind some one bigger. At length there stood up in his place the bold, brave youth Nikitich, who could both read and write, and said:

"My lord and master, Prince Vladimir, have I leave to speak what is in my mind without fear of speedy death or distant exile or heavy chastisement?"

And Vladimir said, "Say on, Nikitich, and God may forgive you if you speak unwisely."

Then the bold youth said fearlessly:

"I know a fitting mate for you who is all that you have said, a beauty with whom none can compare in all the white world. For myself, I have not seen her, but of her loveliness I have often heard from my comrade, quiet Dunai, who sitteth now in the inn and hath no garments to fit him out for appearance at this honourable feast."

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"Take my golden keys," said Vladimir, "and open my wardrobes. Choose from thence all that quiet Dunai requires of raiment, and bring him to me."

Then Nikitich went out and did all that the Prince had ordered; and as he passed through the streets with quiet Dunai by his side, the maidens and the wives, young and old, put forth their heads from the windows, asking each other across the narrow way, "Whence come such goodly youths as these?"

As soon as they had come into the banquet hall, Dunai bowed to North, South, East, and West, and especially to Prince Vladimir, and they gave him a seat in the great corner by the fair white oaken table. Then they set food and wine before him, and when he had refreshed himself, Prince Vladimir poured out green wine into a crystal goblet from the East with a rim of thick gold and brought it to quiet Dunai, who took the cup in one hand and quaffed its contents at a breath. Then he stood up and said steadily:

"I know a bride fit even to mate with you, Prince Vladimir, the Fair Sun of Kiev. The King of Lithuania has two fair daughters. The eldest, the Princess Nastasya, is no mate for you, for she loves best to ride abroad in the open plain seeking adventures, but her sister, the Princess Apraxia, sits at home in a fair chamber of her palace embroidering a kerchief of white linen with threads of ruddy gold. She sits behind thrice nine locks of cunning workmanship and thrice nine guards in a lofty castle, and the ruddy sun may not scorch her nor the fine and frequent rains drop upon her, nor the stormy winds disarrange her braided locks of yellow gold, while no venturesome breeze may mar the delicate flush in her face like unto the white hare. I have not yet seen her, but I know of her peerless beauty and speak of what I know."

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"Hear ye this, my Russian heroes!" cried Prince Vladimir, while his eyes shone brightly and his face was wreathed in smiles. "Whom shall we send as our royal envoy to far-off Lithuania?"

Then one of the heroes spoke out:

"Prince Vladimir," he said, "we have none of us been in strange lands with

strange customs, nor talked in strange speech with strange people. In a matter where more than strength and goodwill is needed, namely, the wooing of a fair Princess, I doubt that none of your heroes would serve you well. Send quiet Dunai. He has been ambassador to royal courts and has received ambassadors also. He can talk in strange speech as well as fight; let him woo the fair Princess Apraxia for you, and when she comes here, as she surely will, we will eat the white swan and drink green wine in her honour, and crack skulls, too, if she needs such heroic help."

The truth of these words could not be denied, and as the hero who had spoken, suddenly realising that he had made a wise speech, hid in confusion behind his neighbour at the table, Prince Vladimir rose to his feet and said:

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"Go in my name, quiet Dunai, to the far-famed Lithuanian kingdom and woo the Princess Apraxia for me with all the skill at your command."

"I go at your bidding," said quiet Dunai, with a bow, "but it is not fitting that I should go alone."

"Take a great army with you, if you will," said the Prince, "and if the King will not send his daughter with his blessing take her with his curse."

"I need no army," said quiet Dunai, "nor yet rich store of treasure to tempt the King to sell his daughter. Send Nikitich with me. He is my beloved comrade, a man of good birth who knows how to read and write, and therefore understands how to deal with people. Give us only two shaggy colts, fresh from the steppe, which have never borne saddle or bridle, and prepare a parchment scroll setting forth to the King that you desire the Princess Apraxia, not for youthful vanity, but for helpfulness that you may make her your wife, to whom all your thoughts will be made known, and who will share in all your counsels."

These things were done in exact accordance with the wishes of quiet Dunai, who then left the palace in the company of Nikitich. In the courtyard they found awaiting them two shaggy colts, fresh from the steppe, which had never borne saddle or bridle. Upon these they fitted plaited bridles of many-coloured silks and saddle-cloths of silk, not for youthful vanity but for ease to their steeds. Over these they laid thick felts, and then their saddles of stout leather secured by twelve girths with silver buckles, while the buckles of the stirrups were of fine ruddy gold.

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Then they dressed themselves in silken robes and Saracen caps, took up their maces of steel from Damascus, their mighty bows, and their silken whips, and, mounting their frisky chargers, rode quickly through the narrow streets of Kiev city. Before long they came to the outskirts and then out upon the open plain, when they urged on their shaggy steeds, spurring them gently and persuading them further with their whips of braided silk. Past deep lakes they rode and through dense forests, crashing through the undergrowth where the hoof of horse had never trodden, until they came at last, and after a long journey, to the brave land of Lithuania and the royal palace of its King.

Quiet Dunai asked no leave of guards, porters, or gate-keepers, but flung the barriers wide and led the horses into the spacious courtyard, where they dismounted. Leaving Nikitich on guard over the chargers, Dunai took the bridles in his left hand, and in his right his club of elm-wood.

"Stand there, Nikitich," said quiet Dunai, "and look steadfastly towards the hall of royal audience. When I call, come!"

Then quiet Dunai crossed the courtyard and went into the hall of royal audience, where he found the King sitting upon his throne, and said to him in a quiet tone:

"Hail, little father, King of brave Lithuania!"

"Hail, quiet Dunai!" said the King. "Whither do you wander? Have you come to fight against us or to serve us as before? But before you answer, eat your fill and drink all that you need." Then he set him in the great corner, and when he had refreshed himself somewhat hastily, Dunai said:

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"My errand is peaceful, little father. I come on behalf of the Fair Sun, Vladimir of Kiev, to woo your daughter the Princess Apraxia." Then he laid the parchment scroll upon the table, and the King spelled out a little of it, a little and no more, but that was enough to make him tear in anger at the black curls upon his forehead and stamp his feet upon the floor of red brick.

"Stupid and dolt is Prince Vladimir of Kiev, who sends as his envoy such a slave as you. Ho there, my merciless jailors! Seize quiet Dunai by his white hands and by his flowing curls, and lead him down to the deepest dungeon. Shut him in, bar

the door, heap up against it logs of wood and iron gratings, and then over all pile up the yellow sand. Feed him on frozen oats and let him drink cold spring water until he returns to his senses."

Quiet Dunai hung his head for a moment, and dropped his clear eyes to the floor of red brick. Then he raised his white hand and smote the table with his fist so that the wine was spilled, the dishes rolled upon the floor, the tables tumbled down and the pillars of the hall leaned this way and that, while the roof groaned and creaked. The servants of the King fled this way and the other, while their master gathered up the skirts of his royal robe and ran at great speed up the winding stairway to the top of his lofty tower, never pausing even to take a deep breath until he was safely hidden beneath a thick rug of marten skins.

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Then quiet Dunai took one light leap over the King's golden chair, seized one of the stout attendants by the heels, and using him as a club, began to slay the rest. "This club is tough," he said quietly but a little grimly to himself, as he went on with his work. "He will not break. He is wiry and will not tear." Then raising his voice he called through the window, "Ho, there, Nikitich!" and the young man entered the hall, snatched up another attendant by the heels, and began to assist quiet Dunai in the first part of his strange wooing of the Princess Apraxia.

But by and by the two friends heard the voice of the King through the window of the topmost apartment of his lofty tower. "Ho, there, quiet little Dunai!" he cried. "Forget not my kindness towards you of old. Let us sit again together, you in the big corner, to discuss the wooing of Prince Vladimir. Take my elder daughter the Princess Nastasya, for I know little of her seeing that she loves adventure on the open steppe, and I shall not miss her so much."

"I will not," said quiet Dunai, and went on with his work, Nikitich also ceasing not to assist him.

"Take, then, the Princess Apraxia," cried the King in great haste, and the two friends paused to gather breath. Then quiet Dunai went to the great castle and began to knock off the thrice nine locks, and to force open the doors. He entered the tower with the golden roof and came to the apartment where the Princess Apraxia was pacing to and fro clad in a fine robe without a girdle, her golden hair all unbound and her feet all bare.

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"Hail, Princess," said the royal envoy, bowing courteously, "and pardon my coming without announcement. Will you wed with Prince Vladimir, the Fair Sun of Kiev?"

"For three years," said the Princess, "have I longed and prayed that Vladimir might be my husband." Then quiet Dunai took her by the small white hands, kissed her golden ring, and led her at once into the courtyard where they met the King.

"Take with the Princess," he said, "her royal dowry," and he gave immediate orders for the loading of thirty wagons with red gold, white silver, and fine seed pearls. Then the Princess arrayed herself, and coming forth again rode away with the goodly youths over the smiling, far-reaching, green and open plain; and as they rode she sang softly to herself of love and freedom and a fair white throne.

When the dark night fell the two youths set up a white linen pavilion, in which the Princess Apraxia rested, while they lay down near the entrance with their shaggy steeds at their feet, their sharp spears at their heads, their stout swords at their right hands and their daggers of steel at their left. Both slept, for their steeds were their sentinels, and the dark night passed by with nothing seen except the stars, nothing heard except the rustle of the breeze round the curtains of the fair white linen bower of the Princess Apraxia.

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While it was still early morning they arose, and were setting out again upon their way, when, looking back, they saw a Tatar horseman in pursuit of them, his steed all bespattered with the mire of the plain. When Dunai was aware of this, he sent Nikitich forward to Kiev town with the Princess Apraxia, but remained himself to meet the bold adventurer, who surely had not heard how quiet Dunai had wooed the Princess Apraxia for his royal master.

In the midst of the plain the combatants met, and, without taking time to observe each other closely, but each taking the other for an accursed Tatar, they fell to resounding blows. In a few moments quiet Dunai was unhorsed, but he sprang at once to his nimble feet and fought his foe with mace and spear and sword, until he laid him prone upon the broad bosom of moist Mother Earth. Then quiet Dunai drew his dagger:

"Tell me now," he said, as he brushed the dew of onset from his eyes with his left sleeve, "the name that you bear and the name of the accursed horde from whence you come."

"If I sat on *your* white breast," said the stranger, "I would not ask your name and horde, but would stab you to the heart." Then quiet Dunai raised his dagger and would have pierced the heart of his foe, but with his will, or without his will, his arm stiffened at the shoulder and that blow never fell, for now he saw in the prostrate figure before him the form of a woman—while the fallen headgear revealed the parted, flowing hair and the low brow of the Princess Nastasya who loved quiet Dunai and kept him ever in her golden heart. [98]

Without a word of speech, but with a heart full of deep and tender reproach, quiet Dunai took Nastasya by her lily-white hands, and raising her to her nimble feet, looked at her until he knew of her forgiveness and then kissed her sugar mouth. "Let us go," he said quietly, "to Kiev town and take the golden crowns." Then he placed her upon his good steed, took from her the mace of steel and the sharp sword which she bore, and, mounting behind her, rode onward to the city of Prince Vladimir.

"I came to seek my sister," said the Princess, as if suddenly remembering the cause of her ride.

"You shall find her in Kiev town," said Dunai, "and there she and Prince Vladimir will also take the golden crowns."

Then Nastasya spoke no further, for she was too contented for speech, and they rode ever onward across the open steppe, the glorious far-reaching, sun-lit, boundless plain.

Thus they came to Kiev town, and went at once to the great church. In the outer porch they met Prince Vladimir and the Princess Apraxia who had also come thither to take the golden crowns. The sisters greeted each other with love, and the company went into the dim coolness of the great church and up to the high altar where a priest awaited them. And there Prince Vladimir was wedded to the Princess Apraxia while the singing boys held the golden crowns above their heads, and quiet Dunai was wedded to the Princess Nastasya while the singing boys held in turn the golden crowns above their heads; and when that was done the whole company went to the palace of Prince Vladimir, where such a feast was laid as had not been prepared since the coming of the Prince to his royal city; and quiet Dunai sat in the great corner. [99]

For three years they lived in mirth and joy, the Princess Apraxia keeping to her palace, her fine embroidery and her household and knowing all her husband's thoughts; the Princess Nastasya sharing her husband's life of quiet wandering, both of them being quite content in the summer with the life on the boundless steppe and in winter returning to the palace of white stone in fair Kiev city.

Then Prince Vladimir made another great feast, and when it came to the boasting time quiet Dunai bragged with the loudest:

"In all this royal city," he said, "there is no such hero as quiet Dunai. From the land of Lithuania he carried away two white swans of glorious plumage, one of whom he took for himself while he gave away the other with ungrudging hand."

The Princess Nastasya looked at him, and a world of wisdom was in her glance. "Your boast is emptiness, Dunai," she said. "I have not dwelt long in this city, but I have learnt much. There are handsomer, braver, more courteous heroes in Kiev town whom I could name. Neither in deeds nor promise are these men lacking, and, apart from them, even I, the wife of a boaster, have some skill with the bow. Let us take a stout bow and set up a sharp dagger on the open steppe a mile away, and before the dagger a silver ring. Then let us shoot through the ring of silver at the sharp dagger in such a skilful way that the shaft may fall into two equal parts against the dagger, into two parts exactly equal both to the eye and to the discerning hand which can tell weight from weight." [100]

Thereupon quiet Dunai was very angry, but he said steadily, "It is well, little Nastasya. Let us go to the open steppe, set up a sharp dagger a mile away with a silver ring before it, and shoot our fiery darts as you have said." So they went out to put the matter to the trial. Nastasya shot a flaming arrow, which passed through the ring as through the open air, fell upon the sharp blade and was cut into two parts exactly equal both to the eye and to the discerning hand. Then quiet Dunai shot a flaming arrow, and it sped too far; he shot a second, and it sped not far enough; he shot a third, which came not near the silver ring and was not seen again. Then he shot a fourth into the breast of Nastasya, and she fell upon the open plain where she had loved to wander.

And still in the moment of her death she loved quiet Dunai and kept him ever in her golden heart. "Forgive, my lord, my foolish woman's words," she said, "and tend with care the son of mine whom I leave in Kiev town, for such a boy is not to be found in all the world. His little legs are silver to the knee, his arms to the elbow are of purest gold; upon his open forehead glows the fair round sun, upon his golden head glitter countless stars, and at the back of his head the bright moon shineth." So she spoke in her death-pain, and the heart of quiet Dunai burned within his breast for deep grief and scorching remorse and torturing pity. "Where the white swan fell," he said, "there shall fall the falcon bright."

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Then he placed the handle of his sword in the bosom of moist Mother Earth and fell with his white breast upon the sharp point. And from that spot far away across the boundless plain flowed two gently wandering streams. The greater was the Dnieper, deep and full and quiet, yet resistless in its noiseless might, which ran past Kiev town; the lesser was the Dwina, which flowed to the kingdom of Lithuania. And where the two streams met, two cypress trees sprang up, and their branches twined lovingly together, whispering when the breeze arose in tender tones of love and pity of the steadfastness of the Princess Nastasya, who loved quiet Dunai and kept him ever in her golden heart.



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THE STORY OF NIKITICH AND MARINA

The day of the birth of Nikitich had been a day of trouble for wide distances across the open steppe. For upon that wonderful day a great storm seemed to

arise, and yet not a great storm but a strange commotion, unseen, unheard, but keenly felt. From far across the open plain came a herd of beasts, wild beasts and fearsome dragons large and small, and sought the shallow valley of the Dnieper river. At their head ran the Skipper-beast, with woolly fleece, twisted horn, and hoofs which struck sparks from the pebbles of flint. Then the waters of the Dnieper were strangely troubled, the banks of the river quaked and fell, and trees which once had waved upright now spanned the stream. Such had been the day of the birth of Nikitich.

Now when he grew up to youthful manhood, Nikitich sought service in the royal household of Prince Vladimir, and though he was of supernatural wisdom, having learnt to read and write, he served with the rest, for three years in the palace, for three years in the royal gardens, and for three years as keeper of the gate; but for all his faithful service he won no praise of Vladimir and no reward except a horse of the finest mettle, and he was kept always within the confines of the royal palace. But at a certain princely banquet Nikitich rose to his feet in his place at one end of the oaken board, and said:

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“Prince Vladimir, Fair Sun of royal Kiev, I have served thee long and faithfully, but always within the confines of the royal palace. Give me leave to wander farther, and first of all through the narrow lanes of Kiev town.”

“Young nestling,” said Prince Vladimir, “fly not from the nest. Young colt of the open steppe, gallop not away.” But the heroes of Holy Russia who sat at the board of Prince Vladimir had pity upon the young man and they said, “Go, Nikitich, and ask your mother.” Then Vladimir laughed and gave the young man leave.

And the counsel of the mother of Nikitich ran thus:

“Walk at will through all the streets of Kiev town and roam through all the little by-ways. But avoid a certain little lane where dwells the Princess Marina, for she is a witch of the vilest who has brought to their death many Tsars and Tsareviches, Kings, and Crown Princes, nobles and their heirs. If you go near the Princess Marina you will lose your life.”

But, sad to tell, the counsel had this effect upon the young man, that he longed most of all to go to the certain little lane where dwelt the Princess Marina.

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On the next day he rose very early and washed himself very white in clear water from the spring. Then he took his stout bow in his hand and slung his quiver of gleaming arrows upon his back. He wandered on through the streets and narrow lanes and came at length to a certain little lane where he found the palace of the Princess Marina. It was finely built and richly adorned, while in the window of one apartment sat a mated pair of dark-blue doves cooing lovingly with yellow bill to yellow bill and wing enfolding wing. Then Nikitich fitted a flaming arrow to his stout bow and shot at the cooing doves, but as the shaft was leaving the string his left foot slipped and his right hand shook so that the arrow missed the loving birds, went singing through the lattice-window and slew the favourite of the Princess Marina who was known as the Son of the Dragon and was known for nothing good.

“If I go into the palace,” said Nikitich to himself, “I shall lose my head. If I do not go, I shall lose my arrow.” So he called to his page, who always walked or stood three paces behind him, and sent him into the palace to seek for the arrow.

“Thou witch and sorceress,” said the bold page to the Princess, “return to us our burning arrow.”

“Nay,” said Marina, “let him who sent it come to ask for it.” And when this was told to Nikitich he ran quickly into the courtyard of the palace and from thence to the apartment of the Princess Marina and took the shaft from the body of the Son of the Dragon. Marina lay upon a couch which was covered with a broad mantle of marten skins and fondled a fiery dragon with her right hand, while she played with two poisonous serpents with her left. As soon as Nikitich entered the room she sprang to her nimble feet and stretched out her lily-white hands to him:

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“Sweet Nikitich,” she said looking at him with honey eyes and sugar lips, “stay with me always and I will teach you to calm the fiery dragon and charm the poisonous serpent. You shall rest all day and no foe, however powerful, will be able to harm you.”

“Sweet Marina,” answered the young man, who was really in a very great hurry, “I will not. I have no desire to calm the fiery dragon and charm the poisonous serpent but to fight and kill them. Nor would rest without labour have any

charms for me. Besides I know your guile, for you have brought nine brave Russian heroes to their end and now are minded to put an end to me." Then he turned abruptly from the apartment in spite of all the sweet glances of Marina, who was really very lovely, and went home again to his mother with his fiery dart in his hand.

As soon as he was gone, Marina seized her dagger, and from the clay floor of the apartment she hacked out the footprints of Nikitich. Then she painted the pieces of earth with many devices in various colours and said her verses over them as she placed them in an oven to bake:

"Burn ye footsteps of Nikitich, burn in this oven, burn, burn; and as his footsteps burn may his heart burn to return to me."

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'Marina lay upon a couch ... and fondled a fiery dragon with her right hand'

Now as the witch spoke these words Nikitich felt a strange longing and uneasiness fall upon his spirit. He sat down at night by the fair white oaken table but he could eat no food; when he went to rest he could not sleep but lay tossing about and waiting with impatience for the coming of the white dawn. At the first bell for prayers he rose, dressed himself, went first to the cathedral service, and then took his way to a certain little lane in Kiev town where lived the Princess Marina.

He entered the apartment of the Princess slowly and with downcast eyes; but she turned her white shoulders upon him and did not reply to his greeting.

"Ah, sweet Marina," said the enchanted youth, "I have come to stay with you always, for since yesterday I have had no peace of mind apart from you."

"I asked you yesterday to stay with me, Nikitich," said the enchantress, "and you would not. So now you are in my power. If I wish, I can turn you into a raven, a magpie, a pig, or a heroic ox with golden horns, silver hoofs, and a coat as sleek as velvet, or even into a loathsome frog. And if I change you into a frog no power on earth or in the sky or in the sea, or in the underworld can change you again so that your spiteful mother will know you."

Then by a slight movement of her lily-white hand she turned the young man into a heroic ox with golden horns, silver hoofs, and a coat as sleek as velvet. And she drove him out into the open steppe to drink swamp water and to eat marsh grass and to be lord over the nine brown oxen which had once been Russian heroes, strong and mighty. Now as he roamed about the plain not far away from the dwellings of Kiev, he saw a flock of geese which belonged to his aunt; and wickedness entered into his heart, so that he trampled the whole gabbling flock to death down to the very last gosling. Then the goose-girls went to their mistress and with much shaking of dark locks and heaving of white shoulders they told their tale.

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As soon as they had finished their story the swan-keepers came with a similar tale, and then the shepherds, and after these the herdsmen. Not a living creature of all the flocks and herds had the golden-horned monster spared.

"I know," said the aunt of Nikitich, "whence comes this fierce beast. It is my well-beloved Nikitich whom the vile witch Marina has changed by her sorcery." Even as she spoke the horse-keepers came to tell how the animal had driven the steeds before him so that all had been lost far over the open steppe, dispersed and driven away many miles from Kiev city. Then the aunt of Nikitich rose in white anger, and by means of a secret charm she knew she changed herself into a chattering magpie and flew away to the palace of Marina, where she perched herself upon the sill of the lattice-window and began to scold with all her might and to say:

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"Wicked Marina, the ugly! Why have you turned my nephew Nikitich into a golden-horned heroic ox, and set him free to roam across the open steppe? Take off your charm from my nephew or I will turn you into a long-tailed dog to be chased through the lanes of Kiev by the children, or into a chattering magpie full of guile and spleen."

Now at the game of changes no one could excel Marina, and when she heard the threat of the aunt of Nikitich she changed herself into a grey swallow and flew over the head of the chattering magpie far away across the open steppe. After a long flight she came to the golden-horned heroic ox, and alighting upon his head said in his ear:

"Promise me now, Nikitich, promise me with a great oath that you will take the golden crowns with me, and I will turn you back into your own shape again. Swear now, for you have roamed the wild steppe and must needs be weary, and have wandered far by the bubbling marshes and must needs be tired."

"Ah, sweet Marina," said Nikitich, glancing upward with a piteous look, "only deliver me from the form of this heroic beast and I will take the golden crowns with you. I will marry you, Marina, and will teach you the little lessons which a wise husband imparts to an obedient wife for her advantage."

Then Marina believed him and turned him into a goodly youth as he had been when he first entered her apartment in search of his fiery dart; and she changed herself into a lovely bride, but she could not change the emerald hue of her eyes.

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"Now I will wed you, Marina," said the wise Nikitich. "Round this bush we go, three times round this willow bush, and then you may call Nikitich your husband if you will." So round the bush they went, hand in hand, three times round the willow bush, while the eyes of the beautiful bride gleamed greener than ever before.

So the bride and bridegroom came, side by side, to the palace of Marina, where Nikitich called to one of the servants:

"Ho, there, bring me a cup of green wine, and a sword of damascened steel, sharp and bright."

At these words the witch bride put forth her spells again and turned her bridegroom into a little ermine and began to frighten him. Then she turned him into a falcon, but by her witchcraft she was able to prevent him from flying anywhere except round and round her head.

"I cannot fly like the falcon clear," said Nikitich, "I can only flap my wings up and down. Give me, I beg of you, a cup of green wine to drink."

Then as if to delight her own eyes and tease him still further, the witch bride turned him once more into a goodly young man who shouted out again:

"Ho, there, bring me a cup of green wine and a sword of damascened steel, sharp and bright."

Once more Marina raised her lily-white hands and began to perform her enchantments. But before she could change her bridegroom again the servant stood at his side with the cup of wine in one hand and the sword in the other. Nikitich set aside the wine and taking the sword in his hands cut off the head of Marina with one sharp stroke.

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In the morning, as the young man went to his bath, a great company of princes and nobles met him in the passage:

“Hail, Nikitich,” they cried courteously. “How is it with your bride?”

“Hail, princes and nobles, heroes and courtiers of Vladimir,” said the young man with a jolly laugh. “Last night I was wedded and no longer alone. This morning I am alone and no longer wedded, for I have cut off the head of my troublesome bride, who had brought to their death many heroes and princes of Holy Russia.”

Then he went to his bath, and returning to the court of Vladimir was given a seat in the great corner while he told his wonderful adventure. “There is no need,” said the Prince, “to cross the boundless plain for strange happenings, for to the adventurous the adventure may come in a narrow lane.”

But in spite of the words of his Prince, Nikitich now longed to roam the open plain to seek fresh adventures. So he set out on the very next day and wandered on and on until he came to a wide-spreading oak on which a pied raven, half of whose wings were white, sat croaking, croaking, croaking. So harsh was its voice that Nikitich strung his bow, fitted a flaming arrow to the cord and prepared to shoot the croaking bird. But as he did so the raven put its head on one side and spoke to him in the speech of Holy Russia.

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“Hail now, little Nikitich, the adventurer. Do not kill me and I will make known to you all kinds of secrets. Do not the little ones of the lanes and streets say to one another, ‘There is no wisdom in killing an old man, and he who shoots a raven makes no broth.’ Now that I see your bow unstrung I will tell you something worth knowing in return for your forbearance. By the lofty mountain across the steppe there are three wonders, even three marvellous damsels. The first is a lily for whiteness, the second is a rose for redness, and the third is a violet for darkness. More beautiful are they than the spring flowers on the steppe. How is this for an adventure on a fine morning for Nikitich the slayer of dragon brides?”

Now Nikitich had succeeded so well in his first adventure that he was burning to try a second. So he lowered his bow and reflected a little before he spoke. Then he said:

“What you have quoted of the children’s wisdom must be true and I will try the adventure. It is better to go to the lofty mountain and see with my own eyes the lily, the rose, and the violet, those three marvels of beauty, than that I should prove my valour by shooting a raven.” Then the pied bird flew away, croaking, croaking, croaking.

Nikitich turned his horse and rode, quickly, very quickly, very, very quickly, and with heroic speed, towards the lofty mountain far away across the open steppe, and at the foot of this mountain he found a pavilion of fair white linen embroidered with gold. “This is a fitting dwelling for three marvellous damsels,” said the young man to himself, “the first a lily for whiteness, the second a rose for redness, and the third a violet for darkness. But it seems to me that either they are not at home or they have locked up their beauty very securely;” for the entrance to the pavilion was secured by a stout bar on which was a lock of damascened steel. The young man alighted, spread fine wheat for his horse near the entrance of the pavilion, planted his spear in the bosom of moist Mother Earth, and went forward to look more closely at the lock, upon which he found this inscription:

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“Whoso enters this pavilion shall not come thence alive.”

This was, of course, a direct invitation to an adventurous youth, and with one blow of his fist Nikitich struck the lock from its place and it fell to the earth at his feet. Then he removed the beam and pushed his way into the pavilion, where he saw tables set with food of the richest and wine of the greenest. He looked round warily, his hand upon his sword, and even searched beneath the tables, but found neither hero nor damsels in all the place. So he sat down at one table and ate well and drank too well, for as soon as he was satisfied he began to throw food and wine about the floor. When he was weary of this foolish exercise, he lay down to sleep.

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For a long time he slept, dreaming of lilies, roses, and violets, and knew not that

even as he slumbered the owner of that fair pavilion was speeding across the open steppe. This was the hero Alyosha of the court of Prince Vladimir, who arrived breathless to find a steed feeding quietly before his pavilion, and a sleeper within who had eaten well and drunk too well and then had thrown food and wine about the floor.

Now at this sight Alyosha grew very angry, and his turbulent heart boiled within him. His pointed spear was in his hand, and in a moment his anger suggested to him that he could easily punish Nikitich for his fault. But he put aside the idea with disgust, for he was a hero and a gentleman. "I shall win no honour," he said to himself, "if I kill a sleeping man who is no better than a dead one." Then he reflected for a few moments, smiled gently, went out of the pavilion and mounted not his own horse but the good steed of Nikitich.

Holding his spear reversed, he rode into the pavilion and struck the sleeper on the breast with the butt end of it. Nikitich sat up suddenly, sprang to his nimble feet, from which he had cast his shoes before falling asleep, and grasping his mace in his right hand prepared to defend himself against all comers. Then a stern fight began within the pavilion to the sound of tumbling tables, breaking crockery and crashing glass. All day they fought without ceasing even to snatch up a bite of food; all night the fight went on with never a draught of wine to slake their thirst. For two more days and two more nights the combat continued, and then there came a clap of thunder loud enough to wake Svyatogor from his sleep among the Holy Mountains.

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Now Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack heard that sound and he said to himself, "Somewhere in the white world Russian heroes are fighting one another. That is not well, for their strength must be kept for battle with accursed Tatars."

So he saddled his good steed Cloudfall, and those who watched his preparations for his ride saw him mount, but they did not see him as he rode, so quickly sped the shaggy bay steed across the open steppe. In a short space of time he came to the lofty mountain, and entering the pavilion saw the two young men fighting amidst the remnants of a feast. Then he seized Nikitich by his right hand and Alyosha by his left and shouted in a heroic voice, "Why fight *against* each other, ye heroes of Holy Russia?"

Alyosha was the first to speak. "Ah," he said, "thou Old Cossack, Ilya of Murom, how could I refrain from punishing Nikitich? For I prepared a banquet within my own pavilion and this fellow unbarred the door, sat down by himself to eat well and drink too well, and then scattered the rich food and green wine about the floor!" As he spoke, the voice of Alyosha rose higher and higher with indignation until the last words were like the scream of a peacock in the garden of the Princess Apraxia.

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"You did well, Alyosha," said Ilya with a fatherly smile about his lips, "for a man is no man who is not able to defend his own. And as for you, Nikitich, how does it stand with your case?"

"I could do nothing in honour but fight," was the reply. "For the inscription on the lock denied life to those who entered this pavilion. It was but an invitation to an adventurer from the court of Vladimir."

"You did well, Nikitich," said Ilya with a deep laugh in his eyes, "to defend yourself against such odds, for a hero is no hero who is not able to defend his own." Then he paused and looked at both of the combatants, who presented a sorry spectacle. After that he looked round about the wrecked pavilion which had been intended as a place of entertainment for heroes and bold warrior maids.

"It will be well, Nikitich," he said quietly, "if you stay to be invited to the next feast that is laid in this pavilion, and well for you, Alyosha, if you do not tempt brave men by forbidding them. Come now, calm your heroic turbulent hearts and swear brotherhood with exchange of crosses." Then the two heroes swore eternal friendship with the exchange of crosses, and they all set out for the court of Vladimir, who when he saw them and heard their story laughed in his beard.

"It is not wise, Nikitich," he said, "to expect to win a bride in each day's adventure."

Then they went in to supper, and Ilya of Murom sat in the great corner that night and it was he who told the tale.

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HOW THE COURT OF VLADIMIR RECEIVED A VISITOR FROM INDIA THE GLORIOUS

From far beyond the deep blue sea, from India the Glorious, came Lord Diuk the son of Stephen. Like a white hawk his ship skimmed lightly across the heaving waters, and like a white ermine coursing he rode across the boundless open plain. As he rode jauntily onward his bow-case and his quiver beat against his hips, and like a flaming arrow from that same bow was the speed of his good steed, Rough-Coat. His helmet and his armour were of gleaming silver, his shirt of mail, close fitting, was of ruddy gold woven in chains as fine as silk from Samarcand. When he came to a river he asked for no bridge or ford, for Rough-Coat leapt from shore to shore at a single bound.

Now as Lord Diuk rode onward he hunted, and the foxes, martens, eagles, geese, white swans and downy ducks knew and told each other by their cries that a practised hunter was abroad. When an arrow sped from his bow a shaft of light seemed to rend the heavens, and where the flaming darts fell to earth a radiance streamed as from the pale cold moon shining across the white world of the snowy steppe. He shot three times a hundred arrows and three times one, and though he found the three hundred shafts he did not find the three; and this appeared to him to be a very great wonder.

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“The three arrows which I have lost,” he said to himself, “are of priceless value. They were made of the graceful reeds and were covered with gold beaten finer than the parchment of the holy monks, and set with precious stones so that in their flight they shone like the rays of the sun at early dawn. The feathers were those of the blue-grey eagle, which is swifter in its flight than all the birds of the air, and flies across the deep blue sea to visit its eyrie on the tall burning white stone which flashes for a thousand miles. Its feathers are hard to come by, being more precious than satin or cut velvet, or silk from Samarcand.”

Thinking deeply and somewhat depressed at his heavy loss, Diuk once more mounted Rough-Coat and gave him the rein for home. As he sped onward he overtook a company of one and thirty wandering pilgrims, and reining in his horse demanded:

“Ho, there, you greybeards, are you thieves or robbers or travellers, midnight prowlers or plunderers of churches?”

Then the psalm-singers replied:

“Young Diuk, we are neither thieves, nor robbers, prowlers nor plunderers of churches, but pilgrims on the long journey from Kiev town to India the Glorious.”

“Is the journey long?” asked Diuk in a more respectful tone.

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“We have indeed come a long way from Kiev town,” was the quiet answer. “It is a journey of a year on foot and then three months on the bosom of the deep blue sea.”

With a low reverence to the holy pilgrims, Diuk rode to his home, which he reached in a short space of time; and on the next day after having been to vespers he sought out his lady mother.

“Mother mine,” he said, “must I stay always at home engaged in childish pursuits while my manhood calls me, calls me ever and ever more loudly across the boundless plain? I ought to ride with head aloft and shoulders squared upon my dapple bay steed Rough-Coat, and prove my manhood by my fearless deeds. I have seen some fair cities, but never have I seen Kiev the Great nor beheld with my own eyes the beauty of the Princess Apraxia whom all men praise. Give me leave, lady mother, leave and your good blessing, and let me go to Kiev town at once and now.”

Then the mother's heart grew tender, and in her eagerness to keep him by her side she magnified the dangers of the way and thus, all unknowing, added to his eagerness to go.

"Alas, my dear son," she said, "you have not yet ridden far across the boundless plain nor heard the roar of the wild beast and the fierce cry of the accursed Tatar. Never will you return in safety from the dangers of the open steppe. As for Kiev, the city of Vladimir, the people of that place are not worthy to keep company with such as you. They will look upon you as a purse to be picked, for they are traders, sons of merchants, traffickers in goods which your forefathers would win with sword and mace and lance. I will not give you leave and blessing to go to the Court of Vladimir, that ruler of shop-keepers."

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Diuk's eyes had gleamed as his mother spoke of the way in which his ancestors had won their wealth; and seeing this she tried another course.

"Besides," she went on quickly, "there are three great barriers on the way to Kiev city. The first is the barrier of the moving mountains, which clash together and catch the unwary traveller in their strong grip. The second is the barrier of the ravenous birds, which will tear thee and thy good steed to a thousand pieces. The third barrier is the Mountain Dragon with twelve tails, each with a sting in it. He will devour you if indeed you have been fortunate enough to pass the clashing mountains and the ravenous birds."

Each fresh terror which she described added to the young man's eagerness to set out upon the journey to Kiev town; and having done reverence to his weeping mother he went to the stable and combed the coat of his faithful steed with a fine comb of fishes' teeth, as well as the mane and tail, which brushed the bosom of moist Mother Earth as he passed on his flight and swept away all traces of his hoofs. Then he saddled his good horse and plaited bright jewels in his mane, standing off to admire his handiwork, speaking meanwhile to the animal in human speech; and in human speech the horse replied to him saying:

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"Tear not my sides with spurs, dear master; lash me not with your whip of silk; tighten not the bridle upon my faithful head; but when I speed cling to my mane and fear not when I leap from mountain-top to mountain-top, when I clear a great lake at a bound and a river at an easy jump. So shall I be your friend and helper as was Cloudfall to Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack."

Then Diuk prepared himself for the heroic journey and went to say farewell to his lady mother, who had wept till her eyes were bright again, and she was ready to give both leave and blessing to her bold and fearless son. She gave him also a warning. "My dear son," she said, "when you come to Kiev town and to the Court of Prince Vladimir and he makes a banquet in your honour, boast not of your wealth, or of me your mother." Then she kissed him upon his honey mouth and he rode away with happy heart. They saw him as he mounted Rough-Coat but they did not see him as he rode, so swift was his flight—it was only a wreath of smoke, a pillar of dust far off upon the boundless plain, and he was gone.

Now in due time he came to the first barrier of the moving mountains, which, of course, could not always be meeting, but must also part to meet once more; and watching for the time when they parted, Rough-Coat darted between them so quickly that they only caught a long hair from his flowing tail. Then they came to the second barrier of the ravenous birds, which swooped down upon them. But Rough-Coat dipped his head and flung up his hind feet so that they pecked only at his hoofs and found no sweetness in that meal; and with two heroic leaps the brave steed was far beyond the reach of the pecking birds. Last of all they came so suddenly upon the barrier of the dragon that before he could rouse himself and uncoil his stinging tails one by one Rough-Coat was far beyond the reach of their malice.

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So the three terrible barriers were safely passed without the loss of a single arrow, and Diuk rode onward singing gaily of the great deeds of Svyatogor and Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack. On he went across the boundless open plain until he came to a ring-barked oak on which sat a raven as black as night, croaking, croaking, croaking. Diuk looked up with impatience, for in his heart he feared an omen more than clashing mountains, pecking birds, or dragons with twelve stinging tails.

"Thou bird of evil," he cried, "I will scatter thy sable feathers upon the open plain. I will spill thy blood upon the ring-barked oak and give thee over to croaking Death."

But the raven answered him in the speech of Holy Russia, "Shed not *my* blood, young Lord Diuk. Ride on across the open steppe and you will find an adversary worthy of your stout bow and your shining arrows."

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This speech filled the heart of the young hero with gladness and with the hope of meeting an adventure worthy of his ancestry. He rode on again until he came upon the hoof-prints of a horse deeply marked on the broad lap of moist Mother Earth, so deeply that it was clear to all eyes that a hero of mighty stature had recently passed that way. A few more leaps of Rough-Coat, and Diuk came to a pavilion of fair white linen embroidered with gold, beside which strayed a shaggy charger eating fine white Turkish wheat, which was heaped freely upon the ground for his solace and entertainment.

When Diuk saw this his heart failed him and he said to himself, "My courage leaves me and I dare not enter that pavilion, for the hero who sits therein will assuredly cut off my head. But I will place Rough-Coat by the side of this charger and he also shall stoop to the wheat. If the two horses eat together in peace, I will take it as a sign that the hero will do me no harm. But if the horses begin to quarrel I shall know that it is time for me to return to my lady mother." For a strange dread and fear was upon the young man who had set out so boldly but who now felt that he was within the circle of a spell. And well he might, as we shall see.

The two chargers ate in peace, and Diuk, taking heart again, entered the pavilion, bowing as he passed the threshold to North, South, East, and West, and especially to—the owner who slept in one corner with a terrible snore. Diuk came forward, and looking closer knew at once that the sleeper was none other than Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack, wrapt in one of the deep sleeps for which he was as famous as for heroic deeds.

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"Rouse ye, Ilya of Murom," cried Diuk; "it is time to go to royal Kiev town so as to be present at matins on Easter morn." But Ilya slept on and snored and stirred not. Again Diuk shouted, and again without result; but at his third shout the great warrior unclosed his eyes in a manner which seemed to suggest that he had been sleeping a hound's sleep and said:

"Ho, stranger, tell me your name and horde." Then Diuk told him all the truth.

"Why, then," asked Ilya, "have you roused me from my heroic sleep. Do you wish to go with me out upon the open plain and see which of us shall carry home the head of the other?"

"Nay," said Diuk in great haste. "Why should I fight with Ilya upon the open plain? Death will not come to *you* in battle. As there is one sun in the daylight sky and one moon in the dark blue heavens, so there is one Ilya of Murom in Holy Russia."

This speech was courteous enough and fitting for the mouth of a young hero, and it pleased Ilya mightily. He sprang at once to his nimble feet, caught Diuk by his white hands, kissed him upon his sugar lips, and swore with him eternal friendship, making the solemn exchange of the cross. And Diuk thought no more of home or of his lady mother and her tears of loneliness.

Then the young hero and the old sat down in the fair pavilion and ate and drank well but not too well; and when that memorable feast was ended, Ilya said to Diuk:

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"Go now alone upon your way to Kiev town, and if any one there shall mock at you send me word of it. But do not take your part when the boasting time shall come."

With a heart full of hope and youthful expectation, Diuk rode on alone to Kiev town; and when he came there Rough-Coat leapt over the walls and flew like a whirlwind to the palace of white stone. In the courtyard Diuk leapt lightly to the ground, planted the butt end of his spear in the soil, and flung his bridle over the point. Then he looked up and saw the Princess Apraxia looking out of the window and said out loudly, "The washerwoman, I suppose." But he also bowed to her and asked, "Where is Prince Vladimir, the Fair Sun of Kiev?"

Thereupon the Princess Apraxia raised her head with a look of scorn and passed into the shadow of her apartment; and it was the serving men in the courtyard who answered the young man's question. "Royal Vladimir," they said, "is on his way to the Easter Mass." So Diuk mounted Rough-Coat once again and rode off to the Cathedral. At the great door he let his horse go free and entered the hall of the ambassadors, but he did not bow to North, South, East, and West and especially to any one, but gazed about and scanned the faces of all the congregation. When the service was over the courteous prince sent a messenger to invite the strange youth to the palace, and to this man Diuk replied lightly and by no means courteously:

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"You have lately been favoured in these parts with spring weather and my embroidered garments are befouled with the mire of the plain." This he said to show his magnificence, for he was splendidly clad, as befitted his ancestry, and he knew it. So he went to the banquet-hall, his steed following after him; and when he came within the place he bowed to Prince Vladimir until his golden curls swept the red brick floor. Then he stood upright and looked about him, and having looked he shook his head doubtfully and slightly, for to his eyes accustomed to the shining splendour of India the Glorious the palace was mean beyond compare.

But he sat down with another shake of his head, wondering upon what meal of frozen oats his fine steed was being regaled and eyeing with scorn the tables of white oak with their cloths patterned with drawn-work of white thread, the handiwork of the Princess Apraxia. He ate and drank well, however, and when he showed more contentment, Vladimir asked him courteously if it were a long journey from India the Glorious to Kiev town.

"I set out at vespers on Holy Saturday," said Diuk lightly, "and as you know, I have been at early Mass in Kiev town this Easter day."

"And can you buy such steeds as yours cheaply in India the Glorious?" asked Prince Vladimir still courteously.

"Oh," said Diuk lightly still, "we have them at a rouble, or two roubles, or six roubles, or even seven, but Rough-Coat is priceless and not to be purchased by the wealthiest trader." Then he thrust his hands into his belt and stared about the room, while a great hush fell upon the company.

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But one of the heroes of Holy Russia rose slowly to his feet and said heavily: "My lord, Prince Vladimir, I have travelled far from Kiev town and have been even to India the Glorious. And I know without hearsay that by the straight way for heroic travellers it is a journey of three months, but by the round way for merchants it is a six months' passage and more, indeed, unless on the way the traveller springs from horse to horse, making no delay."

To this speech courteous Prince Vladimir said nothing in reply. The guests looked at each other at a loss for the next event, and then feeling hungry and thirsty again fell upon the banquet with heroic strength. But Diuk sat at the board sad and silent until Vladimir spoke to him.

"What ails your sad heart, bold youth?" he asked gently. "Is the feast not to your taste? Or do you fear the boasting time which is surely coming, when you shall have nothing of which you may brag?"

"Prince Vladimir," said Diuk, "I am wealthier far than you are. For my father left me great riches, and I am used to fine white bread made from flour of Turkish wheat."

Then courteous Prince Vladimir ordered his servants to bring wine of the greenest and cakes of wheaten flour. Diuk drank one half of the wine and poured out the rest upon the table as if its value were of no account, and some of the dogs licked the drops and then lay down to sleep. He took off the top crust of the fine wheaten cakes, ate the middle, and flung the rest to the other dogs. And even yet courteous Prince Vladimir blamed him not at all.

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But another Russian hero sprang to his nimble feet and cried, "What boorish fellow is this? He is not really Lord Diuk from India the Glorious, and for the first time to-day this fellow has drunk green wine and eaten fine wheaten cakes. He is a cow-herd, a fugitive serf from the castle of some nobleman, who has done his master to death, dressed himself in his embroidered garments, and stolen his goodly steed. He is not of noble birth, for as he walked I noticed that he looked not straight before him but at the shoes upon his feet. He has come here in order that you, Prince Vladimir, may feast him honourably and then give him a rich gift in accordance with your courteous custom."

"I desire no treasure which can be given to me here," cried Diuk, "for I have wealth untold at home, and rich food and green wine in abundance. I had heard tales of wonder concerning Kiev city and came here to test the truth of what I had heard. But it is not with you as it is with us in India the Glorious."

And even yet Prince Vladimir parted not from his courteous bearing but said gently:

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"Why did you stare about the church at Mass this Easter morning, instead of reverently bowing your head in the company?"

"I stared about, Prince Vladimir," said the young man, "because I had heard

tales of Kiev churches and of the richness of their beauty. But in this matter also, it is not with you as it is with us in India the Glorious. Your churches are of wooden beams with domes of timber, but ours are of stone with roofs of beaten gold. Our meanest houses are finer than your palaces of white stone. Your streets are foul with mire, but ours are cleanly swept and strewn with dry yellow sand.

"The steps of your royal palace," went on Diuk, "are of black stone with railings of turned wood fastened together with pegs of wood, and these rough pegs, as I know to my annoyance, catch the flowing robes of those who mount the steps. But the steps of my palace in India the Glorious are of smoothest ivory, and are spread with rugs of silk from Samarcand, while the railings are of polished ruddy gold on which no speck of dust is allowed to settle.

"The floor of this banquet-hall is of rough, uneven pine planks, and even these rough boards are a luxury for the high table and the great corner, while the rest of the hall is paved with coarse red brick. Your walls and ceiling are unpainted, your tables are of oak, and the cloths laid upon the most exalted are patterned with drawn threads. But the floors of our hall are of smooth ash timber in every part, laid with great evenness, our walls and ceiling are painted in the richest colours, while our tables are of gold when they are not of ivory. Over my lady mother's doorway are seventy pictures of holy saints shining in glorious colours, while you have only ten. From our churches to the palace are laid pavements of hard smooth wood, spread with scarlet cloth, but your pathways are so miry that they soil the embroidered garments of a Prince."

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Even yet Prince Vladimir remained courteous, and all he said in reply was:

"Why did you throw away some of my green wine and a portion of my wheaten cakes?"

"For a good reason," returned the young lord; "I could not eat your cakes, for the upper crust has a flavour of pine wood, while the lower tastes of clay, so that I knew at once that your ovens are built of brick and your oven brooms are made of pine twigs. But in our palace in India the Glorious the ovens of my lady mother, which are under her own care, are made of hard glazed tiles, while her oven brooms are of silk dipped in honey dew. If a man eats one of my mother's cakes he leaves no crumb behind, and his whole desire is to eat more. Your wines taste of damp and their flavour is foul. But my mother's wine-cellars and their contents are the wonder of India the Glorious. She has wines which saw the dawn of history, and these are kept in casks of silver with hoops of gold, which are hung on chains of brass in bricked-out caves of forty fathoms' depth; and from these great caves run open pipes underground to let in the fresh sweet air from the plain; and when the strong winds play about the open ends of these pipes the silver casks swing to and fro and make a murmur like that of snowy birds playing upon the bosom of a peaceful lake. So we have wine which cannot be described but must be tasted, and if a man drinks one cup thereof he leaves no drop behind, for there are no dregs in this liquor, and his whole desire is to drink more.

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"As for the embroidered garments of my lady mother, the store in her presses and cupboards cannot be valued. At all times the sewing women are busy, stitching, stitching, stitching, and when one group grows weary, another takes up the work. My lady mother's under-robe is set with precious stones, while the bodice is of cloth of gold; her cap is covered with fair seed pearls with jewels of marvellous lustre and priceless value set in front, and as for myself I wear a dress one day, but woe unto my body-servant if I see it again. Your horses are fed on frozen oats, but ours are regaled on fine Turkish wheat. Beneath our palace are twelve deep cellars filled with ruddy gold, white silver, and fine seed pearls, and the contents of one cellar alone would be sufficient to buy up the whole of Kiev town and Chernigof as well."

At last Vladimir was a little moved. "I wish that Churilo the Exquisite were here, for he would know how to reply to your boasting." Even as he spoke the white oaken doors of the banquet-hall were flung open, and Churilo the Exquisite entered with a graceful bow to North, South, East, and West, and especially to Prince Vladimir, but not at all to Diuk from India the Glorious. But that young man was not thereby abashed.

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"I have heard," he said, "even in far-away India, the fame of Churilo's beauty, and truly Rumour was no lying wench, for his face is like the rosebud for redness and his neck like the driven snow for whiteness. But Rumour lied when she praised his courtesy; for he has not learnt how to salute his betters."

Then the face of Churilo grew redder than the full-blown rose, and he cried in anger: "Braggart and boaster, son of a slave. Let us lay a wager of roubles, a

wager of thirty thousand. For the space of three years you and I shall live in Kiev, and upon every single day of the year each shall wear fresh clothes of the richest, and upon every single day ride a horse of a different hue. And the wager shall pass to him whom all men acclaim as the most glorious. This can I do to uphold the honour of the court of Prince Vladimir, the Fair Sun of Kiev.”

“It is easy for you to wager such a sum and to propose such a test,” said Diuk somewhat wearily, “for you live at home where your clothes presses and your stables are full; but I am far from home and have only one travelling suit which is foul from the mire of the dirty ways of Kiev town. But I accept your wager.”

Then the young lord sat down at the oaken table and called for a parchment scroll on which he wrote a letter and a list, a letter and a list for his lady mother far away in India the Glorious. Having rolled the scroll and sealed it he went out into the court where Rough-Coat stood pawing the ground impatiently, and placed it in one of the saddle-bags. “Haste thee home,” he said in the quivering ear of the faithful steed, “home to India the Glorious, and when you reach the palace of my lady mother neigh loudly so that all may hear.”

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They saw the good steed while Diuk spoke in his quivering ear, but they did not see him when he had finished speaking—there was only a wreath of smoke on the open boundless plain, and he was gone. And when the good steed came to the palace of his master he neighed loudly, and the lady mother came out upon the ivory steps holding the railing of ruddy gold with her right hand and her own heart with her left, for she saw the empty saddle of Rough-Coat, and thought instantly of the worst. But the horse neighed again with a joyful note, and when the grooms felt in the saddle-bag they found the scroll which they gave to their mistress on bended knee.

Holding herself proudly erect, she read the words which Diuk had written, and the colour came back to her face and the light of love to her eyes. “The foolish boy has boasted as I warned him that he must not do, for there is no need for one to boast whose splendour is beyond doubt or rival. But I must do what I can to redeem his pledged word—and it may be that his precious life is endangered.” Then she unbound her golden keys and taking with her a band of sewing maidens, she unlocked the doors of spacious wardrobes, and packed changes of lawn and silken raiment sufficient for three years and three days, and so as to afford three changes for each day; and though the number of garments was so great the weight of the bales were not too heavy a burden for Rough-Coat, so fine was the texture of lawn and silk, each garment having stood the test of being drawn through a finger ring before it was embroidered with gold or silver or fine seed pearls.

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When Rough-Coat was duly loaded, the lady mother threw an old and much-worn garment over all and said:

“Haste to my precious son, good Rough-Coat, and warn him of your coming with a neigh.”

Before long the young Lord Diuk and Churilo the Exquisite began their strange contest, riding about Kiev town in new garments and upon a fresh horse every day. Churilo ordered great herds of horses to be driven into Kiev from Chernigof, and took much pains to select one of different hue every morning; but Diuk anointed Rough-Coat each morning with dew and so changed the colour of its coat. For three years this peaceful warfare lasted, and then on Easter morning the two combatants went to early Mass and stood in the porch of the cathedral side by side, but not too close together.

The garments of Churilo the Exquisite were slashed with ruddy burning gold and with white gleaming silver. In place of buttons he had clasps made in the likeness of handsome youths with loops fashioned in the semblance of lovely maidens. So high were the insteps of his slippers of green morocco that swallows swooping to the earth might easily pass under them, while their tips were as sharp as the shoemaker’s awl. His cap was of softest down overshadowing his eyes in front and his white neck behind. His over-mantle flung back in youthful vanity was of sables of the richest gloss.

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But his opponent stood by his side in the worn garment which his lady mother had placed on the back of Rough-Coat to protect the bales from the weather; only, beneath this beggar’s robe shone jewels on his footgear of value greater than that of all Kiev, except for the gems upon the statues of the Virgin and the Saints in the great cathedral.

Vladimir came and looked at the young men, while Churilo fingered his clasps and loops as if to draw attention to their exquisite fashioning; but Diuk looked straight ahead as if he saw right across the open steppe to the palace of his lady

mother in India the Glorious.

Then the Prince spoke in tones of quiet judgment:

"To our mind," he said, "the young Lord Diuk from India the Glorious has forfeited his wager; for such inventions as these clasps and loops have never been equalled in the eyes of men."

"The value of the wager," cried Diuk, "is nothing to me, but for my renown I am jealous enough." Then he threw his worn garment aside and stood forth in apparel so wondrous that all the watchers fell to the earth, stunned with the sight of its shining beauty. At the fore peak of his cap shone the sun like ruddy gold; at the back was the moon with shining silver rays; between the two points shone a light as from pearls heaped up in the darkness. [140]

Then he fingered the clasps in front of his embroidered doublet which were fashioned in the shape of singing birds, and at the touch of his caressing fingers the birds began to sing. He pulled the loops at the edges of his coat which were fashioned in the shape of lions and dragons, and at the touch of his caressing fingers they began to crawl and leap and hiss and roar. When he had finished the whole of the company, including Churilo the Exquisite, lay prone upon the floor.

Vladimir was the first to rise, and he gasped out with his hand to his forehead: "The wager and the renown are yours, goodly youth. Now cover up your birds and beasts with a garment to which my people are more accustomed." And Diuk did so; whereupon the people recovered from their stupefied astonishment and began to praise Diuk for having outdone Churilo the Exquisite in the ingenuity and richness of his apparel. And the victor spent the thirty thousand roubles on green wine for the applauding crowds, which made them applaud him still more loudly.

Now Churilo the Exquisite was a young man of determination, and even this defeat did not quench his spirit or his ingenuity. As soon as he had recovered himself he approached Diuk once again and said with great respect: [141]

"My Lord Diuk, let us make another wager of another kind. Let us prove whose horse can leap the broad stream of Mother Dnieper, which measures two miles across, and let our heads be the stake; the winner to cut off the head of the loser."

"I have only my travelling nag with me," said Diuk, "but I accept the challenge." Then he went to Rough-Coat in the stable and told the good horse in what danger he stood of losing his head.

"That is well," said Rough-Coat, in the speech of Holy Russia, "for not only will I leap over Mother Dnieper, but I will carry you an even distance upon the farther shore. I belong to a heroic family, and my eldest brother is Cloudfall, the shaggy bay steed ridden by Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck, while my second brother bears Nikitich upon his adventures, but my youngest brother is the steed of Churilo the Exquisite."

Without loss of time Diuk saddled Rough-Coat and rode far out across the open plain with Churilo by his side, riding step by step but not too near. Behind them flocked a great crowd of mighty heroes of Holy Russia, as well as of the townfolk of Kiev, who had come to watch the manly contest, which was much more to their taste than an exhibition of clothing and decoration, however ingenious and splendid they might be.

At last they came to the shore of broad Mother Dnieper, and both the combatants stood for a moment with their hands to their foreheads gazing out across the deep water to discover a possible landing-place on the farther bank. Then said Churilo the Exquisite: [142]

"Do thou leap first, Lord Diuk."

"Nay," answered the other, "do thou leap first, and when we leap together in India, then will I take the lead."

So Churilo put his horse to the stream. The younger brother of Rough-Coat left the shore with a courageous leap, but came down with a great splash in mid-stream. Then Diuk put his horse to the stream. The younger brother of Cloudfall left the shore with a courageous leap, cleared the river and an even space on the farther shore, and then turning quickly leapt back again; and as Rough-Coat soared across the broad bosom of Mother Dnieper, Diuk stooped and caught Churilo by his yellow curls.

On the banks of the stream the victor prepared to cut off the head of the Exquisite; but all the ladies, young and not quite so young, lovely and not quite so lovely, who had come out from Kiev, implored him to spare the life of the young man. So Diuk merely gave him a mighty kick and said:

“Go, Exquisite, to the women to whom you owe your life, and stay with them; for the men of Holy Russia, to say naught of India the Glorious, have no need of such as you.”

Churilo the Exquisite had not yet parted with the whole of his ingenuity, and he turned to Prince Vladimir:



‘Diuk stooped and caught Churilo by his yellow curls’

“My Lord,” he said, “if this young man is a truth-teller, let us send talesmen who can compute and count to India the Glorious, to make lists of all his boasted possessions in treasure and goods and herds and flocks.”

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“Whom shall we send?” asked Prince Vladimir.

“Let Alyosha go,” answered Churilo.

“Nay,” said Diuk quickly, “Alyosha shall not go; for he hath greedy eyes and pilfering fingers, and he will never, I assure you, come back again to Kiev town.” Then he sat down at the table of the banquet hall, where the whole company was now gathered, and wrote a message upon a parchment and fastened it to one of his flaming arrows. To this he whispered a word of direction, and then, fitting it to his bow, he shot it forth from the open window across the boundless plain. The winged messenger found Ilya of Murom near the door of his pavilion where he was resting with Nikitich, and as soon as he had read the scroll the Old Cossack said to his wise companion:

“Go thou to Diuk in Kiev town and tell him that, if Nikitich is not an army in himself, then Ilya will come who is a host.”

As soon as he saw Nikitich, Diuk’s eyes shone with welcoming pleasure. “Ah, Nikitich,” he said, “you shall go as talesman with two others to India the Glorious, to make lists of all my possessions in treasure and goods and herds and

flocks.

"Take parchment sufficient for three years and three days," the young man went on, "and I promise you in prophecy that you will do homage to my servant-maids, mistaking each of them in turn for my lady mother." Then he laughed gently as one who wins a fight by putting aside with naked arm the ponderous mace of his adversary.

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The three talesmen set out at once, followed by three waggons heaped with parchment; and after many wanderings and not a few adventures Nikitich came to India the Glorious, on the verge of which they climbed a lofty mountain, from whence they beheld the land lying before them.

"Why, the country burns!" cried Nikitich in fearful amazement. But when they drew nearer they saw that it was only the glow of the golden roofs and the temple domes, blended with the colour of the yellow pathways spread with ruddy scarlet cloth. In the midst they saw the white stone palace of Diuk, which had three-and-thirty towers, whose rounded roofs were covered with green copper which is more precious than fine gold. Round about the gleaming palace spread a lovely garden, delicious in the coolness of its greenery, planted with all kinds of fruit trees, and surrounded by a high railing of gold pillars, set with knots of green copper and broken here and there with gates of brass. About the pathways of this pleasure-ground and in the verandahs of the palace walked the loveliest of maidens, attended by resplendent gallants, who played upon their musical instruments and sang gay songs of love and valour.

The talesmen were so much struck with wonder and amazement that it was a long time before they could summon up their courage to enter the palace garden, at whose gates no guards were set. At last they did so, and came to the first of the three-and-thirty towers, where they found an aged woman who looked as if she was the mother of a goodly son. Her dress was of silver thread mixed with a little silk, and her bearing had so much dignity that the visitors from Kiev found themselves bowing down before her almost without knowing what they were doing.

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"Hail to thee!" said Nikitich, "thou honourable mother of the young Lord Diuk."

"I am not my lord's mother," said the ancient woman, "I am the keeper of his cows."

Then the talesmen were so much filled with vexation and shame that they left the palace garden and went out into the open plain, where they pitched a tent and went to bed without saying a word to each other.

On the next morning they came again and drew near to the second of the three-and-thirty towers, where they found an aged woman of comely face clad in cloth of silver and gold.

"Hail to thee!" said Nikitich brightly, "thou honourable mother of the young Lord Diuk."

"I am not my lord's mother," said the aged woman, "I am his washerwoman."

Swallowing their confusion the three talesmen went on, wondering no longer that Diuk had mistaken the Princess Apraxia for the washerwoman of Prince Vladimir; and they fared in the same manner before the cook, the women of the bedchamber, the baker of cakes, and the nurse, until the last took pity upon their despair and told them that the lady mother of their lord had gone to High Mass, and that they would be able to distinguish her when she left the church by three certain signs. Before her would come a great army of men armed with shovels, and then another army with brooms to make all clean on the pathway, and then a third army laying cloth of brilliant scarlet upon the tawny sand. Last of all would come the mother of young Lord Diuk, with a great company of lovely maidens round about her. "And when you go into the town," the nurse concluded, "you must not salute all the ancient ladies in fine raiment like mine, for there are so many of us thus arrayed that we pay little heed to it. And if you do reverence to all of us your back will remain bent like the bow of Ilya of Murom."

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The talesmen went on their wondering way and in due time met the mother of the young Lord Diuk, preceded and attended as the nurse had told, and dressed in garments of rich but quiet beauty. Before her the three men bowed, and in pleasant tones she asked why they had come to the city.

"Your son sent us as talesmen," was the answer, "to make lists of all his possessions in treasure and goods and herds and flocks."

“That is beyond your powers,” said the lady; “but come first of all to partake of my hospitality, and then I will show you whatever you choose to see.”

So they went to the feast of rich food and richer wine, and they ate of the fine wheaten cakes baked by the mother of the young Lord Diuk, and left no crumb behind. When they were well satisfied, the lady mother showed them her son’s horses; and they took parchment and tried to count up their value in roubles, but the figures confused their eyes and vexed them so that they gave up the task. Then she showed them the shoes of her son; and they took parchment again and tried to tell the tale of their value, but once more they gave up in despair. After that she led them to the wine-cellars and to the treasury of trappings for horses with the same result. At last Nikitich said: “Leave us here, seated before this single saddle ornamented with all the jewels of India, and let us compute the value of it alone.” The lady graciously gave her consent; and they stayed three years over their task of computation, but at the end of that time they had not finished one tenth of the work.

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Then they sent a message to Vladimir which ran:

“Sell Kiev for parchment and Chernigof for ink, and then we shall perhaps be able to make a beginning of computing the possessions of the young Lord Diuk.”

When Vladimir had read this message he set out with a great company for India the Glorious, and Diuk went in his train; and when they came to the palace of the lady mother, they found that not one-tenth of its splendour had been told to them.

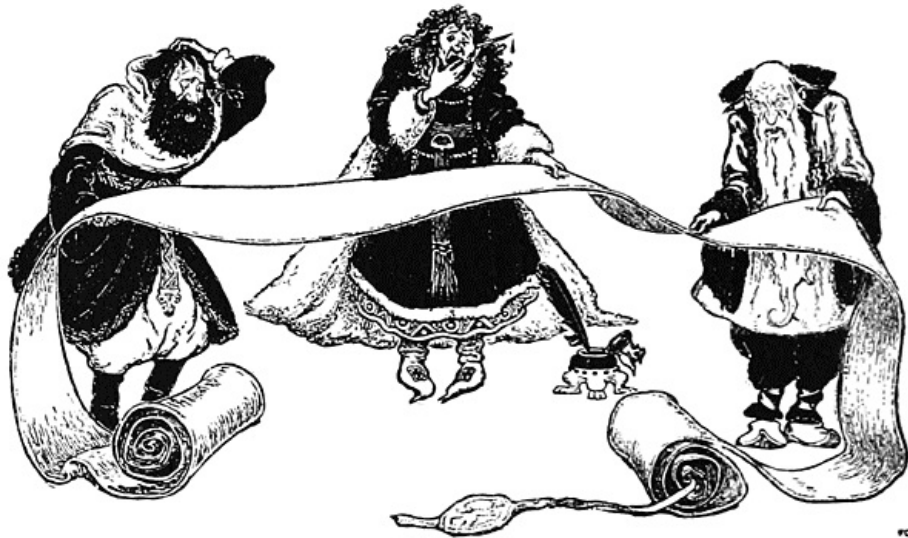
As they stood there, three men came before them whose forms were withered up like shavings; and they looked long upon them and very earnestly before they saw that these men were Nikitich and his companions, who had shrunk from grief at the greatness of their task and their inability to perform it. But the young Lord Diuk consoled them and feasted the company right well before they set out, still in quiet wonder, on their way back to Kiev town.

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When they were gone the lady mother turned to her son and asked:

“Did I not speak truth? Was there aught in Kiev or in the train of Vladimir to compare with India the Glorious?”

“Only one thing, lady mother,” said Diuk, who had seen enough of splendour, “a man and a hero, Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack. And for his renown I would barter all the wealth of India the Glorious.”



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THE STORY OF KASYAN AND THE DREAM MAIDEN

Of all the mighty heroes of Holy Russia one of the mightiest was young Kasyan, the leader of a band of forty. Brave he was, without equal, who had fought against the accursed Tatars, and had won great renown in battle against infidel hordes; but he had never taken the golden crowns nor loved any lady except the Dream Maiden, whose image he kept ever in his golden heart. For she had come to him in a vision; and whether she were a lily for whiteness, a rose for redness, or a violet for darkness he could not tell. He knew only that he would know her when he met her among the warrior-maids or gentle hearth-dwellers of Holy Russia, and that she would know him also. But in all his wanderings and among all the fair maidens of palace and plain, he had seen no living lady who could compare with the Dream Maiden; though many a Princess and noble-woman of high descent had favoured him secretly or openly, and had longed to be hailed as the beauty of his vision.

On the broad and open plain he assembled his band of forty, and they came to a halt in a green meadow, dismounted from their nimble steeds, and sat down in a ring to tell of adventure and to take counsel as to the next journey to be made across the boundless steppe. They told many tales of far journeys and bold deeds, and boasted of death as if it were a pretty plaything. Then when silence fell upon them young Kasyan spoke:

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“Greatly have ye sinned against the Most High, ye mighty heroes of Holy Russia; for though ye are bold and fearless, ye have made a plaything of death and shed much blood without cause. Will you agree, one and all, to follow out my plan? It would be better that each of us should now go on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem, to pray in the Holy of Holies, to visit the grave of the Risen Lord, and to bathe in Jordan river, for in this way only shall we win pardon for our sins. But before we go, it will be well if we take a vow—the keeping of which will prove our heroic strength—not to rob or steal, not to look with love upon the face of any maiden, and not to stain our hands with blood. And if any of our band shall break his vow then shall his nimble feet be hewn off at the knee, and his white hands at the elbow, his far-seeing eyes shall be darkened, and his tongue cut out, and he shall be buried up to the breast in moist Mother Earth.”

The heroes agreed at once to the word of Kasyan, and rising to their feet loosed their good steeds and gave them their freedom. Then they dressed themselves in pilgrims’ dress of the hue of the scarlet poppy, and slung over their shoulders the beggars’ wallets of black velvet embroidered in thread of red gold and set with fine seed pearls, while on their heads they placed the pilgrims’ caps. With curving staves of walrus tusks in their hands, they set out upon their way, travelling by day in the light of the glorious sun, and at night in the radiance which came from the jewels set thickly in their shoes of fine leather. So they passed onward from town to town and from city to city until they came to Kiev.

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In the open plain near the city they met Prince Vladimir hunting the martens, black sables, white swans, grey geese, and downy ducks, and as the royal party drew near to them the pilgrims shouted: “Vladimir, Fair Sun of Kiev, give alms to the wandering pilgrims. Not a pittance but a royal gift will we take from such as you, even a noble benefaction of forty thousand roubles.” Then the Prince lifted his hand to stay the hunt, and dismounting from his horse, greeted the holy pilgrims with the reverence which he paid to the Saints, and begged them to sing in his hearing the sweetest of the holy songs, even the psalm of Elena, which he was longing to hear.

So the one-and-forty pilgrims placed their staves in damp Mother Earth and hung their wallets upon them. Then standing in a circle they sang the sweetest of the holy songs, even the psalm of Elena; and as the sound welled upward to

the heavens the bosom of moist Mother Earth heaved and trembled as if with mingled joy and grief, the pine trees shook in a neighbouring wood, far away the oak trees upon the mountains bowed their heads, and the birds were hushed into silence. The Prince was strangely moved, and at length could listen no longer, for the sound of the holy psalm showed him all that he might be as a King and a Leader; so he held up his hand to cause the music to cease, and the one-and-forty pilgrims took their wallets from their staves and made ready to pursue their journey.

"I have no roubles with me," said the courteous Prince, "nor can I refresh you as you deserve and as I desire. But go onward to Kiev town to the Princess Apraxia, who in my name will give you food and drink and lodging."

So they journeyed on until they came to Kiev town, where they went to the palace and gave the pilgrims' cry; and at this piercing sound from so many heroic throats the Princess Apraxia came in haste to the window of her apartment, with her golden hair all unbound, and thrust herself from the window to her waist. Then she saw the young Kasyan among the foremost, and knew him for the dreamer who had troubled the hearts of so many fair ladies; and there came into her heart a burning desire that he should find her as beautiful as the Dream Maiden and *should tell her so*.

The one-and-forty pilgrims were now conducted to an ante-chamber and from thence, after a little time, to the great hall, where they bowed to North, South, East, and West, and particularly to the Princess Apraxia, who was now arrayed more splendidly than ever before. She gave them a gracious welcome and ordered the cloths with drawn-thread work to be laid upon the white oaken tables, and the richest of food with the sweetest of drinks to be set before her guests. The Princess herself sat at the high table with her nurses and ladies and a host of bold warrior maids, and Kasyan sat in the great corner. He had laid aside his cap and from his fair hair the sun seemed to shine, while his eyes rested upon the company of ladies for a while, searching diligently, after his manner, for the Dream Maiden; but though all the beauty of Holy Russia was now before his eyes he turned away, after a while, to contemplate the painted pictures of holy saints.

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When the feast was over the pilgrims were conducted each to his own apartment, where he might pray before retiring to rest. Now as Kasyan sat in holy meditation the door was opened and the Princess Apraxia entered softly. She was dressed in a simple robe of gleaming whiteness with a girdle of ruddy gold, and holding out her hands she cried in quivering tones:

"Am I not fair as the Dream Maiden, young Kasyan?"

"Nay, not so," was the cold answer. "Princess, ask Vladimir for his thoughts on your beauty." Then the young pilgrim turned aside, and with anger in her heart the Princess Apraxia left the room. But while he slept she came again very quietly, took down his pilgrim's wallet from the place where it hung, cut it open and placed within it the silver loving-cup from which Prince Vladimir always drank when he returned from his hunting. Then she sewed up the velvet once more, so neatly, that the place of the rent could not be seen.

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Next morning, as the early sun was rising, the one-and-forty pilgrims arose, washed themselves in cold spring water and prayed to God. The Princess was already astir and saw that her guests were well supplied. Then having satisfied their heroic hunger, they called down a blessing upon Prince Vladimir and upon Princess Apraxia, swung their wallets over their shoulders and set out for the holy city of Jerusalem.

A short time after their departure Vladimir returned from his hunting, and sat down to appease his mighty hunger. Then he called for his silver loving-cup, and the stewards searched for it in all corners of the palace, but were not able to find it. The Prince was very angry, and looking round upon his household he asked sternly, "Which of you hath taken the royal cup?"

None spoke for a moment, and then the clear, cold voice of the Princess was heard. "My Prince and Lord," she said, "we feasted yesterday a band of one-and-forty pilgrims, in accordance with your own desires. It may be that they have stolen the royal cup." Thereupon Prince Vladimir gave the word, and a company of heroes sprang to their feet, eager to ride after the pilgrim band. But as they prepared themselves the voice of Ilya of Murom was heard from the great corner:

"These were no psalm-singers," he said, "but heroes of the boldest. Whom have we worthy to go and outface them."

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"I will send Alyosha alone," said Vladimir, and it was done in accordance with his word, the messenger being commanded to speak gently to the pilgrims. But when he overtook them he called out in an angry voice:

"Ho, there, ye thieves and robbers. Restore to me now without dispute the royal cup which you have stolen."

At this discourteous speech young Kasyan sprang to his nimble feet, grasped his travelling staff of walrus ivory as if it were his heroic mace and flourished it about his head.

"Think you," he cried in righteous anger, "that we went to Kiev town for the royal cup? Come nigh to me and I will punish you as you richly deserve."

But Alyosha did not dare to come within the whirling circle of that ivory cudgel. He wheeled his horse about and returning in haste to Kiev told how the robbers had set upon him when he asked for the cup, and how he had escaped with difficulty from their heroic turbulence.

"Alyosha is a fool of an ambassador," said Ilya of Murom, "send Nikitich. He knows how to sweeten valour with courtesy."

So Nikitich mounted his horse at once, and when he came to the pilgrims, who were seated in a ring on the open plain, he said:

"All hail, ye one-and-forty holy men. I ask for your hospitality."

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"All hail, goodly youth," was the reply, "sit with us here and share our humble fare."

Then Nikitich sat with them, and in hesitation began his message. "There is great trouble," he said gently, "in the palace of Prince Vladimir, for the royal loving-cup is mislaid and without it the Prince cannot refresh himself after his hunting. Let me therefore beg of you, good youths, to look within your pilgrims' wallets and see whether it has strayed into one of them in error."

The one-and-forty looked at each other, and then forty turned and looked at Kasyan. "It is well, good comrades," said their leader, "to satisfy the courteous youth. Open your wallets and show him what they contain, for we can do this without fear." Thereupon all the pilgrims sprang to their nimble feet, opened their wallets and showed Nikitich what they contained, but the royal cup was not to be found among the forty. Last of all Kasyan opened his velvet wallet and, lo! the loving-cup was found within.

Then the forty pilgrims looked in anger and sadness upon Kasyan. "What shall we do to you now, young Kasyan?" they asked sternly. "Did you not impose the great vow upon us of your own choice?"

"Beloved comrades," said their leader, "I did not steal the royal cup. Nevertheless do now what has been agreed amongst us, and break not your great vow for me."



'There passed over the boundless white plain an aged saint with flowing beard, ... and eyes which shone with laughter'

Then they wept sorely, but they took Kasyan and did with him in accordance with their terrible vow. After that they prayed to God and went on their way once more to the holy city of Jerusalem. Young Nikitich stood in silence while the vow was performed, and then rode back at great speed to Kiev town, where he gave the cup to Prince Vladimir and told of all he had seen. When he had finished the Princess Apraxia fell in her place to the floor; and when her ladies had restored her she spoke no word, but unloosing her golden hair and unbinding her golden girdle she went unto the courtyard and lay upon the great dung-heap.

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Prince Vladimir now prepared himself to go and see the wonder of the fulfilment of the vow. But before he could reach the place where Kasyan had been buried to the breast in moist Mother Earth there passed over the boundless white plain an aged saint with flowing beard, ruddy cheeks, and eyes which shone with the laughter of boys and girls. With his holy hands he restored Kasyan to his completeness, his manly strength and youthful beauty, and set him again upon his nimble feet, saying:

"Go thy way, young Kasyan, and thou shalt overtake the forty at the first inn upon the way to the holy city of Jerusalem. Pray in that holy city, visit the grave of the risen Lord and bathe in Jordan river. And when you come home again build a cathedral church to St. Nicholas, who loves all men and especially youths and maidens." Then the old man vanished from sight; it was only a snow-wreath driven before the winter wind across the white world and he was gone.

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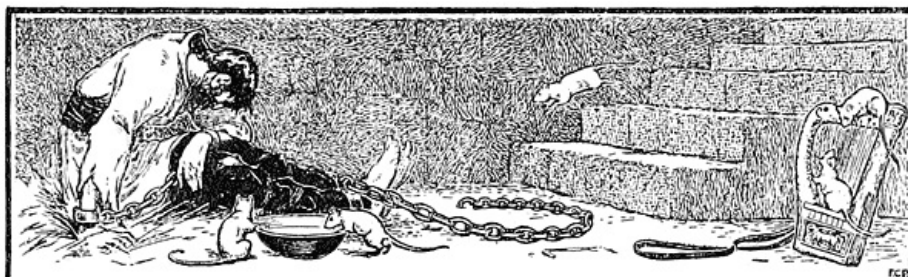
Young Kasyan went on his way and late on that same evening he overtook his companions, who, when they saw that he was much more comely than he had ever been, rejoiced over him and praised God for His goodness. Meanwhile Prince Vladimir had come to the place where young Kasyan had been buried and found a deep pit only, whereupon he and his company returned in wondering amazement to Kiev town.

Once more the one-and-forty pilgrims home returning stood at the gateway of Prince Vladimir's palace, asking alms in the name of the Risen Lord. Then the

Prince begged them with reverence to enter his great hall and partake of his hospitality, and they came within the portals. But before they sat down to meat Kasyan asked that he might be taken to the Princess, who still lay upon the dung-heap, and whom when he saw in her sorrow and debasement he breathed upon with his holy breath. Then he laid his white hand upon her lowly head and pardoned her, and she arose, arrayed herself, and had never seemed so fair in the eyes of her lord, Prince Vladimir.

Then after feasting and quiet merriment the one-and-forty pilgrims went to their own home; and young Kasyan raised a cathedral church to St. Nicholas, who loved all men and especially youths and maidens; and for himself he spent his time in holy deeds and in ministration to the poor, loving always the Dream Maiden only and keeping her ever in his golden heart.

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HOW STAVR THE NOBLE WAS SAVED BY A WOMAN'S WILES

Stavr the Noble lived in Chernigof, and when the daughter of Prince Vladimir was honoured at her father's feast he was among the guests but took no part in the boasting. For he sat all silent while the heroes praised their heroic chargers, their mighty strength, or their rich store of treasure, and while the merchants bragged of their great wealth of Siberian fox-skins or sables. Now when the Prince saw Stavr sitting all silent, he poured out with his own royal hands a cup of green wine and brought it to him, courteously inquiring why he would neither eat nor drink.

"You do not eat of the white swan, Lord Stavr," he said, "nor do you make any boast along with the others. Have you then no towns with wide suburbs, or villages with subject hamlets, nor yet a good mother, nor a beautiful young wife of whom you may make your boast?"

"I have enough of which I might boast," said Stavr. "What petty town is this of Kiev? My palace alone covers five miles, my halls of white oak are hung with pelts of the grey beaver, the roof with skins of the black sable. The floors are of silver and the locks and bars are of steel.

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"Furthermore, Prince Vladimir, I have thirty young men in my hire, each one a master shoemaker. With never a pause the thirty continue making shoes, and I wear a pair for one day and only by a chance wear them a second day. After I have cast off a pair of these shoes they are taken to the market and sold to some prince or nobleman for their full value. I have another thirty young men in my hire, each one a master tailor. With never a pause the thirty continue making coats, and I wear a coat for one day and only by a chance wear it for a second day. After I have cast off one of these coats it is taken to the market and sold to some prince or nobleman for its full value. But I am no boaster."

"Moreover," he went on, after a short pause for breath, "I have a mare with a golden coat which cost at a market price five hundred roubles. On the best of her foals I ride abroad myself, while the worst are sold to princes and nobles, who are delighted when they get them. But I am no boaster."

"Yet there is one treasure," he continued, "of which I will boast, and that is my wife Vasilissa, who could buy all Kiev town in one market and sell it in the next, who could by her wiles deceive the most dignified princes and nobles, and drive even Prince Vladimir out of his mind."

For a moment no one among the guests spoke a single word, but Prince Vladimir sat in his place with ever darkening brow. Then some of the men about him said:

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“Prince Vladimir, Fair Sun of Kiev, it is not meet to permit this boaster to flout us all. Let him be cast into a cold, dark dungeon, and then let his young wife Vasilissa buy all Kiev town in one market and sell it in the next, let her by her wiles deceive us all, and let her, if she can, drive even Prince Vladimir out of his mind.”

The counsel seemed wise to the Prince, and he ordered his guards to fasten iron fetters on the feet and hands of Stavr, and to place him in a cold, dark dungeon, with doors of iron and locks of steel, and there feed him on frozen oats and cold spring water. This was done forthwith, but while the Prince’s command was being performed the body-servant of Stavr took horse and rode homeward to Chernigof, where he found Vasilissa presiding at a great feast which she had made for the wives of the rich traders and the councillors of the town, including also the wife of the Elder, who was of great consequence.

When the young Vasilissa heard the news from Kiev town she rose in her place at the board and said:

“It is time, good dames, that ye went to your own dwellings.”

Then they all did so without a word, and Vasilissa sat pondering for the space of three full hours. “It is not a matter of ransom, however high the offer,” she said to herself, “nor of force, however great and courageous, but it is a matter for a woman’s wit.”

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Then she rose in her place, went to her own apartment and summoned the ladies of her wardrobe.

“My trusty maids,” she said, “cut off my red gold hair, dress me like an envoy to a prince and prepare for me a heroic steed. I go now as ambassador from Kodol Island to Prince Vladimir, the Fair Sun of Kiev, asking the hand of his daughter Lovely in honourable marriage.”

In a short space of time she was ready, shorn and dressed like a goodly gallant and a prince’s envoy. Then they brought her heroic steed, and she rode off, surrounded by a brave body-guard of forty youths of the stoutest, across the open, boundless glorious plain, and as she rode she trilled a merry song.

Half of the journey was accomplished when the party met a rider whose face was sternly set towards the city of Chernigof. They greeted him courteously, and reining in his horse he asked the leader of the party who he was and where he was going.

“I am the ambassador of King Yetmanuila Yetmanuilovich,” was the answer, “and I am on my way to collect tribute from any princes who value their lives above roubles. Whither away, yourself?”

“I am the messenger of Prince Vladimir,” returned the other, “and I am on my way to lock the doors of Stavr’s palace of white stone, and to conduct his young wife Vasilissa to Kiev town.”



'She put her good steed to the walls the leapt lightly over them'

"You are too late," said the youths of the bodyguard, "for the Lady Vasilissa has left the palace of her husband and has gone away to a distant land."

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The messenger thanked the young men for their news, and turning his steed, rode swiftly back to Kiev town, where he informed his royal master that an ambassador from the stern King Yetmanuila Yetmanuilovich was on his way, with a strong body-guard, to collect tribute from any prince who valued his life above roubles. At this intelligence Vladimir was sorely troubled, but gave orders that the streets of Kiev should be cleaned without delay, and that logs of wood should be placed across the muddy holes, so that a fair passage might be afforded to the body-guard.

When Vasilissa reached the outskirts of Kiev town she put her good steed to the walls and leapt lightly over them into the courtyard of Vladimir's palace of white stone. Then she leapt from her horse, thrust the butt end of her spear into moist Mother Earth, and flung the bridle over the point. With the stride of a bold envoy she passed the guards without greeting, and came into the royal hall, where she bowed to North, South, East, and West, and especially to Prince Vladimir. Then she turned to the Prince, and making known her name as Vasily Mikulich, the envoy of King Yetmanuila Yetmanuilovich, she demanded the hand of Prince Vladimir's daughter Lovely in honourable marriage. The Prince looked earnestly at the bold wooer and then said:

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"It is well. I will give you the hand of my daughter Lovely in honourable marriage."

Then, after due notice had been given, he went in state to his daughter's apartment to tell her with all the solemnity which the occasion demanded, that he had chosen for her a goodly husband whose claim upon her love was supported by a strong body-guard of forty good youths.

But Lovely looked with a smile at her royal father, and then looked again with a laugh. "Why, father," she said, "this is no bold ambassador from the Island of Kodol or elsewhere; from King Yetmanuila Yetmanuilovich or any other stern-eyed monarch. *It is a woman.* Why, when he walks in the courtyard I think of a

duck in the pond. When he speaks I think of the note of a flute. When he walks in the palace I think of the dance, and when he sits on the bench of white oak he presses his feet close together. His hands are lily white with taper fingers, and upon them the marks of rings are plainly to be discovered." Then Lovely laughed and laughed again, and the sound was not pleasant to Prince Vladimir, the Fair Sun of Kiev, who walked away to the window.

"I will prove her," he said, after pondering for a time. Then he left the apartment and came to the ambassador. "Will it please you," he said courteously, "to accept the challenge of my heroes to a shooting match?"

"I have longed for many things," was the quick reply, "but for none so much as to receive such a challenge." Then without further delay they went out upon the open plain and began to shoot at an oak tree standing at a distance of about a mile. One shot and another shot, one struck and another missed, the shooting was good and not so good, and the old oak merely shook its smaller boughs as if a summer breeze were blowing.

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Then it came to the turn of the ambassador from the stern King Yetmanuila Yetmanuilovich, and stepping forward the envoy said, "I will not shoot with one of the heroic bows of Kiev. I have within the fair white linen pavilion in which I have lodged my brave body-guard a little bow which I always carry with me when my royal master sends me upon an embassy across the open steppe." Then at a hail from the envoy the brave body-guard brought out the bow. Five of them carried it at one end and five at the other, while the remaining thirty bold youths dragged along the quiver filled full of flaming arrows. Then the ambassador took the little travelling bow in her hand and fitted to the bow-string a flaming shaft of steel.

The cord twanged, Prince Vladimir stepped quickly aside, the arrow sang a journeying song and shivered the trunk of the ancient oak, so that the sun streamed through it.

"I will prove this ambassador once again," murmured Prince Vladimir in his royal beard. "If he (she) be a woman he (she) will have no taste for a wrestling match."

Then he got together his strong wrestlers and assembled them in a brave company. "Will it please you," he said courteously, "bold ambassador of the stern King Yetmanuila Yetmanuilovich, to try a bout of wrestling."

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"Have you then bold wrestlers, as well as expert bowmen?" asked the envoy. "I have often wrestled with children during my childhood, and I can but make a bold man's effort." Then the ambassador grasped two brave wrestlers in one heroic arm and three brave wrestlers in the other heroic arm, and cracked their skulls together until the Prince begged the wrestler with children to spare his brave heroes. Then said the ambassador:

"I came to woo your daughter Lovely, Prince Vladimir, and if you will not give her to me with your blessing, I will take her with your curse."

"You shall have her by my own consent," said the King, "for with such a wooer her own consent does not greatly matter."

Then Prince Vladimir seized the occasion to make a great wedding-feast, which lasted with intervals for resting for the full space of three days. When the feast was over the bride and bridegroom were about to be led to the church to take the golden crowns, but the ambassador sat sad and silent in the hall.

"What ails you on your wedding morning?" asked the father of the bride.

"I know not," was the reply. "It may be that my father has died or my mother, and my heaviness is the sign of grief. Perchance I need some music. Call the harp players, and let us see if they can dispel my heaviness."

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So the harpers were called, and they sang of the great deeds of Svyatogor, of Ilya of Murom, and of Ivan the son of Golden Tress, but for all their skill and sweetness the heaviness of the ambassador was not dispelled.

"I heard in my own home," he said, when the music ceased, "of a skilful player upon the harp of maple wood whose name was Stavr of Chernigof. Send for him, and let us see if he can dispel my heaviness."

"If I do it not," said Vladimir in his royal beard, "I shall anger the stern King Yetmanuila Yetmanuilovich. If I do it, Stavr may be freed from my prison." Yet he did it.

Then Stavr came, and, standing before the ambassador, plucked the strings of his harp of maple wood. And he sang brave songs of heroic victory, and gentle songs of constancy in love. As he sang, the ambassador began to sleep and dream, and from these signs the royal host knew well that his guest was pleased and delighted and thankful beyond measure. Then with a gentle sigh the envoy woke and the music ceased.

"A boon, O Prince," cried he; "let Stavr go to my white pavilion to entertain my brave body-guard as he has entertained me."

Such a request from one who had paid the musician the high honour of dreaming to his music could not be refused, and Stavr was allowed to go out of the banquet-hall with the ambassador by his side.

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Now when they came out into the bright sunlight and had almost reached the pavilion, Vasilissa looked up at her husband and said:

"Do you not know me, Stavr?"

"Alas and alack!" said he, rubbing his eyes, "after such a time in such a dungeon I cannot recall the faces of far-off years."

"Stupid," said she. "Do you not know your own young wife Vasilissa, of whom you made your boast?"

"I would know Vasilissa if I had not seen her for thirteen years," said Stavr, with a great deal of certainty and not a little vexation.

"Stupider and stupider," said Vasilissa, turning away. "I am certain that you would not know her after three months."

Then she went into the pavilion, where she put off her ambassador's garments and dressed herself as Vasilissa, placing a coif upon her head to hide her shortened hair. When she came forth Stavr dropped his harp of maple wood upon the lap of moist Mother Earth, and taking his young wife by her lily-white hands, he kissed her sugar mouth.

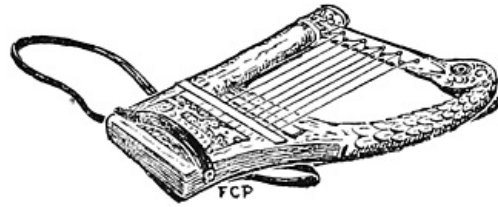
"Let us ride, my fair one," he said, "ride fast and far."

"Not so," was the reply; "we shall not steal away but *march* away from royal Kiev town. Let us go back to Prince Vladimir, and to Lovely, my promised bride."

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So they went back to the Prince and told him all their tale. "With good reason did Stavr boast of his young wife," he said, with a laugh, and then with a frown he added, "but what of Lovely the forsaken bride, for whom I chose a husband?"

"She will doubtless be easily consoled," said Vasilissa, "and will choose her next bridegroom for herself. May he harp as well and boast *not* so well as Stavr of Chernigof."



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THE GOLDEN HORDE

Prince Vladimir lost no occasion of making a royal feast, and his banquets were the admiration of Holy Russia and of all the white world. To one banquet he invited a large number of princes, nobles, mighty heroes and their body-guards, as well as a company of merchant princes who had bought land with their wealth in order that they might be accounted gentlemen. The host made good cheer, the food was of the richest, the wine of the greenest, and the white oak tables gleamed like the newly fallen snow on the wide steppe. The stove glowed fiercely, and Ilya sat in the great corner honoured of all.

As the wine-cup passed, the heart of Prince Vladimir grew more and more generous, and he gave cities to one prince, towns to a second, villages to a third, and hamlets to another; but to Ilya he gave a cloak of marten skins with a collar of sables. Then the hero arose, left the banquet-hall with the cloak held out at arm's length from him, and came at last to the kitchen. There he dragged the cloak about the brick floor by one sleeve as if he wished to defoul it and said savagely:

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"Just as I drag about this cloak of marten skins with its collar of sables, I will drag about that poisonous serpent Tsar Kalin by his yellow curls. As I pour green wine upon this cloak," suiting the action to the word, "I will pour out his heart's blood."

Then a kitchenmaid came with unwashed face into the presence of Prince Vladimir, and said without preface: "Ilya hath been in my kitchen and hath dragged about the brick floor the mantle of marten skins with the collar of sables, saying that even so would he drag Vladimir by his yellow curls. And he has poured green wine upon the mantle, saying that even so would he pour out the heart's blood of Prince Vladimir." Then wiping her hands upon her apron she added, "And I know not what to do in the matter."

Prince Vladimir rose to his feet and his face was black with anger. "Ye mighty heroes!" he cried, raising his right hand aloft, "lead Ilya to our dungeon and place him behind the iron grating. Pile up trunks of oak trees against the door and heap yellow sand over all."

At once a great company of heroes left the banquet-hall, and coming to the kitchen stood in a ring round Ilya, who smiled at them as a father might smile at his boys; and no man laid hands upon him, for he was the pride of them all. "Help us now, Ilya of Murom," they said, "or Prince Vladimir will visit upon us his sore displeasure." So Ilya, smiling still, called Cloudfall, saddled him and rode himself to the entrance of the dungeon. There he dismounted and let the shaggy bay steed go free, after having taken from him his saddle and plaited bridle.

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Then Ilya went down into the dungeon, and the heroes set up the iron grating, piled up trunks of oak trees at the door, and heaped yellow sand over all, as the prince had commanded. After that they went back to their host, who praised them for their obedience and their expedition; but Princess Apraxia dug a deep passage underground, and with her own fair hands carried food of the richest and drink of the sweetest to Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack. And this went on for three years, until Tsar Kalin heard of it, and he was head of the Golden Horde, who in all his wanderings had seen no fairer lady than the Princess Apraxia, whom he meant to take as his own in spite of Prince Vladimir and all his band of well-fed heroes.

Tsar Kalin assembled the Golden Horde, which was in number like the yellow sands upon the seashore, to ride against the royal town of Kiev. Under him were

forty Tsars and Tsareviches, and forty Kings and their heirs, each with a company of forty thousand men, and when the host was all assembled it stood along the banks of swift-flowing Mother Dnieper and round about Kiev town on all sides for a distance of a hundred miles all told—a goodly escort for a fair princess. When all was ready Tsar Kalin sat down upon an armless chair in his gold-embroidered tent of white linen, and wrote a letter in great haste, using a swan-quill pen with molten gold in place of ink, and crimson velvet in place of parchment. Then he called his best and favourite runner and gave the royal letter into his hands.

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“Go,” he said, “to the town of Kiev, falsely styled ‘royal.’ Enter not by the gates of shining white oak, but leap over the city wall. Dismount not, but riding your charger enter without announcement the palace of white stone. Set the door wide open, but do not close it behind you. Bow not to North, South, East, or West, and do no special reverence to Prince Vladimir. But stand right over against him, and fling this letter upon the table, saying to him:

“Take this letter and ask Nikitich, the young man of supernatural wisdom who can both read and write, to tell thee what it contains, for it disposes in set terms of all your pretensions to royalty. Clean all the streets of Kiev town, take down the wonder-working crosses of the Holy Temples—but leave upon the domes the tall fiery darts of Ilya lest Falcon the Hunter should still be alive—and build stalls for horses in the churches. Cleanse also your palaces of white stone and prepare beds without number, for our host is great. Brew sweet liquors, for our thirst is also great, and let cask stand upon cask in noble array. For in less than two days Tsar Kalin and his great host shall walk the streets of Kiev, and our master shall wed the Princess Apraxia.”

The boldness and the careful detail of the command caused the heart of Prince Vladimir to sink very low, and the best he could imagine was to gain time. So he caused Nikitich to write a letter in reply, saying: “Cleaning and fermenting are both slow processes. I shall need a space of three months to prepare this city for its coming guests.” Then the favourite runner of Tsar Kalin brought this submissive reply to his master, and the truce was granted.

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Prince Vladimir paced to and fro in his chamber, chewing his moustache, and occasionally heaving a heavy sigh when no one was near. Meanwhile, the cleaning and the brewing were proceeding apace, for as Princess Apraxia said quietly, “There is nothing lost by cleanliness, and a good store in the larders and the cellar, for who knows which of our friends will sleep in the clean beds and partake of our cheer.”

“Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck is no more,” said Prince Vladimir bitterly. “There is no hero to fight for our faith and fatherland. There is none to defend Prince Vladimir.” When the busy Princess heard these words she paused for a moment in her work and said, “Little father, command thy trusty servants to go to the deep dungeon and see whether Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck be even yet alive.” Then she went on with her dusting, for the china bowls and cups from Farthest East were always her own particular care.

“Foolish princess,” said her husband, pausing in his pacing to and fro. “If I cut off your light head, will it grow again? How can the youthful aged one be alive after three years’ starvation?” The Princess said nothing, but went on with her work, and in a few moments Vladimir himself went off to the dungeon on the desperate chance. And there, to his wonder, he found Ilya lying on cushions of down, with food of the richest and wine of the greenest on a table beside him, on which was also spread a wonderful written parchment of the Holy Gospels.

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Vladimir was so much astonished to find Ilya not only alive and well, but to all appearance very comfortable and happy, that he bowed to North, South, East, and West, and then particularly to the hero. “Come forth, Ilya,” he said, as if he had taken no share in the Old Cossáck’s imprisonment. “Come forth, and defend us against the Golden Horde, for the sake of the widows and orphans which are to be.” Ilya smiled gently and rose slowly from his seat of comfort, for three years’ restraint had somewhat stiffened him. Then Vladimir hastened to take him by the hands, as if he had quite forgiven him for a crime which he had never committed, and leading him to his own table, placed him in the great corner and heaped food of the best before him.

But Ilya was not hungry, and he left the table without a word, for he wanted heroic exercise most of all. In the open field he saw Cloudfall grazing quietly as though his master had ridden him only yesterday; and you may be quite certain and absolutely sure that no other rider had during the past three years sat on the back of the faithful shaggy bay steed. The horse gave a joyful chuckle when Ilya once more drew near to him, and as his master proceeded to saddle him he turned his head about and gazed upon him with heroic approbation.

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Certain of the people of Vladimir's palace saw Ilya mount upon Cloudfall, but they did not see him as he rode away, so swift was his flight—there was but a smoke wreath on the open steppe and streams of water burst forth where good Cloudfall's hoofs beat upon the ground. He gave a great leap upwards and alighted on the crest of a lofty mountain, from whence he looked out across the open plain to see if any of the heroes were within sight who had come out to defend Holy Russia against the Golden Horde of the Tatars.

Far away in the east he saw the white linen pavilions of the heroes who had helped him to form the barrier against Falcon the Hunter, and the sun shone brightly on their golden embroideries. At the opening of one snowy tent his keen eyes could descry even at that distance how the fine wheat had been shaken out upon the earth for the delight of a hero's charger, and how that same hero had planted upright a spear of heroic height and hung upon it a golden tassel, not for vanity of youthfulness, but as a signal to all the enemies of Holy Russia that a champion abode within that pavilion. As he stood there with his hand shading his eyes Ilya saw another hero come to that vicinity and, even at that far distance, he knew him for the young man of supernatural wisdom—Nikitich, who could both read and write. He saw how the new-comer pitched his pavilion, shook out fine wheat for his charger's delight, planted a lofty spear and displayed two tassels, not for vanity of youthfulness, but to show that a hero and a scholar abode in that pavilion.

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Then Ilya came down from the mountain-top, and before you could say SVYATOGOR he had arrived in the space between the two upright staffs, where he gave Cloudfall the rein that he might take his share of the fine wheat, planted his own lofty spear and hung three tassels upon it, as a sign that a hero, a scholar, and a landed gentleman had come to the assistance of Holy Russia against the Golden Horde. He now entered one of the snowy pavilions, where he found twelve Russian heroes sitting at meat, who all rose to their feet, kissed him and bade him welcome, whereupon they sat down again to go forward with the business of eating. But as he was not yet hungry Ilya did not join them. He hastened to explain his mission, and asked for their help in defending Kiev town, Vladimir, and Princess Apraxia. But one of them said:

"Nay, nay, Ilya of Murom, we will not mount our steeds to defend Kiev town, Vladimir, and his Princess. For he has many princely nobles, whom he feasts right heroically and upon whom he bestows the richest gifts."

"It will be the worse for all of you," said Ilya, in great anger, and their voices rose in wrath so that the good steeds raised their heads from the fine wheat and looked with intelligent wonder through the opening of the pavilion.

Meanwhile Vladimir wrapped himself in his black velvet mantle, which was trimmed with marten, and paced to and fro in his palace in Kiev town, for the time of the truce was almost over, and so far the heroes had not made their appearance. Now as he paced up and down to soothe his anxiety his nephew Yermak came to him and begged that he might have a warrior's charger, a coat of heavy chain mail and a ponderous mace, as well as leave to ride against the Golden Horde.

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"You are a mere boaster," said Vladimir carelessly. "Why, you have never yet handled a mace."

"If you do not give me the charger, uncle," said Yermak, "I will set out on foot." The youth's quiet determination had more effect upon Vladimir than weeks of persuasion, and he bade Yermak choose what charger he desired from the royal stables as well as the armour which suited him best from the armoury. Off went the youth in great glee and equal haste, but the chain mail which he found was so rusty that he flung it down with impatience upon the brick floor, whereupon all the rust flew from it; so he picked it up, selected weapons to his taste, ran to the stables, saddled a horse, mounted it and rode at topmost speed to the pavilion of the heroes.

And what did he find in that hour of anxiety and the direst peril? Why, the twelve heroes contentedly sitting playing at draughts upon a board of gold and Ilya sound asleep upon a couch under a heavy coverlet of sables. Then the anger of Yermak was very great indeed, and he shouted with all his might. "Ho, there, you Old Cossack, Ilya of Murom. Yonder in Kiev city there is bread to eat and to spare, but no one to defend the place against the Golden Horde."

Now Ilya, from force of habit and long practice, slept always with one ear open, and he knew also that it was a fatal mistake to lose his calmness, especially when others about him had lost their own. So he turned slowly on his couch and said quietly, "Climb up into the damp oak, young Yermak, and make an effort to number the host which comes against us by counting the standards which are

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displayed." So Yermak climbed up into the damp oak, and Ilya turning upon his other side went to sleep once more. From his perch in the damp oak Yermak saw a vast host of the Golden Horde, and how at that moment the leaders were marshalling their men in battle array; and he knew that the shaking of the bough on which he sat came from the trembling of moist Mother Earth at the tramp of their myriad feet. So great was the army that the swift grey wolf could not trot round it in the space of a long spring day; the black raven could not fly about it in the longest day of summer; the grey bird could not wing its flight across it in the longest light of autumn.

Now Yermak had in him some of the qualities of a hero, for the size of the host roused his courage to such a height that he felt impelled to advance against it by himself, single and alone. So he leapt quickly from the damp oak, sprang upon his charger, and rode fiercely across the open steppe against the vanguard of that great host. Meanwhile the game of draughts went quietly on in the fair pavilion of white linen, and Ilya slept. For three days and three nights this went on while Yermak hurled himself again and again against the forefront of the Golden Horde. Then Ilya awoke and said to Nikitich:

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"Mount into the damp oak, young man of supernatural wisdom. Perhaps young Yermak has fallen down from the branch for no longer do I see him there."

Then Nikitich climbed up into the tree-top and looked out upon the Golden Horde. He saw the vast host and he saw more than that—not the black raven flying, nor the bright falcon soaring, but that heroic youth galloping boldly against the heathen horde; and he made his report to Ilya, who rose deliberately from his couch:

"Rise, ye draught players, and mount your good steeds. Then in the first place let one of you take grappling hooks and catch young Yermak by the shoulders. Say to him when he is stayed in his headlong flight, 'Thou hast breakfasted to-day. Now let the heroes dine.'"

So one of the company went out with strong grappling irons. Thrice he caught Yermak by the shoulders and thrice did the young man break away, rending his chain mail in the action. Then the messenger returned to report his failure and Nikitich made the attempt with as little success. So Ilya went himself. He sat on Cloudfall as the grandfather of all the oaks stood upon the lap of moist Mother Earth, and caught Yermak by the shoulder with his heroic hand saying to him, "Rest your heroic heart and let *us* labour now."

Then Ilya rode against that mighty host as the swift eagle swoops down upon the swans and geese or the falcon darts upon the wild duck; and at the place against which Yermak had beaten in vain he made a breach in the line and began to hew a path through the host as the mower makes a way through the thick standing wheat. Then Cloudfall addressed him with the voice of a man:

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"Ho, thou mighty hero of Holy Russia! with a heart of steel thou hast advanced against this mighty host, but even your great might may not overcome it, for that pestilent robber, Tsar Kalin, is served by many men of great renown and warrior-maids of heroic strength and feminine fierceness. Moreover, he is a wily leader, for he has dug three trenches across the open steppe and into these you will fall. I can lift you out of the first and likewise out of the second, but out of the third I may not lift you though I should succeed in rising from it myself. For I watched them digging the trenches while you were sleeping, and, indeed, I missed a great deal of the fine wheat while I served you in this manner."

Such a counsel of despair was not pleasing to the heroic Ilya, who grasped his silken whip in his right hand and beat Cloudfall soundly upon the flanks. "Traitor and renegade," he cried in heroic anger, "I feed thee on white wheat and give you water from crystal springs and yet you will forsake me in the deep ditches of the open steppe." And he paid no heed to the warning of the intelligent animal, but rolling up the sleeve of his right arm advanced with unabated fury against the foe. In a few moments he came to the first trench, into which he fell forthwith and from which Cloudfall bore him forth in safety. On he rode, fighting all the way, until he came to a second ditch, and from that also he escaped in like manner. Then he advanced again, fighting all the way, until he came to the third ditch from which Cloudfall leapt nimbly. But he left Ilya behind. Thereupon the accursed Tatars leapt down into the trench and fell upon Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack. They bound his swift feet and his strong white hands and led him to where Tsar Kalin sat in his pavilion of fair white linen embroidered with gold.

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"Ah, ho! Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack," cried the pestilent leader of the Golden Horde. "How could you hope, you old dog, to prevail against my mighty host?" Then to his guards he said, "Unfetter his swift feet and unbind his strong white hands." This was done at once, and then Tsar Kalin said in a voice of honey:

"Now sit down at my table, Ilya of Murom. Eat of my food and drink of my mead, put on an embroidered robe, and marry my daughter. Serve Prince Vladimir no longer but be vassal to me."

Then Ilya's eyes flashed fire like the fire of Falcon the Hunter, whose father he was. "If I had by me my good sword," he said, "thou dog, Kalin the Tsar, it should woo thy neck. I will do none of these things, for my duty is to fight for the Christian temples which my darts have protected even against my own son Falcon the Hunter, for Prince Vladimir and Princess Apraxia and the city of Kiev."

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Then Ilya raised his eyes and listened and a voice sounded in his ears, "Lift up thy hands, Ilya." He raised them heavenward and into his heroic arms came the strength of twenty heroes; and in that strength he fell upon Tsar Kalin and laid his lifeless body upon the floor of the fair pavilion. Snatching up the monarch's sword he ran from the pavilion to turn it against his host, and company after company fell before him until his sword edge turned and the weapon was useless. Then he flung it aside in impatience, and picking up a Tatar by the ankles he used him as a club with which he cleared a path through the host of astonished warriors. "It is a stout club, this of mine," he cried grimly as he dealt blows to right and left; "and it has a hard end to it with which to crack infidel pates."

At last he won his way to the edge of the host, where he flung his human club from him with a last great effort, and seizing the horn which hung at his side he sounded a mighty blast; for the heroic efforts he had made had dimmed the clearness of his eyes, so that he could not distinguish either the white day or the black night. From far away Cloudfall heard the sound of that familiar horn and in two heroic leaps was once more at his master's side. In a trice Ilya had mounted him and then he rode away to a lofty mountain upon the summit of which he stood and, raising his hand to his brow, gazed far away to the eastward. There he saw again the white pavilion of the heroes and the horses feeding on the fine wheat which was strewn for them. "I will send them a swift messenger," said Ilya of Murom the Old Cossack.

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As he fitted a fiery dart to his stout bow, Ilya conjured it saying, "Fly, little dart, to yonder pavilion. Tear through the roof and pierce the white breast of my brother-in-arms, Samson, that glorious hero of Holy Russia, and make a small scratch—not a wound which you would bestow upon one of the Golden Horde,—for the hero Samson sleepeth and taketh his ease while I stand here alone and have need of his help."

The shaft made a stream of blue light through the air, and reaching the pavilion tore a flaming path through the roof, but too quickly for the linen to catch fire, and made a small scratch upon the white breast of Samson, rousing him from his heavy sleep. He opened his eyes, gazed upwards, and saw the rent in the roof of the pavilion. Then he was aware of a slight discomfort on his breast, looked down, saw the scratch, and leapt lightly to his nimble feet.

"Ho, there," he cried aloud, "ye mighty heroes of Holy Russia, saddle your good steeds without delay and mount with speed. A message of distress has come from my brother-in-arms, and had it not been for the cross upon my breast it would have honoured me with a wound fit only for one of the Golden Horde."

Roused at last the heroes took their chargers from the scattered wheat, saddled them and rode them towards Kiev town; and Ilya noting this from his point of vantage came down from the mountain to join his twelve brethren, and in a long line of strength and swiftness the thirteen heroes rode against the Golden Horde.

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For the space of five hours they mowed down young and old, and they left at the end of that heroic period not so many as one single soul to continue the accursed race. Flushed with victory and self-confidence, they came together in one place, and all except Ilya began to boast and to say, "If there were steps raised up to Heaven we would climb them and wage war against the sacred hosts."

As these impious words were spoken there happened a wonder of wonders. For the Tatars rose up from the field of the slain, and where there had been one man there were now three, and they all stood up strong and well upon their feet; and if Ilya had not accounted for Tsar Kalin their advance upon Kiev town would have been sudden and overwhelming; but they turned hither and thither like the sands of the desert, having no leader.



'A mountain cave which no man has ever seen'

Now as the heroes saw them rise, man after man, three in place of one, they rubbed their eyes in wonder, and the impious words which they had spoken dazzled their sense and confused their wits, so that they turned their arms against each other and fought with the fury of sundered friends. But Ilya took no part in that unnatural fight. Sadly and dazedly he watched until the twelve lay dead upon the plain. Then he slowly turned his shaggy bay steed Cloudfall and rode towards a mountain cave which no man has ever seen or shall see till the end of Holy Russia; and sitting in that cavern with his sword across his knees he slowly turned to stone. Cloudfall also became a lifeless statue, and there the two heroic friends sit on, waiting, waiting, waiting for the touch of life which will come when Holy Russia is in direst need and calls aloud in distress for the courage and skill, the patience and the fiery valour of Ilya of Murom the Old Cossáck.



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WHIRLWIND THE WHISTLER,
OR
THE KINGDOMS OF COPPER, SILVER, AND GOLD

In a certain kingdom in a certain land known to all of us lived the Great White Tsar and his wife Golden Tress, who was so beautiful that twice each day she caused the sun to blush a rosy red, once in the morning as he rose across the steppe, and once in the evening as he bade farewell to the white world; but for the rest of the day he asserted his kingship even over Golden Tress, and looked at her boldly and whenever he wished.

Now the Great White Tsar and his Tsaritzza, Golden Tress, had three sons, Peter, Vasily, and Ivan, and one great enemy, Whirlwind the Whistler, whom he feared greatly, because this impetuous foe had vowed with a shriek and a howl to come at sunset and whirl away Golden Tress from the palace of the Little Father.

One evening Golden Tress went out with a company of maidens and nurses to walk in the gardens of the palace, and Whirlwind saw his chance. He rushed down upon the palace garden, blinding the eyes of all so that they could not see what tricks he was playing; and when the maidens and nurses opened their eyes they saw nothing at all and heard nothing at all except a far-off call of distress and a shriek of spiteful fury; for Whirlwind the Whistler had carried away Golden Tress to his den among the fastnesses of the mountains, while the trees bowed in fear before him as he took his way across the open steppe.

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The Great White Tsar was now in deep distress, and knew not what to do. Years went by and still he knew not what to do, but one day it occurred to him to ask the help of his sons, who were now grown into fine young men. "My dear boys," he said, "which of you will go and seek Golden Tress?" "We will go, and at once, father," said the two elder brothers, and without delay they set out upon their quest.

When they had been gone for some time the youngest son, Ivan, said to his father, "Let me go also, my father, to seek Golden Tress." "No," said the Tsar, "for you are all I have in the white world." "Do let me go also," said Ivan, "for I long to wander over the white world and seek my mother." The father did his best to persuade his boy to stay with him, for he was now very lonely, but when he saw that Ivan could no longer rest at home he yielded to his entreaties, saying to him, "Well, there is no help for it; go, and may the God of Holy Russia be good to you."



Whirlwind the Whistler carries away Golden Tress

Ivan without delay saddled his good steed, entered the audience chamber of his father, bowed to North, South, East, and West, and particularly to the Great White Tsar, mounted his horse and rode on and ever onward across the steppe, whether it was long or short. By and by he came to a forest in the heart of which stood a lordly castle protected from the keen winds by a ring of encircling pines. Ivan rode into the broad courtyard, where he met an old man and greeted him kindly with the words, "Many years and years of health to you." "Who are you, goodly youth?" asked the old man, and Ivan said quietly and proudly, "I am Ivan Tsarevich, son of the Great White Tsar and his Tsaritz, Golden Tress." "Oh, my very, very own nephew," said the old man; "and whither is God leading you?"

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"I am in search of my mother, Golden Tress," said Ivan. "Can you tell me, uncle, where she may be found?"

"No, nephew, I cannot," returned the old man, "and that to my sorrow and discomfiture. But what I am able to do I will do willingly. Here is a ball. Throw it before you as you ride. It will roll onward and lead you to a range of steep rugged mountains. In the side of this range of mountains you will find a cave which you must enter, and having entered you will find within a pair of iron claws."

"Take these iron claws," the old man went on, "and place them upon your hands and your feet. This will enable you to climb up the steep face of the mountain, and having done so, *perhaps* you will find there your mother, Golden Tress."

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This was good advice so far as Ivan was able to judge, so he took the ball in his hand, thanked his uncle courteously, and, starting his horse on the path which led through the pine forest, threw the ball before him. Onward and ever onward it rolled, but it seemed something more than a mere ball, for occasionally it came to a parting of the ways and then appeared to pause for a moment and consider. Then onward and ever onward it rolled, while Ivan rode behind it until he came out at last upon an open plain where a great horde was encamped; and in the midst of the horde stood a fair pavilion of white linen embroidered with gold. The ball made a path through the ranks of the men-at-arms, who stood nimbly aside to let it pass, until it rested, but impatiently rested, by the opening of the

pavilion, near which two stout chargers were feeding on wheat of the finest which was scattered thickly for their sustenance and comfort.

Then two leaders came forth shoulder to shoulder and hand to hand from that fair pavilion, and Ivan saw that they were his two elder brothers.

"Where are you going, Ivan, son of the Great White Tsar?" they asked, and the young man answered, "I grew weary at home and thought of going to seek my mother, Golden Tress. Send these men of yours to their homes and let us go together."

The two brothers assented, and in a short space of time the great army was disbanded, and the two brothers sat across their chargers ready to go forward after the ball which was bouncing in great impatience. As soon as the three put spurs to their horses it rolled on again and went onward and ever onward until it came to a cave in a steep mountain. At the opening of this cave Ivan slipped down from his horse and said to his brothers, "Take care of my horse while I go on up the face of this mountain, where *perhaps* I shall find my mother. Remain here and wait for me for the space of just three months. If I do not come back within that time then you may conclude that it is of no use waiting for me any longer."

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The brothers looked up the face of the steep mountain and thought in their hearts, "How can a man climb that mountain-side? He will merely fall and crack his skull." But they did not give utterance to their thoughts. They merely said, "Well, brother, go, and God be with you. We will wait for you here."

Ivan now stepped forward to the cave, after giving his charger an affectionate pat upon its glossy neck, and saw that it was closed with a door of iron. He raised his hand and struck a hearty blow upon the door, which opened, and he went in. As he stood in the middle of the dark earthen floor, iron claws came upon his hands and feet of themselves, and, coming forth from the place into the light of day, he began to climb up the steep face of the mountain—climb, climb, climb.

For a whole month he toiled upward, resting at night beneath some friendly bush, and at the end of the month reached the summit with a sigh of relief. "Well," he said, "well, well, glory be to God!"

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For a little while he rested, and then walked onward on the summit of the mountain—walked and walked, walked and walked, until he came to a castle of copper. At the gateway sat terrible wriggling serpents fastened with copper chains, crowds of them writhing in a mass upon the earth; and not far away was a well, at the mouth of which was a copper bucket fastened with a copper chain. Now Ivan watched the writhing serpents for a moment, and then, obeying an impulse of kindness, he drew water in the copper bucket and gave to them to drink. When they had quenched their thirst they lay down in quiet, and Ivan was able to enter the castle unmolested.

At the doorway and just over the threshold the young man was met by a Tsaritzza who was clothed in a cloth of a coppery red, warm and brilliant, and whose hair was of a deep auburn tinged with light and shining with the early gloss of youthfulness. She looked coolly at Ivan as if she thought little of him, but her greeting was courteous enough. "Who are you, gallant youth?" she asked, and the young man replied simply:

"I am Ivan, youngest son of the Great White Tsar."

"How did you come here?" asked the Copper Tsaritzza, "with your own will or against your will?"

"With my own will," said Ivan. "I am in search of my mother. For, while she walked in the green palace garden, Whirlwind the Whistler came with a shriek and bore her away to an unknown land. Can you tell me where I may find her?"

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"No, I cannot," was the reply, "but far away from here lives my second sister the Silver Tsaritzza—perhaps she will be able to tell you where you may find Golden Tress. But I pray you, good youth, when you have killed Whirlwind the Whistler, do not forget me, poor unfortunate, but rescue me from this place and take me out into the free white world. Whirlwind the Whistler holds me here as a captive and comes to visit me once in three months to torment me with his doleful whining." Then she gave the good youth a copper ball and a copper ring as a token. "This ball," she said, "will lead you to my second sister, and within this ring lies the whole of the Kingdom of Copper."

Then Ivan set the copper ball rolling and followed it until he came to a castle all of silver and finer than the first. At the gateway were terrible writhing serpents

fastened with silver chains, and near them was a well with a silver bucket. Remembering the previous reward for his impulse of kindness, Ivan drew water and gave it to the serpents to drink. When they had quenched their thirst they lay down in quiet, and Ivan was able to enter the castle unmolested.

At the doorway, and just over the threshold, he was met by a Tsaritzza, who was clothed in cloth of silver and whose hair was of fine white silver, which yet did not take away from the beauty of her youthfulness. At first she did not see Ivan, and she spoke to herself. "It will soon be three years," she said, "since Whirlwind the Whistler first imprisoned me in this silver castle, and during that time I have not seen or spoken with a dweller in Holy Russia. But by my lost Kingdom I see a Russian now and a goodly one." Then she bent her beautiful eyes upon Ivan and said in a voice like a silver bell, "Who are you, good youth?"

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"I am Ivan, youngest son of the Great White Tsar," was the simple answer.

"How did you come here?" asked the Silver Tsaritzza, "with your own will or against your will?"

"With my own will," said Ivan. "I am in search of my mother. For, while she walked in the green palace garden, Whirlwind the Whistler came with a shriek and bore her away to an unknown land. Can you tell me where I may find her?"

"No, I cannot," was the reply, "but not far away from here lives my eldest sister the Golden Tsaritzza, Elena the Lovely—perhaps she will be able to tell you where you may find Golden Tress. But I pray you, good youth, when you have killed Whirlwind the Whistler, do not forget me, poor unfortunate, but rescue me from this place and take me out into the free white world. Whirlwind the Whistler holds me here as a captive, and comes once in two months to torment me with his hideous voice." Then she gave the good youth a silver ball and a silver ring as a token and said to him, "Within this little circle lies the whole of the Kingdom of Silver."

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Once more Ivan set the ball rolling, and wherever it went, there he followed it, and he came at last across many leagues of open country to a castle of gold. At the gateway sat terrible wriggling serpents fastened with golden chains, crowds of them writhing in a mass upon the earth; and not far away was a well at the mouth of which was a golden bucket fastened with a golden chain. Again Ivan watched the writhing serpents for a moment and then drew water in the golden bucket and gave to them to drink. When they had quenched their thirst they lay down in quiet, and Ivan was able to enter the castle unmolested.

At the doorway, and just over the threshold, he was met by a Tsaritzza, who was clothed in cloth of gold and whose hair was of fine red gold glowing with the fire of youthfulness. At once she saw Ivan and said to him:

"Who are you, good youth?"

"I am Ivan, youngest son of the Great White Tsar," was the simple answer.

"How did you come here?" asked the Golden Tsaritzza, "with your own will, or against your will?"

"With my own will," said Ivan. "I am in search of my mother. For, while she walked in the green palace garden, Whirlwind the Whistler came with a shriek and bore her away to an unknown land. Can you tell me where I may find her?"

"I can indeed tell you," said the Golden Tsaritzza. "She lives not far from here. Whirlwind the Whistler flies to her once a week and to me once a month, and he wearies both of us with his shrieks and his moans. Here is a golden ball for you. Throw it before you and follow it. It will lead you to your mother." Then she gave the good youth a golden ring as a token and said to him: "Within this little circle lies the whole of the Kingdom of Gold. I pray you, good youth, when you have conquered Whirlwind the Whistler, do not forget me, poor unfortunate, but rescue me from this place and take me out into the free white world."

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"I will take you," promised Ivan. Then he rolled the golden ball before him and wherever it went, there he followed it, until he came at last to such a palace as he could scarcely bear to look upon, it blazed so brightly with diamonds and precious stones. At the gateway six-headed serpents were hissing, but when Ivan had given them water from a well with a diamond bucket, fastened with a chain of fine seed pearls, they sank down in quiet and allowed him to pass into the castle. He walked quickly through one lofty chamber after another and in the last chamber he found his mother.

She was sitting on a great throne of a single emerald clad in the festal robes of a Tsaritzza, and crowned with a dazzling crown, beneath which her golden tresses

flowed downward over the emerald steps. Raising her sad clear eyes, she looked at the stranger, and as she looked the mist of memory cleared, a smile played about her beautiful ruddy lips, and she said eagerly, holding her hands forward, "Ah, is it you, my dear, dear son? How have you found out the place of my concealment?"

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"That is so and so and by the way and matterless," said Ivan. "Suffice it to say that I have come to fetch you home."

"But, my dear, dear son," said Golden Tress, "that will be indeed a hard matter for you. In these mountains the king of all is mighty Whirlwind, whom all the spirits of the air obey. It was he who bore me away, and it is against him that you must fight. Come quickly to the cellar."

Golden Tress stepped with the step of youthfulness down from the emerald throne, and taking her son by the hand led him down a dark stairway into the cellar beneath the palace.

Now in the cellar there were two tubs of water, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Golden Tress led Ivan forward and said to him, "Drink from the tub on your right hand." Ivan drank and drank deeply while his beautiful mother watched him closely, and when he was finished she asked, "Well, what strength is in thee?" "I am so strong," said the youth, "that I could turn over the whole castle with one hand."

"Drink again," said Golden Tress, very quietly. Ivan drank again and drank deeply.

"What strength is in thee now?" asked his mother.

"I am so strong," said he, "that, if I wished, I could turn the whole world over."

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"That is very great strength," said Golden Tress. "Now move these tubs of water so as to make them change positions. Place the right-hand tub on the left and the left-hand tub on the right." Ivan did so with perfect ease.

"Now," said Golden Tress, "let me tell you why I asked you to do this. In one of these tubs is water of strength, but in the other, water of weakness. Whirlwind always drinks the water of strength, and puts it on the right side, so we must mislead him or you will never be able to overcome him." Thereupon they made their way up the winding stairway to the apartment of Golden Tress, in which stood the shining throne made from a single emerald.

Golden Tress sat down upon this throne and composed herself, as if she were expecting a visitor. "In a short time," she said, "Whirlwind will fly home. Come and hide beneath my purple robe so that he may not be able to see you, and when he enters and runs to try to embrace me reach out your hand, which is now a hand of heroic strength, and seize his club. He will rise high and ever higher, but do not therefore release your hold upon his club. He will fly out of the window in the roof, and will carry you over seas and over precipices, but do not in dizziness release your hold upon his club. After a while Whirlwind will grow weak and will return to this palace and go down to the cellar, but do not release your hold upon his club. He will drink of the water in the tub on the right hand, but see that you drink meanwhile of the water in the other tub."

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"When he has drunk well, he will grow weak, and then you must take his sharp sword from his girdle and hew off his head with it. As soon as his head falls to the ground you will hear voices behind you crying, 'Strike again, strike again.' But these will be the voices of tempters, and your answer to them must be, '*A hero's hand strikes once to kill, but never once to maim.*'"

Ivan had scarcely disposed himself under the flowing purple robe which swept down upon the green and translucent base of the throne of Golden Tress, when suddenly the room grew dark and everything within it trembled and creaked. Whirlwind flew to his castle, and no one saw his form until he struck the courtyard stones. Then he became a goodly young man with a changeful restless face, and strode quickly into the castle carrying his club with a flourish, until he came before the emerald throne.

"Tfu, Tfu, Tfu," he said, sniffing disgustedly. "There is an odour of Russia here. Have you had visitors?"

"I cannot tell why you should think so," said Golden Tress. Then Whirlwind came forward and held out his arms to embrace the mother of Ivan, but with a quick movement the heroic youth stretched out his hand and seized his club. "I'll eat you," cried Whirlwind in a passion of anger, and Ivan replied, "Well, either you will or you won't."

With a piercing shriek Whirlwind turned and mounted quickly upward. He passed with a howl through the open window in the roof, and then his form was changed, but what it was now no one knew or was able to describe, for as often as any one opened eyes to look at him he filled them with dust and water; if any one sniffed him he made them sneeze; if any one tried to lay hands upon him he buffeted them in the chest and turned them about like weather vanes, all the while crying out, "What is my shape?" Only pigs could see him and knew of what shape he was and they had no powers of description.

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It was well for Ivan that in this furious flight he kept a firm hold on Whirlwind's club, for as he rushed on over the world he kept shrieking, "I will smash you! I will lay you low! I will drown you!" But as his club was firmly held he was powerless to give a knock-down blow, and presently, wearied out with his own fury, he grew weak and began to sink. Then he turned homeward, and alighted gently and wearily upon the stones of the courtyard, where he became a young man with a restless peevish face, listlessly bearing his club, which would have trailed upon the ground if the heroic hand of Ivan had not upheld it. He made what speed he could to the cellar, and at once took a deep draught of the water of weakness, while Ivan, dropping the club, ran to the water of strength, of which he drank long and contentedly, and so became the first mighty hero in the whole white world.

Seeing that Whirlwind had now become weak to extremity he took his sharp sword from his girdle and cut off his head with it. Then from behind him he heard voices crying, "Strike again, strike again, or he will come to life." "No," cried Ivan in a heroic voice which in spite of himself seemed to echo throughout the world. "*A hero's hand strikes once to kill, but never once to maim.*" Then without loss of time he made a fire, burned the body of Whirlwind as well as the head, and scattered his ashes from the ramparts of the castle to North, South, East, and West.

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Then Golden Tress was glad and embraced her son. "Now let us eat," she said, "and then go home together. It is very wearisome here—for of what use is a throne of a single emerald if there are no people? What are fine couches and sideboards and flagons and furniture if there is no love?"

"Are there not even servants to wait upon you?" asked Ivan. "How are you served?"

"You will see in a moment," was the reply. "Think of dinner." So Ivan thought of the nicest dinner he could imagine—thick soup, white fish with pink sharp sauce, meat, potatoes and spinach with rich brown gravy, iced pudding and apples and nuts for dessert—and before he could have written out the list all these things were upon the sideboard where they kept hot until they were needed, all of course except the pudding which stayed outside upon the window-sill to keep cool.

But with all this there was no sound, not even the cheerful clatter of plates or the chink of a jug upon a tumbler, for the plates came floating singly through the air and settled down quietly before the diners, while the wine rose from the bottom of the glasses as you have seen it do at the conjuror's. Ivan and his mother ate in silence, and the young man was surprised to find the meal somewhat disappointing. His lovely mother watched him closely with a wise smile upon her face. "When we get home," she promised herself, "he shall have hot cakes fresh from the oven with plenty of butter and—*I shall make them myself.*" Then she laughed inwardly and sniffed gently through her delicate nostrils as if she smelt the kitchen smell of newly made bread and cakes, and that is better even than a throne of a single emerald or a couch with a cover of sable skins lined with softest silk from Samarcand.

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When mother and son had rested for a while and talked of many things, Golden Tress enquiring particularly how the stoves were drawing in the palace of the Great White Tsar, the young man said, "Mother, let us go home now, for it is time, and besides, under the mountains my brothers are waiting for me. And on the way I must rescue three Tsaritzas who are living in the castles of Whirlwind the Whistler."

In a short time mother and son were ready for the journey, and though the castle was full of untold treasure they carried away with them not even a diamond of the size of a pin point. But they carried as many linen sheets as they could bear, not for vanity of housewifery but for a useful purpose. After a long journey they came to the Golden Tsaritzza, Elena the Beautiful, and led her forth, asking her to carry with her as many linen sheets as she could comfortably bear. In a similar manner they led forth the Silver Tsaritzza and the Copper Tsaritzza, and these also brought linen sheets for the device which Ivan had designed.

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When they came to the top of the precipice they tore the sheets into broad strips, knotted them together, and made a long linen rope of them; and by means of this stout rope, one end of which they fastened to the trunk of a lofty pine which had seen the dawn of history, they let themselves down to the plain below, first the Copper Tsaritzta, then the Silver Tsaritzta, then the Golden Tsaritzta, Elena the Beautiful, and last of all Golden Tress, the Tsaritzta of the Great White Tsar.

Now the two elder brothers of Ivan were standing below, waiting and watching, and when they saw the lovely ladies step daintily one after the other upon the earth they said to each other:

“Let us leave Ivan up there and let us take the three lovely maidens and our mother to our father, and tell him that we rescued them from Whirlwind the Whistler.”

“Right and just,” said Peter quickly, “I will take the Golden Tsaritzta, Elena the Beautiful, for myself, and you, Vasily, take the Silver Tsaritzta for yourself, and we will give the Copper Tsaritzta to some general.”

Meanwhile Golden Tress was looking steadily up the face of the precipice, waiting impatiently for Ivan to come down by the ladder of linen. But the two brothers ran forward, seized the linen, pulled it and tore it away. And when Ivan heard it snap near the trunk of the great pine, he sat down and in spite of his strength and manliness wept so sorely, and for such a long time, that his tears made a cascade down the face of the precipice, where the ladder of linen had wavered in the breeze. [214]

Then he arose somewhat refreshed and relieved, and turning back walked aimlessly through the Copper Kingdom, the Silver Kingdom, and the Golden Kingdom, but he met no living person. Then he came to the Diamond Kingdom, but even here he met no living person. He was now weary almost to death, and in the midst of wealth untold yearned for the sound of a human voice. In the Diamond Palace, from which he had rescued his mother, he wandered disconsolate not knowing what to do when, all at once, he saw a whistle lying on the window ledge. He took it up, and, being a good musician, began to play a tune, but as soon as he had sounded only one note Lame and Crooked stood before him, who seemed to be bowing all the time.

“What is your pleasure?” he asked.

“Get a bed ready,” said Ivan, and as soon as the words were spoken the bed stood near him with the pillows smoothed and the quilt turned down a little, so as to show the sheets of the finest linen. Ivan crept into the bed, in which he found a warming pan, settled down cosily and was soon in a deep sleep. After a time, the exact length of which does not matter, he awoke refreshed and whistled again. Before he could say Elena, Lame and Crooked stood before him. [215]

“What is your pleasure?” he asked.

“Can *everything* be done, then?” asked Ivan.

“Everything is possible,” was the reply. “Whoever blows that whistle has everything done for him. As we served Whirlwind the Whistler before, so now we are glad to serve the man who conquered him by bracing himself with draughts of the water which comes from the stinging East. It is only necessary to keep the whistle by you at all times.”

“Well, then,” said Ivan, “let me be in my own city this very moment.”

He had no sooner spoken than he found himself in his own city, and standing in the middle of the market square. As he stood looking around him a jolly old shoemaker came up and Ivan said to him, “Where are you going, my good man?”

“I am going to sell my shoes,” was the reply, “for I am a shoemaker.”

“Take me into your employment,” said the son of the Great White Tsar.

“But do you know how to make shoes?” was the cautious enquiry.

“Oh yes,” said Ivan, with such confidence that the man could do nothing but believe him.

“I have the means of doing everything—not only making shoes but clothes as well.”

“Come along, then,” said the jolly shoemaker, and they went to his house. As

soon as they had entered, the man took Ivan to the workshop and pointing to a seat near a bench he said: "Sit down there and get to work. I will go out to sell my wares, and when I return to-morrow I shall be able to judge exactly of your skill."

As soon as the man was gone Ivan took out his whistle and summoned Lame and Crooked.

"What is your pleasure?" asked he.

"To have shoes ready by to-morrow."

Lame and Crooked smiled a smile which seemed to wander round the room. "That is not work," he said, "but recreation."

"Here is the leather," said Ivan, and Lame and Crooked looked at it with a curving upper lip. "That is poor stuff," he said, "and the proper place for it is out of the window." Then he jumped out very nimbly after it and Ivan saw him no more; but when the young man awoke next morning he saw on the table beside his bed several pairs of shoes of the very best. He had scarcely dressed himself when the jolly old shoemaker came into his room and said, "Well, young man, are the shoes ready?"

"They are ready for sale," said Ivan quietly, pointing to the shoes on the table beside his bed. The shoemaker inspected them very closely, and his eyes opened wide in wonder. "Why, young man," he said, with a jolly smile, "you are not a shoemaker but a magician. I must go at once to the market and turn these fine shoes into good red gold."

Off he went to the market, and while he waited for customers to arrive he heard all the gossip of the city, which was greatly moved to curiosity over three forthcoming weddings at the palace of the Great White Tsar. He heard that Prince Peter was to marry the Golden Tsaritzza, Elena the Beautiful, that Prince Vasily was to marry the Silver Tsaritzza, and that the Copper Tsaritzza was to marry a general. Dresses were being made for the wedding, said the good dames of the market-place, such as had never yet been designed or embroidered within the memory of the oldest in Holy Russia. Then came a royal messenger seeking shoes for Elena the Beautiful, and after searching the whole market he came to the stall of the jolly old shoemaker and easily concluded that his wares were finer and more delicate than any others; so he told the man to pack up his entire stock and come with him to the apartments of the Golden Tsaritzza, Elena the Beautiful, in the palace of the Great White Tsar.

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The Golden Tsaritzza was seated among her maidens, who were so busy and excited and trembling that they sewed many of the lovely garments quite wrong; and as the shoemaker entered the room the Lady-of-Honour, who bore the high title of Golden Scissors, was scolding a pretty young dressmaker for putting the right sleeve in the place of the left. As for Elena the Beautiful herself, she sat looking straight before her with the expression on her face of a person who is obliged to do one thing but would rather do something else.

When she saw the shoes spread out on a table before her she looked at them in a listless manner; then, all at once, her beautiful eyes moistened and brightened, and she said to the shoemaker who stood near with his cap of rough fur in his hand, "What is the meaning of this? They make shoes of this pattern only in the mountains." At once an idea for gaining time came into her mind, and turning to the somewhat bewildered shoemaker, whose jolly face was clouded and anxious owing to his good fortune, she said to him in a voice which sounded hard and cold like the ring of steel upon an anvil, "Make me, without measure, another pair of shoes cunningly sewn, set with precious stones and glittering with diamonds. They must be ready for to-morrow, otherwise my servants will hale you to the gallows."

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The shoemaker was then taken to the Tsar's treasury, where he chose the precious stones required, and was given money to buy leather of the richest and softest kind that could be obtained. He had received the most exalted order he had ever been honoured with, and might have put upon his signboard, "Shoemaker by Royal Appointment to the Golden Tsaritzza," but still he was far from happy—in fact he was utterly miserable. "By Svyatogor, Ilya, and Vladimir and all the heroes," he said, "but greatness means great worry. Whatever shall I do? How can I make shoes by to-morrow when I am not allowed to measure the exalted foot of the beautiful Tsaritzza? I shall make nothing by to-morrow but an end to my life, for it is very clear that I shall make acquaintance with the gallows—say about ten o'clock. However, seeing that it cannot be helped, let me have a last jollification with my companions."

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Off he went to the inn where he had more friends than was good for him, and when they saw his face so gloomy which was usually so jolly and generous they eagerly asked him the cause of his trouble.

"Oh, my dear friends," he said, "I have been honoured with a Court order and as a consequence they are going to hang me to-morrow, and only the lucky man who succeeds to my business will reap the benefit of being able to call himself 'Shoemaker by Royal Appointment to the Golden Tsaritzza.'"

"Why so?" asked his companions, who were so thirsty that they thought the shoemaker might have made a much shorter speech. Then the man told his trouble as shortly as possible, concluding with the words, "What think you, friends, of an order like that? I may as well enjoy myself with you for the last time, for they will surely come for me to-morrow morning—say about ten o'clock."

So they drank and drank and sang and joked and danced and then drank again, by which time the shoemaker was by no means steady upon his legs. "Well," he said, as the town clock struck twelve, "I will take home a keg of spirits and lie down to sleep, and to-morrow when they come to take me to the gallows I will drink a gallon and a half at one draught, and if they hang me drunk I may be able to look and feel jolly until the last."

Then he staggered home with the keg under his arm. He had scarcely passed the threshold when he saw Ivan and began at once to upbraid him. "You abandoned rascal," he cried, "see what your fine shoes have done for me." Then he told him as much of the story as he could remember, and staggered off to bed saying, "When they come for me in the morning, wake me up."

As soon as all was quiet Ivan took out his whistle and blew, whereupon Lame and Crooked appeared as before.

"What is your pleasure?" he asked, and the young Prince told him what was required.

"We obey!" said Lame and Crooked, who did not even ask for the precious stones from the Tsar's treasury which the shoemaker had used to wipe out his score at the inn.

Ivan lay down to sleep, and when he awoke next morning he thought that the sun had risen two hours too soon for his room was filled with fiery golden light. But it was only the brilliance of the precious stones set in the dainty shoes on the table by his bedside. He jumped up, dressed himself in the light of the shining gems which shone not by reflected radiance, but from the depth of their glowing hearts. Then he picked up the dainty shoes, kissed them lightly, and took them to his master whom he roused with a shake.

"It is time to rise," he said in the man's ear.

"What!" cried the shoemaker, sitting bolt upright with a tremendous start. "Have they come for me? Bring me the keg quickly and draw the blind to keep out the light, which shines too cheerfully for a poor fellow who is to be hanged about ten o'clock. Here is a cup. Pour the spirits in. They shall hang me drunk."

"But the shoes are made," said Ivan quietly, looking at the man with amusement almost conquered by disgust.

"Made? How made? Who made them? Where are they? Can't you draw the blind and keep out that silly light?"

Ivan drew the blind but the light was not thereby diminished, and now the bewildered shoemaker saw that the radiance came from the precious stones in the shoes which Ivan held in his hand.

The man rubbed his eyes in a dazed manner and then said, "They are made sure enough and look small enough even for Elena the Beautiful. When did we make them?"

"They were made in the night," said Ivan quietly, "but it is possible that you do not remember. Do you really find yourself unable to recall having cut and sewed them. *Do* try to remember—think it over very hard."

"Oh, brother," said the bewildered shoemaker, "it must have been working over these brilliant gems that has dazed my wits. I barely remember, but only very barely. But I must make haste to carry them to Elena the Beautiful. Thank goodness we have been able to execute her exalted order."

"And that you have been saved from occupying a still more exalted position," said Ivan, who being a prince had a great sense of humour.

"Yes, indeed," said the shoemaker as he left the house at great speed. Before Ivan could say Elena, which, by the way, he was continually saying to himself, the jolly shoemaker was standing in the apartment of the Golden Tsaritzta where the preparations for the wedding seemed to be as busy as ever.

Elena the Beautiful looked at the shoes, and something to which she dared not give a name told her heart what had taken place. "Surely," she said to herself, very very softly, "the good Spirits made these for Ivan." Then aloud she said to the grinning shoemaker, "How did you make these?"

"Oh," said the man, "I am able to do everything."

The reply of the Tsaritzta came quickly upon this boast. "If you can do everything, make me a wedding robe embroidered with gold and ornamented with diamonds and precious stones, which will fit my body as exactly as these shoes fit my feet. Let it be ready by to-morrow morning, for, if it is not, off goes your head."

The face of the shoemaker fell, and he went out into the street and walked a long, long way thinking very hard. "Well, well," he said at last, "it is of no use mourning. To-day will be my last day, that is quite certain, and I may as well spend it in jollification. For though a shoemaker may by great industry make a wonderful pair of shoes, he cannot make a wonderful wedding robe for a beautiful Tsaritzta without measurements, to say nothing of trying on." Then he went off to the inn, where he found his companions, who seemed to live there.



"Oh," said the man, "I am able to do everything."

"Well, what is wrong now?" they asked him as soon as they saw his gloomy face.

"Nothing but contradiction," he said. "My high-born patron has now made me Court Dressmaker and has ordered me to make her a wedding-robe embroidered with gold and ornamented with diamonds and precious stones, which will fit her body as exactly as my shoes fit her feet, and the whole contraption is to be ready by to-morrow morning, for, if it is not, off goes my head."

"Ah, brother," said the loafers, "it is clearly impossible that you should execute the order, and as we suppose you have the stones on your person we may as well go and frolic for to-day."

The face of the shoemaker fell still lower, for in his consternation he had forgotten to ask for the jewels from the royal treasury. But he had in his pocket the large price paid for the shoes, and, as his previous score was paid, the inn-keeper allowed the toppers to have a good supply of spirits. Once more they caroused and once more the shoemaker-dressmaker took a keg of spirits home with him and told Ivan all his tale, concluding with the words, "Wake me in the morning. I'm off to bed." In a few minutes he was sound asleep.

Ivan at once blew the whistle, and Lame and Crooked appeared before him.

"What is your pleasure?"

"Make me a robe which will fit Elena the Beautiful to perfection. Let it be embroidered with gold and ornamented with diamonds and precious stones, and deliver it here before dawn."

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"We obey," said Lame and Crooked. "The wedding robe shall be ready."

Ivan slept and woke before dawn. He knew at once that the light in his chamber came from the shining gems on the bodice of the beautiful robe which lay across a chair by his bedside. He jumped up, dressed himself quickly, and taking up the dress kissed the corsage where the heart of Elena would beat, and carried the wonderful garment to the chamber of his snoring master.

The light from the gems roused the man, who groaned, sat up slowly, and rubbed his eyes. "What!" he cried in a trembling voice, "is it broad day already, and have they come to cut off my head? Give me that keg of spirits and a can. I will drink three gallons at a draught and then I shall be so full of courage that I shall not feel the axe."

"But the robe is ready," said Ivan very quietly.

"What?" roared the Court Shoemaker-Dressmaker. "When did we make it?"

"It was made in the night, of course, and it is not the first time that a Court Dressmaker has had to work until the small hours. Do you not remember cutting the cloth?"

"Ah, brother," said the man who was now weeping like a crocodile for sheer relief, "it must have been the sheen of the gold embroidery that dazzled my wits. I barely remember, but only very barely. But I must make haste to carry this robe to Elena the Beautiful. Thank goodness I have been able to rise to the occasion once more."

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"Yes, thank goodness," said Ivan, "but it is to be hoped that you will not be honoured with any more Court appointments." His employer, however, did not hear this last remark, for by the time that Ivan had finished speaking he was standing in the apartment of Elena the Beautiful, where the preparations seemed to be as busy as ever.

The Golden Tsaritza looked at the robe and something to which she dared not give a name told her heart what had taken place. "Surely," she said to herself, "the good Spirits made this robe for Ivan." Then aloud she said to the prinking shoemaker, "How did you make this?"

"Oh," said the unlucky man, "I can make anything."

The reply of the Tsaritza came like a flash of lightning. "See that at to-morrow's dawn," she said, "the Kingdom of Gold be on the sea, seven miles from shore, and across the blue waters stretching from that Kingdom to our palace let there be a bridge of gold with costly crimson velvet laid upon it and set at each side with wonderful trees to form an avenue full of love-birds singing sweetest songs of dawn with varied voices. If this is not done by to-morrow morning I will have you cut up into four quarters."

As the Tsaritza spoke, the face of the shoemaker took on an expression of wonder worthy of a large audience at the most wonderful conjuring entertainment you can imagine. Then he turned slowly and left the apartment of Elena the Beautiful, muttering to himself, "Court Shoemaker, Court Dressmaker, and now Court Magician. I may as well have another day's frolic, for though a man may rise twice in drowning he does not rise thrice and live."

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He walked slowly off to the inn, heavily weighed down with greatness and

cursing the day when he had forsaken his simple life. But he had the price of the robe in his pouch and the third carousal was as jolly as the others, and he swore to drink six gallons of spirits on the following morning. His friends gave him a drunken cheer, sang "He's a jolly good fellow," and saw him home with the keg under his arm.

As before Ivan was waiting for him, and as good luck would have it, the poor man for all his intoxication was able to remember what was required of him; and as for Lame and Crooked he smiled a crooked but very intelligent smile when the task was detailed to him. "At last," he said, "you give me real work to do."

Ivan went to sleep and woke early thinking that he had overslept himself and that it was now broad noon, for a bright light as of the sun was shining in at his chamber window which, as he knew very well, faced due south. He sprang from his bed, and, drawing aside the blind, saw across the sea the Kingdom of Gold in all its splendour lying like a shining island seven miles from the shore, and across the waters stretching from that Kingdom to the palace of the Great White Tsar there was a bridge of gold with costly crimson velvet laid upon it, at each side of which were set wonderful trees to form an avenue full of love-birds singing sweetest songs of dawn with varied voices. Ivan dropped the blind, dressed himself with particular care in the golden light which filled his chamber, went into his master's room and roused him from his heavy sleep.

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"Have they come for me?" cried the man in great terror, "give me the keg and ——" But Ivan said quietly:

"But the Kingdom of Gold is upon the sea."

"Ah," said the shoemaker. "How did we do that?"

"Don't you remember how we fixed it?" said Ivan.

"Yes, yes," was the hasty reply. "I dimly remember, very, very dimly. Let us go out to see if we have finished the work with the care expected of our exalted appointments."

In a few moments they were upon the shore and found everything prepared in a manner which seemed to be fit even for Elena the Beautiful, but one thing did not please the fastidious taste of Ivan.

"Here, master," he said, "here is a peacock feather duster. Go and dust the railing of the pathway to the kingdom. And if you meet any persons in the avenue give them this letter."

The man at once went off to do the bidding of his journeyman, and was soon busily engaged in delicately dusting the golden railing of the bridge.

Meanwhile Elena the Beautiful arose, and drawing the curtains of her chamber which looked towards the sea saw the Kingdom of Gold lying like a shining island on the bosom of the deep blue waters. Her maids dressed her in a simple robe of white lawn, with a girdle of gold, and then she went to the Great White Tsar, who sat at breakfast with Golden Tress, and told him what she had seen across the sea. At once the mighty monarch sent out royal messengers and these men walked along the bridge until they met the shoemaker, who was busily engaged in the task which Ivan had set him. When they accosted him he did not cease his work, but taking a letter from his pouch handed it with his left hand to the men whose duty it would have been to hang, behead, and quarter him if it had not been for his wonderful assistant who could get everything done.

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The men went away and brought the letter to the Great White Tsar just as he was beginning on toast and marmalade. He propped it up against the diamond teapot and read it as he finished his morning meal, and as he did so he made such strange exclamations that Golden Tress thought with concern that a crumb of toast must surely have gone down the wrong way.

Then he arose and ordered out the golden State coach for himself and Golden Tress, as well as a simple waggon of dark wood drawn by a small shaggy pony for the Golden Tsaritz, and in this way they came to the end of the bridge which led to the Kingdom of Gold, where stood Ivan with Peter on one side of him and Vasily on the other.

The Tsar frowned when he caught sight of his two elder sons, for Ivan's letter had told him all the truth, but as he looked Ivan embraced both of them as a sign that on this golden morning he could forgive any one.

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The State carriage came to a stop, and Ivan ran forward to greet his parents, but hearing a low cry of gladness from the simple waggon behind he ran forward,

lifted Elena the Beautiful to the ground, and leading her to his mother knelt to receive her blessing.

You have not paid much attention to the details of this story if you cannot imagine what followed; but even the most careful reader cannot measure the bliss of the lovers who had known that they loved each other since their first meeting without a word being spoken; and that is really a greater wonder than the magic feats performed by Lame and Crooked, when you come to think about it soberly.

As for Peter, he was married to the Silver Tsaritzza, while Vasily wedded the Copper Tsaritzza, and the shoemaker was made a general on the retired list, which meant that he had fine uniforms and a grand house, but was not expected to do any fighting. He was given a coat of arms by Golden Tress which bore three spirit kegs, as a reminder that he was to be a temperate man for the rest of his life, and for all I know, he really was.



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VASILY THE TURBULENT

Peace had no charm for Vasily of Novgorod the Great, but where there was fighting to be done there he was at his best and happiest. Rest and ease had no attraction for him, but where the rover wandered there was the place of his journeying. His father, however, had lived in peace with the men of Novgorod the Great, and had died leaving to his widow and his only son a great store of treasure, a wide palace with a lofty tower, and a cellar full of green wine without price.

When Vasily had reached the age of seven years his mother sent him to learn to read and write, for she longed to curb his fiery spirit with the rein of reflection which learning places upon the violent; and Vasily, being of a determined disposition, applied himself to learning with a will so that he succeeded better than all the scholars who studied by his side. But reading and writing did not curb his fiery spirit, nor even church singing in which he also excelled, and he could pass from the cathedral and the singing of holy songs to noisy brawls in the city streets in which he cracked heads as if they were nuts. He was so strong and thoughtless that even his friends ran down side paths to avoid meeting him, for it was said that he had one day torn out a young man's arm in the act of shaking hands with him, and had stricken another to the ground by clapping him playfully upon the back.

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As Vasily grew up his vigorous pranks began to terrify the good people of Novgorod, who came to his widow mother to beg for protection against her son. She was a peaceable, gentle lady, who was greatly alarmed at the strength which her son was developing, and she upbraided him with tears in her eyes.

"My son," she said, "why do you delight in going about the city making cripples? At your age your father had no treasure to speak of, but he had a band of brave bodyguards, and was a wise leader among men and a judge among the people of Novgorod the Great."

These gentle words displeased Vasily greatly, and instead of restraining him moved him to greater mischief. "Men shall speak of my *might*" he muttered as he left his mother, "and in after years shall boast even in Novgorod of the heroic deeds of their own townsman, aye, even if I crack hundreds of their own thick skulls for them. They will remember me when they have forgotten men of wisdom and of safe judgment." Then he proceeded to win his reputation.

He went up to his own room in the top of his lofty tower and sat down at the table to write on a scroll of parchment, but it was no psalm or cathedral hymn which the turbulent scholar wrote. It was an invitation to a feast and ran thus:

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"Whosoever wishes to eat savoury viands ready to his hand and without cost to himself, as well as to drink green wine of priceless value and to wear embroidered robes of the best, let him come to the court of Vasily at once and instantly."

He wrote out this invitation many times and then gathering up the scrolls went to the open window. Here he fitted each of the parchments to a stout arrow and shot them into the city, which was about two miles away; and as the men of Novgorod came from church they gathered up these strange missives in the streets and lanes and broad paven courtyards. Many of them wondered, and they came together in groups gravely discussing the marvellous matter, until a priest came along from the church and read one of the scrolls which was attached to the arrow. Then the word buzzed round the town, "Vasily the Turbulent commandeth us to an honourable feast." And the men of Novgorod the Great thought that now their chance had surely come to pay off the long score against the man who troubled the peace of their trading city.

Meanwhile Vasily was making preparation for his guests, and he meant to use the occasion to select for himself a brave bodyguard. The test for admission to this very select and honourable company was to be so severe that Vasily would be perfectly sure of gaining protectors of the bravest. He rolled a great cask of green wine from the vaults and set it up in the middle of the banquet-hall, saying to himself, "Whoever shall lift in one hand a cup of this wine and shall drain it at one breath, and shall likewise stand upright after a blow from my cudgel of red elm, shall make one of my brave bodyguard." Then he went to his room in the top of the lofty tower and lying down upon his heroic bed of smooth planks slept the sleep of Ilya the Old Cossack.

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The next morning, very early, his widow mother paced the passages of her palace and chanced to look out upon the broad courtyard. To her surprise she saw that it was crowded with a great company of the men of Novgorod. In trembling haste she ascended the tall tower and roused her unruly son from his heavy sleep.

"Do you sleep, Vasily," she said, "and take your ease and care nothing for the peril which is even now at your gates? See, a company of angry men make your courtyard as black as a raven's wing."

The young man at once sprang to his nimble feet, grasped his great club of red elm in his white hands, and went out into the wide courtyard.

"Ho, there, Vasily the Turbulent," shouted some of the foremost of the guests.

"We have come to your banquet and are determined to eat up all your stores of food, to drink up your green wine, to wear your embroidered robes, and then drag forth your golden treasures."

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The tone of the acceptance of the invitation could scarcely be described as polite, and it roused the hot blood of Vasily the Turbulent. He leapt forth into the courtyard, grasped his club of red elm with a firm grip and began to brandish it. Wherever he swung it forward an open lane appeared among the crowd, and when he drew it backward he made an alley. Soon the men of Novgorod were lying in great heaps in the courtyard, while the rest went back to the town; and Vasily climbed once more to his chamber at the top of the tall tower.

After a while there came a black-browed handmaid to the door of the chamber, and calling Vasily outside she told him that the New Trader wished to join his bodyguard; and Vasily came down to the hall where the young man stood near the great vat of green wine. He was a comely youth with black curls upon a white brow, and blue eyes which looked ever into the distance, as if he sighted new lands afar off and cared not for the trodden ways. As soon as he saw him standing there proudly erect, Vasily advanced swiftly upon him, grasping his great club of red elm, and smote him a stunning, staggering blow. But the young man was neither stunned nor did he stagger. He stood firm under that heavy blow, the black curls upon his forehead did not move, and the wine from the full cup in his hand was not spilt.

"Is my strength waning?" cried Vasily in despair, and then as if to test it he raised the club again and brought it down upon a white and burning stone which lay at his feet. The hard stone was shivered to atoms and Vasily laughed grimly, as he turned to the New Trader.

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"Drain off the green wine at a breath," he commanded, and the young man did so. "Hail, New Trader!" cried Vasily the Turbulent, "you shall be of my bodyguard from this day forward."

Then there entered the hall two young men of the town, one of whom was known as the Lame and the other as the Hunchback, and in spite of their infirmities these two stood the severe tests of Vasily and were admitted to his bodyguard.

In this strange manner did Vasily the Turbulent choose his brave bodyguard of three men only, three men and no more.

"Enter now my palace of white stone," said the hero, "and there we will feast on the best that my larders can afford; and while we eat together I will tell you how I shall entertain the men of Novgorod."

The four heroes sat down to the white tables and Vasily sat in the great corner. They were waited upon by the black-browed maiden, and when the meal was nearly over Vasily unfolded his plan for his next banquet. His bodyguard laughed gently as they heard of his purpose; and the next day they went out into Novgorod to invite the leading men to come and partake of the hospitality of Vasily the Turbulent. They came in a great crowd and found the tables prepared for a banquet, being filled with dishes and huge cups, but there was only one waiting-maid, the girl of the black brows, to attend upon this great company.

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As soon as the guests were seated and Vasily had taken his place in the big corner, the black-browed maid brought steaming dishes and foaming tankards and placed them before her master and his bodyguard, but she placed neither food nor drink before the men of Novgorod, who were very hungry, for the wind was keen and the world was white. Now when the citizens saw that they were mocked by Vasily and his bodyguard, and even by the black-browed servant maid, they were spitefully angry and cursed their host and his men, but this only made the four jokers laugh the louder; whereupon the guests arose and crowded out into the snow-covered courtyard rather more hungry than when they came in.

"We will not forget this vile insult," piped one small citizen in a mantle of marten skins with a collar of sables; "why, my neighbour was full of spleen because of my invitation to the lord's castle, and when the story is known his pity and scorn will be much worse to bear than his spleen. But we shall repay Vasily in his own bad coin. Let us make such a feast as the citizens of Novgorod have never seen before, *and we will not send Vasily an invitation.*"

"That is a good thought," said two stout citizens, and they all went home with their heads so high in the air that some of them slipped down on the way upon some slides that certain wicked boys—who would assuredly never grow up to be councillors—had made in the roadway. In a few days the feast was prepared and the invitations were issued, but there was no bidding for Vasily and his

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contemptible bodyguard.

It was impossible that the preparations for the banquet should escape the vigilance of Vasily, and indeed the merchants agreed that it would be well if he *did* hear of it. "Otherwise," said one of them, who had made a great fortune by buying and selling rags and bones, "how can he be humbled, for, look you, neighbours, if he does not know of the feast he will not miss our invitation."

"That is so," said the others, "that is indeed so, and true, and wise, and intelligent. Our friend must be the next Elder of Novgorod the Great."

So the servant maid of the rag-merchant told the servant maid of another trader, who told the black-browed maid at the castle, only to find that she knew all about it already, for her master had told her two days before.

"Mother," said Vasily that morning, "I shall go to the feast of the men of Novgorod."

"My dear child," said the old lady, "there is always room for the guest who is bidden, but none for the guest who is unbidden." But her gentle counsel placed no restraint upon Vasily who, when the time came, summoned his bodyguard and walked straight into the banquet-hall, asking no leave of the gatekeepers nor yet of the lackeys at the doors. He strode forward to the wall-bench in the great corner by the stove and sat down there to wait his turn to be served. No man present dared withstand him, and he glared down the table in such a ferocious manner that many of the citizens burnt their tongues by forgetting to blow upon their broth.

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"Ah, well," said one of them, as he made a brave attack upon a great sirloin of beef, "Vasily may be here but he wasn't invited, while we *were* invited,—in fact I invited myself."

"Ah, yes," piped the small rag-merchant, who wore a coat of greater value than any, "we were invited but he wasn't." And with this consolation they went on with their feasting, Vasily being served as nobly as the rest with meat of the richest and wine of the greenest.

As the banquet went on the spirits of the citizens arose, and the small rag-merchant began to think that he might some day be bold enough to challenge even Vasily to mortal combat. As for the turbulent lord himself, he stood up when the merriment was at its height and issued a mighty challenge. He would go, he said, with his brave bodyguard on the following day to the bridge over the Volkof river, and would hold his own against all the men of Novgorod. Then he stalked from the room and across the snow-covered streets to his own palace.

At the doorway he was met by his widow mother, who noticed at once that he was aroused to turbulent anger. "Did they pass you with the dishes," she asked, "or did they jeer at you?" Vasily was too much moved to reply, but the bodyguard told her all the truth. Then the widow mother put her shoes upon her bare feet, cast her mantle of fine sables over her cold shoulders and went her way down, down into the deep vaults below the palace. There she heaped up a bowl with rich red gold, another with white silver, and a third with fine seed pearls; and having called the black-browed maiden, who came from her room with hair unbound and feet all bare, the two women crossed the white courtyard and passed along the silent streets until they came to the hall where the citizens were finishing their banquet.

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The widow mother went forward to the great corner with the black-browed maid close behind her, and holding out the glittering bowls, said to the chief citizens:

"Hail, ye men of Novgorod! Forgive now the fault of Vasily my turbulent son."

But the citizens were now so filled with the courage born of rich food and green wine that they thought themselves superior to bribes, and with drunken scorn they refused the gifts of the peace-loving mother, and said with a great show of spirit:

"If we shall be able to take Vasily, we will ride his good steed, wear his embroidered garments, and take, but not as a gift, *all* his rich red gold, his white silver, and his fine seed pearls. We will pardon him freely when we shall have cut off his turbulent head."

Then the widow mother went home in great grief and sadness, scattering as she went upon the frozen snow the rich red gold, the white silver, and the fine seed pearls, saying to herself as she went, "Not these things are dear to me, but the turbulent head of my own dear son."

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Now when she came once more to her own house she gave Vasily to drink of the cup of forgetfulness, led him down into the deepest dungeon, and locked him securely within. Then she went out into the stables and set his wild shaggy charger free to wander over the wide steppe, and taking his great cudgel of red elm, his sharp sword, and his coat of mail, she hid them where she thought no one would ever be able to find them.

Early the next morning Vasily's brave bodyguard took their stand at one end of the bridge over the Volkof river, and the men of Novgorod came against them in a great crowd. All that day they fought without pause for refreshment, and for a second day and a night and yet a third day without pause for taking breath. In the meantime Vasily slept and took his ease, knowing nothing of the straits to which his brave bodyguard was reduced. But as the black-browed maiden went to the stream for fresh water, with her buckets fastened on a maple yoke, she saw the fight by the bridge. Then she set down the buckets, and taking the yoke from her white shoulders entered into the fray and cracked the skulls of many more citizens than she could count. After that she ran quickly home, and coming to the door of Vasily's dungeon cried out:

"Do you sleep, Vasily, and take your ease? Up there upon Volkof bridge your brave bodyguard stand as prisoners of the men of Novgorod, their feet in blood, their heads broken with whips, and their hands bound with their own girdles."

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"Open this pestilent door," roared Vasily, "and I will give you as much treasure as you desire in return for the displeasure of your mistress."

The black-browed maiden needed no bribe to urge her to obey. With one stout blow of her maple yoke she broke the heavy lock, whereupon she set her white shoulder against the door, which creaked and then gave way under her young strength. So Vasily came out once more into the white world, and as he could not find his warlike gear he wrenched the iron axle from a cart which stood in the empty stable, threw it over his shoulder and said, "I thank you, maiden, that you did not let my brave bodyguard perish. Hereafter I will repay you, but now I must not tarry."

"Haste, oh haste," said the black-browed maid, "and give no thought to reward for me. It is enough for me to be the handmaid of a man who loves a fight against odds."

In a short time Vasily came to the Volkof bridge and found all as the black-browed maid had told him. "Ah, my brave bodyguard," he cried, "you have breakfasted well; now let me dine. It was not I, my band of brothers, who betrayed you but my own mother." With a mighty forward sweep of the iron axle he made a lane through the crowd of citizens and with a backward stroke he made an alley. Then he loosed the bonds of his brave bodyguard and said to them, "Go now, my brothers, and rest, while I play with these children from Novgorod."

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Thereupon he began to stride about upon the bridge, brandishing his axle, and the men of Novgorod fell in great heaps about him. At this the leaders drew off unobserved and went with the Elder at their head to the peace-loving widow mother, begging her to calm her wild son before he had completely wiped out all the citizens of Novgorod; but she said, "I dare not do that, you men of Novgorod, for I did him grievous wrong by confining him in a dungeon and sowing distrust of his valour in the hearts of his brave bodyguard. But my son has a godfather who is known as the Ancient Pilgrim, and who dwells in the monastery upon the hill. He is a man of discretion—for what can a woman do alone in such a strait? Ask *him* for help against my turbulent son."

So the men of Novgorod with the Elder at their head went to the Ancient Pilgrim and told him all their trouble, at which he sorrowed greatly; and he made ready at once to leave the peace of his monastery and go with them to see what he could do. Now he was known as the Ancient Pilgrim, but he was really a great Russian hero who was spending some time in quiet, but who had known what it was in the earlier days to stand up against a host. Hearing that there was stern fighting going on, it came into his mind that he might possibly need protection, and having no armour or helmet at hand he climbed up very nimbly for an Ancient Pilgrim into the belfry, loosed the great service bell and put it upon his heroic head.

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"This will serve me in good stead," he said, "in the place where heads are being broken." Then finding the clapper of the bell somewhat in his way, he detached it and used it as a staff; and as he stepped across the great drawbridge which led from the monastery it bent and groaned beneath his weight.

He walked straightway to Vasily and looked him squarely in the eyes. "My

godson," he said in a coaxing voice, "curb your heroic turbulence. Spare at least a few of these men to carry on the business of the town."

These words added fuel to the fire within the breast of Vasily, and he replied:

"Hail, godfather! If I gave you no white peace egg at Easter yet take this red one from me on St. Peter's Day."

Then he heaved up the great axle and brought it down with a resounding clang upon the great service bell on the heroic head of the Ancient Pilgrim; and with that single blow the life of the hero of old time was ended. His staff now served Vasily for a new weapon, and he continued to strike down the men of Novgorod in dozens and twenties. The Elder and his companions kept carefully upon the outside of the throng, and when they saw the fall of the Ancient Pilgrim they went again to the widow mother and asked her to make intercession for them with her turbulent son.

So she dressed herself in a robe of black, threw a cloak of fine sables about her shoulders, set a helmet from her husband's armoury upon her aged head, and went to plead with her son. She did not, however, as the Ancient Pilgrim had done, walk straight up to Vasily and look him squarely in the eyes; she crept up behind him and laid her trembling hands upon his mighty shoulders, entreating him to spare the men of Novgorod in his wild anger. And at the sound of her gentle voice Vasily dropped his arms, the bell clapper fell from his hands upon the lap of moist Mother Earth, and he said in a gentle voice:

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"Lady mother, you are a cunning old woman and a wise one too. Well you knew how to break my power by coming at me from behind, for if you had approached me from before I should not have spared even you in my anger, so blinded was I with fury against these traders of Novgorod."

The Elder and the councillors now took heart, and having conceived a tremendous respect for Vasily came forward and prayed that he would be their honoured guest at a banquet, where he should sit in the great corner and eat and drink of the best. Vasily consented to go with them, but he felt ill at ease at the banquet, for he was the only fighting man there and had no conversation for traders. So he slipped away from the feast as soon as he could, and went home to his widow mother and his brave body-guard; and he sat among them by the stove until long past midnight, talking of many things which had happened and of things which were to come.

"When our wounds are healed," said Vasily, "I will build me a red ship with delicate sails of white linen and launch it upon the bosom of Ilmen Lake; and with my brave bodyguard I will go to pray in Jerusalem city, to worship at the holy of holies, to visit the grave of the Risen Christ, and to bathe in the Jordan river."

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In a short time the red ship was built and sailed proudly upon the bosom of Ilmen Lake. Vasily walked the decks while his brave bodyguard managed the sailing, and as the sun shone on the sails of white linen the heart of the hero filled with pride.

"Set the sails towards the town of Novgorod," he cried, and in a short space of time they caught the shore, threw out gangways to the bank, and having left a watch behind on the ship came into the town and thence to the palace of Vasily. The hero sought out his widow mother and gently folded his strong arms about her trembling form.

"Lady mother," he said in persuasive tones, "give me your sacred blessing, for with my brave bodyguard I will go to pray in Jerusalem city, to worship at the holy of holies, to visit the grave of the Risen Christ, and to bathe in the Jordan river."

"Ah, my son," his mother made answer, "if you go with a good purpose I will give you my good blessing, but if you go to rob I will not give it. If that is your purpose may moist Mother Earth no longer bear you."



'The black-browed maid stood upon the bank as the red ship ... sailed away from Novgorod'

"That is to be discovered and found out," said Vasily, and he persuaded his mother so that she gave him freely from the armoury great stores of weapons, and from the kitchen and larder as much bread and other food as the black-browed maid had prepared in a month of Holy Days. Then she said good-bye with tears, and the black-browed maid stood upon the bank as the red ship with sails of fair white linen sailed away from Novgorod and ran out like a full-breasted water-bird upon the bosom of Lake Ilmen.

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For a long time the black-browed maid stood shading her eyes with her hand while her white shoulders heaved. Then when the ship could no more be seen, she turned and went back to the kitchen, where she wrapped the widow mother in her cloak of sables; for though the sun shone the mother of Vasily was cold as with the breath of winter from the broad white world.

For two days the red ship sailed onward, and on the second day they met a ship which they spoke in a friendly fashion. "Whither away, Vasily?" asked the sailors, who hailed from Novgorod the Great.

"I am going, my mariners," said Vasily, "upon an unwilling path. Young as I am I am blood-guilty, and I must save my soul; so now I go to pray in Jerusalem city, to worship at the holy of holies, to visit the grave of the Risen Christ, and to bathe in the Jordan river. Tell me, good youths, where is the straight way to the Sacred City?"

Then they told him that the straight way would lead him by a seven weeks' journey, but that the way about would take a year and a half to traverse. But if he took the straight way he would meet with a stout barrier, for the chieftains of the Cossacks, in number about three thousand, made their lair upon the island of Kuminsk, robbing merchant vessels and destroying red ships with sails of fair white linen.

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"I trust in my cudgel of the red elm," said Vasily. "Haste now, my bodyguard, and steer my red beauty by the straight way."

So they sailed onward, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, until they

came to a lofty mountain which sloped down steeply to the water. Tired of his confinement Vasily ran in to the shore and ascended the steep hill with his brave bodyguard at his heels. Half-way up the ascent they found a human skull and human bones lying in the pathway. Vasily cast them aside with spurning foot, and from the hollow skull came a human voice. "Hey, Vasily the Turbulent, why do you spurn me? There was a time, O youth, when I was such as you are, and even yet I know how to defend myself. Upon this lofty mountain, in the days that are to come, shall lie the skull of Vasily the Turbulent."

The young man made a gesture of disgust and passed on, saying, "Surely a spirit unclean speaks from this hollow skull." At the top of the mountain he found a huge stone on which was carved the inscription: "He who shall comfort himself at this stone and divert himself by leaping *along* it shall break his turbulent head."

Vasily scoffed at the warning and began to divert himself by leaping across the great stone, his brave bodyguard following his example. But, somehow, they did not feel inclined to leap lengthwise. After spending some time in this diversion and stretching their cramped limbs thereby, they came down from the mountain and embarked once more upon the red ship. Then they hoisted the sails of fair white linen and sped swiftly over the heaving bosom of the Caspian Sea until they came to that great barrier feared of merchantmen where the robber Cossacks hid in the island of Kuminsk, robbing merchant vessels and destroying red ships with sails of fair white linen.

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At the landing stood a hundred fierce warriors, but neither their height nor their girth nor their weapons had any terrors for Vasily. He drew near to the shore, his men cast out landing-stages, and he crossed over into the midst of the Cossack guard, flourishing his cudgel of red elm.

As soon as the brave hundred saw Vasily coming they trembled, turned and fled to their chieftains, who did not seem to be greatly surprised at the news brought by the young men.

"Surely," they said quietly, "it is Vasily the Turbulent from Novgorod the Great who comes upon us with the flight of the falcon."

They had no sooner spoken these words than the young man stepped boldly among them with his club of red elm in his hand. But instead of making a lane with a forward stroke and an alley with a backward, Vasily bowed courteously before the Cossack chiefs and said, "Hail, masters! Show me now the straight road to the holy city of Jerusalem."

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The chieftains bowed in return saying, "Hail, Vasily of Novgorod! We entreat you to eat bread and drink green wine with us."

Then they poured out green wine without price, and Vasily, grasping the cup in one hand, emptied it at a single draught, though it contained a bucket and a half. At this the chieftains wondered greatly but said nothing, and when they had broken bread together, Vasily went back to the red ship with fair white linen sails, taking with him rich gifts from the Cossack chieftains—a bowl of red gold, another of white silver, and a third of fine seed pearls. He was also accompanied by a young Cossack chieftain who had undertaken to be his guide to the holy city of Jerusalem.

Without loss of time Vasily and his brave bodyguard hoisted their sails of fair white linen and ran out upon the Caspian Sea. After much journeying they came to the Jordan river, where they threw out strong anchors and landing-stages upon the steep banks; and Vasily with his brave bodyguard entered in all peacefulness the holy city of Jerusalem. They came to the cathedral church and attended mass, where Vasily prayed for his mother, himself, and all his family, and as he prayed the thought of Novgorod the Great softened his turbulent heart. On the next day a service was held for the bold travellers, and the priests begged forgiveness for all their guilt in the matter of violence and headstrong wilfulness. Then Vasily prayed before the holy of holies, bathed in the sacred river Jordan, gave gold without stint to the priests of the city as well as to the aged people, and embarked once more on his red ship with sails of fair white linen.

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Now before they put off again the brave bodyguard went also to bathe in the sacred Jordan river, and as they did so an aged woman came down to them.

"Why do you bathe," she said, "in Jordan river? None must bathe therein save Vasily only, whom you shall lose on your way home. Do you not know that your master will be taken from your head as you go homewards?"

And the youths answered curtly:

“Be silent.”

In a short time the sails were hoisted, and they put out once more on the broad bosom of the Caspian Sea, and came at last to the island of Kuminsk, where they sought out the Cossack chieftains and bowed down before them. But Vasily was somehow disinclined to talk of his travels or of his early days of violence and headiness. He gave to the chieftains a parchment scroll which he had brought from Jerusalem, in which were written many hard commandments that he enjoined the Cossack chiefs to follow. When these men invited him to a banquet Vasily declined, and taking leave of them very quietly for a man of such a turbulent heart, he set out once more across the Caspian Sea for Novgorod the Great.

When they had sailed for two weeks they came to the steep mountain, and being weary of confinement on the ship they landed to stretch their legs. The young man went up the steep face of the mountain with springing step and came at last to the great stone upon the summit across which they all leapt in much merriment of heart. Then Vasily in his height of spirits tried to leap lengthwise along the stone, but fell in a heap upon it and was taken up dead; and his brave bodyguard buried him at the place where the hollow skull had lain.

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Then the sad youths hoisted the fair white sails upon the masts of the red ship and came at last to the city of Novgorod the Great. They sought out the widow mother of Vasily who sat huddled by the stove in the kitchen and who gave no sign of surprise when the brave bodyguard entered, bowed before her, and gave her a letter which Vasily had written upon the voyage. She read the scroll without tears, surprise, or cries of desolation, and then holding up her head in the pride of sacred grief she said:

“Thanks to you, good and noble youths. Go now into the treasure-house and take from thence whatever your hearts desire.”

Then the black-browed maiden came forward and led them to the vaults, turning her white shoulders from them as they chose whatever seemed good to them. When they returned to the kitchen they found the dry-eyed widow mother preparing clothes and boots and food and wine for them that they might clothe themselves afresh and feast well before they went into the city to speak with the men of Novgorod.

After supper they sat quietly near the stove and the widow mother was the first to break the silence. “Yet Sadko came back to Novgorod the Great,” she said; “Sadko came back to take his ease in his own city.”

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“But Sadko was a trader,” said the black-browed maid with quiet scorn.

“Tell on,” said the brave bodyguard. And the maiden said, “It will pass the time till morning if I tell you the tale of Merchant Sadko which has been told in Novgorod since you went away in your red ship with fair white linen sails.” So she seated herself at the feet of the widow mother on the red bricks of the floor for humility, and told her story to the listening youths, the tale of

Merchant Sadko, the Rich Guest of Novgorod.

In Novgorod the Great dwelt Sadko the harpist, who had no store of treasure except the golden tones of his harp of maple-wood. He went about to the great feasts of the nobles and made all merry with his playing.

Now for three days Sadko had not been bidden to any merry feast, and his heart grew sad within him. So he went down to the shore of Lake Ilmen and sat down upon a blue stone. And there, to soothe his spirit, he began to play upon his harp of maple-wood, and played from early morning until far into the night. Then a great storm arose; the waves lashed up the shore to the blue stone on which Sadko sat, and great terror seized upon the heart of the minstrel so that he returned to Novgorod in haste and disquiet.

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The stormy night passed, another day dawned fair and peaceful, but still Sadko was not bidden to a merry feast. So he went again to the shore of the lake, again a storm arose, and again he returned to Novgorod in haste and disquiet.

The stormy night passed, another day dawned fair and peaceful, but even yet Sadko was not bidden to a merry feast. So he went again to the shore of the lake, again a storm arose, but this time the heart of Sadko grew stout, and he went on with his playing though his fingers trembled sorely. Then the Water Tsar arose from the lake and said to Sadko:

"We thank you, Sadko the Musician, for your diversion, for the sweet sounds of your harp came down to the ears of the worshipful guests at my banquet; and I am at a loss, Sadko, for means of granting reward to you.

"But go back, Sadko, to Novgorod the Great, where to-morrow you shall be called to a merry feast, at which many merchants of Novgorod shall be present. Now when they have eaten well and drunk better, they will begin to boast. One shall brag of his good horse as if it were another Cloudfall; another of the great deeds of his youth as if Svyatogor were puny beside him; a third of the beauty of his young wife as if she were another Golden Tress; and a fourth, a wise man, of the goodness of his aged father and the tenderness of his mother.

"Then boast in your own turn, Sadko, and say: 'I know something which is known to none of this worshipful company. I know that there are in Lake Ilmen fishes with golden fins.' Then they will argue with you and say that such fishes do not exist, but you must wager your head upon the truth of your word, in return for their pledge of all their shops and their precious wares.

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"Then you shall buy a net of the finest silk, not for youthful vanity, but for strength, and come and cast it into the waters of Lake Ilmen. You must cast the net three times in the lake, and at each cast I will place within it a fish with fins of gold. So shall you win your wager, even the rich shops of Novgorod, and become Sadko the Rich Guest. But in wealth forget not your sweet playing, nor the golden tones of your harp of maple-wood."

Then the Water Tsar vanished from Sadko's sight.

The harper went back to Novgorod the Great, and it all happened as the Water Tsar had spoken up to the time when the boasters had said their say. Then one of them said to Sadko:

"Why do you sit there, musician, and utter never a single word of boasting?"

"What shall I boast of?" asked Sadko. "I have no treasure except the golden tones of my harp of maple-wood. But there is one thing I know right well; there are in Ilmen Lake fishes with fins of gold."

"You lie, Sadko," cried the merchants. But Sadko said:

"I will wager my head against all the wealth of your shops."

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"It is done," said they, and at once they went down to Lake Ilmen, Sadko carrying a net of fine silk, not for youthful vanity but for strength; and it all fell out as the Water Tsar had promised. Then the merchants gave Sadko the treasures they had wagered, and he took to trading. He prospered well, for he did not forget his sweet playing nor the golden tones of his harp of maple-wood, and so wherever he went he was welcomed among the merchants of distant lands and won great profit thereby. In a short time he married a beautiful young wife, and built a palace of white stone, wherein all things were heavenly. His young wife moved among treasures of which even Elena the Beautiful would have been envious.

After a while Sadko made a merry feast, to which he invited a great company, including the brave heroes Laka and Thoma. Now when they had eaten well and drunk better they began to boast. One bragged of his good horse as if it were a second Cloudfall; another of the great deeds of his youth as if Svyatogor were puny beside him; a third of the beauty of his young wife as if she were another Golden Tress; and a fourth, a wise man, of the goodness of his aged father and the tenderness of his mother.

Then Sadko, not to be outdone, boasted of his wealth, and swore to buy up all the wares of the shops of Novgorod, both good and bad, day after day, until there should not be any more for sale in all that city of busy traders. And upon his oath he named a great wager of countless treasure.

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The next day he sent his servants to the markets of Novgorod, who bought up all the wares, both good and bad. On the second day the markets were full again, but Sadko sent his servants, who bought up all the wares, both good and bad. On the third day he found the markets full of precious merchandise from Moscow, and felt a merchant's pride in the enterprise of his city; and he made a pause while he went home, sat down in his own chamber and softly played upon his harp of maple-wood, which seemed to speak the golden tones of wisdom.

"If you buy all these goods from Moscow," it seemed to whisper, "others will flow into Novgorod the Great from far away across the sea; and even Sadko the Rich Guest cannot buy *all* the treasures of the whole white world. Sadko is rich but Novgorod the Great is still richer. Yield your wager and venture forth upon

the merchant path of lake and river and broad grey sea where the Water Tsar will be your friend."

Then Sadko yielded his wager, which was an enormous sum of gold, and built a great fleet of thirty-three red ships with sails of fair white linen. The prows of these scarlet vessels were in the likeness of fearful dragons, whose eyes were precious jacinths, whose brows were Siberian sables and whose ears were the dark-brown skins of Siberian foxes. Soon these ships were filled with the rich wares of Novgorod, and Sadko sailed away to Lake Ladoga and thence into the Neva and through that river to the deep-blue sea. At the ports upon the shore he sold his wares, making great gain and filling many casks of forty buckets with red gold, white silver, and fair seed pearls. Then they sailed away with Sadko in the Falcon ship which was ever foremost and the finest in all that scarlet fleet.

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But suddenly the blue sea turned to grey and the ships, now almost black in the shadow, halted and stood still. The waves rose like mountains, the sails flapped, the ships began to rock while men whispered of Whirlwind the Whistler and said that surely Ivan the son of Golden Tress had not killed him.

Then Sadko, the Rich Guest, shouted from his ship:

"Ho, there, my brave mariners! I hear the voice of the mighty Water Tsar, to whom we have paid no tribute. Cast into the waters a cask of red gold." And they did so, but still the dark-red ships rocked, the waves beat, the sails tore, and the hearts of the mariners longed for Novgorod the Great.

Again Sadko the Rich Guest shouted from his ship:

"Ho there, my brave mariners! A cask of red gold is but a small gift for the Water Tsar. Cast into the waves a cask of fine seed pearls." And they did so, but still the dark-red ships rocked, the waves beat, the sails tore, and the hearts of the mariners longed for Novgorod the Great.

Once again Sadko the Rich Guest shouted from his ship:

"Ho, there, my brave mariners! It is plain that the Water Tsar asks the tribute of a living man. Make therefore slips of alder-wood and let each man write his name upon his own lot and cast them all into the dark-grey sea, and the lots of all who are to see their homes once again shall float. But that man among us whose lot sinketh shall be cast into the sea." Then the command of Sadko was obeyed, but Sadko's lot was a bunch of hop flowers. And all the lots swam like ducks, but the bunch of hop flowers sank like a stone.

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Yet again Sadko the Rich Guest shouted from his ship: "Those lots were not just. Make other lots of willow-wood and try again." Then the command of Sadko was obeyed, but Sadko's lot was a piece of blue steel from Damascus, wondrously wrought and heavy in weight. And all the lots swam like wild ducks, but the piece of blue steel sank like a stone.

Then Sadko said, "It is plain that the Water Tsar asks for Sadko himself." So he told his servants to fetch him his massive inkstand, his swan-quill pen, and his paper, and they did so. Whereupon Sadko seated himself in his folding chair at his table of oak and began to apportion his goods. He gave much to God's churches, much for the improvement of choir singing, much to the poor, and much to his young wife, and the remainder of his goods he divided among his faithful mariners.

Having done this in due order he wept and said to those about him:

"Ho, my brave mariners! Place an oaken plank upon the heaving dark-grey sea upon which I shall journey; and fill a bowl with red gold, another with white silver and a third with fine seed pearls and place them upon the plank." After that Sadko took in his right hand an iron image of a saint of God, and in his left hand his harp of maple-wood. He wore a mantle of rich sables over all, and he stepped upon the oaken plank and was borne away upon the waves while the dark-red ships sped on and flew as if they had been ravens over the field of the slain.

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Now as his strange raft floated turbulently upon the surface of the water, Sadko at first was greatly terrified, but after a while he fell into a gentle sleep, and when he awoke he was in the crystal kingdom of the Water Tsar. He looked about him and saw the red sun burning though it gave no heat, and he saw also before him a palace of white stone in which sat the Water Tsar with a head like a heap of yellow hay.

"Welcome, Sadko, the Rich Guest of Novgorod," he said. "You have long sailed upon the waters, but have paid no tribute to the Water Tsar. I have sent for you

that you may solve this riddle which is a matter of dispute between me and my Tsaritzta. *Which is now of greatest worth in Russia, gold or silver or damascened steel?*"

"Gold and silver are of great worth in Russia," said Sadko, "but damascened steel is of great value also. For without gold and silver a man may contrive to live, but without the ore of iron no man can live at ease."

"What do you hold in your right hand and in your left?" asked the Water Tsar.



The Water Tsar dances

"In my right hand is a holy image," replied Sadko, "and in my left my harp of maple-wood."

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"I am told," said the Water Tsar, whose memory must, of course, have been washed quite clean each day by living in the sea, "that you are, in spite of your trading, a master player upon the harp. Play for me upon your harp of maple-wood."

Sadko at once commenced to finger his harp, and forgetting all his trading and golden prosperity—perhaps the water washed *his* memory clean also—he played such music as the sea fairies with the pink conch shells could not surpass. Then he struck up a merry dance-tune, and at once the Tsar rose from his throne and began to jump about, beating time with the skirts of his royal robe and swinging his mantle of white fleece round him like an encircling cloud, while above all gleamed his hair as yellow as a bunch of hay. At the sound a troop of lovely sea fairies, clad in transparent garments of the most beautiful colours, joined in a choral dance, while strange sea creatures squatted and leapt about the oozy floor of the ocean sea.

But the merriment at the bottom of the Water Tsar's kingdom made sad havoc at the top. For the upper waters of the sea were churned into yeasty foam, heaving into great billows, breaking ships asunder, drowning many mariners, and swallowing up rich stores of merchandise. For three hours did Sadko play, and then the quiet-eyed Water Tsaritzta said to him in a compelling voice:

"Break thy harp of maple-wood, Sadko the Rich Guest, for though the Water Tsar

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makes merry in his palace below, in the upper borders of his realm there is trouble enough and to spare."

All at once Sadko stopped playing, broke his harp and snapped its golden strings, and when the Water Tsar commanded him to play for two hours more, he told him boldly that the instrument was broken.

"But I have sea-smiths here," said His Watery Majesty, "who can mend a broken pearl, so that it would be an easy thing for them to restore a harp-string."

"All the sea-smiths of your ocean realm," said Sadko, "could not revive music that is lost. That can only be done in Holy Russia, when the maker of the music comes once more to his own home."

"Talk not of land kingdoms," said the Tsar, whirling round Sadko in the hope of regaining the step which he had lost, but finding it impossible to dance without music. "Stay with me and wed some beautiful sea-maiden. Take your choice from the maids in the train of my queen."

Seeing that he was in the power of the Water Tsar, Sadko promised to do so, and asked the advice of the quiet-eyed Water Tsaritzza, who gave it in her own compelling voice, so that Sadko felt that it was a command. "Do not choose," she said, "any sea-maid from the first three hundred which the Tsar will marshal before you, but let them pass by in all their beauty. Do not choose from the second three hundred, but let them pass in all their loveliness. But from the third three hundred choose the Princess who shall come last of all, and who is smaller and blacker than all the rest. But when you have chosen her do not kiss her, for if you do, you shall never more dwell in Holy Russia, nor see the fair white world and the round and ruddy sun."

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Therefore Sadko allowed the first three hundred maidens to pass him by in all their beauty; and he let the second three hundred pass him by in all their loveliness; but from the third three hundred he chose the Princess who came last of all, and who was smaller and blacker than all the rest. But when he chose her he did not kiss her, for he longed once more to dwell in Holy Russia, to see the fair white world and the round and ruddy sun.

At the wedding feast the Water Tsar made a great banquet, after which Sadko lay down and fell into a heavy sleep; and when he awoke he found himself on the steep banks of a river near Novgorod. He sat up, rubbing his eyes, and saw far away on the Volkof river his fleet of bright-red ships with their sails of fair white linen on the decks of which his men were standing thoughtful, thinking of Sadko in the depths of the deep-blue sea. But when they saw their master standing upon the steep bank, they rubbed their eyes in astonishment. Then they hailed him, and took him on board with great rejoicing. He carried with him a broken harp, and lo, as he entered his palace and saw his young wife again the harp-strings were suddenly restored to all their strength and flexibility, and the body of maple-wood rang as sound as the great bell of St. Sophia.

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Thenceforth Sadko sailed no more upon seas, either blue or grey, but lived at home in Novgorod the Great, and delighted all with the golden tones of his harp of maple-wood.

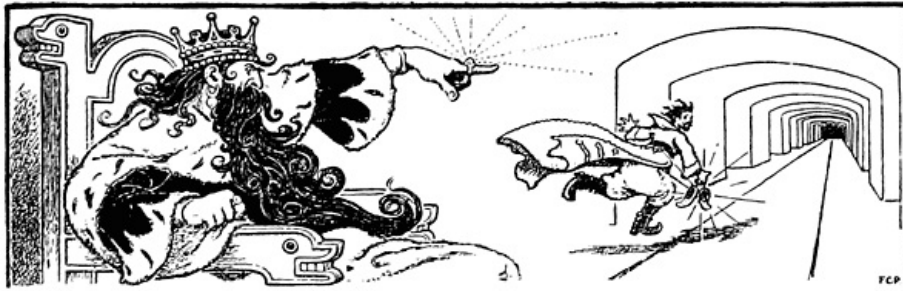
The stove was growing cold, the black-browed maiden rose to her feet, and stretching herself to ease her limbs stooped tenderly to wrap the great mantle of sables more closely about the widow mother of Vasily the Turbulent, who murmured gently but not complainingly, "Yet Sadko came home again."

"We thank you for your tale, maiden," said the brave bodyguard of Vasily. Then they went to their rest; and on the next day they sought out the men of Novgorod, and the Sea Trader told them of new routes for rich merchandise which their turbulent lord had opened out for their enrichment; and they equipped the brave bodyguard with more scarlet ships to go out again upon those routes and win more glory for Novgorod the Great.

As for Vasily, they made a great image of him, and set it up in their market, telling all men how his valour had earned for him the praise of all his townsmen.

But the black-browed maiden smiled with upturned scarlet lip when she saw it, and shrugged her white shoulders as she turned away to wait upon the mother of Vasily the Turbulent.

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NIKITA THE FOOTLESS AND THE TERRIBLE TSAR

In a certain kingdom of Holy Russia there reigned a ruler so fierce that he was known as the Terrible Tsar, and the way in which he won his title was this. One day he frowned such an angry frown at his body-servant, who had brought him diamond shoes instead of those set with fine seed pearls, that the man ran out of the room in great terror; and he told the chambermaid, who told the butler, who told the cook, who told the soldiers of the guard, who told the generals, who told the people that their master was indeed the Terrible Tsar. So this ruler became the terror of all the neighbouring princes; and when he heard of his reputation he took great care not to lose it for it proved very useful to him.

By-and-by the Terrible Tsar made up his mind to marry, and he wrote a proclamation in golden ink on a large piece of crimson velvet, and sent a herald into every town and village to read the announcement, which was to this effect—that whoever should find for him a bride who was ruddier than the sun, fairer than the moon, and whiter than snow should be given a reward so great that he would be forced to spend most of his time in computing its value. This was a prize worth trying for, and before long the people of all the cities with their suburbs and towns with their villages, as well as the goose-herds, swan-herds, cow-herds, and keepers of downy ducks on the open steppe, were wagging their heads over the matter and counting up enormous numbers upon their fingertips.

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Now not far from the Tsar's palace there was a large brewery, and when the workers in this place met together to eat their food they began to talk of the matter which was exercising the minds of the people throughout the kingdom. "Well, my brothers," said a certain man among them, who was known as Nikita Koltoma, "I am quite certain of this. No one can find such a bride as the Terrible Tsar desires without *my* help; and if I promise to find her, found she shall be, though whether the Tsar enjoys his good fortune when he finds her is another matter."

"You are a fool and a boaster," said the other workmen. "How can one of us do such a great deed as this? Why all the bravest heroes of Holy Russia will attempt it, and even they have small chance of success. Let us go back to make more beer. Why, Nikita, you could not do it in a dream, to say nothing of your waking hours."

"Well, brothers," said Nikita firmly and cheerfully, "say what it may please you to say; but I have faith in myself, and if any man can find the bride I can do so."

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"Hush, Nikita," said the others in warning voices. "Have you not heard how terrible our Tsar really is? Why if he hears of your boasting he will surely put you to death."

"Not so," said Nikita quite cheerfully, "he will not put me to death. He will give me much money, and some day, indeed, he may make me his first minister."

The workmen looked at him in dismay and terror, for over the wall they saw the head of one of the Tsar's soldiers, and they could tell quite plainly from the tilt of his headgear that the man had heard all the boastful speeches of Nikita. Before long a strong guard came to take the boaster away to the Tsar's palace. "That is the last of him," said one of the workmen as the poor fellow was marched off. And so it was, at least as far as the brewery was concerned.

For the Terrible Tsar received Nikita with great delight. "Are you the man," he asked, "who boasted that you could find me a bride ruddier than the sun, fairer than the moon, and whiter than snow?"

"I am, Your Majesty," said Nikita firmly.

"That is well," said the Terrible Tsar. "If you can do this, I will give you such and such a reward and make you first minister. But if, after boasting, you cannot do it, I will cut off your head."

"I am honoured by Your Majesty's august commands," said Nikita; "but I beg of you that you will first give orders that I should be given a holiday for a month."

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The Terrible Tsar consented to this, and ordered his steward to give Nikita a paper commanding all keepers of inns and eating-houses to place before him food and drink of their best without stint and without charge. Then Nikita went out, and for three complete weeks he enjoyed himself as he had never done before. Meanwhile the Terrible Tsar waited patiently, and when Nikita presented himself at the palace he scarcely knew him he was so well favoured, so vigorous, and so cheerful and confident of success. To him even the Terrible Tsar seemed to have lost his terror.

"May it please Your Majesty," said Nikita, "to choose for me twelve brave youths exactly the same in height, in breadth, in the colour of their hair and the pitch of their voice; and let your workmen make thirteen tents of fair white linen embroidered with gold." In a very short space of time the youths and the tents were ready, and Nikita said to his royal employer:

"Now Great Tsar, prepare yourself, and we will go to find a bride ruddier than the sun, fairer than the moon, and whiter than snow."

Without further delay they saddled their good steeds and packed the white linen tents on horseback. Then after saying a prayer in the cathedral they gave the rein to their chargers. So fast they rode that it was only a pillar of dust on the open plain and they were gone. For three days they travelled onward, and then they came to a smith's forge.

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"Go ahead now," said Nikita, "and may good go with you. I will go into this forge to smoke a pipe with the blacksmiths." Then he went in and found fifteen smiths making the anvils ring.

"Good-day to you, brothers," he bellowed, and at the sound of his great voice they ceased their hammering and returned his greeting with proper courtesy.

"Make me a staff of wrought iron," he said, "of five hundred pounds in weight."

"We are willing enough to make such a staff," said the master smith, "but who will turn the iron? Five hundred pounds is no light weight even for a hero."

"Beat away, my merry men," said Nikita, "and I will turn the iron." So they beat away and Nikita turned the iron; and when the staff was ready Nikita took it out into the open field. There he threw it skyward to a height of ninety feet and let it fall into his hand. As he grasped it with his heroic strength, it bent and broke. Then Nikita went back to the forge, paid the men for their work, threw the broken pieces of rod away, and rode off with a pleased look upon his face. Before long he caught up again with his companions, and they rode onward for three days longer, when once more they came to a forge in the open field.

"Go ahead again," said Nikita, "and may good go with you. I will go into this forge to smoke a pipe with the blacksmiths." Then he went in and found twenty-five smiths making the anvils ring.

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"Good-day to you, brothers," he bellowed, and at the sound of his great voice they ceased their hammering and returned his greeting with proper courtesy.

"Make me a staff of wrought iron," he said, "of a thousand pounds in weight."

"We are willing enough," said the master smith, "to make such a staff, but who will turn the iron?"

"Beat away, my merry men," said Nikita, "and I will turn the iron." So they beat away and Nikita turned the iron; and when the staff was ready, Nikita took it out into the open field. There he threw it skyward to a height of one hundred and fifty feet and let it fall into his hand. As he grasped it with his heroic strength, it bent and broke. Then Nikita went back to the forge, paid the men for their work, threw the broken pieces of the rod away, and rode off with a pleased look upon his face. Before long he caught up again with his companions, and they rode onward for three days longer, whence once more they came to a forge in the open field.

"Go ahead a third time," said Nikita, "and may good go with you. I will go into

this forge to smoke a pipe with the blacksmiths."

Within the third forge he found fifty blacksmiths tormenting an old man whom they had stretched out upon a large anvil. Ten of these great fellows were holding him by the beard with pincers and the forty were pounding him on his body with hammers.

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"Have mercy, have mercy, good brothers," the old man was screaming. "Leave some life in me to allow me to show how sorry I am."

"Good-day to you all," roared Nikita above the din.

"Good-day to you, brother," replied the blacksmiths, pausing in their work.

"Why do you use this old man in such a cruel manner?" asked Nikita.

"Because he owes each one of us a rouble," was the answer, "and he will not pay. Why should he not be beaten?"

"It is a great deal to suffer for fifty roubles," said Nikita. "Here is the money. Let the old fellow go in peace."

"Very good, brother," said the blacksmiths. "We do not care who pays the money so long as we get it somewhere, somehow." Then they let the old man free, and as soon as they stood aside from the anvil he vanished from their sight.

Nikita rubbed his eyes and looked round in blank amazement. "Why, where is the old man?" he asked.

"Oh," replied one of the blacksmiths, "you may look for him in vain now. He is a wizard, and can wriggle out of anything."

Nikita laughed, and then ordered the blacksmiths to make him a staff of iron weighing two thousand pounds. When it was ready he went out into the field and threw it upward to a height of three hundred feet. The staff fell into his outstretched hand, which never shook, and remained there firmly held.

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"This will do," said Nikita. Thereupon he paid the men for their work, and rode off quickly after his companions. But as he rode onward he heard some one behind him lustily calling out his name, and turning in his saddle he saw the old man running quickly after him.

"Thanks, thanks, many thanks and more thanks again for your help," said the old man. "For thirty years I lay upon that anvil and was tortured by those fifty fiends. Now will you accept a present from me in return? Here is a wonderful cap for you. When you put it on your head no man will be able to see you, for it is a cap of darkness." Nikita thanked the old man warmly, took the cap, and once more galloped on after his companions, whom he overtook after a short space of time. By-and-by they came to a castle which was surrounded by a stout iron paling through which there was no gateway.

"Well," said the Terrible Tsar, "what shall we do now? It is very plain, Nikita, that the people of this castle do not intend that any one should enter."

"Why not?" asked Nikita. "That is surely a small difficulty—with all due respect to Your Majesty. Now, boys, tear down the paling and let us through." So the good fellows got down from their horses and began to tug and push at the railings with all their heroic strength; but they could not make them budge an inch.

"Oh, brothers," said Nikita. "I find I am a deep-sea captain of a crew of river sailors. What I wish to have done I must do for myself. No matter; after all it was I myself who promised to find for the Terrible Tsar a bride who is ruddier than the sun, fairer than the moon, and whiter than snow." Nikita leapt from his horse, put his heroic hand to the paling and a full length of it lay upon the ground. Through the opening thus made the company rode boldly forward. On the green lawn before the great door of the castle they quietly set up their white gold-embroidered tents, ate a good meal, and then, lying down, slept soundly. But Nikita did not enter one of the tents. He took three old mats, made a little shelter for himself, and lay down on the cold hard ground; and Nikita did not sleep, but waited watchfully for what might turn out.

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Now when morning dawned, Yelena the Haughty Beauty woke with a sigh and looked out through the lattice-window of her room which was decked with ruddy gold, white silver, and fine seed pearls. There she saw upon the lawn the thirteen white tents of the Terrible Tsar, and in front of them all a small shelter made of old mats, from which a pair of very sharp eyes were looking out.

"Whatever can have happened?" said Yelena to herself. "Who are my new guests and whence have they come? Why the strong iron paling which was better than a whole army of guards is broken and thrown to the ground." Then she put her haughty head out of the window and cried in a voice of heroic rage:

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"Ho, there, guards and protectors! To my rescue! Put these intruders to a speedy and cruel death while I watch you at your work. Throw their carcasses over the iron paling and bring their white gold-embroidered tents to me."

Then the hero who lived in the castle as the special protector of Yelena the Haughty Beauty, saddled his great steed and put on his battle armour, on which the morning sun shone brightly, and rode towards the unbidden guests, while the Princess watched from her lattice-window to see that her orders were strictly carried out.

Nikita sprang from his little shelter and stood boldly in the path of the horseman.

"Who goes?" he asked.

"Who asks?" was the angry reply.

Then Nikita sprang forward, and seizing the hero by the foot, dragged him from his horse. Raising his iron staff he gave him one all-sufficient blow and said, "Go now to Yelena the Haughty Beauty; tell her to hide her haughtiness and prepare to marry my master the Terrible Tsar without further delay."

Meanwhile the would-be bridegroom and his young men slept on.

The bold hero was glad enough to obey the brave wooer, and rode up to the castle, where he saluted his mistress with reverence and said:

"These are men whose might cannot be measured, O Princess. Their leader is plainly a man of great weight, and told me to bid you hide your haughtiness and prepare to marry the Terrible Tsar without further delay."

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The lady looked down from the window, and as she looked her scorn seemed to wither up the hero, horse and all. Then she turned haughtily from the window, attired herself in her most beautiful garments, and went down to the great hall, where she summoned a band of generals and leaders.

"My brave men," she cried in tones of passionate anger, "get together a great array and sweep these intruders out of my lawn as the serving maids sweep the court before the great door."

Then quickly, very quickly, and with lightning speed, the horsemen rode forth from the castle and swept down with a sound of rushing water upon the tents of the Terrible Tsar. But they drew rein when Nikita stood before them waving his mighty staff; and quickly, very quickly, and with lightning speed, they fell and lay dead upon the green lawn.

Meanwhile the would-be bridegroom and his young men slept on.

"Go back," cried Nikita to the first hero, who had kept well out of reach of that terrible staff. "Go back to Yelena the Haughty Beauty and tell her not to resist us further. See how I have dealt with your men alone and all by myself! What will it be when the Terrible Tsar and his young men awake from sleep? We shall not leave one stone of your castle upon another. You would do well to go back and tell the bride to prepare for her wedding."

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So the hero went back and told his mistress all that had happened.

"What is to be, *must* be," she said with outward graciousness. "I will go to meet this heroic bridegroom in a manner fitting to his warlike ways." So she summoned her heroic bodyguard, and, surrounded by these youths, who carried battle-bows in their hands, she walked proudly from the front door of the castle towards the tents of white linen standing upon her own green lawn.

Nikita saw them coming, and knew without instruction that the kiss of the bride would be sharp and stinging. So he put on the Cap of Darkness, bent his own bow, shot off a flaming shaft, and knocked off the top story of the castle. Yelena the Haughty Beauty bowed to her fate, advanced with stately step towards the Terrible Tsar, took him by the hand, and led him within the banquet-hall, where he and his company were feasted on the best. When his master had eaten well and drunk just as well, Nikita said in his ear, "Does the bride please you, or shall we set out to seek a better?"

"No, Nikita," said the Terrible Tsar with a smile of satisfaction, "let us not go on

any more, for the whole white world cannot contain better fortune than is granted to us here."

"Well, then," said Nikita, "haste to your wedding, but beware of your bride." So the wedding was hastened, and when the feast was over the bride came to the bridegroom and laid her hand in affection upon his shoulder. But if this were affection it was heavy affection, for at the weight of her hand the Terrible Tsar felt as if he were being pushed down bodily into the lap of moist Mother Earth.

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"Is my hand heavy, my lord and master?" asked the bride sweetly.

"It is as heavy as a feather on the bosom of the summer lake," was the polite reply. "But, stay, my bride. I have to give an order to my brave troops." Then with a great effort he freed himself, and went out into the next room where Nikita was awaiting him.

"Ah, Nikita," said the Terrible Tsar in great distress, "what *shall* I do? The hand of my bride is heavier than the staff of Ilya of Murom."

Then Nikita put on his Cap of Darkness and went back into the room with the Terrible Tsar, and as often as Yelena laid her hand upon his master in affection, he stepped in the way and bore the weight of it. So they went on all the time that the Terrible Tsar stayed in the castle for the wedding festivity, which lasted for a week. But before the week was over Yelena the Haughty Beauty knew that her people were laughing at her because she had married a man whose strength was as nothing but who relied always upon Nikita; and she planned in her heart a terrible revenge.

"We have feasted enough," said the Terrible Tsar at the end of the festival week. "It is time for us to go homeward and we shall go by water."

So a glorious ship was prepared, and the bridal party went on board. The sails were set, and the ship put out from the harbour with a fair wind and a bright sun. The Terrible Tsar was very happy in his good fortune, but the haughty bride made merry to his face and plotted behind his back. As for Nikita he fell into a heroic sleep and slept for twelve whole days and nights.

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When Yelena saw him sleeping she summoned her trusty bodyguard and ordered them to cut off his legs to the knee, put him all maimed into a boat, and cast it out upon the open sea. They did so; and on the thirteenth day Nikita awoke from his heroic sleep to find himself lying footless in an open boat far out upon the sea with no ship in sight anywhere.

Meanwhile the bridal ship sailed on its way with a fair wind and a bright sun, and at last it entered the harbour of the royal city of the Terrible Tsar. Then the cannon gave the sign, and the people ran down to the wharves, where the nobles and the chief merchants, with the Elder at their head, offered bread and salt to their royal master, and greeted him with compliments on his marriage with a bride so beautiful and so stately. And the Terrible Tsar was so busy for a long time in feasting and smiling, giving presents and receiving them, that he forgot all about Nikita.

But when the feast was over the haughty bride took the rule of the kingdom upon herself, and forced the Terrible Tsar to go out into the fields to herd the pigs! Then she gave orders that all the relatives of Nikita should be brought before her at the royal palace. Her soldiers found only one, Timothy, the brother of Nikita, and by order of the Terrible Tsaritzza his eyes were put out and he was driven from the town into the green fields.

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The blind man went on with his hands spread out before him, onward and ever onward until he came to the seashore and found the water beneath his feet. Then he halted and stood still, fearing to go forward. But as he stood there with his sightless eyes turned towards the heaving waters of the deep blue sea a boat was quickly borne towards the beach and a cheery voice called out: "Ho, good fellow! Help me to land in your fine country."

"I would gladly do so, friend," was the sad reply, "but, truth to tell, I am without sight and see nothing."

"But who are you and whence do you come?" asked Nikita.

"I am Timothy, the brother of Nikita," said the blind man, "whose eyes have been darkened by Yelena the Haughty Beauty."

"My own and very true brother," said Nikita cheerily. "Turn, Timothy, to the right hand where you will find a tall oak growing. Pull out the oak, bring it here, and stretch it from the shore across the water. Then I will mount upon it and so

come to you in safety.”

Timothy did as his brother directed and made a bridge of the tall oak so that Nikita could creep on shore, where he took Timothy in his arms and kissed him heartily.

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“Ah, brother,” he said, “how is it now with the Terrible Tsar?”

“He found his bride,” said Timothy, “and she is indeed ruddier than the sun, fairer than the moon, and whiter than snow, but her heart is as black as night. The Terrible Tsar is now in great misfortune for he is herding his own pigs in the field! Each morning he has for breakfast a pound of sour bread, a jug of frozen water, and three stripes upon his back!”

“Alas,” said Nikita. “We now have indeed a Terrible Tsaritzta.”

Then the two brothers began to discuss their present condition and their future plans, and of course Nikita was full of ideas. “Brother of mine,” he said brightly, “you cannot see my condition so I must tell you that I am footless. Now as you are blind it seems to me that there is only one sound man between us. My plan is that you should carry me upon your back while I will tell you where to go.”

“It is well,” said the blind man, kneeling down at once so that his brother could get upon his back. Then he walked onward with his new burden, onward and ever onward, turning to the right hand or to the left as his brother directed him. After a long time they came to a dense forest in which stood the pine-wood cabin of the wicked Baba-Yaga.



‘Timothy began to dance, the cabin also began to dance, the table danced’

Nikita directed his brother towards this hut, and the two in one entered the home of the wicked Baba-Yaga, but found no one inside. “Feel in the oven, brother,” said Nikita, “perhaps there is some food there.” Sure enough they found hot savoury food in the oven and they sat down to the table and had a good meal, for the sea air had made them both very hungry. When they were fully satisfied Nikita asked his brother to carry him round the cabin in order that he might examine everything that was to be found in it. On the window-sill he found a small whistle, and, putting this to his lips, began to blow. The shrill

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sound had a marvellous effect, for, whether he would or would not, Timothy began to dance, the cabin also began to dance, the table danced, the chairs danced, and even the stove took to its nimble feet.

"Stop, Nikita," cried Timothy at last, for he was utterly exhausted, "I can no longer dance with such a burden upon my back." So Nikita stopped whistling, and as the last note died away everything settled down in quiet once again. Then when all was still the door was suddenly opened and the wicked Baba-Yaga entered her cottage.

When she saw the two in one she screamed out with a loud voice:

"You beggars and thieves! Up to this time not even a bird or a beast had come to my lonely dwelling, and now you have come to devour my food and loosen the very props of my little cottage. But very soon, and indeed sooner than that, I will settle with you."

"Hold the wicked old witch, Timothy," cried Nikita, and the blind man caught her in his arms and squeezed her very hard. Then Nikita seized her by the hair, and she was ready enough to make all kinds of promises to win her freedom. [286]

"We want nothing," said Nikita, who had still more ideas in his head, "but your whistle and healing and living water. I have the whistle already, and if you will give us the water, you shall go free once more into the white world."

"That I can, and will since I must," said the Baba-Yaga.

"That you shall and are obliged to," replied Nikita.

Then the old witch led them to two springs and said:

"Here for your benefit is healing and living water." Nikita took of the healing water and sprinkled his stumps, whereupon his feet grew out as they had been before, but they would not move. So he sprinkled them next with living water, and they were made sound and whole as they had been before.

Guided by his brother, the blind man stooped to the spring of healing water and bathed the hollow sockets of his eyes. Then eyeballs came into them as they had been before, but they could not see. So he sprinkled them next with living water and they were made sound and useful as they had been before.

The brothers thanked the wicked Baba-Yaga and gave her a gift in exchange for her help and her whistle of which Nikita had need, but she grunted and said, "I could, and I would, and I did because I must." Then she went off to her cottage and the restored men took their way to the city of the Terrible Tsar for Nikita had another bright idea. In a field outside the palace they found the Terrible Tsar herding pigs, whereupon Nikita began to blow on the whistle and the pigs began to dance, for their ancestors had come from the herd of the wicked Baba-Yaga. Yelena the Haughty Beauty saw what was happening from the window, but she did not laugh, for she was not a woman of that kind. She only rose in all her haughty beauty and gave a stern command to her servants to take a bunch of rods and beat the pig-herd and the two strangers who were standing near him. At once the guards ran out and brought them to the castle to give them the punishment they deserved for their lack of gravity. This was just what Nikita desired, for he ran forward and seizing Yelena by her lily-white hands in a grasp no man or woman could ever resist, he cried: [287]

"Now, Terrible Tsar, what shall I do with the Terrible Tsaritzza?"

"Send her home," said the poor worried monarch, "out of my sight." So they sent her away to her own castle, where she spent all her time in admiring her beauty in the mirror until she died of dulness. But Nikita was made chief minister, and Timothy a general, and the Terrible Tsar did whatever they wished him to do from that day forward. [288]



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PEERLESS BEAUTY THE CAKE-BAKER

In a far-off land lived a Tsar and a Tsaritzza who had one son, whom they named Ivan. They were very glad when he was born, and placed him in a beautiful oaken cradle among pillows of the softest down, covering him with a little eider-down quilt of silk from Samarcand. The pillow on which rested his little head was ornamented with drawn-thread work and all was cosy and comfortable, but try as they would the nurse-maidens—and they were pretty ladies of the highest degree—could not rock Ivan Tsarevich to sleep. Softly they sang and sweetly they crooned, but the young prince roared lustily, tossed off the coverlet, kicked out the pillow, and beat the sides of the cradle with his little fists.

At last the nurse-maidens lost all patience and they cried out to the Tsar, "Little Father, Little Father, come and rock your own son." So the Tsar sat down by the side of the cradle, placed his great toe upon the rocker, and said:

"Sleep, little son, sleep, sleep, sleep. Soon you will be a man, and then I will get you Peerless Beauty as a bride. She is the daughter of three mothers, the granddaughter of three grandmothers, and the sister of nine brothers."

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He made this promise once only, and it had such a soothing effect upon the restless Tsarevich that he went to sleep and continued sleeping for three days and three nights, during which time the nurse-maidens sat and praised his beauty among themselves. But they ceased talking as soon as he woke up again, for now he cried more loudly than ever, tossed off the coverlet, kicked out the pillow, and beat the sides of the cradle with his little fists.

Once again the nurse-maidens tried to console him and to rock him to sleep, for they loved and admired him best in his slumbers; but he refused to sleep, and they were forced to call out, "Little Father, Little Father, come and rock your own son."

The Tsar came once more to the cradle of his son and made the wonderful promise, whereupon the child fell asleep again and slept for three days and three nights.

But when he woke up he was as naughty as before, and for a third time the nurse-maidens had to call in the help of the Little Father.

When the Tsarevich awoke the third time he stood upon his cradle and said, "Bless me, Little Father, for I am going to my wedding."

"My dear son," said the Tsar in great wonderment, "you are altogether only nine days old. How can you marry?"



"Bless me, Little Father, for I am going to my wedding"

"That shall be as it is," said the Tsarevich, "and if you will not give me your blessing I fear I must marry without it."

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"Well, well," said the Tsar, "may all good go with you." Then he was not in the least surprised to see his son step down from the cradle a full-grown youth of goodly shape, call for clothes suitable to his age—they were all ready to hand—and then go forth to the stable. On the way across the courtyard he met an old man who looked at him and said:

"Young man, where are you going?"

"Mind your own business," said the young prince. But when he had gone forward a little he stopped and said to himself, "That was a mistake. Old people know many useful things." So he turned again and went after the old man.

"Stop, stop, grandfather," he said, "what was the question which you put to me?"

"I asked you," said the ancient, "where you were going, and now I add to my

question. Are you going there of your own free will or against your will?"

"I am going of my own free will," said the Tsarevich, "and twice as much against my will. I was in my cradle when my father came to me and promised to get me Peerless Beauty as a bride. She is the daughter of three mothers, the granddaughter of three grandmothers, and the sister of nine brothers. So I suppose I must go to seek her."

"You are a courteous youth," said the old man, "and deserve to take advantage of the knowledge of the aged. You cannot go on foot to seek out Peerless Beauty, for she lives at the edge of the white world at the place where the sun peeps up. It is called the Golden Kingdom of the East."

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"What shall I do?" asked the Tsarevich, thrusting his hands into his belt and standing with feet wide apart. "I have no horse of mettle or whip of silk for such a ride."

"Why, your father has thirty horses of the best," said the old man, "and the trouble with you will be to make a wise choice. Go to the stables and tell the grooms to take the thirty to bathe in the deep blue sea. When they come to the shore you will see one of them push forward into the water up to its neck and drink. When this happens watch with care to see if the waves rise high and break in foam upon the beach. If so, take that horse, for it will bear you safely to the edge of the white world and to the place where the sun peeps up, which is called the Golden Kingdom of the East."

"Thanks and thanks again, good grandfather," said the Tsarevich, who went on to the stables and selected his heroic steed in the manner described by the old man. On the following morning the Tsarevich was preparing this horse for the journey when it turned its head and spoke to him in the speech of Holy Russia:

"Ivan Tsarevich," it said, "fall down upon the lap of moist Mother Earth and I will push you three times." The youth was so much astonished to hear the horse speak that he found it no difficult matter to fall down. Then the horse pushed him once and pushed him a second time, but after that it looked at the youth for a little time and said, "That will suffice, for if I push you a third time moist Mother Earth will not be able to bear you." So the Tsarevich rose to his feet, saddled his horse, and set out. His father and those about him saw him as he mounted, but they did not see him as he rode. It was only a smoke wreath on the open boundless plain and he was gone. Far, far away he rode until the day grew short and the long night came on. As the darkness fell the rider came to a house as large as a town, with rooms each as big as a village. At the great door he got down from his horse and tied the bridle to a copper ring in the door-post. Then he went into the first room and said to an old woman whom he found there:

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"May God be good to this house. I should be glad to be permitted to spend the night here."

"Where are you journeying?" asked the old woman.

"That is not the first question," said the Tsarevich. "Give me food to eat and wine to drink, then put me next into a warm sleeping chamber. In the morning ask me whether I have slept in peace and *then* ask where I may be journeying." And the old woman did so, just as the Tsarevich had said.

Next morning she asked him the second question and he replied, "I was in my cradle when my father came to me and promised to get me Peerless Beauty as a bride. She is the daughter of three mothers, the granddaughter of three grandmothers, and the sister of nine brothers."

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"Good youth," said the old woman, "I am nearly seventy years of age, but of Peerless Beauty I have never heard. But farther on the way lives my elder sister. Perhaps she knows." Then Ivan Tsarevich went out of the great house, and, after taking courteous leave of the old woman, rode far away across the open steppe. All day he rode, and as night was coming on he came to a second house as large as a town, with each room as large as a village. He dismounted from his horse, tied the bridle to a silver ring in the door-post, and asked an old woman whom he met in the first room if he might have a night's lodging. And here it happened as it had happened before, only the old woman was eighty years of age.

"Farther on the road," she said, "lives my elder sister and she has givers of answers. The first givers of answers are the fishes and other dwellers in the heaving restless sea; the second givers of answers are the wild beasts of the dark forests; and the third givers of answers are the birds of the open air. Whatever is in the whole white world is obedient to the will of my elder sister."

Once again Ivan Tsarevich set out and came to a house where he tied his horse

to a golden ring, and was received by an old, old woman who screamed at him in a voice like a flock of peacocks:

"O you man of boldness, why have you tied your horse to a golden ring when an iron ring would be too good for you?"

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"Patience, good grandmother," said the Tsarevich gently, "it is easy to loose the bridle and tie the horse to another ring."

"Ah, my good youth," said the old woman gently, and as one would speak to a child, "did I frighten you? Sit down now on the bench and take food and drink." Ivan did so, and then without being asked he told the old woman where he was going and what was his quest.

"Go to your rest," she said shortly. "In the morning I will call my givers of answers."

Next morning the old woman and the young man sat in the porch, and the former gave a heroic whistle, whereupon the blue sea heaved in a great heap, and the fishes, large and small, sea-serpents and sea-dragons, rose upon the surface and made for the shore.

"Come no farther," said the old woman, raising her right hand. "Tell me where this good youth can find Peerless Beauty." Then the answer came from a million mouths, "We have not seen or heard of her."

The old woman blew her whistle and the forests echoed to the sound of a million voices of wild beasts, but the answer to her question was, "We have not seen or heard of her."

"Come hither," said the grandmother, "all ye birds of the air." And in a moment the light of the sun was hidden and the sound of flapping wings was like a tempest. But the answer of the birds to the question was, "We have not seen or heard of her."

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"My givers of answers fail me," said the ancient woman as she took Ivan by the lily-white hand and led him into the house. Then there flew through the open window the Mogol Bird which fell to the ground at her feet.

"Ah, Mogol Bird," said the old woman, "whither hast thou come?"

"I come from the home of Peerless Beauty," was the tired reply, "and I have been dressing her for Mass in the Cathedral."

The old woman clapped her hands in delight. "That is the news I seek," she said. "Now, Mogol Bird, do me a favour. Carry this young man, Ivan Tsarevich, to the home of Peerless the Beauty."

"That I will," was the reply, "but we shall need a great deal of food."

"How much?" asked the old woman.

"Three hundredweight of beef," was the answer, "and a keg full of water."

Ivan filled a large keg with water and placed it upon the back of the Mogol Bird with the heaped-up piles of beef round about it. Then he ran to the forge and told the smith to make him a long iron lance, and with this weapon in his hand he sat on the edge of the keg with the beef all round about him. Up rose the Mogol Bird and once it was under way it flew so steadily that the top of the water in the keg remained always level, but now and again the bird would slowly turn its head and look at Ivan, when he would at once give it a large piece of beef upon the point of his long iron lance.

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Onward, and ever onward, flew the Mogol Bird, feeding on the beef and drinking the water from Ivan's cap, which he extended at the point of his lance, until all the meat and water were finished, whereupon the Tsarevich threw the keg overboard.

"O Mogol Bird," he said, "haste to finish your journey, for there is no more beef and there is no more water."

"I cannot go down to earth in this spot," said the bird, "for beneath us there is nothing but a bog like glue. And I *must* have more meat. If you cannot get beef, veal will do." So Ivan cut off the calves of his own legs, and when the bird had refreshed itself it flew on till it came to a green meadow with tall silken grass and blue flowers. Here it flew down to earth, and Ivan alighted, but, of course, walked very lame.

"What makes you halt, Ivan Tsarevich?" asked the Mogol Bird, and when the young man told what he had done the bird blew upon the back of his legs and restored him to his former condition.

On went the young man, eager to finish his quest, until he came to a great town, where he entered a narrow street and found an old woman in a poor, mean house, who seemed to be expecting him.

"Go to bed and sleep soundly after your flight, Ivan," she said, "and when the bell rings I will call you."

The young man lay down and slept soundly, so soundly that when the bell rang for early morning prayers not all the calling nor all the shaking, nor all the shouting nor all the beating could rouse him. Then the bell rang again for Mass, and the old grandmother tried once more, calling, shaking, shouting, beating, but all with no result, until she took a tiny feather and tickled the sleeper's nose. Then he awoke with a start, washed himself very clean, dressed himself very carefully, and went to Mass in the cathedral. He bowed first to the high altar, then to North, South, East, and West, and especially to Peerless Beauty, who knelt alone in the church. So Ivan Tsarevich knelt beside her and then stood beside her while she prayed. When the service was over the young man looked at Peerless Beauty, and looked again and yet again without speaking, and while he looked six brave heroes came up from the sea-shore and stood at the great door of the cathedral. Peerless Beauty went to meet them with Ivan Tsarevich close behind her.

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"What country clown is this?" cried the brave heroes, but Ivan stepped before Peerless Beauty and swung his right arm in a circle three times round; and when he stopped the heroes were lying at the feet of the Princess in a heap of confusion.

Then Ivan Tsarevich went back to the old grandmother, who put him to bed. On the second day it all fell out as on the first occasion. Peerless Beauty looked at Ivan as he knelt in silence by her side, and as she looked she blushed. On the third day it all fell out as on the first in every particular except that when Ivan entered the church Peerless Beauty gave him a silent salutation and then came and stood at his left hand; and when the young man had laid low six more scornful heroes Peerless Beauty took him by the hand, and together, without a word, they went up to the priest and took the golden crowns. After that they went home and feasted, and then prepared to set out for the home of Ivan Tsarevich. Over the open boundless plain they rode, speaking little, but looking much and smiling frequently, until Peerless Beauty grew weary and lay down to rest, while Ivan Tsarevich guarded her slumber. When she awoke refreshed the bridegroom said:

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"Now guard my slumbers, Peerless Beauty, for I am very weary."

"Will your sleep be short or long?" asked the bride.

"I shall sleep," said Ivan, "for no longer and no shorter than nine days and nine nights. If you try to arouse me I shall not wake, but when the end of the time comes I shall wake without any arousing."

"I shall be weary of waiting and watching, Ivan Tsarevich," said Peerless Beauty with a sigh.

"Weary or not, it cannot be set aside or gainsaid or altered," said Ivan Tsarevich. Then he lay down and slept for nine days and nine nights. And while he slept there came a rushing whirlwind across the open steppe, and in the heart of the whirlwind, where was the point of peace, rested Koschei Who Never Dies, who bore away Peerless Beauty to his kingdom beyond the sea. And Ivan Tsarevich awoke without any arousing to find himself alone.

Sadly he gazed across the empty boundless plain, and when he arose, went back to the town, sought out the old woman in the poor, mean house, who seemed to be expecting him, and told her all his tale of sadness.

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"I had all things," he said, "and now I have nothing."

"Go to bed and sleep soundly after your sorrow, Ivan," she said, and he went to bed, but could sleep neither soundly nor restlessly. But at midnight there came a rushing whirlwind across the open steppe, and in the heart of the whirlwind, where was the point of peace, rested Koschei Who Never Dies, who bore away Ivan Tsarevich to his kingdom beyond the sea.

At the gate of the palace Ivan knocked—tock, tock—and the wicket-gate in the large gate was opened by Peerless Beauty, who peeped out with eyes like violets

wet with the rain, and cheeks like roses in the morning sun, and a brow like a seed pearl of priceless lustre. She opened the little wicket-gate wide, and Ivan stepped in. Then they went to an upper room, where the bridegroom said to the bride:

“When Koschei comes home, ask him where his death is.”

Then Koschei came in at one door and Ivan went out at another door.

“Phu! phu!” said Koschei Who Never Dies, “I smell the blood of a Russian. Was it Ivan Tsarevich who was with you just now, at this moment, and recently?”

“Why, Koschei Who Never Dies,” said Peerless Beauty clasping her hands, “Ivan Tsarevich has long ago been devoured by wild beasts of the plain, at least it must have been so and not otherwise.” So they sat down to supper, and when Koschei had eaten well and drunk better Peerless Beauty said to him, “Tell me, now, Koschei, where is your death?”

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“It is tied up in the broom, silly one,” said Koschei; “why do you wish to know?”

Next morning Koschei Who Never Dies went out at the head of his men to fight, and as soon as he had gone Ivan Tsarevich came to Peerless Beauty and kissed her sugar lips. Then she took the broom from the corner near the stove and gilded it all over with pure beaten gold. When this was done—and it took a long time to cover each twig of the birch boughs with the gold—Ivan left his bride and Koschei Who Never Dies came in by another door.

“Phu! phu!” he said, “I smell the blood of a Russian. Was it Ivan Tsarevich who was with you just now, at this moment, and recently?”

“Why, Koschei Who Never Dies,” said Peerless Beauty clasping her hands, “you have been flying through Russia and have caught up the odour of the country on your own garments. Where should I see Ivan Tsarevich?” Then they sat down to supper, and Koschei saw the gilded broom lying across the threshold. “What does this mean?” he asked sternly.

“See how I honour you,” said Peerless Beauty, “for I gild even Death for you.”

“Little simpleton, I fooled you,” said Koschei. “My death is not in the broom, but is concealed in the oak fence.”

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Next day it fell out as before. Peerless Beauty, helped by Ivan Tsarevich, gilded the fence, and when Koschei saw it burning like fire in the evening sun, he laughed and said to Peerless Beauty:

“Little simpleton, I fooled you. My death is in an egg, the egg is in a downy duck, and the duck is in the stump of a tree which floats upon the open sea.”

Next day Peerless Beauty rose very early, before the sun was up, and went to the stove in the kitchen. “I must send Ivan Tsarevich,” she said, “on the long search for that downy duck. He has a long way to go, so I must bake him a love cake.” So she baked him not one love cake but three, and as she kneaded the dough, she spoke a love-spell into it so that Ivan Tsarevich should fare well on his journey. The cakes were browned and buttered and wrapped in a napkin of fine white linen, with edges of drawn thread-work, when Ivan came into the kitchen just as the sun rose. Then he put his arms about the cake-baker, and she whispered into his ear where to look for the death of Koschei. And Ivan kissed her honey mouth and went out with the cakes in his pouch.

Onward he went and ever onward, until he came to the margin of the ocean sea, and then he knew not how to go farther. He had eaten all the cakes and was very hungry, so very hungry that when a hawk flew up above his head, he cried:

“Hawk, hawk, I will shoot you dead and eat you without cooking.”

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“Why eat me?” asked the hawk in the speech of Holy Russia, “I can be of good service to you.”

Then a great bear came shambling along with its fore-paws turned inwards to show that it was a bear of good breeding. “Bear, bear,” said Ivan, “I will shoot you dead and eat you without cooking.”

“Why eat me?” asked the bear in the speech of Holy Russia, “I can be of good service to you.”

Then Ivan saw a great pike leap from the ocean sea and lie floundering upon the shingle shore. “Pike, pike,” said he, “I will kill you and eat you without cooking.”

“Better, far better, and much the best,” said the pike, “if you cast me into the

sea.”

“It seems to me,” said Ivan Tsarevich, “that the cakes of Peerless Beauty have wrought a spell, and that I am to have nothing further to eat. Well, then, in the strength of those cakes I will go on with it.” So he flung the floundering pike back into the ocean sea, and when it splashed the great water boiled up and began to race along and up the shore so quickly that Ivan was forced to run before it with all his might and main.

Onward he ran and ever onward, with the water racing at his heels and occasionally washing them.¹ Onward he ran and ever upward, until he came to a tall tree upon a high bank of sand. Upward he climbed and ever upward, and then saw that now the waters of the ocean sea were quickly falling; and when they had gone back within their own boundaries Ivan saw that they had left high up on the shore a huge stump of a tree.

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The bear ran up, raised the stump in its arms, and hugged it until it cracked—snap, smash—and from the inside of it flew out a downy duck, which soared high and ever higher, until it looked like a dark green bottle with a long neck. Then the hawk flew up and caught it, whereupon an egg fell into the sea, which was caught by the pike, which swam to the beach and laid it gently at Ivan’s feet.

The young man placed the egg in the warm napkin within his pouch and ran forward, ever forward, until he came to Peerless Beauty, who was stooping over the stove in the kitchen. Ivan put his arms about the cake-baker, who grasped his hands and pressed them; and when she stood upright the egg was in her left palm.

Ivan turned and saw Koschei sitting on the window ledge and scowling at him, because he expected that the cakes and baked meats that Peerless Beauty was cooking were all for him. But as the two rushed to the grip, Peerless Beauty dropped the egg upon the stove. It broke, and as the shell cracked, Koschei’s heart broke also, and he fell down dead.

Then the bride and bridegroom went to the eating room, and Ivan Tsarevich feasted on cakes and baked meats which Peerless Beauty had prepared when he was on his journey to the ocean sea; and after that they went to the country of Ivan’s father, who rubbed his eyes when he saw them and said, “Why, Ivan Tsarevich left home when he was only nine days old, and now he brings Peerless Beauty to me as my daughter. Well, I never!”

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“Well, *we* never!” cried the nurse-maidens in a chorus, as they ran to get ready for the second wedding, which was to be celebrated with great splendour. “Really, we never did! Whoever would have thought it?”

There is very little doubt that Ivan Tsarevich was the first “nine days’ wonder” that ever was.



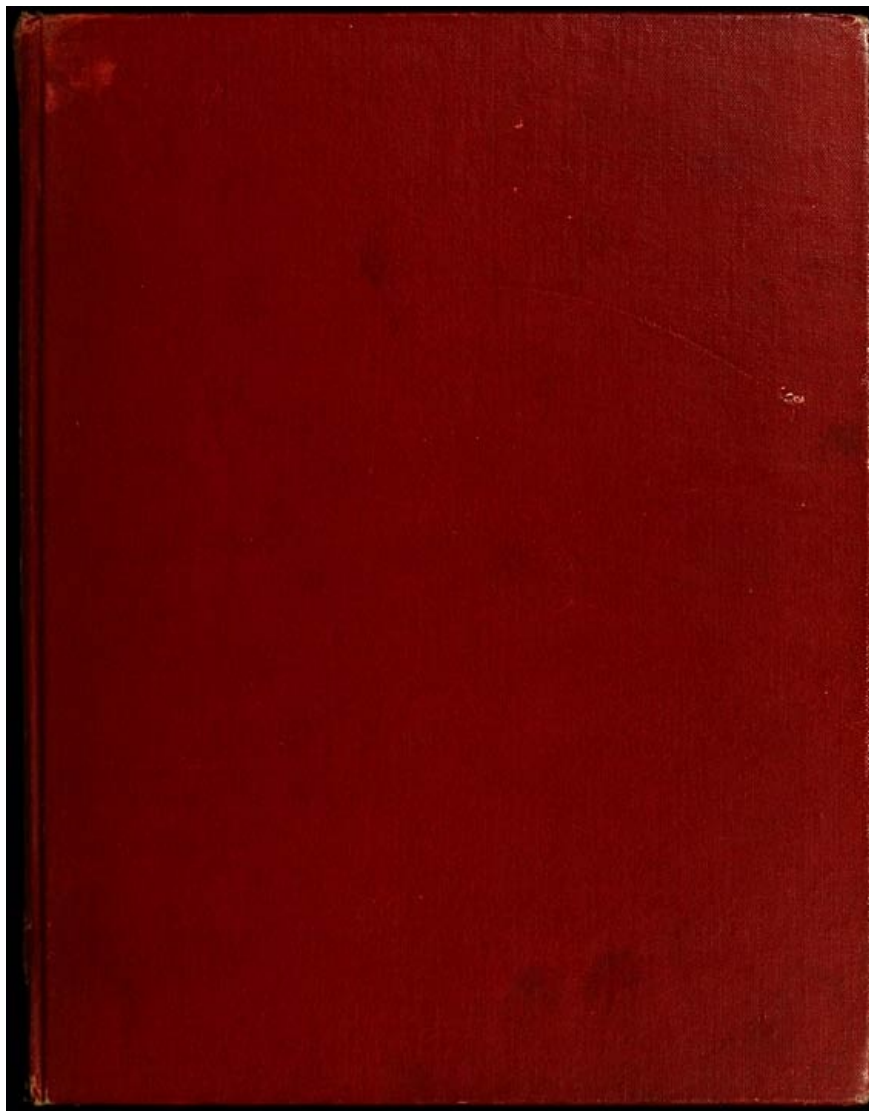
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Corrections

The following corrections have been applied to the text:

Page	Source	Correction
38, 304	[Not in source]	"
56	"	[Deleted]
65	doubtlet	doublet
219	"	'
219	[Not in source]	'

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