



# In a Certain Kingdom

*Twelve Russian Fairy Tales*

*Translated by Thomas P. Whitney*

*Illustrated by Dieter Lange*



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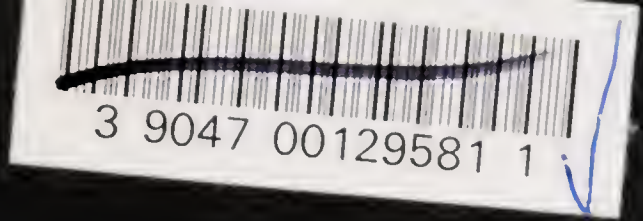
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ILLUSTRATED BY DIETER LANGE

The stories in this volume were selected by the translator from the over 600 tales and legends that appear in the definitive Afanasyev collection. They offer an exciting glimpse into the magical world of Russia's great oral tradition. It is a world inhabited by firebirds with golden feathers and falcons who are princes in disguise, by the fiery snake-dragon Zmei Gorynych, by Koshchei the Deathless and the various wise and beautiful Vasilisas, the spine-tingling yet sometimes friendly Baba Yagas, the simple Ivans who are not really fools, and the mighty *bogatyrs*, Russia's epic heroes.

In an excellent Afterword Mr. Whitney presents a biographical sketch of Alexander Nikolayevich Afanasyev and tells the intriguing story of how the folklorist's celebrated collection came into existence.

Dieter Lange's striking illustrations have the freshness and folk quality of woodcuts.



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*Twelve Russian Fairy Tales*

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*The Macmillan Company, New York, New York*  
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*To my Siberian cat Charley*

*R.I.P. 1947-1968*



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*Go I Don't Know Where  
and Bring Back  
I Don't Know What*

**I**n a certain kingdom there lived a king who was unmarried. He had a whole regiment of riflemen who went out hunting for wildfowl to keep his table well supplied with game. One of them, a handsome young soldier called Fedot, was so fine a marksman, the king preferred him over all his comrades.

One day Fedot went hunting very early, even before dawn. He went into a dark, dense forest, where he saw a turtledove sitting on a tree. He cocked his gun, aimed and fired, wounding the bird in the wing. It fell from the tree to the damp earth. The soldier picked it up and was just about to wring its neck and put it in his hunting pouch, when the turtledove spoke.

"Oh, handsome young soldier, do not kill me. Do not send me into the other world. Take me home alive and set me on your windowsill. If you keep watch over me and,

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at the very moment that I begin to doze off, strike me a backhand blow with your right hand, you will win great happiness."

The soldier was astounded. "What's this?" he thought to himself. "A bird that speaks with a human voice! I have never heard of such a thing."

He took the bird home, placed it on his windowsill and stood there waiting. After a little while, the turtledove put its little head beneath its soft wing and dozed off. The soldier raised his right hand and struck the dove lightly with a backhand blow. The dove fell to the ground and became a lovely maiden whose beauty was such as is only found in fairy tales. There was no other maiden in the whole world as beautiful.

She said to the soldier, "You proved your skill when you captured me and your kindness when you did not kill me. You are my destined husband and I am your God-given wife."

And so they were married and Fedot was very happy with his young wife, but he did not neglect his duties to the king. Each morning at dawn, he went into the forest and shot a variety of wildfowl for the royal kitchens.

But his wife noticed that he had grown tired and thin from so much hunting, and she said to him, "Listen, my dear, I feel sorry for you. Every single day you are out before dawn wandering about the forests and the swamps. You always come home wet to the skin, and yet we have little gain from all this. What kind of a trade is it really? I possess a skill which is bound to bring us profit. Get together a hundred rubles or so and we will soon put things to rights."



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Fedot went to his comrades and, by borrowing a ruble here and another there, succeeded in getting together two hundred rubles, which he took to his wife.

"Good!" said his wife. "Now go out and buy all the silk yarn you can for this money."

When he brought back the silk, she said, "Do not worry. Say your prayers and lie down to sleep. Things always look better in the morning."

The soldier went to sleep and his wife went out on the veranda and opened her magic book. At once two young wizards appeared before her and said, "Command us and we will obey."

"Take this silk yarn and, within the hour, make a carpet so wondrous that there is none to match it. Weave it in a pattern that shows all the kingdoms of the world together with their cities, villages, rivers and lakes."

The two wizards set to work. It did not take an hour but a mere ten minutes before they had made a carpet that was a marvel to all who saw it. As soon as they gave it to the soldier's wife, they disappeared.

In the morning she gave the carpet to her husband.

"There you are," she said. "Take it to the foreign merchants' market and sell it there, but remember one thing: take whatever is offered, do not set a price of your own."

Fedot took the rug, rolled it up, hung it over his arm and went to the market.

A merchant saw him and came running up. "Is this carpet for sale, sir?" he asked.

"It is."

"What is the price?"

"You are a merchant—you set a price."

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The merchant thought and thought, but could not put a price on the rug. Another merchant came up and a third and then a fourth, until a large crowd had assembled. All admired the rug, but none was able to settle on a price.

Just then the palace governor arrived in the market. He saw the crowd and decided to find out what the merchants were squabbling about.

He got out of his carriage and approached them. "Good day, merchants and tradesmen, guests from across the sea," he said. "What are you arguing about?"

"Well, you see, we're finding it impossible to set a price on this rug."

The governor examined the rug and was overcome with admiration for it. "Listen, soldier," he said, "tell me the honest truth. Where did you get such a glorious rug?"

"My wife made it."

"How much do you want for it?"

"I do not know anything about prices. My wife instructed me not to bargain, but to take whatever was offered."

"Well, in that case, here are ten thousand rubles."

Fedot took the money and gave the governor the rug. The governor, who was close to the king, always ate and drank with him. And so when he went to dine, he took the rug with him.

"Would your majesty like to see what a glorious thing I bought today?"

The king inspected the rug, in which he could see his entire kingdom, so to speak, woven into a space the size of the palm of his hand.

"Now that is a rug!" he exclaimed in wonder. "In my whole life I have never seen one so marvelous. Well, gov-



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error, you may ask what you will for it, but I will not return this rug to you."

Then and there the king took out twenty-five thousand rubles and gave them to the governor. And he ordered that the rug be hung in the palace at once.

"That's all right," thought the governor. "I will buy an even better one for myself."

So the governor hurried to the peasant hut in which the soldier lived, but when he entered it and saw the soldier's wife, he forgot the business on which he had come. Before him stood such a beauty that he could have feasted his eyes on her for a lifetime. He looked and looked and could not look away. As he looked, he thought to himself, "Who ever heard of an ordinary soldier possessing such a treasure? Even though I serve the king personally and have the rank of general, I have never even seen beauty to compare with hers."

The governor was at last forced to make his unwilling way home. But from that time on, whether waking or sleeping, he could think of nothing but the soldier's beautiful wife. And when he ate or drank, he hardly noticed what he was doing.

The king soon saw that something was wrong and questioned him. "What has happened to you? Have you suffered some misfortune?"

"Oh, your majesty! I have seen a soldier's wife and there is no beauty to compare with her in the entire world. I keep thinking and thinking about her and nothing can break the spell she has cast over me."

The king wished to see her for himself. He ordered his carriage and went to the section of the city in which the

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soldiers were billeted. He entered the soldier's hut and indeed he found that Fedot's wife was beautiful beyond belief. Anyone who looked at her, old or young, was bound to fall hopelessly in love, and the king too felt a sharp pang in his heart.

He thought to himself, "After all, here am I, still unmarried. I would like to marry this beauty. Why should she be the wife of a mere soldier? It is her destiny to be a queen!"

The king returned to his palace and said to the governor, "You showed me the soldier's wife. Now it's up to you to get rid of her husband. I want to marry her myself. And if you don't get rid of him, you will hang from a gallows tree though you are my loyal servant."

The governor left the palace and was sadder than ever, for he could not think of a good way to get rid of the soldier.

He searched through nooks and crannies and wild and vacant places, until he found a Baba Yaga.

"Stop, servant of the king! I can read your thoughts," she said. "Would you like me to help you in your great misfortune?"

"Help me, granny! I will pay you whatever you ask."

"The king has ordered you to get rid of Fedot the soldier. That is not easy. Fedot is simple enough, but his wife is very clever. Well, we shall have to work up a riddle that he won't quickly solve. Return to the king and say: 'Beyond thrice nine lands, in the thrice tenth kingdom, is an island. On this island there lives a deer with golden horns.' Let the king muster half a hundred sailors—the most slipshod, useless drunkards to be found—and let him have readied for sailing



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the oldest, rottenest ship in his fleet, one that has been retired from service for at least thirty years. Then let him send Fedot the soldier to sail on this ship in search of the deer with the golden horns. It will take Fedot no more and no less than three years to get to that island and it will take him three years to sail back, which makes six years. But the ship will go to sea, sail for a month and then sink. And Fedot and the sailors will all drown."

The governor listened carefully, thanked Baba Yaga for her advice, rewarded her with gold and returned to the king.

"Your majesty!" he said, and he told the king what Baba Yaga had said, concluding with: "In this way you will surely be rid of the soldier."

The king agreed and immediately ordered that an old and rotten ship be loaded with provisions for six years, and had assigned to it a crew of fifty of the most disorderly and habitually drunken sailors in the fleet. The king's couriers searched the inns and wineshops and collected an assemblage of motley sailors such as has rarely been seen. Some had blackened eyes and others had broken noses. As soon as the king was told that the ship was ready, he summoned Fedot.

"Fedot, you are a fine young soldier, the best rifleman in the regiment. I am going to ask you to perform a service for me. Go beyond the thrice ninth land to the thrice tenth kingdom and find the island on which there lives a deer with golden horns. Capture him alive and bring him back to me."

The soldier considered the king's request and did not know what to answer.

"There is nothing to think about," said the king. "If you

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do not do as I order, I will have you beheaded!"

That evening when Fedot returned home, he was sad and would not utter a word.

His wife asked, "Why are you so downcast? Has something happened?"

Fedot then told her the whole story, and she replied, "So that's it. Well, that is nothing. Just a trifle. Say your prayers and lie down to sleep. Things always look better in the morning. Everything will be taken care of."

The soldier lay down and went to sleep and his wife opened her magic book. Immediately two young wizards appeared before her and said, "Command us and we will obey."

"Go beyond the thrice ninth land, into the thrice tenth kingdom. There you will find an island on which there lives a deer with golden horns. Capture him alive and bring him here."

"We obey! By daylight all will be done!"

A whirlwind bore them to the island where they caught the deer with the golden horns and brought him straight to the soldier's yard. Their task once accomplished, the wizards disappeared. It was still one hour before dawn.

The soldier's wife awakened her husband earlier than usual and said to him, "Have a look—the deer with the golden horns is pasturing in your own yard. Take him aboard the ship. Sail out to sea for five days, and on the sixth day, turn homeward."

The soldier placed the deer in a boarded-up cage and had it loaded on the ship.

"What is that?" asked the sailors.



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"Various stores and medicines," he replied. "It is going to be a long journey and many things will be needed."

The time came for the ship to sail. Many people came to see the voyagers off. The king himself arrived to bid farewell to Fedot and to name him commander of the ship.

The ship sailed for five days and left the seacoast far behind. Fedot gave orders that a huge barrel of wine be rolled out on the deck and said to his sailors, "Brothers, drink up! Don't wait. Don't hesitate. Drink as much as your hearts desire."

The sailors were very happy to obey such orders and rushed to the barrel. They drank wine in such measure that they fell on their faces and slept right where they were.

Fedot took the wheel and turned the ship toward home. To prevent the sailors from noticing, he let them drink wine from morn till night. No sooner did they open their blood-shot eyes than they found a new barrel ready and waiting.

On the eleventh day, the ship docked at the wharf, ran up its flag and fired a salute. The king heard the salute and rushed to the wharf to see what was happening. At the sight of Fedot, he grew furious and shouted angrily, "How dare you return ahead of schedule!"

"What else could I do, your majesty? No doubt some idiot might sail about on the high seas for years and accomplish nothing, but I have managed to carry out our mission in eleven days. Would you not like to see the deer with the golden horns?"

The cage was immediately unloaded and the deer with the golden horns released. The king saw that the soldier had succeeded and that there was nothing more to be done

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at the moment. He permitted the soldier to go home. And since the sailors who had manned the ship had, in effect, completed the work they had been assigned to do and could not be retained in active service, he granted them leave for the remainder of the six years.

The very next day the king summoned the governor and denounced him angrily. "What are you trying to do—play tricks? It would seem your head is not precious to you! Do what you must, but find a way to send Fedot the soldier to an evil death."

"Your royal highness, just give me a chance to think about it, and I will try to find another way!"

The governor once again searched through nooks and crannies and wild and vacant places until he saw the Baba Yaga coming toward him.

"Stop, servant of the king! I know your thoughts. You want me to help you in your misfortune."

"Help me, granny. The soldier has returned and brought with him the deer with the golden horns."

"Alas, I have already heard. He himself is a simple fellow and to dispose of him would be as easy as taking a pinch of snuff. But his wife is very clever. We will set him another riddle, one that he won't be able to solve so quickly. Go to the king and tell him to order the soldier to 'go I don't know where and bring back I don't know what.' Now this is a task which in all eternity he will never be able to carry out. Either he will be lost without a trace during the search or he will come back empty-handed."

The governor rewarded Baba Yaga with gold and went to the king. The king heard him out and summoned Fedot.



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"Well, Fedot, you are a stout young soldier, the very best rifleman in the regiment. You have performed one service for me. You have brought me the deer with the golden horns. Now I ask you to perform another: Go I don't know where and bring back I don't know what. And you must understand that should you fail you will lose your head."

The soldier left the palace and returned home sad and thoughtful.

His wife asked, "Why, darling, are you so unhappy? Have you suffered some misfortune?"

"Alas," he said, "I have just managed to get over one catastrophe and am already faced with another. The king has ordered me to 'go I don't know where and bring back I don't know what.' It is because of your beauty that I must suffer this disaster."

"Well," replied his wife, "this particular service is no small feat. It will take nine years on foot to get there and another nine to return. That is eighteen years. And whether we will get results even then, God only knows."

"What am I to do?"

"Say your prayers and lie down to sleep. Things always look better in the morning. Tomorrow I will tell you everything."

The soldier lay down to sleep. His wife waited for night and opened her magic book. Immediately the two wizards appeared. "Command us and we will obey."

"Can you solve the riddle of 'go I don't know where and bring back I don't know what'?"

"No, we cannot."

She shut her book and the wizards disappeared.

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In the morning the soldier's wife awakened her husband. "Go to the king and tell him you must have a lot of gold for your journey. After all you will be gone for eighteen years. When you receive the money, come back to bid me farewell."

The soldier went to see the king, who gave him a great pouch full of gold from the royal treasury. Then he went to say farewell to his wife.

She gave him a kerchief and a little ball. "When you leave the city, throw this ball before you and follow wherever it rolls. And here is a sample of my handiwork to take with you. No matter where you are, whenever you wash, always, without fail, use this cloth to dry yourself."

The soldier said farewell to his wife and comrades, bowed north, south, east and west, and left the city. He tossed the little ball ahead of him. It kept rolling and rolling and he followed after it.

A month passed and the king summoned the governor and said, "The soldier has left on a journey that will take eighteen years. He will wander through the wide world and it would seem more than likely that he will not return from this journey alive. After all, eighteen years is not two weeks. Who knows what will happen along the way. He has a great deal of money with him and no doubt that will tempt thieves. They will rob and kill him. And so it seems to me that I need wait no longer for his wife. Take my carriage, go to the soldier's hut and bring her to the palace."

The governor drove to the soldiers' section of the city. He entered Fedot's hut and said to the soldier's wife, "Greetings, wise and clever lady, the king has ordered you to present yourself at the palace."



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The wife went to the palace, where the king met her joyfully and led her into a gilded chamber. The king said to her, "Would you like to be my queen? For I wish to marry you."

"How can you take a wife from a living husband? No matter who he is, even if he is an ordinary soldier, he is still my lawful husband."

"If you don't marry me of your own free will, I will compel you to do so."

At these words the beautiful wife laughed, struck the floor, turned into a turtledove again and flew out of the window.

The soldier journeyed through many kingdoms and the little ball always led the way. When they came to a river the ball made a bridge across it, and whenever the soldier wished to rest, the little ball made up a feather bed for him.

Whether it took a long time or a short time we do not know, for though a tale is quickly told, a deed takes time to do. Finally, however, the soldier came to a large and magnificent palace. The little ball rolled up to the gates and disappeared. The soldier hesitated a moment and then decided to go in.

Once inside, he mounted a staircase that led to a chamber where he was greeted by three maidens of indescribable beauty.

"Where have you come from? Why are you here?" they asked.

"Oh, beautiful maidens, you don't even give me a chance to rest from my long journey, but instead question me right

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off. Give me something to eat and drink and let me rest, and then I will answer you."

They set a table for him at once, gave him food and drink and, when he had eaten, showed him to a bed.

The soldier slept his fill and as soon as he awoke, the beautiful maidens brought him a washbasin and an embroidered towel. He washed in the fresh spring water, but would not accept the towel they gave him.

"I have my own cloth with which to dry my face," he said.

The beautiful maidens asked, "Good sir, where did you get that cloth?"

"My wife gave it to me."

"Then you are married to our own dear sister."

They called their old mother, who came to look at the cloth. She too recognized it instantly. "It is the handiwork of my daughter," she exclaimed.

She began to question her guest, and he related the whole story. How he had come to marry her daughter and how it was that the king had sent him to "go I don't know where and bring back I don't know what."

"Alas, my dear son-in-law, even I have never heard of anything so strange. But wait a moment. Perhaps my servants have heard of it."

The old woman went out on her balcony and called in a loud voice. Suddenly, out of nowhere, all varieties of wild beasts came hurrying to her and all manner of birds flew down from the sky.

"Welcome, beasts of the forest and birds of the air. Beasts, you go everywhere and, birds, you fly everywhere:



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have you every heard of 'go I don't know where and bring back I don't know what'?"

All the beasts and birds answered in chorus. "No, we have not heard of that."

The old woman let them return to their own haunts—to the thickets, the forests and copses—and went back into the house. She got out her magic book and 'opened it. Instantly two giants appeared before her.

"Command us and we will obey."

"My true servants, carry me and my son-in-law out into the broad ocean-sea and stand right in the middle of it, in its deepest depths."

The giants immediately lifted the soldier and the old woman and carried them on a whirlwind out into the midst of the broad ocean-sea and placed themselves in its deepest depths. Once there they stood like pillars holding the soldier and the old woman in their hands.

The old woman called out in a loud voice—and all of the fish and reptiles of the sea swam to the surface. The sea was alive with them. There were so many the water could hardly be seen.

"Welcome fish and reptiles! You swim everywhere and visit all the islands of the sea. Have you ever heard of 'go I don't know where and bring back I don't know what'?"

And all the fish and reptiles of the sea replied in one voice: "No, we have never heard of that."

But just then a lame old frog, who had been living quietly in retirement for thirty-five years, pushed his way forward and said, "Croak, croak! I know where this wonder is to be found."

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"Well, my dear frog, you are the one I've been looking for," said the old woman.

She picked him up and ordered the giants to take her, the frog and her son-in-law home.

In one instant they had returned to the palace, and the old woman asked the frog, "What road must my son-in-law take?"

"The place is at the very edge of the world—far far away. I would guide him there myself, but I am very old and I can hardly drag my legs behind me. It would take me fifty years to hop there."

The old woman brought out a big jar and poured some fresh milk into it. She placed the frog in the jar and gave it to her son-in-law. "Just carry this jar in your hand," she said, "and let the frog show you the way."

The soldier took the jar, said farewell to the old woman and her daughters and, directed by the frog, continued on his journey.

Was it far, was it near, did it take long, or was it soon? Who knows? They arrived at a fiery river, and beyond the river stood a high mountain in which a door could be seen.

"Croak, croak!" said the frog. "Let me out of the jar. We must cross the river.

"Well, my handsome soldier," he continued, "sit on my back and don't feel sorry for me, because you're not going to crush me."

The soldier seated himself on the frog, who was pressed hard to the ground, but the frog began to puff himself up and he grew bigger and bigger, until he was as large as a haystack. The soldier had only one thought on his mind—



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how not to fall off, knowing that if he did, he would be killed.

Nevertheless the frog continued puffing and growing until he made a gigantic leap, which took him across the fiery river. As soon as they landed he shrank to his normal size again.

"Now, handsome soldier," he said, "enter that door and I will wait for you here. You will find a cave, where you must hide yourself well. After a time, two old men will come. Listen to what they say and see what they do, and when they have gone, say and do the same yourself."

The soldier went up to the mountain and opened the door. The cave was so dark, it was as if he were blind. He crawled on all fours and began to feel things with his hands. He came to what seemed to be an empty closet, sat himself in it and covered himself up.

In a little while, two old men came into the cave and said, "Hey there, Shmat the Wise, feed us!"

That very instant from out of nowhere, chandeliers were lighted, plates and serving dishes rattled, and all kinds of fine foods and wines appeared on a table. The old men ate and drank their fill and then ordered, "Hey there, Shmat the Wise, take it away!"

Suddenly everything disappeared. There was nothing there, no table, no drinks, no food, and the chandeliers went out. The soldier heard the two old men leave. He climbed out of the closet and cried, "Hey there, Shmat the Wise!"

"What would you like?"

"Feed me!"

Once again chandeliers were lighted and a table was set with all kinds of food and drink.

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The soldier seated himself at the table and said, "Hey there, Shmat the Wise, sit down with me! Let's eat and drink together, brother. Because alone it's lonely."

An invisible voice replied, "Oh, good man, from where has God sent you? It will soon be thirty years that I have been serving the two old men truly and faithfully, and during the entire time they have not once invited me to sit down with them."

The soldier watched with astonishment. He could see no one, but the food was disappearing from the plate as if it were being swept up by a whisk broom, and the bottle rose by itself and poured wine into a glass. And as the soldier watched, the glass was emptied. He ate and drank and then he said, "Listen to me, Shmat the Wise. Would you like to serve me? Life with me will be good."

"Why not! I have long been bored with things here and you, I see, are a good man."

"Well then, get your things together and let's be off."

The soldier emerged from the cave and looked about him, but could see no one.

"Shmat the Wise, are you here?"

"Here! Don't worry! I will not lag behind."

"Very well," said the soldier.

He mounted the frog and the frog puffed himself up, gave a mighty leap across the fiery river and, once across, became his normal size again. The soldier put the frog back in the jar and they set off for home.

They came to the palace of the soldier's mother-in-law and he ordered his new servant to serve a feast for the old woman and her daughters. So well did Shmat the Wise entertain them that the old woman almost danced for joy.



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In reward for his good service the frog was to receive three jars of milk each day.

The soldier said farewell to his mother-in-law and continued homeward. He walked and walked until he was exhausted. His feet dragged, his arms drooped.

"Alas," he said, "Shmat the Wise, if you only knew how weary I am. My legs are simply too tired to move."

"Why didn't you tell me before? I would have got you home in an instant."

The soldier was at once lifted up in a strong whirlwind and borne through the air so swiftly that his cap fell off his head.

"Hey there, Shmat the Wise, wait a minute. My cap has fallen off."

"Too late, sir! Your cap is five thousand miles behind us."

Cities and villages, rivers and forests flashed past. They were flying over a pale-blue sea and Shmat the Wise said to the soldier, "Would you like me to build you a golden pavilion right here on this sea? You can rest there and find good fortune, too."

"Very well," said the soldier. He had no sooner spoken than he felt himself landing.

Where before there had been only waves, there now rose a tiny island and on the island stood a golden pavilion.

Shmat the Wise said to the soldier, "Seat yourself in the pavilion. Rest and look out to sea. Three merchant ships will sail up and approach the island. Summon the merchants to you, entertain them and feast them, and exchange me for the three marvels which the merchants carry with them. When the time comes, I will again return to you."

The soldier looked out to sea and there were three sailing

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vessels approaching from the west. The sailors had spotted the island and the golden pavilion.

"What miraculous island is this?" they asked. "We have sailed these waters many times, but never before has there been anything but ocean here. And just look over there at that golden pavilion! Let's get close to the shore, brothers, and have a better look."

The ships hove to and put down their anchors. The three merchants, who were the ships' owners, boarded a small boat and rowed to the island.

"Hail, good man," they said to the soldier.

"Hail, foreign merchants! I bid you welcome. Enjoy yourselves. Rest awhile. This pavilion was built just for guests such as you."

The merchants entered the pavilion and seated themselves.

"Hey there, Shmat the Wise," cried the soldier, "give us something to eat and drink."

In an instant a table appeared before them and on the table were fine food and wine—as much as the heart could desire. The merchants could only "oh" and "ah."

"Come," said they, "let us exchange marvels. Give us your invisible servant and in exchange you may have any one of our marvels."

"What marvels have you?" asked the soldier.

"Wait and you shall see," they promised.

One of the merchants took from his pocket a small box, and as soon as he opened it, an entire park, complete with flowers and pathways, rolled out and covered the whole island. The moment he closed the little box, the park disappeared.



## *Go I Don't Know Where*

The second merchant took an ax from beneath the folds of his robe and chopped once. Immediately a ship appeared. He chopped again, and there was a second ship. One hundred times he chopped and there were one hundred ships, complete with sails, cannon, all ready to sail. The sails were hoisted, the cannon roared and the ships' captains asked the merchant for orders. Having amused himself, the merchant hid his ax and the ships disappeared without a trace.

The third merchant took out a horn and blew it. Instantly an army appeared—infantry and cavalry, with rifles, cannon and banners. The merchant received reports from all the regiments and issued orders in return. The troops marched, martial music blared, banners flew. This merchant too, having amused himself, took the horn, blew into its wrong end, and all the troops disappeared.

"Your marvels are fine," said the soldier, "but they do not suit my needs at all. Armies and navies are matters for a king, and I am only a simple soldier. If you wish to make an exchange with me, then, you must give me all three of your marvels for my invisible servant."

"Aren't you asking too much?"

"Well, do as you please. I will not make the exchange on any other condition."

The merchants thought to themselves. "Of what use to us is the park, or those regiments or ships? We will do better to make the exchange. At least we will be well fed and given drink without any fuss and bother."

So they gave the soldier their marvels and said, "Hey you, Shmat the Wise, we are going to take you with us. Will you serve us faithfully?"

"Why not? It is all the same to me whom I serve."

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

The merchants returned to their ships and ordered a great feast for all their sailors.

"All right, Shmat the Wise, hurry up now!"

On board the ships, all drank themselves into a stupor. Meanwhile the soldier sat in the golden pavilion considering things, and he said aloud, "Too bad! I miss my loyal servant, Shmat the Wise. I wonder where he is now?"

"I am here, sir."

The soldier was delighted. "Isn't it time for us to go home?"

He had no sooner spoken than he was caught up in a wild whirlwind and borne into the air. The merchants in their ship had awakened and wanted more to drink.

"Hey there, Shmat the Wise, give us something to get rid of our hangovers."

No one replied. No one came to wait on them no matter how much they shouted.

"Good Lord! That cheat robbed us. Only the devil could find him now. The island is gone and so is the golden pavilion."

The merchants mourned their loss for a time. Then they hoisted their sails and sailed away.

The soldier was borne swiftly home to his own kingdom. He landed on an empty strip of coast near the deep-blue sea.

"Hey there, Shmat the Wise, can you build me a palace here?"

"Why not? It will be ready in an instant."

Immediately such a wonderful palace rose from the



## *Go I Don't Know Where*

ground that it is impossible to describe it. And it was twice as big as the king's palace.

The soldier opened the tiny box that the first merchant had given him, and a park appeared with rare trees and flowers. As the soldier sat at an open window of his palace admiring his park, a turtledove flew in, struck the floor and became his beautiful, young wife. They embraced and were soon relating their adventures to one another.

"Since you left the house," the wife said, "I have spent my time flying through the groves and the forests."

The next morning the king went out on his balcony and, looking toward the sea, saw on the shore a new palace, surrounded by a lovely green park.

"What boor has dared to build on my land without asking my permission?" the king demanded.

Couriers were sent to find out and returned with the report that the palace had been built by the king's former rifleman, who was living there with his wife. The king grew even angrier than before and ordered his army to be assembled. They were to burn down the park and palace and put to death the soldier and his wife.

When the soldier saw that the king's army was moving to attack his palace, he quickly took up his ax and went chop, chop, and one ship after another appeared, until there were a hundred in the sea. He then took out his horn and blew once and infantry poured forth ready for battle. He blew again and a cavalry regiment appeared.

The commanding officers of the regiments and the captains of the ships came to him for orders. The soldier signaled for the battle to begin. Martial music blared, the drums were

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

beaten, and the regiments advanced. The infantry broke the ranks of the king's soldiers. The cavalry pursued them as they fled and took prisoners. The ships fired volley after volley into the capital.

The king saw that his army was fleeing and rushed out to stop the deserting soldiers, but he could do nothing and in half an hour he himself was killed.

When the battle was over the people gathered together and begged the soldier to rule over the kingdom. The soldier agreed and was made king and his wife became the queen.











## *Frost*

**T**here once lived an old couple who had three daughters. Marfusha, the eldest, whose own mother was dead, was stepdaughter to the old woman. The stepmother disliked her and favored the two younger daughters, who were her own. She scolded Marfusha continuously, made her get up very early and do all the work. Marfusha looked after the livestock, carried firewood and water to the house, kept the stove going and swept and cleaned before the sun was up. But the old woman was not satisfied and continued to berate her.

"What a lazy good-for-nothing slattern you are! The broom is not in its proper place. It's standing crooked and the house is dirty."

The girl never answered back but wept to herself. She kept trying to please her stepmother and waited upon her

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

two half sisters. But the sisters, following their mother's example, took pleasure in insulting Marfusha. They picked quarrels with her and used every means they could to make her miserable.

They themselves got up late, washed in the water Marfusha brought them, dried themselves with the clean towels she had readied and did no work at all until after they had lunched.

In this way the three girls grew and matured until they reached marriageable age.

A tale is quickly told, but a deed takes time to do. Although the old man felt sorry for his eldest daughter, and loved her, he had been unable to improve her lot. She was obedient and hard-working, never stubborn or capricious, and did what she was told without protest. But the old man was weak and his wife was a shrew and a scold, while her daughters were stubborn loafers.

Each in his own way, both the old man and the old woman, considered what to do about Marfusha. The old man tried to find a way to help his eldest daughter; the old woman, on the contrary, schemed how best to get rid of her.

One day the old woman said to her husband, "Well, old man, it's time to marry off the eldest."

"All right," said the old man and climbed up to his place on the stove, where she followed him to talk the matter over. The old woman said, "Tomorrow you must get up very early, old man, and hitch the mare to the firewood sleigh. You and Marfusha are to gather up all her things, put them in a basket and cover them with a white cloth. You are going visiting."



Good Marfusha was delighted when she was told that she was going visiting. She slept soundly and sweetly all night, got up early in the morning, washed, prayed to God, got her things together and packed everything carefully. She dressed herself in her very best and she was indeed a girl fit to be a bride.

It was winter and crackling cold outside.

Before dawn the old man hitched the mare to the firewood sleigh and brought her to the door. Then he came into the hut, sat down on a bench and said, "Well, everything is ready."

"Sit down at the table and eat," said the old woman.

The old man sat down next to Marfusha. He broke off a piece of bread for each of them, and the old woman served them some stale cabbage soup. Then she said to the girl, "Well, my dear, eat and out with you! I've had to look at you long enough. Old man, you will take Marfusha to her bridegroom. See to it, you old good-for-nothing, that you follow the road straight ahead and turn off to the right at the pine forest. When you come to the big pine tree that stands on the hillock, you will turn Marfusha over to Frost."

The old man's eyes opened wide. He gaped at his wife and stopped eating. Marfusha began to cry.

"What are those tears all about? After all your bridegroom is a handsome, rich man. Just look about and see how wealthy he is. All the firs, pines and birches are dressed in finery these days. He makes a good living and is a great warrior as well."

The old man packed his daughter's things into the sleigh in silence. He told her to put on her sheepskin coat and they set out.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

Finally they arrived at the pine forest, turned off the road and continued over the crusty snow.

When they reached the hillock, which was in the deepest part of the forest, the old man told his daughter to get out of the sleigh. He set her basket down beneath the enormous fir tree and said, "Sit here and wait for your bridegroom, and make sure you treat him tenderly."

He got back into the sleigh, turned the horse about and drove home.

Marfusha sat there and shivered. She was soon cold to her very bones. She felt like sobbing, but had not the strength to do so. Only her teeth kept chattering. Suddenly, not far off, she heard Frost crackling among the trees. He was leaping from one fir tree to another, snapping and crackling as he went along. When he reached the top of the fir tree beneath which the girl sat, he said to her, "Are you warm, fair maiden?"

"I am warm, warm, Father Frost."

Frost came closer, crackling and crunching noisily. And he asked, "Are you warm, maiden? Are you warm, fair one?"

The girl could hardly breathe, but still she said, "Warm, dear Frost. Warm, Father Frost."

Frost crackled and snapped ever closer and said, "Are you warm, maiden? Are you warm, fair one? Are you warm, little one?"

The maiden began to stiffen and, just barely loud enough to be heard, said, "Oh, very warm, dear lovely Frost."

Then and there Frost took pity on her and wrapped her in furs and blankets to warm her.

In the morning, the old woman said to her husband, "Go, you old good-for-nothing, and wake up the newlyweds."



The old man hitched up his horse and rode off. When he arrived at the fir tree, he found Marfusha alive, dressed in a fine fur coat and wearing a lovely bridal veil. Next to her stood a chest full of rich gifts.

Without saying a word the old man loaded everything into his sleigh, seated himself next to his daughter and drove home. The old woman, who had not expected her stepdaughter to be alive, was astounded to see the girl not only unharmed, but also wearing a new fur coat and bringing a chest full of fine linens and gifts.

"Well, you little witch," she thought to herself, "you are not going to cheat me."

After a short time had passed, the old woman said to the old man, "Now, take my own daughters, too, to Frost. He will give them even finer gifts."

Well, the long and the short of it was—since deeds take time to do, but stories are quickly told—that early one morning the old woman fed her daughters, dressed them in their wedding finery and sent them off. The old man took the girls to exactly the same spot, under the fir tree, where he had left Marfusha and returned home. The girls sat there and giggled. "What sort of joke has our mother dreamed up—to marry both of us off at once? After all there are plenty of young men in our village, and some devils we don't even know are likely to appear here."

Although the girls wore sheepskin coats, they soon began to feel cold.

"Well, Pasha? The cold is coming through to my skin. If our fiancés don't come soon, we'll freeze here."

"All right, Mashka, that's enough complaining. If our fiancés come early, we can have dinner out-of-doors."

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

"What if only one comes? Which one of us will he choose?"

"Not you, silly."

"Not you, certainly."

"Of course, me!"

"You! That's enough bragging out of you!"

Frost bit the hands of the girls, and they put them inside their dresses to warm them against their bodies and went on with their bickering.

"Oh, you, you ugly snout, you pest! You're so stupid, you don't even know how to spin."

"What a conceited ass you are! What do you know? The only thing you know how to do it to go about and lick your lips. We will soon see which one of us he takes."

And so the girls argued away until they really began to feel the cold. They both said at once: "What a nuisance! Why do they take so long? Look, we're turning blue!"

Just then from far off, Frost began to crackle and jump from fir tree to fir tree. The girls heard someone coming.

"Listen, Pasha, someone is coming at last, with little bells."

"Get away from me, you witch! I can't hear. The cold has made me numb."

"And you're still thinking about getting married!"

They began blowing on their fingers. Frost came closer and closer until finally he reached the fir tree beneath which the girls sat.

"Are you warm, maidens?" he asked. "Are you warm, my darlings?"

"Oh, Frost, we are chilled through. We're frozen stiff."



## *Frost*

We're waiting for our fiancés, but, curse them, they have deserted us."

Frost drew even closer, crackling and snapping louder and louder.

"Are you warm, maidens? Are you warm, fair ones?"

"Go to the devil! Are you blind? Can't you see that our hands and feet are frostbitten?"

Frost stood next to them and struck out sharply. "Are you warm, my maidens?"

"Go to the devil, rot, be cursed!"

And the girls froze.

The next morning the woman said to her husband, "Harness up the big sleigh, old man. Put in a pile of hay and take along a robe. Maybe the girls have caught a chill. It's terribly cold outside. Come on, you good-for-nothing!"

The old man did not even manage to get himself a bite to eat before he was pushed outside and forced to set off.

When he got to the fir tree, he found their daughters dead. He put the girls in the big sleigh, wrapped them in the robe and covered them with burlap. The old woman, seeing the old man from far away, rushed out to meet him.

"How are the children?" she asked.

"Look in the sleigh."

The old woman pulled back the burlap and the robe and saw her dead daughters.

She shouted like thunder and cursed the old man. "What did you do, you old cur? You killed my daughters, my own dear daughters, my beautiful little flowers, my lovely berries! I'm going to kill you with the oven fork! I'm going to smash you with the poker!"

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

"That's enough, you old crow! You were greedy for wealth and your daughters were stubborn fools. How am I to blame? It's what you yourself had me do."

The old woman continued to rage, scold and curse, but afterward she made peace with Marfusha. They learned to live together happily, accumulated wealth and put misfortune out of their minds.

A village lad asked for Marfusha's hand. The wedding was celebrated, and Marfusha lived with her husband in contentment. And the old man, so that his grandchildren would not grow up to be selfish and spoiled, made sure to tell them the story of Frost.











## *The Frog Princess*

Once upon a time, in a far-away kingdom, there lived a king and a queen who had three sons. All three were bachelors, and unbelievably handsome daredevils.

The king summoned his sons and said, "Beloved sons! Each of you is to take an arrow, aim it in a different direction and shoot it as far as it will go. Wherever your arrows fall, there you will find your brides."

The eldest shot his arrow and it landed in a nobleman's courtyard right beneath his daughter's chamber.

The second son shot his. It flew into the courtyard of a merchant's house and landed on a balcony where the merchant's pretty daughter happened to be standing.

The youngest son, who was called Prince Ivan, shot his arrow. It landed in a dirty swamp and was picked up by a frog.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

"How can I marry a frog?" Prince Ivan said. "She is not my equal!"

"Take her!" replied the king. "That is your fate!"

And so the princes were married: The eldest married the nobleman's daughter; the second married the merchant's daughter; and Prince Ivan married the frog.

The king then summoned his sons and said, "By tomorrow have each of your wives bake me a loaf of soft white bread."

Prince Ivan returned to his rooms, with his handsome head bowed.

"Croak, croak. Prince Ivan, why do you grieve?" the frog asked. "Has your father said something unpleasant to you?"

"How can I not be sad?" he replied. "The sovereign, my father, has given orders that you bake him a loaf of soft white bread by tomorrow."

"No need to be sad, prince! Lie down and go to sleep. Things always look better in the morning!"

When the prince had gone to bed and fallen asleep, the frog shed its skin and became a beautiful maiden, Vasilisa the Wise. She stepped out on the palace balcony and in a loud voice called:

"Servants mine! Make me a loaf of the same soft white bread I used to eat in my father's house."

Prince Ivan awoke in the morning and the bread was long since ready. It was a beautiful loaf, most skillfully decorated with designs representing the royal cities and their gates.

The king was grateful to Prince Ivan for the magnificent bread. Then and there he said to his sons, "Have each of your wives weave me a rug overnight."



## *The Frog Princess*

Prince Ivan again returned to his rooms, with his handsome head bowed.

"Croak, croak. Prince Ivan, why are you so sad? Has your father said something harsh or unpleasant to you?"

"How can I not be sad? The sovereign, my father, has ordered you to weave a rug for him overnight."

"No need to grieve, Prince Ivan! Lie down and go to sleep! Things always look better in the morning."

And when he was asleep she again shed her skin and became Vasilisa the Wise. She stepped out on the palace balcony and called in a loud voice:

"My faithful servants! Gather around me and weave a silken rug like the one on which I used to sit in my father's house!"

It was no sooner said than done. In the morning when Prince Ivan awakened the rug was ready. It was so remarkable that it can hardly be described. Its intricate pattern was skillfully woven in silver and gold.

The king was grateful to Prince Ivan for the rug and he immediately ordered that all three princes bring their wives before him.

Once again Prince Ivan returned unhappily to his rooms.

"Croak, croak. Prince Ivan, why are you so sad? Did you hear something unpleasant from your father?"

"How can I not be sad? The sovereign, my father, has given orders that I must bring you before him. How can I take you among people?"

"Do not be sad, Prince Ivan! Go to see the king alone and I will follow. When you hear thunder and see lightning, you are to say: that is my darling frog arriving in her little box."

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

The two elder brothers appeared before the king with their wives, who were dressed in all their finery. They stood there and mocked Prince Ivan.

"Why did you come without your wife, brother? You might at least have brought her wrapped up in a handkerchief! Just where did you find such a beauty? You must have searched all the swamps for her."

Suddenly there was a great sound of thunder and the castle shook. The frightened guests jumped up from their places and did not know what to do.

But Prince Ivan said, "Do not be afraid, ladies and gentlemen! That is my darling frog arriving in her little box."

Just then a gilded carriage, drawn by six horses, drew up before the palace and from it stepped Vasilisa the Wise. Beauty such as hers is beyond description and exists only in fairy tales. She took Prince Ivan by the hand and led him to the oaken tables covered with rich cloths.

The banquet began and the guests ate, drank and were merry. Vasilisa the Wise drank wine from a glass and poured the dregs into her left sleeve. She ate roast swan and concealed the bones in her right sleeve. The wives of the elder princes, who were watching her, did the same.

Later when Vasilisa the Wise danced with Prince Ivan, she waved her left arm and a lake appeared; she motioned with her right arm and white swans swam on the water. The king and his guests were astounded. The wives of the elder princes, when they danced with their husbands, also waved their left arms but only bespattered the guests. They waved their right arms and the bones flew right into peoples' faces. The king was enraged and dismissed them in disgrace.



## *The Frog Princess*

In the meantime, Prince Ivan left the feast, hurried to his chambers, found the frog skin and threw it into the fireplace where it burned up. Vasilisa the Wise came home and searched frantically for her frog skin, but could not find it.

She grew very sad and said, "Oh, Prince Ivan! What have you done? If you had only waited a little while longer, I would have been yours forever. But now, farewell. You will have to look for me at the ends of the earth in the land of Koshchei the Deathless."

She turned into a white swan and flew out of the window.

Prince Ivan wept bitterly. He bowed in all directions praying to God and set off into the endless distance. He traveled near, he traveled far, whether a short time or a long time no one can say, and came upon an old old man.

"Young warrior!" the old man hailed him. "Where do you go? What do you seek?"

And Prince Ivan told the old man of his misfortune.

"Alas, Prince Ivan, why did you burn the frog's skin? It was yours neither to wear nor to destroy. Vasilisa the Wise was born cleverer than her father. It angered him, and so he forced her to live as a frog for three years. Here is a ball of twine. Follow it boldly wherever it rolls."

Prince Ivan thanked the old man and followed the rolling ball. It led him through open country where he encountered a bear.

"I will kill the beast!" he said to himself.

But the bear begged for his life. "Don't kill me, Prince Ivan! One day I will do you a good turn!"

Prince Ivan continued on his way and suddenly a drake flew over him. The prince aimed his gun and was about

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

to shoot when the bird called out in a human voice, "Don't kill me, Prince Ivan! I will do you a good turn one day."

He spared the drake and went on his way.

A cross-eyed hare ran onto his path. The prince lifted his gun once again, but the hare too pleaded with him in a human voice.

"Don't kill me, Prince Ivan! I will do you a good turn one day."

He took pity on the hare and continued on, arriving at last at the dark-blue sea. On the sand lay a big pike breathing his last.

"Oh, Prince Ivan," begged the pike, "please take pity on me and put me back into the sea."

Prince Ivan threw the pike into the sea and walked on along the shore.

In good time the ball of twine rolled up to a little hut. It stood on chicken legs and turned round and round.

Prince Ivan said, "Little hut, little hut! Stand still, facing me with your back to the sea!"

The little hut obeyed, Prince Ivan entered and saw a bony-legged Baba Yaga lying on the stove at the ninth brick. Her nose was dripping and it was so long it reached the ceiling. She was busy sharpening her teeth.

"Good day, stout warrior! Why have you come to see me?" asked Baba Yaga.

"You old hag!" replied Prince Ivan. "You ought to know better than to start asking questions, brave warrior that I am, before giving me something to eat and drink and letting me steam in a hot bath for a while."

Baba Yaga gave him food and drink and prepared a hot



## *The Frog Princess*

bath for him and Prince Ivan told her he was looking for his wife, Vasilisa the Wise.

"I know!" said Baba Yaga. "She is with Koshchei the Deathless and it's going to be very hard for you to get her back. It's no easy task to deal with Koshchei. His death rests on the point of a needle, and the needle is inside an egg, and the egg is inside a duck, and the duck is inside a hare, and the hare is inside a trunk, and the trunk sits high up in a great oak, and Koshchei guards that oak as if it were his own eye."

Baba Yaga told Prince Ivan where the oak grew. Prince Ivan went to the oak, but he did not know how to get the trunk down. All of a sudden the bear ran up from out of nowhere and tore the tree down by its roots. The trunk fell down and broke into pieces. The hare jumped out and ran off as fast as his legs would carry him. But another hare ran in pursuit, caught him and tore him to pieces. The duck flew out of the hare and rose high into the heavens. The drake raced after the duck, struck her and she dropped her egg into the sea. Prince Ivan, thinking it was lost for good, began to weep. But there and then the pike, holding the egg in his teeth, swam up to the shore. Prince Ivan took hold of the egg, cracked it, got the needle out and broke its point off.

And Koshchei, though he dashed about in every direction, had to die!

Prince Ivan went to Koshchei's house and took Vasilisa the Wise away with him. They returned home and lived happily together for a long long time.







## *Vasilisa the Beautiful*

Once upon a time in a distant kingdom there lived a merchant. In twelve years of marriage he and his wife had had only one daughter, whom they named Vasilisa the Beautiful. Vasilisa was eight years old when her mother became ill and lay dying. She called the girl to her bedside, took a doll from beneath the bedcover and gave it to her.

"Listen carefully, dear Vasilisa," she said. "Remember my words and do as I say. I leave you my blessing and this little doll. Keep her with you always and never show her to anyone. Should you be in trouble give her something to eat and ask her advice. When she has eaten, she will tell you what to do."

The mother kissed Vasilisa and died.

The merchant observed the accepted period of mourning and then began to think about marrying again. He was a

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

good man and there were many brides to choose from. But of them all, a certain widow pleased him the most. She was suitable in every way. She had two daughters about Vasilisa's age, and as she seemed to be a good housekeeper and mother, she was the one the merchant married. But the merchant had been deceived, for as it turned out his new wife was not a good mother to Vasilisa.

Vasilisa was the most beautiful girl in the village, and her stepmother and stepsisters were jealous of her. They made her do all the heavy chores in and around the house hoping that she would grow scrawny from overwork and that her skin would be spoiled by the wind and the sun. They tried in every way to make her life as miserable as possible.

Vasilisa, however, suffered everything without a murmur, each day growing plumper and prettier while the stepmother and her two daughters became thinner and uglier out of meanness. It did not help them to sit around lazily with their hands folded, doing nothing, as if they were noblewomen.

The truth was that the little doll was helping Vasilisa. How else could she have done all the work! Indeed Vasilisa often would not eat enough herself and would save the tastiest morsels on her plate for her doll. At night when everyone was asleep, she would lock herself in the storeroom where she was made to live. Then she would set the food before the doll and say:

"Here you are, my little doll! Eat and hear what misfortune has befallen me. In my own father's house, there's nothing but unhappiness for me. My evil stepmother wants



## *Vasilisa the Beautiful*

to drive me into the grave. What am I to do? Please tell me?"

When the doll had eaten, she told Vasilisa what she was to do and comforted her in her grief. By morning the doll had done all of Vasilisa's work so that the girl could just sit in a shady spot or pick flowers. All the seedbeds had been weeded, water brought from the well and the stove started. The doll had also found an herb for Vasilisa that protected her from the sun. With the doll's help everything was taken care of.

Several years passed and Vasilisa reached marriageable age. All the young men of the village courted her and wanted her as a bride, but not one of them even so much as looked at her stepsisters. The stepmother, who was now more envious than ever, drove all Vasilisa's suitors away with the same words: "I will not have the youngest engaged before her elder sisters have found husbands."

After showing Vasilisa's suitors the door, she would fly into a rage and beat her.

It happened that the merchant's business took him away from home for a long period. During his absence the stepmother moved with her two daughters and Vasilisa to a house on the outskirts of a deep forest. In the middle of the forest, in an open clearing, stood a hut that belonged to Baba Yaga. She allowed no one into her house or yard, and when humans strayed into her path, she devoured them as if they were chickens. From time to time the stepmother would find errands for Vasilisa in the forest, but Vasilisa always returned home safely. The doll showed her the way and kept her a safe distance from Baba Yaga's hut.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

Autumn came. One evening the stepmother gave all three daughters work to do. One was to weave lace, the other was to knit stockings, and Vasilisa was to spin. After giving each one instructions, the stepmother snuffed all the candles but one for the girls to work by and went off to bed. The girls worked until the candle began to flicker. One of Vasilisa's stepsisters got up to trim the wick, but following her mother's instructions, she extinguished it instead, as if by accident.

"What are we to do now?" said the stepsisters. "There's not a light to be had in the entire house and we haven't finished our work. We must get a light from Baba Yaga!"

The stepsister who was weaving lace said, "My pins give me enough light and so I have no need to go."

"I don't have to go either," said the stepsister who was knitting stockings. "I get enough light from my needles."

Both turned to Vasilisa and cried: "You are the one who must fetch a light. Go to Baba Yaga!" And with that they pushed her out of the house.

Vasilisa had again been made to sleep in the storeroom and there she went. She put the food she had prepared for her doll before her and said:

"Here you are, little doll! Eat and hear what misfortune has befallen me. I must fetch a light from Baba Yaga and surely she will eat me up!"

The doll ate. Her eyes gleamed like two candles.

"Don't be afraid, Vasilisa!" she said. "Go where they send you, but take me along. You will be safe as long as I am with you."

Vasilisa gathered up her things and put the little doll in her pocket. She crossed herself and went off into the deep



## *Vasilisa the Beautiful*

forest. She walked and walked all night long. Suddenly a white horseman dashed past her. Everything about him was white—his clothes, the horse beneath him, even the horse's saddle, bridle and reins were white. And immediately it began to grow light.

Vasilisa walked on, and another horseman dashed by. This one was red, was dressed in red and rode a red horse. And immediately the sun began to rise.

Vasilisa walked the entire day, and it was not until evening that she reached the clearing where Baba Yaga's hut stood. It was surrounded by a fence made of human bones topped by human skulls. Leg bones made up the gateposts, skeleton's hands served as bolts, and instead of a lock there was a mouth with sharp teeth. Vasilisa grew faint with fear and stood rooted to the spot. Suddenly a third horseman rode up. He was black, his clothes were black and he was mounted on a black horse. He rode right up to Baba Yaga's gates—and disappeared as if he had fallen through the earth. And immediately night fell. But the darkness did not last long. The skulls' eyes lit up, and it became as bright in the clearing as if it were noon. Vasilisa trembled with fear, but not knowing where to flee she stayed where she was.

Soon a terrible noise came from the forest. The trees creaked and the dry leaves crackled. Out of the woods came Baba Yaga riding in a mortar, pushing her way along with a pestle and sweeping the tracks it left behind with a broom. She rode up to the gates, stopped, sniffed and cried out:

"Foo, foo, I smell a Russian! Who is here?"

Vasilisa went fearfully up to the old woman and, bow-

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ing low, said, "It is I, granny! My stepsisters sent me to you to get a light."

"Very good," said Baba Yaga. "I know them well. From now on you will live here and work for me. If you do what I tell you I will give you a light, and if you don't I will eat you up!" Turning to the gates, she cried out: "Hey there, my strong bolts, unlock! My broad gates, open wide!"

The gates opened and Baba Yaga entered, whistling. Vasilisa followed behind her and the gates closed.

Once inside the hut Baba Yaga sprawled out and said to Vasilisa, "Serve me what you find in the oven. I want to eat."

Vasilisa went out, lit a candle from a skull on the fence and returned to the hut. She took the food out of the oven and served it to Baba Yaga. There was enough for ten people. From the cellar Vasilisa brought up kvas and mead, beer and wine. The old woman ate and drank everything. She left Vasilisa only a bit of cabbage soup, a crust of bread and one little piece of meat.

Then Baba Yaga got ready for bed and said to Vasilisa, "After I leave tomorrow you are to clean up the yard, sweep the house, make my dinner, wash my linens, and in addition you must go to the grain bin, take six bushels of wheat and clean them of weed seeds. Now see to it you do everything I've told you to. Otherwise I will eat you up!"

After giving Vasilisa these instructions Baba Yaga fell asleep and began to snore. Vasilisa put the food given her by the old woman in front of the doll, burst into tears and said:

"Here you are, little doll! Eat and hear what misfortune



## *Vasilisa the Beautiful*

has befallen me. Baba Yaga has given me very hard work to do and she will eat me up if I don't get it all done. Please help me!"

"Don't be afraid, Vasilisa!" the doll replied. "Get yourself something to eat, say your prayers, and lie down to sleep. Things always look brighter in the morning."

Vasilisa awoke very early but Baba Yaga was already up and looking out of the window. The eyes of the skulls were growing dim. The white horseman dashed past—and it grew light. Baba Yaga went into her yard and whistled and her pestle, mortar and broom appeared before her. Then the red horseman dashed past and the sun rose. Baba Yaga climbed into the mortar and rode out of the yard, pushing her way along with the pestle and covering her tracks with her broom. Vasilisa was left all alone. She went through Baba Yaga's house and was astonished to see how much of everything there was. She hesitated a moment not knowing where to begin, but as she looked around she saw that everything had been done. The little doll was already separating the last bits of weed seed from the wheat.

"You have saved me again!" Vasilisa said to the doll.

"The only thing still to be done is to make dinner," replied the doll, climbing back into Vasilisa's pocket. "God bless you, go and cook it and then take a good rest."

By evening Vasilisa had set the table and was waiting for Baba Yaga. Twilight began to fall and the black horseman dashed past. Then and there it grew dark and the skulls' eyes began to gleam. The trees creaked and the leaves crackled and Baba Yaga approached. Vasilisa went out to meet her.

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"Have you done everything?" asked Baba Yaga.

"Look and see for yourself, if you please, granny," Vasilisa replied.

Baba Yaga inspected all and because there was nothing to which she could object fell into a bad mood.

"Well all right!" she said grudgingly. Then she cried out: "My faithful servants, my loyal friends, grind my grain."

Three pairs of hands appeared, took the grain and carried it out of sight. Baba Yaga ate her meal, began to get ready for bed and once more gave Vasilisa instructions.

"Tomorrow you are to do the same things as you did today. But in addition you must take the poppy seeds from the grain bin and clean each one separately, for someone spiteful has mixed dirt with them."

After giving her orders the old woman turned her face to the wall and began to snore. Vasilisa again fed her doll. The doll ate and just as she had the night before said to Vasilisa:

"Say your prayers and lie down to sleep. The morning is brighter than the evening. Everything will be done, Vasilisa."

When morning came Baba Yaga rode once again out of the yard in her mortar, and Vasilisa and the doll immediately set about their work. The old woman returned at night, inspected everything and cried out: "My faithful servants, loyal friends, press the poppy seed into oil."

Three pairs of hands appeared, got the poppy seed and took it out of sight. Baba Yaga began to eat her dinner. She sat there eating while Vasilisa stood silently by.

"Why don't you talk to me?" asked Baba Yaga. "You stand there as if you were dumb."



## *Vasilisa the Beautiful*

"I don't dare," answered Vasilisa, "but if I may I'd like to ask you some questions."

"Go ahead and ask, but remember that the answers to questions don't always lead to a good end. If you know too much, you'll grow old quickly."

"I only wanted to ask you, granny, about some things that I saw on my way to your house. I saw a white horseman, dressed all in white on a white horse. Who was he?"

"That was my day so clear," Baba Yaga replied.

"And then another horseman passed me—a red horseman, dressed in red on a red horse. Who was he?"

"That was my sun so red!" replied Baba Yaga.

"And what about the black horseman who passed me just as I came up to your gates, granny?"

"That was my night so dark! All three are my faithful servants!"

Vasilisa remembered the three pairs of hands but was silent.

"Why don't you ask me anything more?" inquired Baba Yaga.

"If I do, granny, maybe what you said will happen to me—you said that if one knows too much one grows old quickly!"

"It's a good thing," said Baba Yaga, "that you asked only about what you saw outside my courtyard and not inside it! I don't like my affairs talked about, and I eat up anyone who gets too curious! And now I want to ask you a question. How did you manage to do all the work I gave you?"

"My mother's blessing helped me," Vasilisa replied.

"So that's it!" exclaimed Baba Yaga. "Then get out of

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here! I don't want anyone around me who is blessed."

She dragged Vasilisa out of the house and pushed her outside the gates. Then she removed a skull with burning eyes from the fence, stuck it on a stick and gave it to Vasilisa, saying, "Here's a light for your stepsisters. Take it with you. That's what they sent you for, isn't it?"

Vasilisa started for home, her path illuminated by the skull's light, which went out each morning and relighted itself each night. At long last, by the evening of the following day, she arrived home. When she reached the gates she was about to throw away the skull. "Now I am home," she thought to herself, "and by this time they have surely got their own light."

But suddenly she heard a hollow voice from within the skull: "Do not throw me away. Take me to your stepmother!"

She looked into the house and, seeing no light in any of the windows, decided to do as the voice said. She was greeted cordially by her stepmother and stepsisters, who told her that there had been no light at all in the house since she had gone. They had been unable to strike one themselves, and whatever light they had got elsewhere had gone out as soon as it was brought inside.

"Perhaps your light will last," the stepmother said.

No sooner had she spoken these words than the skull began to cast burning rays on her and her daughters! They tried to hide—but the eyes pursued them everywhere until all that was left of them was ashes. Only Vasilisa remained unharmed.

The next morning Vasilisa buried the skull in the earth,



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locked up the house and went off to the city. There she found a place to live with an old woman who had no family of her own. Vasilisa stayed with her, waiting for her father to return.

One day she said to the old woman, "I'm very bored sitting here with no work, granny! Would you buy me some of the best quality flax you can get. Then at least I can spin!"

The old woman bought good flax, and Vasilisa went busily to work. The yarn she spun came out as smooth and as fine as a hair. She worked up a large amount ready for weaving into linen. But there was no loom to be found with a comb fine enough for Vasilisa's yarn, and no one was willing to undertake such a delicate job. So Vasilisa asked her doll to help her, and the doll said:

"Go get me an old comb, an old shuttle and a horse's mane. I will weave this yarn myself."

Vasilisa got everything the doll needed and then lay down to sleep. The doll built a loom in one night. By the end of the winter the cloth had been woven and it was so fine that it could be pulled through the eye of a needle. In the spring the cloth was bleached and Vasilisa said to the old woman:

"Please go and sell this cloth, granny, and keep the money."

The old woman looked at the cloth and exclaimed, "No, my child! Such cloth is fit only for the king. I will take it to the palace."

The old woman went to the palace and walked back and forth beneath the windows of the king's chambers. The king saw her and asked, "What is it you want, old woman?"

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"Your royal majesty," the old woman replied, "I have brought you some wonderful material, and I will show it to no one but you."

The king ordered that the old woman be admitted to his presence, and when he saw the cloth he was astounded.

"How much do you want for it?" he asked.

"It is priceless, your majesty! I have brought it as a gift."

The king thanked the old woman and sent her off with many presents.

The king ordered shirts for himself to be made from the cloth. But no seamstress could be found to do such fine work. Finally the king summoned the old woman and said, "If you were skillful enough to weave this cloth, then you must be skillful enough to make shirts from it."

"It was not I, my lord, who spun it and wove it," said the old woman. "It was the work of my foster daughter."

"Then have her make the shirts!"

The old woman returned home and told Vasilisa what the king had said.

"I knew," said Vasilisa, "that this was something I would have to do myself."

She shut herself in her room and set to work. She sewed without stopping until a dozen shirts were ready.

The old woman took the shirts to the king. Vasilisa washed herself, combed her hair, got dressed and sat at the window, waiting to see what would happen. Soon royal servants appeared in the courtyard. They entered the house and, seeing Vasilisa, proclaimed:

"His royal majesty wishes to see the skillful seamstress who made his shirts and to reward her with his own hands."



## *Vasilisa the Beautiful*

Vasilisa was escorted to the king, and when he saw her he fell in love with her at once.

"Vasilisa the Beautiful," he said. "I shall never part from you. You will be my wife."

The king took Vasilisa by her hands, sat her beside him, and they were married on the spot. Not long afterward, Vasilisa's father returned and was happy to learn of her good fortune. He remained in the palace with his daughter, and the old woman too was invited to live there. And as long as she lived, Vasilisa kept the little doll with her always in a pocket of her gown.







## *Ivan the Fool*

**L**ong ago and far away, in a certain kingdom there lived an old man and an old woman. They had three sons, the youngest of whom was named Ivan the Fool. The elder sons were both married, but Ivan the Fool—Vanyukha, as he was often called—was still single. The elder brothers busied themselves farming, managing their households, plowing and planting. Ivan the Fool did nothing.

One day the father and his daughters-in-law insisted that Vanyukha go into the fields to finish working the last acres of unplowed land.

Vanyukha rode out to the spot where he was to plow. He hitched the horse and had made one or two passes with the wooden plow when clouds of mosquitoes and gnats attacked the animal.

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Ivan picked up a switch, swatted the horse on one of its flanks and killed an unbelievable number of insects. He then swatted the horse on its other flank and killed forty horseflies. When he saw this, Vanyukha thought to himself, "With one blow, I killed forty mighty warriors, *bogatyrs* and countless lesser fellows as well."

He swept his victims into a pile and covered them over with horse manure.

He was so impressed by his feat that, then and there, he decided to stop plowing. He unhitched the horse and rode home.

When he got home, he said to his sisters-in-law and his mother, "Give me a tent and a saddle." And to his father: "You, father, give me your saber, which just hangs on the wall getting rusty. What kind of a man am I anyway? I have nothing."

They all laughed and, to poke fun at Vanyukha, gave him a torn sack instead of a saddle. Vanyukha fastened some belly bands to it, and put it on a scrawny old nag. Instead of a tent, his mother gave him a worn, sleeveless gown. He took that too, as well as his father's saber, which he sharpened. Having made his preparations, he started out.

He came to a crossroads, and though he could barely write, he managed to inscribe this message on a post: "Great bogatyrs, Ilya Muromets and Fyodor Lyzhnikov, join the strong and mighty bogatyr who with one blow killed forty warriors and countless lesser fellows and covered their bodies up with stones!"

And in fact, not long after, the famous warrior Ilya Muromets passed by the crossroads and saw the message on the post.



## *Ivan the Fool*

"Well," he said to himself, "the bogatyr who came through here must indeed be strong and mighty. It would not be very smart to ignore his summons."

He rode along and soon caught up with Ivan the Fool. While still a good distance off, he doffed his cap and called, "Hail, strong and powerful bogatyr!"

Vanyukha did not even bother to remove his cap but merely said, "Hello there, Ilyukha."

And they rode off together.

Before long Fyodor Lyzhnikov rode up to the same post and read what was written on it, and he too decided that it would not be wise to ignore the message. He, in turn, rode off and soon caught up with Ivan the Fool and Ilya Muromets.

Fyodor Lyzhnikov too doffed his cap and, while still at a respectable distance, called, "Hail, strong and powerful bogatyr!"

Again Vanyukha did not trouble to remove his cap. "Hello there, Fedyunka," he replied.

And all three rode on together. They arrived in such and such a country, where they came to a halt on the royal meadow. The bogatyrs raised their fine, luxurious tents and Vanyukha set up the worn, sleeveless gown his mother had given him. The two bogatyrs hobbled their war horses with silken ropes, and as for Vanyukha, he simply cut switches from a tree and braided them into a hobble for his mare. And so they camped.

The king of this country could see from his palace that his favorite meadow was being used by strangers. He immediately summoned his high counselor and ordered him to discover who the strangers were. The high counselor went to the meadow and, addressing Ilya Muromets, asked how

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they had dared to settle on the royal meadow without permission.

Ilya Muromets replied, "It's not my doing. Ask our leader, that strong and powerful bogatyr, over there."

The envoy approached Vanyukha. But Vanyukha began to shout at him before he could even utter one word. "Get out while you're still alive and tell your king that his meadow is being occupied by a strong and powerful bogatyr who with one blow felled forty warriors and countless lesser fellows as well. And tell the king that Ilya Muromets and Fyodor Lyzhnikov are with him and that he demands the king's daughter in marriage."

The counselor related all this to the king and the king looked into his book of chronicles to see if Ilya Muromets and Fyodor Lyzhnikov were mentioned, and indeed they were. But there was no mention of any warrior who went about killing forty bogatyrs with one blow.

The king ordered an army mustered to capture the three bogatyrs and bring them to him.

Vanyukha spied the army coming and shouted, "Ilyukha! Go and drive them away! Look at what they call soldiers!"

Meanwhile Vanyukha lay at his ease, stretched out and resting, but watching like an owl.

Ilya Muromets leaped on his charger and drove the soldiers back. He didn't kill as many of them with his sword as he trampled down with his charger. He left a few alive, however, to report their rout to the king.

The king sent out an even stronger force to seize the bogatyrs.

This time Fyodor Lyzhnikov rode forth on his charger and destroyed the lot, leaving alive only a handful to report their defeat.



## *Ivan the Fool*

Now what was the king to do? Things looked very bad. His forces had been destroyed by the bogatyrs. The king remembered a powerful bogatyr called Dobrynya Nikitich, who lived in his country. He sent him a message asking him to come and conquer the three bogatyrs.

Dobrynya agreed to help the king. When Dobrynya arrived, the king was on his third-story balcony, and Dobrynya, mounted on his steed, sat on a level with him. He greeted the king and they conferred together, and then Dobrynya rode to the royal meadow.

Ilya Muromets and Fyodor Lyzhnikov saw Dobrynya charging down on them. They became so terrified they leaped on their horses and fled.

Vanyukha had no time to follow their example.

He was still trying to catch his old nag when Dobrynya came up to him and started laughing. What sort of a "strong and mighty" bogatyr was this? He was so small and scrawny.

Dobrynya bent his head down to get a better look at Vanyukha.

Vanyukha, however, lost neither his wits nor his courage. He quickly drew his saber and cut off Dobrynya's head.

The king, who had witnessed the scene, was in a panic.

"What a catastrophe!" he exclaimed. He lost no time in inviting the bogatyr to the palace.

One can hardly imagine such a delegation of important persons as the king sent to Vanyukha—the highest nobles in their best carriages. Vanyukha was invited into a carriage and escorted to the king, who gave him the hand of the princess in marriage. They are still living happily together, eating their daily bread.







## *The Swan-Geese*

**T**here once lived an old man and an old woman who had a daughter and a small son.

“Daughter, daughter,” said the mother, “we must be off to work now. When we return, we’ll bring you a loaf of bread, some cloth for a dress and a kerchief. Just be prudent and take good care of your little brother. And do not leave the yard.”

The parents left and the daughter promptly forgot her mother’s instructions. She sat her little brother on the grass beneath a window of the house and ran off down the street, playing and amusing herself.

While she was away, the swan-geese came, seized her little brother and flew away with him.

The little girl came home and looked about, but her brother was nowhere to be seen. She began to cry, dashed here and there, but he simply was not to be found. She

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called to him, with the tears pouring down her cheeks. She pleaded, explaining how severely their parents would punish her. There was no reply.

She ran out into the open country to look for him. But by this time the swan-geese had disappeared behind the dark forest, and their wings were flapping far, far away.

It was known that the swan-geese stole small children away. And so the girl guessed that the swan-geese had taken her little brother and she decided to go after them. She ran and ran until she was stopped by a stove that stood in her path.

"Stove, stove, tell me true, where, oh where, the swan-geese flew?"

"Eat my rye bread and I will tell you."

"In my father's house we don't even deign to eat bread made of wheat," the girl replied.

So the stove told her nothing.

She ran on and came to an apple tree.

"Apple tree, apple tree, tell me true, where, oh where, the swan-geese flew?"

"Eat my wild apples and I will tell you."

"In my father's house, we don't even deign to eat common orchard apples," said the girl and hurried on her way.

Soon she came to a river of milk that flowed between shores of cranberry jelly.

"Oh, milky river, tell me true, where, oh where, the swan-geese flew?"

"If you eat my plain jelly and drink my milk, I will tell you."

"In my father's house, we do not even deign to eat cream," the girl replied.



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And she might have continued wandering through field and forest for a long, long time, but fortunately she met a hedgehog. She wished to push him out of her way, but she was afraid of being pricked by his quills, and so she asked, "Hedgehog, hedgehog, tell me true, where, oh where, the swan-geese flew?"

"Over there," he said.

She ran in the direction he indicated until she came to a little hut, standing on chicken legs. It was turning around and around. In the hut sat a Baba Yaga, with a flat snout and clay feet. And the girl's little brother sat on a bench playing with golden apples.

His sister crept up to him, grabbed him and ran off.

The swan-geese came after them in full pursuit. They were about to catch her. Where could she hide?

She came to the river of milk flowing between its jelly banks.

"Oh, mother river, hide me!"

"Will you eat my jelly?"

There was nothing else she could do, so she ate some jelly, and the river hid them in a cave on its shore until the swan-geese flew past.

The girl came out and said, "Thank you."

Once again she ran on with her little brother, but the swan-geese turned around and flew toward them. What was she to do? Luckily she caught sight of the apple tree in front of them.

"Apple tree, apple tree, little mother, hide me!"

"Will you eat my wild apples?"

She quickly ate an apple.

The apple tree sheltered them with its branches and

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covered them with its leaves, and the swan-geese flew past without seeing them.

Out she came once again, and was on her way with her little brother. Again the swan-geese caught sight of them and flew in pursuit. They were right on their heels and the little girl could already feel the wind from their wings. She knew her brother was about to be torn away from her. But by some good fortune, they found themselves at the door of the stove.

“Oh, good lady stove, hide me!”

“Eat my rye bread.”

The little girl quickly took a mouthful of rye bread and crawled into the stove with her brother.

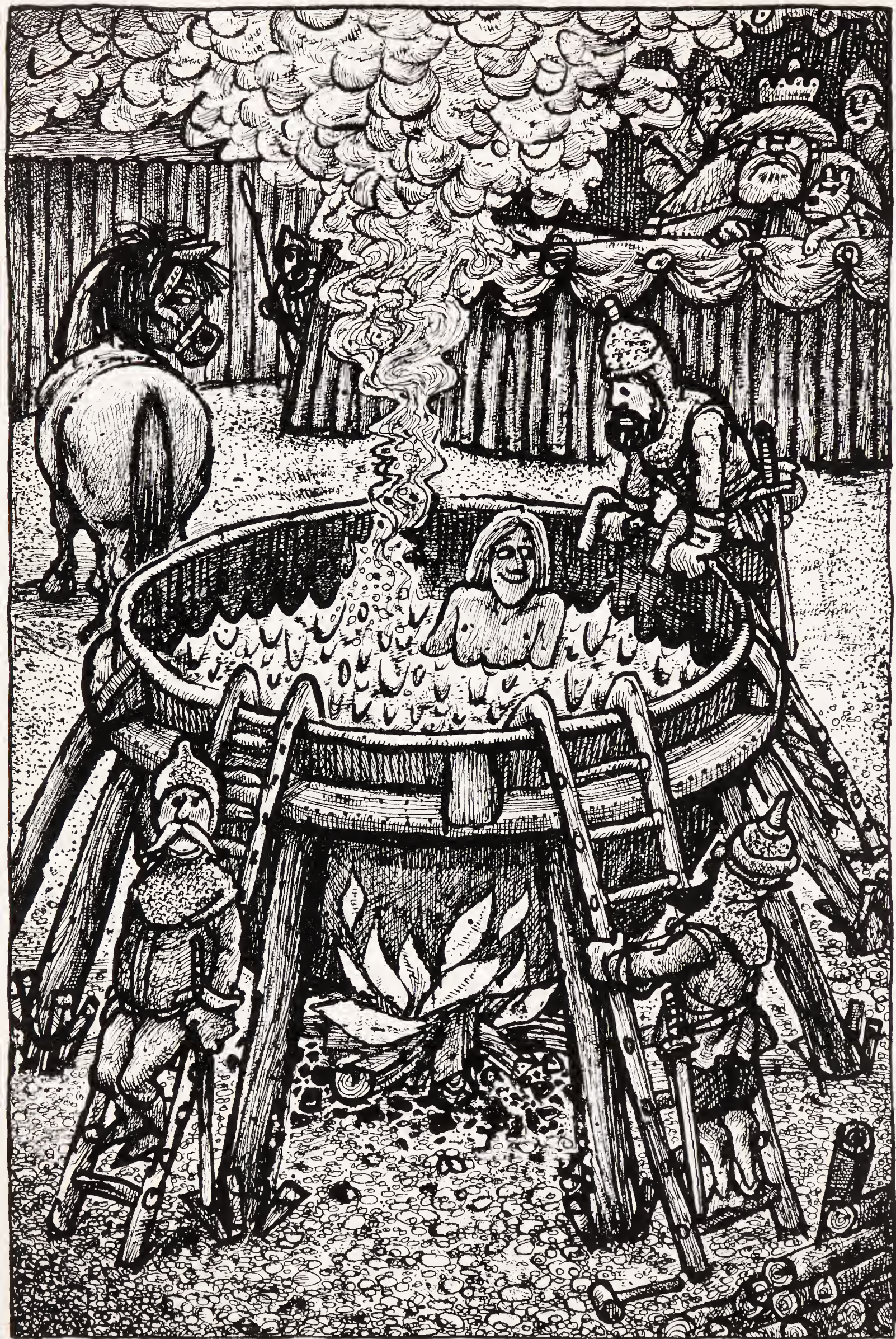
The swan-geese flew past and then back and screeched and screeched, and finally they flew away.

She ran home with her little brother, and when they arrived, their father and mother rushed out to greet them.











## *The Firebird and Princess Vasilisa*

**I**n a certain kingdom at the ends of the earth there lived a strong and powerful king. Among the king's warriors was one who possessed a marvelous steed—a charger.

One day the warrior rode off on his charger to hunt in the forest. He traveled far and wide, and came upon a golden feather dropped by the firebird.

But his steed said to him, "Do not take the golden feather! Because, if you do, you will know grief and misfortune!"

The warrior considered whether he should pick up the feather or not. He thought if he brought it to the king he would get a rich reward and earn the king's favor as well, something that everyone desired most jealously. And so the warrior did not listen to his steed's warning and took the feather with him to give to the king.

"Thank you!" said the king. "And since you have been

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able to get me one of the firebird's feathers, you must now go and catch the firebird itself. If you do not succeed I shall have you beheaded!"

The warrior went to his charger and wept bitterly.

"Why are you weeping, master?"

"The king has ordered me to catch the firebird."

"I told you not to pick up the feather and that if you did it would bring you grief and misfortune! But don't be afraid. Don't be unhappy. This is not the real misfortune! The true one is yet to come! Go to the king and ask him to have one hundred bags of white wheat scattered over an open field."

The warrior went to the king who gave orders for the white wheat to be scattered in a forest field that overlooked the sea.

The next day at dawn the young warrior rode out to the field, sent his steed out of sight and hid himself behind a tree. All of a sudden the surrounding forest rustled and the waves rose high in the sea. The firebird flew over the field, landed and began to eat the wheat. The charger approached the firebird and stepped on its wing with one of his hooves so that the bird could not move. The warrior jumped out from behind the tree, ran up, tied the firebird up, mounted his horse and galloped to the palace.

He brought the firebird to the king, who was overjoyed. The king thanked the young warrior, rewarded him with a high rank and immediately gave him another task to perform.

"Since you were able to get the firebird, you must now go and get me a wife. At the end of the earth, at its very edge, where the red sun rises, lives Princess Vasilisa. She is



## *The Firebird and Princess Vasilisa*

the one I desire. Go and bring her to me and I will reward you with gold and silver. But should you not succeed, I'll have you beheaded!"

The warrior went to his steed and wept.

"Why are you weeping, my master?" the steed asked.

"The king has ordered me to bring him Princess Vasilisa!"

"Do not weep. Do not be unhappy. This too is not the real misfortune! The true one still lies ahead! Go to the king and ask him for a tent with a golden cupola and for food and wine and all the provisions you will need for the journey."

The king gave the warrior food and wine and a tent with a golden cupola. The warrior mounted his charger and rode off to the ends of the earth, to where the red sun rises out of the dark-blue sea, and saw Princess Vasilisa in a silver boat, paddling along with a golden paddle. The warrior sent his steed to graze on the fresh, lush grass of the green meadows. He put up his tent with the golden cupola and set out food and wine. He sat there, tasting and sipping, and waited for Princess Vasilisa.

Princess Vasilisa had caught sight of the golden cupola and paddled up to the shore to admire the tent.

"Welcome, Princess Vasilisa," said the warrior. "We bid you accept our hospitality."

Princess Vasilisa left her silver boat and came to the tent. The warrior offered her food and drink and the princess drank one glass of foreign wine and fell into a deep sleep. The warrior summoned his charger. He took down the tent with the golden cupola, mounted his steed, took the sleeping Princess Vasilisa with him and set out as swiftly as an arrow shot from a bow.

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He returned to the king, who was overjoyed when he saw Princess Vasilisa. He thanked the warrior for his loyal service, rewarded him with riches and gave him an even higher rank.

Princess Vasilisa awakened and discovered that she was far from home and the dark-blue sea. She wept and pined away. And no matter how the king tried to persuade her to marry him it was all in vain.

Finally she said to the king, "Let the warrior who brought me here go to the dark-blue sea and find a great rock that lies buried deep in the middle of it. Beneath the rock my wedding gown is hidden. Without that dress I shall never get married!"

The king sent for the warrior.

"Go immediately to the edge of the world, where the red sun rises. There at the bottom of the dark-blue sea lies a great rock and under that rock is hidden the wedding gown of Princess Vasilisa. Get the dress and bring it here. It is time for the marriage to take place! If you get it I will reward you even more richly than before, but if you return without the dress, I will have you beheaded!"

The warrior went to his steed and wept.

"This time," he thought to himself, "I will not be able to avoid death!"

"Why are you weeping, master?" asked the charger.

"The king has ordered me to get Princess Vasilisa's wedding dress, which lies at the bottom of the dark-blue sea."

"Didn't I tell you not to pick up the golden feather, that it would bring you grief and misfortune? Nevertheless, do not be afraid! This is not the real misfortune! The true one



## *The Firebird and Princess Vasilisa*

is still to come! Get up on my back and let us be off to the dark-blue sea!"

In a long while or a short while they came to the edge of the world and stopped at the shore of the dark-blue sea. The charger saw a gigantic sea crab crawling along the sand and he stepped on its neck with a heavy hoof.

The sea crab begged, "Do not kill me, let me live and I will do whatever you wish."

The steed replied, "At the bottom of the sea there is a great rock and beneath that rock lies the wedding dress of Princess Vasilisa. Get it for me."

The crab called in a loud voice across the dark-blue sea and immediately the water became agitated and an unbelievable multitude of crabs of all sizes crawled from every direction onto the shore. The giant crab gave them his orders. They hurled themselves into the water and in an hour's time they had dragged up from the depths of the sea, from under the great rock, Princess Vasilisa's wedding dress.

The warrior returned to the king and gave him the princess's dress. But Princess Vasilisa remained stubborn and refused to go ahead with the wedding.

"I am not going to marry you!" she said to the king, "until you give orders that your young warrior be thrown into a tub of boiling water."

The king ordered an iron tub to be filled with water and when the water was heated to boiling, the young warrior was to be thrown into it.

Everything was ready. Hot spray from the boiling water shot into the air. The poor warrior was brought forward.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

"Now this is the true misfortune!" he thought to himself. "Why did I pick up the golden feather of the firebird? Why did I not listen to my steed's advice?"

He remembered his steed and said to the king, "My king and sovereign! Let me go and bid farewell to my steed before I die!"

The king agreed.

The warrior went to his charger and wept.

"Why are you weeping, master?"

"The king has ordered that I be thrown into a tub of boiling water!"

"Do not fear, do not weep, you will come out of it alive!" said the steed. He quickly cast a charm over the warrior to prevent the boiling water from harming him.

The warrior returned from the stable. The king's men immediately seized him and threw him into the tub. He submerged himself once or twice and jumped out again such a handsome young man that neither spoken word nor pen can describe him.

The king saw how the warrior's appearance had been improved and decided to bathe in the water himself. Like a silly fool he climbed down into the tub and was scalded to death in an instant.

The young warrior was chosen sovereign in his place. He married Princess Vasilisa and they lived together in love and harmony for many long years.











## *The Psaltery*

### *That Played by Itself*

Once upon a time there lived a peasant called Alexei who had a son named Vanka. Summer came, and Alexei plowed the land and planted turnips as usual. The crop turned out to be exceptionally plentiful and the turnips were all big and juicy. Alexei was very pleased. Each morning he went out to his field, admired his turnips and offered thanks to God.

One day he noticed that someone was stealing his turnips and he decided to stand guard over his field. He kept his eye on the field day after day but saw no one. Then he asked his son Vanka to help watch over the turnips.

Vanka went out to the field and could hardly believe what he saw. A small boy was digging up the turnips and had already filled up two sacks. The sacks were so enormous that when he pulled them onto his back and tried to haul them away his legs buckled under him. The boy kept trying

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

to carry the sacks but was unable to do so. He let them fall to the ground, and looking about him, he caught sight of Vanka.

"Do me a favor," he said. "Help me haul these sacks to our house. My grandfather will reward you richly."

From the first sight of the strange boy, Vanka seemed frozen to the spot. He stood there, wide-eyed and staring. After a time he got back his tongue and said, "Very well."

Vanka lifted the two sacks full of turnips onto his shoulders and followed the boy, who hopped on ahead.

"My grandfather sends me for turnips every day," the boy said. "If you're willing to carry them for me, he will give you much silver and gold. But don't accept what he offers. Instead tell him that you want the psaltery that plays by itself."

At last they came to a hut. In a corner, there sat an old, gray-haired man with horns. Vanka bowed to him in greeting. The old man offered him a fistful of gold, and Vanka's eyes burned with the desire to take it, but the boy whispered to him, "Don't take it!"

"That's not what I want," said Vanka. "Give me the psaltery that plays by itself, and then you may have the turnips."

When he heard Vanka mention the psaltery, the old man's eyes started from their sockets, his mouth opened from ear to ear, and his horns jumped on his forehead.

Vanka was all goose-pimples with fright. But the boy said, "Give it to him, grandfather."

"You want too much," the old man replied. "However, what's the difference? You may have the psaltery, providing in return I get what is most precious in your house."



## *The Psaltery That Played by Itself*

Vanka thought to himself, "Our little house is so decrepit it has almost worked itself down into the ground. There is nothing in it that is in the least bit precious." And so he agreed.

He took the psaltery and went home. When he got there, he found his father lying dead on the threshold.

He mourned and wept, and then he buried his father and went off to seek his fortune.

He came to a large city where a great king lived. Opposite the king's palace, there was a field in which pigs were kept. Vanka went to the swineherd and bought the pigs and began to herd them himself, and whenever the pigs heard the self-playing psaltery, they began to dance.

The princess was intrigued by the dancing pigs and sent one of her attendants to buy one for her.

But Vanka said, "The princess must come herself."

The princess came to the meadow and said, "Swineherd, swineherd, sell me one of your pigs."

And Vanka replied, "My pigs are not for sale. You may have one, but only on one condition."

"What is it?" asked the princess.

"If you wish to have one of my pigs, you must show me your legs up to your knees."

The princess thought and thought and looked about her to be certain no one was looking. Then she lifted her gown to her knees, and there on her right leg, Vanka saw a small birthmark.

Vanka gave her a pig and the princess had it brought to the palace. She called for the court musicians and ordered them to play so that she could see the pig dance. But the pig only hid in corners and squealed and grunted.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

The king decided the time had come to give his daughter's hand in marriage. He summoned his noblemen and all the important people of the realm, merchants, and peasants. Kings, princes and nobles came from foreign lands as well.

"Whoever is able to tell me," announced the king, "what birthmark there is to be found on my daughter's body will receive her hand in marriage."

But no matter how hard the suitors tried, not one of them could discover the secret. At last Vanka came forward and said, "I know."

And he described the small birthmark on the princess's right leg.

"You have guessed correctly," said the king. Vanka was betrothed to the princess and the king gave a marriage feast, to which he invited the entire city.

So it happened that Vanka became the king's son-in-law and from that time onward lived a full, rich and bounteous life.











## *A Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon*

Once there was an old man who had three daughters. The elder two were vain about their clothes and appearance, but the youngest was concerned only with looking after the household. The father had business in the city and he asked his daughters what they would like him to buy for them.

The eldest said, "Some material for a dress!"

The second daughter wanted the same.

"And what would you like, my darling?" he asked the youngest.

"Please, father, buy me a feather of Finist the Bright Falcon."

The father said goodbye to them and went off to the city. He bought materials for dresses for his elder daughters, but nowhere could he find a feather of Finist the Bright

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

Falcon. He returned home and the elder daughters were delighted with their gifts.

And to the youngest he said, "A feather of Finist the Bright Falcon was not to be found."

"Well so be it," the youngest replied. "Perhaps some other time it will turn up."

The elder sisters cut out and sewed new clothes for themselves and laughed at their younger sister. But she said nothing.

Once again their father was going to the city and asked, "Daughters, what shall I buy you?"

The two elder daughters each asked for a kerchief and the youngest said, "Please, father, buy me a feather of Finist the Bright Falcon."

The father went to the city and bought two kerchiefs but, again, was unable to find a feather of Finist the Bright Falcon. He returned home and said, "Alas, my daughter, a feather of Finist the Bright Falcon was not to be found."

"That's all right, father, don't worry," she replied. "Perhaps some other time one will turn up."

A third time the father had reason to go to the city and as before he said, "Tell me, daughters, what to buy you!"

The two elder sisters said, "Earrings."

And the youngest this time again said, "Buy me a feather of Finist the Bright Falcon."

The father bought the golden earrings and then went about searching for the feather, but no one had ever heard of a feather of Finist the Bright Falcon. Feeling very sad not to have a gift for his youngest, the father started for home. He had already reached the city limits when he saw, walking toward him, an old man with a small box in his hand.



## *A Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon*

"What have you there, old fellow?"

"A feather of Finist the Bright Falcon," the man replied.

"How much do you want for it?"

"You may have it for a thousand rubles."

The father paid the man and hurried home with the little box. His daughters greeted him happily on his arrival.

"Well, my beloved daughter," he said to the youngest, "at last I have succeeded in finding your gift. Here it is—take it!"

The youngest daughter jumped for joy. She took the little box, kissed it and pressed it tightly to her heart.

After dinner the girls went to bed each to her own chamber. When the youngest daughter got to her own room she opened the little box and the feather of Finist the Bright Falcon immediately flew out, struck against the floor, and a handsome prince stood before her.

They had many sweet things to say to one another. The sisters heard their voices and called, "To whom are you talking, sister?"

"To myself," the youngest replied.

"Very well then, open your door so that we can see!"

The prince struck the floor and turned into a feather. The youngest took the feather and put it back into the box. Then she opened her door. The sisters looked all around but could find no one.

As soon as they left the room the youngest opened the window, got out the feather and said, "Fly away, feather, into the wide open spaces. Fly away until it is time to come back!"

The feather turned into a falcon and flew away.

The next night Finist flew back to his maiden. They chattered gaily, and the sisters heard them and hurried to their father.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

"Father! Someone visits our sister at night. He is with her talking right now."

The father went to his youngest daughter's room, but the prince had long since turned back into a feather and lay in the box.

"You good-for-nothings!" the father scolded his elder daughters. "Why do you tell tales about your sister? You would do better to mind your own business."

The next day her sisters decided to play a trick on the youngest. That evening when it had grown quite dark outside they put up a ladder, from the courtyard to the window of their sister's room. Then they climbed up and covered the windowsill with sharp knives and needles.

That same night Finist flew to the window. He beat his wings against it again and again in an effort to get in but he failed and was badly cut up by the sharp knives and needles.

"Fair maiden, farewell!" he called. "Now, if you wish to find me, you will have to travel to the ends of the earth. You will wear out three pairs of iron shoes, break down three iron walking staffs and eat three stone loaves before you find your bold young warrior again!"

The maiden did not wake up. Though in her sleep she could hear these sad words, she could neither open her eyes nor rise from her bed.

In the morning she awoke and looked at her window only to find the knives and needles with dried blood on them. She wrung her hands. "Good Lord! My sisters have destroyed my beloved."

That very hour she gathered up her things and left the house. She hurried to the smithy, where she ordered three



## *A Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon*

pairs of iron shoes, three iron staffs, and then she got three stone loaves and put them in her pack. And she set forth to seek Finist the Bright Falcon.

She walked and walked. She wore out a pair of iron shoes, broke one of the iron staffs and ate one of the stone loaves. At last she came to a hut and knocked on the door.

"Master and mistress! Please give me shelter from the dark night!"

"Welcome, fair maiden," replied an old woman. "Where are you traveling to, my dear?"

"Oh, granny! I am looking for Finist the Bright Falcon."

"Well, fair maiden, you have a long way to go."

The next morning the old woman said to her, "Go to my next younger sister. She will teach you something good. And here is my own gift to you: a silver spinner's board and a golden spindle. Whatever thread you spin with it will come out made of gold."

The old woman picked up a ball of thread, set it rolling off down the road and told the girl to follow wherever it went. The girl thanked the old woman and followed behind the ball of thread.

Whether it took a long time or a short time we do not know, but in the end another pair of iron shoes was worn out, another iron staff was broken and another stone loaf eaten. Finally the ball of thread rolled its way to a small hut. The girl knocked on the door.

"Good people! Give a girl shelter from the dark night!"

An old woman answered: "You are welcome. Where are you going, fair maiden?"

"I seek Finist the Bright Falcon, granny."

"You have a long way to go," the old woman replied.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

The next morning the old woman made her a gift of a silver dish and a golden egg and sent her to her youngest sister, who, she said, would know where to find Finist the Bright Falcon.

The girl bade her hostess farewell and went on her way. She walked and walked and wore out the third pair of iron shoes, broke the third iron staff and ate the third stone loaf. And the ball of thread led her to a third hut.

The wanderer knocked at the door.

"Good people! Give a girl shelter from the dark night."

Once again an old woman came out.

"Come in, dear! You are welcome! Where have you come from and where are you going?"

"I am looking for Finist the Bright Falcon, granny."

"Oh, it is hard, very hard to seek him out! He now lives in a certain city and is married to the baker's daughter there."

The next morning the old woman said to the girl, "Here is a gift for you: a golden embroidery hoop and a golden needle. All you have to do is to hold the hoop—the needle will embroider by itself. Now may God be with you. What you must do is to get yourself hired as a servant at the bakery."

It was said and it was done. The girl went to the bakery and hired herself out as a servant. She was diligent and the work went swiftly in her hands. She fired up the stove, carried the water and prepared the meals. The baker's wife was overjoyed.

"Thank heaven!" she said to her daughter. "We have at last got ourselves a servant who is both conscientious and skillful. She does everything without being told!"



## *A Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon*

And the girl, having finished the household work, took her silver spinning board and her golden spindle and began to spin. She spun and the thread that came from the tow was not ordinary thread but pure gold.

When the baker's daughter saw this she said, "Fair maiden! Would you be willing to sell me your toy?"

"Yes, I will sell it!"

"What is the price?"

"Just let me spend the night with your husband."

The baker's daughter agreed to this condition.

"That's no problem!" she thought to herself. "I can put him into a sound sound sleep with a sleeping draught. And my mother and I can make a fortune with this spindle."

Finist the Bright Falcon was not at home. All day long he flew through the skies and only returned in the evening. They all sat down to eat. The girl served at table and kept looking at him, but he, bold young warrior, did not recognize her.

The baker's daughter put a sleeping draught in his drink and when he went to bed, she said to the girl, "Go to his bedroom and keep the flies from him!"

The girl went to his room, kept the flies away from him and wept as she tried to wake him.

"Awaken, awaken, Finist! I, your betrothed, have come to find you. I broke three iron staffs, wore out three pairs of iron shoes and ate three stone loaves, searching for you, my darling!"

But Finist kept right on sleeping and so the whole night passed.

The next day the girl rolled her golden egg on her silver saucer and many more golden eggs appeared.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

The baker's daughter saw it.

"Sell your toy to me," she said.

"You may buy it," said the girl.

"What is the price?"

"Let me spend one more night with your husband."

"Very good! I agree."

And once more when Finist the Bright Falcon flew home in the evening, they sat down to eat. The girl served the food and it was as if Finist had never seen her before.

Once again the baker's daughter put a sleeping draught in his drink and, when he went to bed, sent the girl to keep the flies off him. And this time too, no matter how she wept, she could not awaken him. He slept until morning and heard nothing.

The third day the fair maiden held her golden hoop in her hands and the needle embroidered by itself, making wonderful patterns. The baker's daughter saw it.

"Sell me your toy, fair maiden!"

"You may buy it," the girl replied.

"What is the price?"

"Let me spend one more night with your husband."

"Very well. I agree."

That evening when Finist returned, his wife gave him a sleeping draught as before and, when he went to bed, sent the girl to keep the flies off him. And as she drove away the flies she tearfully repeated over and over again, "Wake up, wake up, Finist! I, your betrothed, have come and found you. I wore out three pairs of iron shoes, broke three iron staffs and devoured three stone loaves, searching for you. All for you, my darling."



## *A Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon*

Finist slept soundly and heard nothing.

The girl wept for a long long time and kept trying to awaken him. Suddenly one of her tears fell on his cheek and he awoke.

"Something burned me!" he said.

"Finist," said the girl. "I have come to you. I wore out three pairs of iron shoes, broke three iron staffs and ate three stone loaves, searching for you, my darling. I have been watching over you for three nights, and you would not awaken."

It was only then that Finist recognized her and was happier than one can describe. They agreed to leave together. In the morning the baker's daughter looked for her husband, but he and the girl were gone.

She complained to her mother, who ordered the horses hitched up and the daughter went in pursuit of her husband. On her way she stopped at each of the huts of the three old women, but she never caught up with Finist the Bright Falcon. There was no trace of him to be found.

Finist the Bright Falcon and his betrothed arrived at her home. He struck the ground and became a feather once more. The girl hid the feather in her bosom and went to her father.

"Oh, my dear daughter! I feared you were no longer alive. Where have you been for such a long time?"

"I went on a pilgrimage," the girl replied.

As it happened, Finist and the girl returned home at the time of Holy Week. The father and his elder daughters were getting ready to go to church.

"Come, my daughter," he said to his youngest, "come with us on this glad day."

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

"But, father, I have nothing to wear."

"You may wear some of our clothes," her elder sisters said.

"But your clothes do not fit me! I would do better to stay at home."

And so the girl remained behind. When she was alone, she got out her feather. It struck the floor and became her handsome young prince. He whistled out the window and immediately there appeared beautiful clothes, and a golden carriage stood outside waiting for them. They dressed, seated themselves in the carriage and rode off to the church. People were astounded. A prince and princess had evidently come. They left before everyone else and rode home. The carriage and clothing disappeared and the prince became a feather once more.

When her father and sisters returned, the girls said, "Oh, sister! You did not come with us and you missed seeing a handsome prince and a beautiful princess."

"That's all right, sisters! Now that you've told me about it, it's just as if I'd been there."

The next day the very same thing happened. But on the third day just as the prince and fair maiden were seating themselves in the carriage her father came out of the church and saw with his own eyes that the carriage drove up to his house and disappeared.

When he came home he questioned his youngest, and she was forced to confess.

She took the feather from her bosom. It struck the floor and became Finist the prince.

They were married then and there, and it was a fine wedding, too.











## *The Wonder-working Steeds*

Once there was an old man who had three sons, the youngest of whom was called Ivan the Fool. Ivan never did anything except sit on the stove in the corner and blow his nose.

A time came when their father lay dying, and he said to his sons, "My children, when I am dead each of you in turn is to sleep one night on my grave."

And then he died and was buried.

Night fell and the eldest brother, whose turn it was to spend the night at the grave, was either too lazy or else too frightened, for he said to the youngest, "Ivan the Fool, you go to our father's grave. Take my turn for me and spend the night there. You aren't doing anything anyway."

Ivan the Fool took what he needed, went to the grave and lay down there.

At midnight the grave suddenly opened wide and the old

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

man came out and said, "Who is there? Is it my eldest son?"

"No, father, it is I, Ivan the Fool."

The old man asked, "Why didn't my eldest son come?"

"He sent me, father."

"Well, that is your good fortune."

And the old man whistled, a piercing Russian warrior's whistle. Then he called, "Chestnut, Gray, Wonder-working Black!"

A chestnut steed charged up and the earth trembled. Flames shot from his eyes and smoke rose in pillars from his nostrils.

"Here, my son, is a fine steed for you. And you, my steed, serve my son just as you have served me."

Having spoken, the old man again lay down in his grave.

Ivan the Fool stroked and patted the chestnut, then sent him off and went home alone.

When he returned home, his brothers asked, "Did you have a good night, Ivan the Fool?"

"Very good, brothers."

The following night came, and the middle brother did not want to spend the night at the grave either, so he said, "Ivan the Fool, go to Father's grave and spend the night there for me as well."

Without uttering a word, Ivan the Fool made his preparations and went off to the grave, where he lay down and waited for midnight. At midnight, once again, the grave opened and his father came out and asked, "Are you my middle son?"

"No," said Ivan the Fool, "it's I, father."

Again the old man whistled, a piercing Russian warrior's



## *The Wonder-working Steeds*

whistle. Then he called, "Chestnut, Gray, Wonder-working Black!"

This time a gray steed galloped up to them and the earth trembled. Flames shot from his eyes and smoke rose in pillars from his nostrils.

"Well, Gray, serve my son just as you served me. Be off with you now!"

The gray steed galloped off and the old man lay down again in his grave. Ivan the Fool returned home, and his brothers once again asked, "Did you have a good night, Ivan the Fool?"

"A very good one, brothers," he replied.

The third night Ivan did not wait to be told, but made his preparations, went to the grave and lay down. Once again, the old man appeared at midnight. This time, knowing it was Ivan's turn, the old man did not ask who was there, but immediately whistled, a piercing Russian warrior's whistle. Then he called, "Chestnut, Gray, Wonder-working Black!"

A jet-black steed raced up, and the earth trembled. Flames shot from his eyes and smoke rose in pillars from his nostrils.

"Well, Jet Black, serve my son just as you served me."

The old man bade farewell to his youngest son and again lay down in his grave. Ivan the Fool caressed the jet-black steed and sent him away. Then he walked home, and once more his brothers asked, "How did you spend the night, Ivan the Fool?"

"Very well indeed, brothers."

And so they went on living as before. The two elder

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

brothers labored hard and Ivan the Fool did nothing, until one day there came a proclamation from the king.

*"The princess  
will be given in marriage  
to the man who succeeds  
in capturing her portrait.  
It hangs on the wall of the palace  
at the height of  
a specified number of logs."*

The elder brothers decided they would go and watch the contest to see who would win the princess. Ivan the Fool, perched on the stove behind the chimney, said to them, "Brothers, let me have some horse or other. I'd like to go too."

But his brothers upbraided him, saying, "You just go on sitting on the stove, fool. Why should you go? Just to make people laugh?"

But Ivan the Fool kept insisting until they gave in. "All right then, fool," they said, "you may take the little three-legged mare."

The two brothers rode off. Ivan the Fool rode after them, but when he came to the open plains, he dismounted, cut the little mare's throat, skinned her, hung her hide on a fence and threw away the meat. Then he whistled—a piercing Russian warrior's whistle—and called, "Chestnut, Gray, Wonder-working Black!"

Up charged the chestnut steed, and the earth trembled. Flames shot from his eyes and smoke rose in pillars from his nostrils. Ivan the Fool climbed into one of his ears—and



## *The Wonder-working Steeds*

ate and drank his fill. When he climbed out the other ear, he was dressed splendidly and had been transformed into such a handsome fellow that his brothers would never be able to recognize him. He mounted Chestnut and rode off to try his luck at capturing the portrait.

There were more people assembled at the palace than Ivan had imagined existed. They noticed the handsome fellow riding up and everybody stared at him. Ivan spurred his horse to a gallop and rode toward the portrait. His horse jumped and Ivan missed the portrait by a mere three logs. He then rode away, and although all the people had seen him come, no one could say where he had ridden off to.

Ivan sent the steed away, went home on foot and seated himself in his place on the stove. The brothers arrived and began to tell their wives what had happened.

"You should have seen, wives, what a fellow came along," they said. "He was handsomer than any man we've ever seen. He didn't quite reach the portrait, but he got within three logs of it. People saw him coming, but no one knows where he rode off to. They say he will return."

Ivan the Fool, who was listening, perched on the stove, said, "Brothers, was it not I who was there today?"

"How the devil could you have been there? Just sit on your stove, fool, and wipe your nose."

Time passed, and the king once again made the same pronouncement. The brothers made ready to go to the contest, and Ivan the Fool said, "Brothers, give me some horse or other."

And they replied, "Stay home, fool. You will only manage to destroy another horse."

But Ivan the Fool would not leave his brothers alone until

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

they said he might take another crippled mare. Ivan the Fool killed this mare too, hung her hide on a fence and threw away the meat.

Once again he whistled the piercing Russian warrior's whistle and called, "Chestnut, Gray, Wonder-working Black!"

Up galloped the gray steed and the earth shook. Flames shot from his eyes and pillars of smoke rose from his nostrils. Ivan the Fool climbed into the horse's right ear and came out of his left ear a splendidly dressed, handsome young fellow. He mounted the steed and rode off. This time he missed the portrait by only two logs. The people had seen him coming, but no one could say where he had ridden off to. Ivan sent Gray off, walked home on foot and climbed up on the stove to wait for his brothers. His brothers came home and related what had happened.

"Wives," they said, "the very same fellow rode up again today and only missed reaching the portrait by two logs."

And Ivan the Fool said to them, "Brothers, was it not I who was there?"

"Just sit where you are, fool. How the devil could you have been there?"

A short time passed and once again there was a proclamation from the king, announcing that the contest was to be repeated. The two elder brothers prepared to depart, and Ivan the Fool said, "Brothers, give me some horse or other. I want to go, too, and see what happens."

"Just stay home, fool. How many horses do you think we can let you destroy?"

However, when he kept insisting, they finally let him have a worn-out mare and rode off themselves.



## *The Wonder-working Steeds*

Ivan the Fool killed this mare as well and threw her carcass away. Then he whistled, a piercing Russian warrior's whistle, and called, "Chestnut, Gray, Wonder-working Black!"

The jet-black steed raced up and the earth trembled. Flames shot from his eyes and smoke rose in pillars from his nostrils. Ivan the Fool climbed up into one of the horse's ears, ate and drank his fill and came out through the other ear a handsome fellow in fine clothes. Then he mounted his steed and rode off. As soon as he arrived at the king's palace, he rode toward the portrait, jumped his horse and not only took the portrait from the wall but grabbed the princess's kerchief as well. The people had seen him coming, but no one could say where he had ridden off to.

And so he sent Wonder-working Black away, went home on foot, perched himself on the stove and waited for his brothers to come home. The brothers returned and related what they had seen.

"Well, wives, you should have been there! That very same young fellow jumped so high today that he tore down the portrait."

Ivan the Fool, sitting behind the chimney, said, "Brothers, was it not I who was there today?"

"Just sit where you are, fool. How in the devil could you have been there?"

In time the king held a ball to which he summoned all noblemen, generals, princes, counselors, senators, merchants, tradesmen and peasants. Ivan's brothers went too. Ivan the Fool was not to be left behind and, when he arrived, found himself a place on a stove behind the chimney, where he sat staring and gaping open-mouthed. The princess greeted

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

the guests, brought ale to each of them and looked to see whether any one would wipe his mouth with her kerchief, for the man who did so was her betrothed. But no one used her kerchief, and she did not see Ivan the Fool. The guests departed. The next day the king held a second ball. Once again the princess failed to discover the man who had taken her kerchief.

“What has happened?” she thought to herself. “My betrothed is not to be found.”

Just then she looked behind the chimney and saw Ivan the Fool. His clothing was in tatters and covered with soot and his hair stood on end. The princess poured out a glass of ale for him, and his brothers watched and thought to themselves, “The princess even serves ale to a fool.”

Ivan the Fool drank down the ale and then wiped his mouth with the princess’s kerchief. She was overjoyed, took him by the hand and led him to her father. “Father, this is my betrothed.”

Ivan the Fool’s elder brothers were filled with jealousy and thought to themselves, “What has happened to the princess? Has she gone out of her mind to take a fool as her betrothed?”

There is not much more to tell—everything moved swiftly after that. There were gay festivities and a wedding. Our Ivan was then and there transformed from Ivan the Fool to Ivan the King’s Son-in-Law. He put his clothes in order and cleaned himself up and he became the smartest of the gay blades at court. Not a soul would have recognized him.

And his brothers at last understood why they too should have honored their father’s dying wish and taken their turns at his grave.











## *Marya Moryevna*

**O**nce upon a time in a far-away kingdom there lived a prince named Ivan. He had three sisters. The eldest was called Princess Marya, the middle one Princess Olga and the youngest Princess Anna. It happened that their father and mother died at about the same time, and they left instructions for Ivan regarding the future of his sisters. He was to accept the first suitors to ask for their hands in marriage and was not to keep them single and in his own charge for long.

After the funeral, Prince Ivan and his sisters went for a walk together in the palace park to find comfort in their grief. Suddenly a black cloud covered the sky and it looked as if a thunderstorm were about to start.

"Let's hurry home, sisters," said Prince Ivan.

They had no sooner returned to the palace than it began to thunder. The ceiling split open, and a bright falcon flew

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

into the room. The falcon struck itself against the floor, became a handsome young man and said, "I bid you good day, Prince Ivan. I used to come here as a guest, but now I come as a suitor for the hand of your sister, Princess Marya."

Prince Ivan replied, "If you love my sister, I shall not stand in her way—she may accept you with my blessing."

Princess Marya agreed. They were married and her husband took her off to his own kingdom.

Day followed day, hour followed hour—and a whole year flew by just as if it had never been at all. Prince Ivan went for a stroll in the palace park with his two sisters. Once again a thundercloud covered the sky, the wind raged and lightning flashed.

"Let's go home, sisters," said the prince. And no sooner had they returned to the palace than thunder rolled, the ceiling split open and an eagle flew in. The eagle struck the floor and became a handsome young man.

"Greetings, Prince Ivan. I used to come here as a guest, but now I come as a suitor."

And he asked for the hand of Princess Olga.

Prince Ivan replied, "If you love Princess Olga, she may marry you. She is free to decide for herself."

Princess Olga agreed. They were married and the eagle took her off to his own kingdom.

Another year passed. And Prince Ivan said to his youngest sister, "Let's go for a walk in the park."

They had strolled for a while, when once again a thundercloud arose, followed by a windstorm and lightning.

"Let's go home, sister," said Prince Ivan.

They returned home, and hardly had they seated themselves, when thunder rolled, the ceiling split open and a



## *Marya Moryevna*

raven flew in. The raven struck the floor and became a handsome young man. The falcon and the eagle had been handsome fellows, but this suitor was the handsomest of all.

"Greetings, Prince Ivan. I used to come here as a guest, but now I come as a suitor. Permit me to marry Princess Anna."

"I leave it up to her. If you love her, she may marry you."

Princess Anna married the raven, and he took her off to his own kingdom.

Prince Ivan was left alone. A whole year passed, and without the company of any of his sisters, Prince Ivan became bored and lonely.

"I will go on a journey and visit my sisters," he decided.

He made the necessary preparations and set out. On his way he came upon a battlefield from which the dead had not yet been removed.

Prince Ivan called out, "If there is anyone remaining alive here, I beg him to tell me who has destroyed this great army."

There was one soldier who still breathed and he replied, "This entire army was slain by Marya Moryevna, the beautiful princess."

Prince Ivan journeyed on and soon came to a camp of white tents. There Marya Moryevna, the beautiful princess, came forth to greet him. "Salutations, Prince. Where by God's will are you going? Are you journeying for pleasure where your free will dictates, or is it a mission that impels you to travel?"

Prince Ivan replied, "Brave young warriors only journey as their free will dictates."

"Well then, if you are not in haste, be my guest here."

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

Prince Ivan was glad of the chance to stop for a bit. He spent two days in Marya Moryevna's camp, fell in love with her and they were married.

Prince Ivan accompanied Marya Moryevna, the beautiful princess, to her own country. After a time she decided to wage war once again. She left Prince Ivan in charge of her household. Before she left she said to him, "Look after everything and go where you wish. There's only one thing you must not do and that is look into this closet."

But Prince Ivan could not restrain himself, and as soon as Marya Moryevna left, he hurried to the closet, opened the door and looked inside. There he saw Koshchei the Deathless shackled by twelve chains.

Koshchei said to Prince Ivan imploringly, "Take pity on me, and give me something to drink. I have been here for ten years, and I've had hardly anything to eat or drink and my throat is so very, very dry."

The prince brought him a whole pailful of water. Koshchei drank it and asked for more. "It takes more than one pail for me to slake my thirst. Give me more," he begged.

The prince gave him another pailful. Koshchei drank it down and asked for a third, and as soon as he had finished it, his former strength returned. He pulled at his chains and at once broke them all.

"Thank you, Prince Ivan," said Koshchei the Deathless. But because of what you've done you will never see Marya Moryevna again. You will no more see her than you do your own ears."

And in a mighty wind he flew out of the window, caught up with Marya Moryevna, the beautiful princess, and carried her off with him.



## *Marya Moryevna*

Prince Ivan wept bitterly and then, equipping himself for the journey, went off in search of Marya Moryevna.

"No matter what happens I will find her," he told himself.

One day passed and another, and at dawn of the third day, he came to a wonderful palace. Near the palace stood an oak tree and on the oak tree sat his brother-in-law, the bright falcon. The falcon flew down, struck the ground and became a handsome young man.

"Oh, my dear brother-in-law, how is the good Lord treating you?" he said, greeting Ivan.

Princess Marya, too, ran out of the palace and embraced him joyfully. She asked about his health and told him about herself.

The prince spent three days with them and then he said, "I cannot stay any longer. I must be on my way to find my wife."

"It will be difficult to find her," replied the bright falcon. "Leave your silver spoon with us. We will know by looking at it whether or not you are in trouble."

Prince Ivan left his silver spoon with the falcon and continued on his way.

He traveled one day and another, and at the dawn of the third day, he saw a palace even more beautiful than the first. Near the palace stood an oak tree, and on the oak there sat the eagle. The eagle flew down from the tree, struck the ground, turned into a handsome young man and cried out, "Come out, Princess Olga! Our dear brother has come."

Princess Olga immediately rushed out to greet Prince Ivan. She kissed him and asked about his health and related how things were going with her.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

Prince Ivan stayed with them for three days and then said, "I cannot stay any longer. I must leave to seek my wife."

And the eagle replied, "It will be difficult to find her. Leave your silver fork with us. We will know how you are faring by looking at it."

He left them his silver fork and went on his way.

One day passed and another, and at dawn of the third day, he saw a palace even more magnificent than the first two. Near the palace stood an oak tree and in the oak tree sat the raven. The raven flew down from the tree, struck the ground, became a handsome young man and cried out, "Princess Anna, come quickly! Our brother has come."

Princess Anna ran out, kissed and embraced Prince Ivan. She asked about his health and told him how things were going with her.

Prince Ivan stayed for three days and then he said, "Farewell, I must leave now to seek my wife."

And the raven replied, "It is going to be difficult to find her. Leave your silver snuffbox with us. We will look at it and know what is happening to you."

The prince gave them his silver snuffbox, bade them farewell and continued on his way.

One day passed and another, and on the third day, Prince Ivan arrived at the place where Koshchei had taken Marya Moryevna. She saw her husband coming, ran to him and threw herself into his arms. Then she began to weep and said, "Oh, Prince Ivan, why did you not obey me? Why did you look into the closet and free Koshchei the Deathless?"

"Forgive me, Marya Moryevna, but we must hurry away. It is best for you to come with me before Koshchei the Death-



## *Marya Moryevna*

less learns that I'm here. Perhaps he will not be able to catch up with us."

They gathered up their things at once and rode off.

Koshchei was out hunting. That night, as he was returning home, his good steed stumbled.

"What are you stumbling for, you scrawny nag? Or do you know that something is wrong?" Koshchei asked.

"Prince Ivan has come and taken Marya Moryevna away with him," replied the steed.

"Can you catch them?"

"You can sow wheat, wait until it grows and ripens, harvest it, mill it into flour, bake five ovens full of bread, eat the bread and then go after them, and even then we would be able to catch them."

Koshchei set off at a gallop and caught up with Prince Ivan.

"Well," he said, "this time I will forgive you, because you were good to me and gave me water to drink. And I will forgive you once again, but the third time I will cut you into pieces."

Koshchei took Marya Moryevna away from Prince Ivan and carried her off. Prince Ivan sat down on a rock and wept.

He wept and he wept and decided to go back for Marya Moryevna. Koshchei the Deathless was again not at home.

"Let us go, Marya Moryevna."

"Oh, Prince Ivan! Koshchei will only catch up with us once more."

"Let him catch up with us, then. At least we will have an hour or two together."

They gathered up their things and rode off.

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And this time also as Koshchei the Deathless was returning home, his good steed stumbled.

"Why are you stumbling, you scrawny nag? Or do you know that something is wrong?"

"Prince Ivan has come and taken Marya Moryevna away with him."

"Can we catch them?"

"You can sow buckwheat, wait till it grows and ripens, harvest it, mill it, make beer with it, drink it till you are drunk, sleep it off and only then go after them—and we would still catch them."

Koshchei galloped in pursuit and caught up with Prince Ivan. "I warned you," he said, "that Marya Moryevna was lost to you for good."

And Koshchei took her away from Prince Ivan and carried her off.

Prince Ivan, left alone, wept and wept and once more returned for Marya Moryevna. Koshchei was not at home.

"Let us go, Marya Moryevna."

"Oh, Prince Ivan! This time Koshchei will catch up with you and cut you into pieces."

"Let him cut me into pieces! I cannot live without you."

They gathered up their things and rode off.

Koshchei the Deathless was returning home, and for the third time, his good steed stumbled.

"Why did you stumble? Or do you know that something is wrong?"

"Prince Ivan has come and taken Marya Moryevna off with him."

Koshchei galloped away and caught up with Prince Ivan. He cut him into tiny pieces and put them in a tarred barrel.



## *Marya Moryevna*

He bound the barrel with iron hoops and threw it into the dark-blue sea. Then he carried Marya Moryevna away with him.

While all this was happening to Ivan, the silver articles he had left at the homes of his brothers-in-law had turned black.

"Alas," they said, "it is clear some misfortune has befallen Prince Ivan."

The eagle flew out over the dark-blue sea, dove down, seized the barrel and dragged it up on the shore. The falcon flew off for living water and the raven for dead water. They met again at the barrel, broke it open, took out the pieces of Prince Ivan, washed them off and put them together in their proper places. The raven sprinkled Prince Ivan with dead water and the pieces grew together again; the falcon sprinkled Prince Ivan with living water and Prince Ivan stirred, got up and said, "How long have I been asleep?"

"You would still be sleeping were it not for us," answered his brother-in-law.

"Come with us now and be our guest."

"No, brothers, I must go back for Marya Moryevna."

When Prince Ivan returned, Marya Moryevna ran out to meet him. "How did God bring you back to the living?" she asked.

He told her what had happened, and then he said, "Find out from Koshchei the Deathless where he got his fine steed."

Marya Moryevna waited for the right moment and questioned Koshchei, who replied, "At the end of the earth, beyond the fiery river, there lives a Baba Yaga. She has a little mare on which she flies around the world each day. She has many other wonderful mares as well. I worked for her three

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days as a herder, and during that time I didn't lose a single one of her mares. In return she gave me one little colt."

"But how did you manage to cross the fiery river?"

"I waved a certain kerchief three times, on my right, and it became a bridge high enough to span the flames."

Marya Moryevna repeated everything to Prince Ivan. She also found the magic kerchief and gave it to him.

Prince Ivan crossed the fiery river and went in search of Baba Yaga. He traveled a long way without eating or drinking. He came upon a strange-looking bird with her little chicks and he said, "I am going to eat one of these chicks."

"Don't eat it, please, Prince Ivan!" begged the strange bird. "Some day you will need me."

Ivan did not touch the chick. He continued on his way and came upon a beehive in a woods. "I am going to take a little bit of honey," he said.

But the queen bee said, "Don't touch my honey, please, Prince Ivan! Some day, you will need me."

He did not touch the honey and went on into the wood, where he met a lioness with her cub. "I am certainly going to eat this lion cub, because I'm sick with hunger," he said.

"Don't touch him, please, Prince Ivan!" begged the lioness. "Some day you will need me."

"All right, as you wish," Prince Ivan answered.

He wandered on and on, still hungry, until he came at last to the house of Baba Yaga. Around the house stood twelve poles, on each of which was a human skull. Only one pole had nothing on it.

"Hello, granny."

"Hello, Prince Ivan, have you come just so or do you want something?"



"I have come to earn a warrior's horse from you."

"Very well, prince. You don't have to serve a year to earn one, just three days. If you herd my mares well, I will give you a warrior's horse; but if you don't, your head will adorn the top of that empty pole."

Prince Ivan agreed to try. Baba Yaga gave him something to eat and drink and set him to work.

No sooner had he chased the mares out into the field than they tossed their tails in the air and ran off in all directions. The moment he set out after them, they disappeared from sight. Then and there he wept, sat down on a stone and went to sleep. The sun was already sinking in the west when the strange bird flew up and awakened him, "Get up, Prince Ivan, the mares are all at home now."

The prince rose, returned to Baba Yaga's house and found her shouting at her mares. "Why did you come home?"

The mares replied, "How could we do anything else? Birds flew at us from all directions and nearly pecked our eyes out."

"Well then, tomorrow don't run through the meadows but scatter in the forest."

Prince Ivan slept through the night and in the morning Baba Yaga said to him, "Look to it, prince! If you don't guard all the mares, if even one is lost, your handsome head will decorate that empty pole."

He took the mares out into the fields and they immediately tossed their tails in the air and ran off into the forest. Once again the prince sat down on a rock and cried himself to sleep. The sun set behind the forest. This time the lioness awoke Prince Ivan. "Get up, Prince Ivan, the mares have all been herded home."

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Prince Ivan got up and went to Baba Yaga's house. She was even angrier than on the previous day and was screaming at her mares. "Why have you come home?"

"What else could we do? Fierce beasts came from all directions and almost tore us to pieces."

"Well then, tomorrow, you must run off into the dark-blue sea."

Once again Prince Ivan slept the night through and in the morning Baba Yaga sent him out to herd the mares. "If you do not guard them well, your handsome head will find itself on my pole."

He drove the mares out into the fields. Immediately they tossed their tails, fled out of sight and ran off into the dark-blue sea, where they stood in the water up to their necks. Prince Ivan sat down on a rock, wept and wept and went to sleep. The sun set behind the forest, and the queen bee flew up to him and said, "Wake up, prince! The mares have all been herded home. And when you return to her house, don't let Baba Yaga catch sight of you, but go straight to the stables and hide behind the stalls. There you will find a mangy colt rolling in the manure. Wait till midnight, then leave and take the colt with you."

Prince Ivan got up, made his way to the stables and lay down behind the stalls. He could hear Baba Yaga making a great racket and screaming at her mares. "Why did you return?"

"What else could we do?" they replied. "Bees flew at us from all directions and stung us on all sides till we bled."

Baba Yaga went to sleep, and at midnight Prince Ivan took the mangy colt, saddled him, mounted and galloped off to the fiery river.



## *Marya Moryevna*

When he arrived at the river he waved three times on his right with the kerchief—and out of nowhere a wonderful high bridge appeared, spanning the river. The prince crossed the bridge and once on the other side he waved two times with his kerchief on his left, and all that remained over the river was a thin thread of a bridge.

In the morning Baba Yaga awakened—and her little mangy colt was nowhere to be seen. She went off in pursuit. She leaped ahead at full speed in her iron mortar, whipping it with her pestle, and with her broom swept up the tracks behind her. She came thus to the fiery river, and saw the bridge. “A good bridge,” she thought to herself. But as soon as she steered her mortar onto it, it broke in the center and Baba Yaga fell into the river, where she came to a fiery end.

Prince Ivan pastured the colt in the green meadows, and he became a marvelous steed.

The prince returned to Marya Moryevna and asked her to come away with him.

“I am afraid, Prince Ivan,” she replied. “If Koshchei catches up with us, he will again cut you into little pieces.”

“He will not catch us this time. I have a wonderful warrior’s horse that can fly like a bird.”

They seated themselves on the steed and rode off.

The steed of Koshchei the Deathless stumbled once again as he was riding home.

“What’s the matter with you, scrawny nag? Or do you know that something is wrong?”

“Prince Ivan has come and taken Marya Moryevna away with him.”

“Can we catch them?”

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"Heaven knows this time! Prince Ivan now has a warrior's horse better than I am."

"I will not stand for it," said Koshchei the Deathless. "Let's go after them."

The long and the short of it was that he did catch up with Prince Ivan, jumped to the ground and tried to slash him with a saber. But Prince Ivan's steed kicked Koshchei the Deathless, smashing his head, and the prince finished him off with a club. Then Prince Ivan placed a pile of firewood on top of him, lighted it and Koshchei the Deathless was burned up. Prince Ivan scattered his ashes in the wind.

Marya Moryevna mounted Koshchei's steed and Prince Ivan mounted his own. They went first to visit the raven, then the eagle and then the falcon. And at each palace, they were met with great joy.

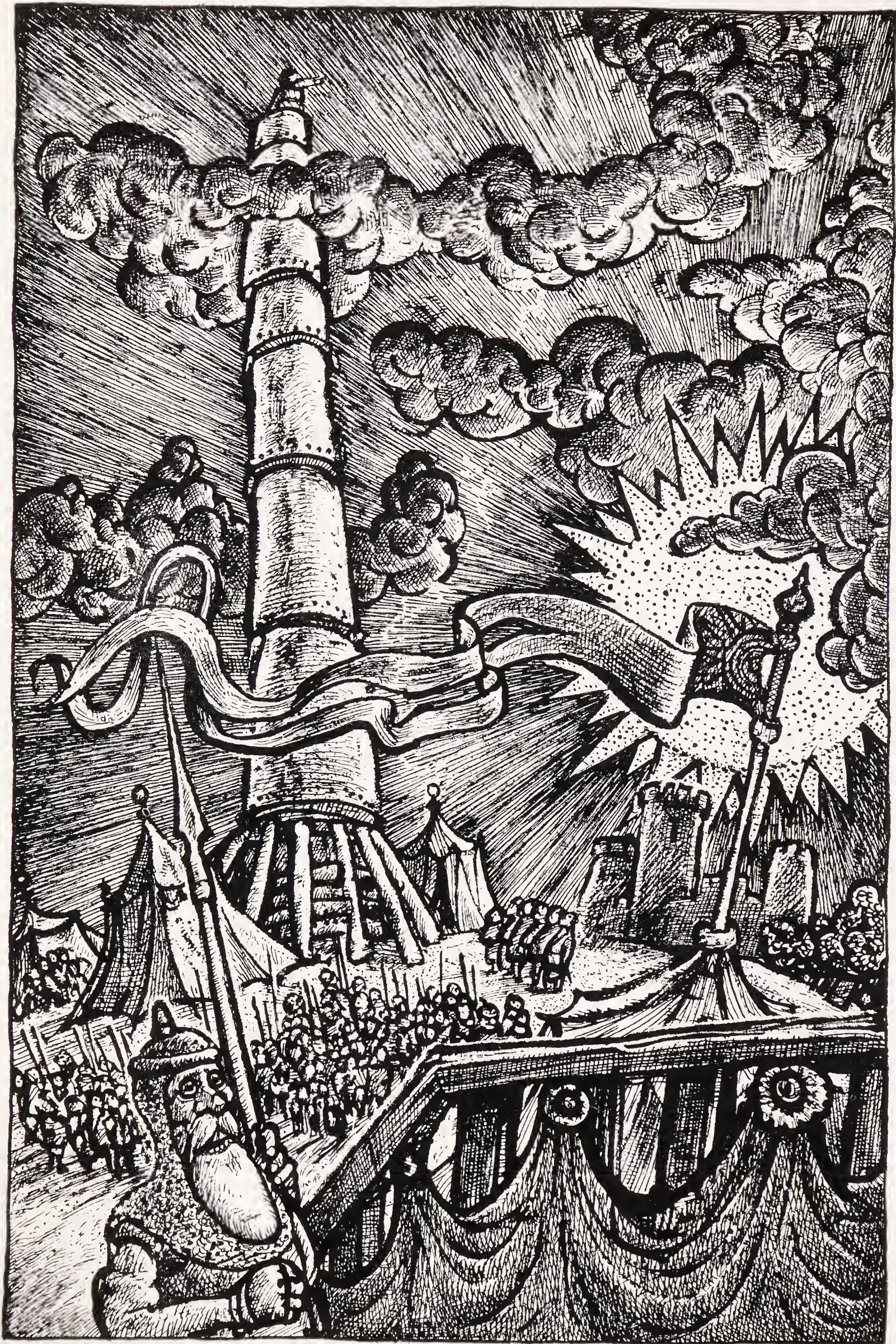
"Oh, Prince Ivan," they said, "we had given up hope of ever seeing you again. And now we see why you were willing to go through such trials. If you searched the entire world you would not find another beauty such as Marya Moryevna!"

Prince Ivan and Marya Moryevna were entertained and feasted; and then they returned to their own kingdom. When they finally arrived home, they lived happily, gathering riches and drinking sweet mead.











## *The Seven Simeons and the Trained Siberian Cat*

**F**ar out on the open steppe there lived an elderly couple. The old man's final hour came and he yielded up his soul to God. A short time later his wife gave birth to seven sons—septuplets. She named all seven of them Simeon.

The seven Simeons thrived and grew. All were identical in face and feature. And each morning all seven together went out to plow.

It happened that the king passed by their farm. From the road he could see a group of men plowing in the distance. The king knew that there was no land in this area belonging to a nobleman, so he was curious to know who the plowmen were.

Were they a nobleman's serfs nevertheless? Or hired hands? Or might they even be his own serfs? He sent his groom to find out.

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

The groom rode over to the seven Simeons and asked, "Who are you? Are you freemen or serfs? And what is your calling?"

They replied: "Our mother gave birth to seven of us at one time. We are all named Simeon and we are known as 'the Simeons who are Septuplets.' The land we are plowing belonged to our father before us and to his father before him."

The groom returned to the king and told him what he had learned. The king was astonished.

"I have never heard of such a miracle!" he said. Then and there he sent to tell the seven Simeons that they were to appear before him and were to enter his service.

All seven came to the king and stood in a row.

"Well!" said the king. "Each of you in turn tell me whether you have a trade or some special skill."

The eldest stepped forward. "I can forge an iron pillar twenty fathoms high!"

"I," said the second, "can set it into the ground."

"I," said the third, "can climb to the top of it and see everything that is going on in the whole wide world."

"And I," said the fourth, "can build a ship that can travel on dry land as well as on the sea."

"And I," said the fifth, "can trade in foreign lands, in any merchandise at all."

"I," said the sixth, "can dive under the water, taking with me a ship, its passengers and cargo and surface safely wherever I wish."

"And I," said Seventh Simeon, "am a thief—and can steal whatever I please."

When the king heard Seventh Simeon he grew angry and



## *The Seven Simeons and the Siberian Cat*

said, "I will not permit any such trade as yours in my kingdom. I give you three days to leave the country. You may go wherever you please, but I order all the other Simeons to remain here."

Seventh Simeon was most unhappy when he heard the king's words. He hadn't the least idea where to go.

But it happened at the time that the king was in love with a beautiful princess who lived in a distant land beyond the gray mountains and the blue seas. Although she would not have him, he wished to marry her. His courtiers and generals suggested to the king that a thief might, in fact, be very useful. He, for example, might be able to steal away the lovely princess and bring her to the king. They advised the king to allow Seventh Simeon to remain in the kingdom for the time being. The king considered the matter and agreed to let him stay.

The next day the king assembled his noblemen, generals and his entire people and ordered the seven Simeons to display their skills.

The eldest Simeon, wasting no time, forged an iron pillar twenty fathoms high.

The king ordered his own men to plant the pillar in the ground. But no matter how hard they tried, they could not succeed.

He then ordered Second Simeon to plant the pillar. Second Simeon, wasting no time in thought, lifted it up and stuck it in the ground.

Then Third Simeon climbed the height of the pillar and, perching himself on its tip, began to look about in every direction to see what was going on in the world. He saw the deep-blue seas with ships bobbing up and down on them like

## *In a Certain Kingdom*

toys. He saw villages, cities and multitudes of people, but he could not find the beautiful princess loved by the king. And so he looked again in all directions and suddenly he spied her. She was seated at a window in the women's apartments of a distant palace. She had rosy cheeks and a white skin so delicate it was nearly transparent.

"Do you see her?" the king shouted.

"I do!"

"Climb down as fast as you can. No matter how you do it or how much it costs you must bring the princess to me!"

All seven Simeons put their heads together. Fourth Simeon built a sailing ship; Fifth Simeon loaded it with all kinds of merchandise and provisions, and they set sail for the land, beyond the gray mountains and the blue seas, where the princess lived. They journeyed on and on between the earth and the sky until at last they reached their destination.

Seventh Simeon had taken with him a Siberian cat trained to go about on a chain, to wait on people and to perform many tricks.

He asked his brothers to remain on board ship until he returned. He took the cat with him and went to explore the island. He came to a city and in a square saw the king's palace. He placed himself in view of the windows of the princess's apartments and put the Siberian cat through its paces. He ordered the cat to fetch and carry, jump over a stick and do all sorts of other tricks.

The princess came to the window and saw this strange beast—a cat had never before been seen on the island. She immediately sent her lady-in-waiting to find out what kind of animal it was and whether it was for sale.



## *The Seven Simeons and the Siberian Cat*

Seventh Simeon listened to the beautiful lady-in-waiting and said, "My beast is a Siberian cat. No amount of money can buy him. But if someone were truly to love him, I would present him to that person as a gift."

The lady-in-waiting returned to the princess and repeated what Seventh Simeon had told her. The princess sent her lady back with the following message:

"My princess has come to love your beast!"

Simeon took the Siberian cat to the princess's apartments and gave the cat to her as a gift. In return he asked only that he be permitted to remain in the palace for three days and enjoy the hospitality of the king.

Then he added, "Beautiful princess. May I not teach you how to handle this beast which is strange to you?"

The princess was delighted and invited Seventh Simeon to spend that very night in the palace.

The news spread quickly that the princess had acquired a strange and miraculous beast. And soon the king, the queen, princes, princesses, nobles, generals, all came to see and admire the tricks of the trained Siberian cat. They all wanted the cat for themselves, but the princess would not give him up for anyone. She constantly stroked the cat's silken coat and amused herself with him day and night. She ordered that Seventh Simeon, as a royal guest, be given whatever he wished to eat and drink.

On the third day, Seventh Simeon thanked her for her hospitality and invited the princess to be his guest on board his ship. He wished to show her the other unusual beasts that he had brought with him.

The princess asked the king's permission to accept the

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invitation and in the evening, accompanied by her servants, attendants and ladies-in-waiting, she went to visit Simeon's ship.

When she came to the ship, Seventh Simeon was waiting for her. He requested that the princess leave her retinue on shore and come aboard alone, "because," he explained, "there are many wonderful beasts on board. And whichever animal you admire, you may have as your own! But we cannot make gifts to all the others as well, and many of them will surely want animals for themselves."

The princess agreed. She ordered her retinue to wait for her on shore and went aboard the ship unattended.

No sooner had she embarked than the ship set sail across the dark-blue sea.

The princess's retinue returned to the palace without her. Weeping, they told the king what had occurred. He fell into a rage and ordered immediate pursuit.

A sailing ship set off at once. There was a fog and the seven Simeons sailed along not knowing that they were being followed. When they saw the ship it was already close behind them. Then and there Sixth Simeon dove underwater, taking the ship with him. They sailed on beneath the sea for a long time and only when they were close to their native land did Sixth Simeon bring the ship to the surface. The pursuing ship sailed for three days and three nights and finding nothing was forced to return home empty-handed.

When the ship of the seven Simeons arrived with the beautiful princess, multitudes of people came out to meet them. The king himself was at the wharf and greeted the seven Simeons and the beautiful princess with great joy.

As soon as they landed, the people cheered and applauded.



## *The Seven Simeons and the Siberian Cat*

The king kissed the princess and escorted her to the palace, where the marriage was celebrated at once. The wedding banquet was held in the white marble chambers. The guests were seated at oaken tables covered with delicately embroidered tablecloths. The king toasted his bride in sweet liqueurs, and offered her pastries and other dainties. The gaiety and great festivity resounded throughout the whole of Christendom!

The seven Simeons were given the freedom of the kingdom—to live and to enjoy life as they pleased, to trade without payment of tithes and duties, to possess lands granted them without let and hindrance. They were honored and presented with many other favors by the king and were allowed to return home laden with wealth and treasure.





## *Afterword*

### *These Stories and the Man Who Collected Them*

A Russian village of one hundred or two hundred or three hundred or even more years ago: It is winter. The snow has drifted high against the solid pine logs of the peasant huts. The wind howls around the thatched roofs. It is dark—and in the winter in northern Russia night sometimes falls at three in the afternoon or even earlier.

Inside the hut the traditional burning pine splinter, used by Russian peasants through the ages, is the only illumination. It gives barely enough light for the large family who occupy the one big room in the hut to go about their usual evening occupations. The men repair footwear, a harness or fishnets—or perhaps carve in wood. The women knit, spin, weave, sew, embroider or make lace.

The central feature of this hut, as of every hut across the length and breadth of Russia, is the enormous stove which provides not only heat but a place to cook and often on its

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broad roof a warm sleeping space for some, and sometimes for all the members of the family.

Seated on the stove, it is usually the grandfather, the family patriarch, who begins the nightly story. It is a story handed down to him through generations of grandfathers and as likely as not it begins:

"In a certain kingdom, in a certain country, there once lived a certain king and queen. . . ."

The long evenings pass quickly in listening to the exploits and adventures of loved and familiar heroes and heroines: The Ivans—who were by no means Fools—the wise or beautiful Vasilisas and Helenas, the Baba Yagas, the powerful evil wizard Koshchei the Deathless, the fiery winged snake-dragon Zmei Gorynych, the firebirds with their golden feathers, the falcons who are handsome princes in disguise and, for variety, the great legends of Russia's epic heroes, *bogatyrs* such as Ilya Muromets, Dobrynya Nikitich and Fyodor Lyzhnikov.

It was only a little more than a hundred years ago that a final systematic effort was made to collect and publish the tales of the great Russian oral tradition. This work was begun, and to a great degree completed, by the Russian historian, archivist and writer Alexander Nikolayevich Afanasyev.

The existence and importance of Russian folk stories were, of course, known to many literate Russians before Afanasyev. As early as the eighteenth century some Russian folktales had appeared in print illustrated with crudely colored woodcuts. These books were intended for the lower classes and were known as the *lubochnye* editions, named after the *lubok* or linden wood used in making the woodcuts. But



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liberties were taken by the retellers and the stories, for the most part, lacked the authenticity of the oral folk story as handed down from generation to generation. In the nineteenth century the great poet Alexander Pushkin tapped the rich vein of Russian folk material for his poetry. Other writers of this period, too, were aware of and made use of Russia's folk heritage.

Yet before Afanasyev very few of the Russian folk stories had been recorded and even fewer had been published.

Alexander Nikolayevich Afanasyev was born in 1826 in a small provincial county seat in the Voronezh area—some three hundred miles southeast of Moscow. His father was a man of very modest means, a scrivener. Young Alexander received a very spotty and unsatisfactory education which he himself described in his memoirs. His first teachers were some semiliterate priests and later he attended a primitive gymnasium (secondary school) in Voronezh.

Most of what he learned in his early years he gained through assiduous reading in the family library, inherited from a grandfather. Alexander was forbidden to read the books but when his father was not at home he would steal hours and hours of secret reading in the frigid mezzanine where the books were kept.

His self-education stood him in good stead when he sought admission to Moscow University, where he studied in the faculty of jurisprudence. After his graduation in 1848, he became an instructor there.

His career in teaching was very brief, however. In that same year of 1848, a year when Europe was swept by revolutions, the tyrannical Tsar Nicholas I sent his Minister of Education, S. S. Uvarov, to conduct an inspection of

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Moscow University with the purpose of discovering any centers of revolutionary activity that might exist there. Uvorav attended a lecture given by young Afanasyev and challenged him on several points. Instead of agreeing with the minister as he was expected to do Afanasyev argued back. As a result he was dismissed from his post and forbidden to teach in Moscow University.

For a time he was without work—but in 1850, with the assistance of friends, he got a good position in the Moscow archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During his twelve years in this post he rose to a responsible position as head of a department. More important, work in the archives gave him access to historical materials of interest to him as well as ample time to do his own research and writing.

As early as 1847, at the age of twenty-one, Afanasyev had begun to publish articles in important Russian journals. For the rest of his brief life he continued to write and to publish prolifically. For a time he edited his own journal, *Bibliographic Notes*, which appeared in 1859–1860. His early works were principally historical, relating for the most part to the eighteenth century.

It was in 1850 that he began to manifest the intense interest in Slavic and Russian mythology, ethnography and folklore which was to continue for the rest of his life.

The Grimm brothers and other students of folklore in Germany had set an example which inspired ethnographers all over the world, among them Afanasyev, to follow suit. Afanasyev published a series of ethnographic studies based on Russian folklore material and at the same time began collecting Russian folktales.

In 1855 Afanasyev published the first of eight issues of



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his famous *Russian Folk Tales*. Its appearance was an important event in Russian cultural life and was widely praised in the leading Russian newspapers and periodicals. By the time the last of the issues was published in 1864, the earlier issues had already run through several new editions.

Of the total of the some six hundred stories that comprise the complete collection only ten were actually transcribed from the storyteller's oral account by Afanasyev himself. In the first three issues the largest number—some seventy-five—came from the collection of the Imperial Geographic Society. For subsequent issues, Afanasyev made use in very large part of the enormous folklore collection of the great pioneer ethnographer, lexicographer and writer Vladimir Dal.

Afanasyev's service was thus not as the direct personal recorder of this great folk literature, but as its collector, systematizer and publisher. He also provided a valuable commentary on the basic fund of Russian folk stories. Fortunately Afanasyev believed in fidelity to exact words, pronunciations and manner of speech of the individual storyteller from whom a folk story had been transcribed. Subsequent collections of Russian folk stories, including some to be found in the Soviet Union today and some of those available in translation in Western languages, are by no means as free of embellishment, elaboration, nor as true to the original folk tellings as Afanasyev's. His collection remains today, because of its comprehensiveness and integrity, the basic collection of Russian folk stories. It is authoritative and unique.

Throughout his professional life, Afanasyev was never entirely free from harassment. When his work *Russian Folk*

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*Legends* appeared in a small edition in 1859, the Russian Orthodox Church censorship—which had charge of religious as contrasted with civil censorship in Imperial Russia—objected to it, with the result that it could not be published in subsequent editions until 1914.

In 1862, because of a visit to him by a Russian political émigré regarded by the tsarist authorities as dangerous, Afanasyev was dismissed from his post in the Moscow Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Afanasyev contracted tuberculosis and died in 1871 at the age of forty-five.

The twelve stories in this volume were chosen from among the fairy stories rather than the folktales and fables of the Afanasyev collection. All of them have been translated in their entirety without omission—with the exception, in several cases, of the formal Russian storyteller's first person recitative ending: "I was there and . . ." (continuing on in a humorous vein). These endings, depending as they do in part on rhymes and puns, lose their charm and meaning in translation. It is in the fairy stories that Russian folk culture found its most beautiful expression. In them the rich Russian imagination was perhaps the least fettered by the chains of harsh Russian reality. And it is not a matter of chance that it is in them that modern Russian writers, artists and composers have found their richest source of inspiration.

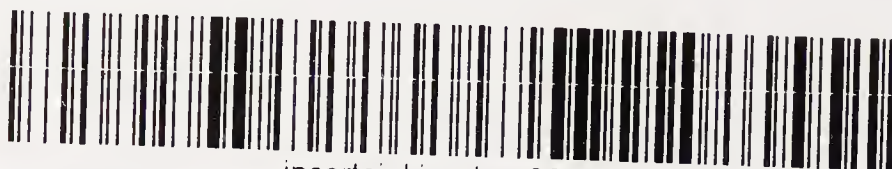
THOMAS P. WHITNEY





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THOMAS P. WHITNEY is the author of *Russia in My Life* and the editor of *The New Writing in Russia*, and has translated both adult and children's books from the Russian. Among the former is *The First Circle* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn; among the latter are *Scarlet Sails* by Alexander Green and the fairy tales *Prince Ivan*, *The Firebird and the Gray Wolf* and *Vasilisa the Beautiful*.

Mr. Whitney, who spent ten years in Russia as an attaché to the American Embassy and later as staff correspondent for the Associated Press of America, was born in Toledo, Ohio. He attended Amherst College and Columbia University.

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DIETER LANGE is a well-known artist and illustrator. He lives in Pforzheim, Germany. *In a Certain Kingdom* is the first American book he has illustrated.

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