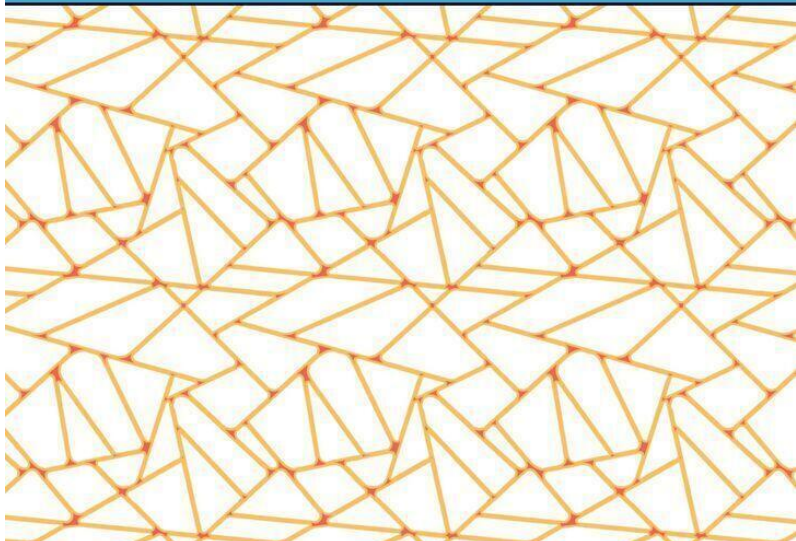


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Viktor Nikitin

The World of Russian Fairy Tales (Book I)



Viktor Nikitin
The World of Russian
Fairy Tales. Book I

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Аннотация

This first volume presents thirteen traditional Russian folk tales retold in clear English. The stories combine everyday life with the supernatural, featuring peasants, merchants, demons, witches, and miraculous events. Themes of justice, greed, faith, and human folly run throughout. Preserving the spirit of oral storytelling, the collection offers both moral insight and imaginative narrative, opening a six-volume series of classic folklore.

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Introduction

Russian folk tales preserve centuries of popular imagination, moral reflection, and traditional beliefs. Passed down orally from generation to generation before being written down, they present a vivid picture of the worldview of ordinary people, in which the everyday and the supernatural exist side by side. Peasants, merchants, priests, demons, witches, and mysterious spirits all take part in stories that combine realism with fantasy, humor with tragedy, and simple language with profound symbolic meaning.

This second volume contains ten classic tales from the rich tradition of Russian folklore. The stories explore a wide range of themes, including the struggle between good and evil, divine justice, greed and generosity, wisdom and foolishness, faith, temptation, and the consequences of human choices. Alongside supernatural adventures and miraculous events, they also offer sharp observations on human character and social life.

The retellings in this collection remain as faithful as possible to the original narratives while presenting them in clear, modern English. The aim is to preserve the plots, atmosphere, and distinctive spirit of the traditional tales, making them accessible to contemporary readers without altering their essential character.

As the second volume of a six-volume series, this collection introduces readers to the remarkable diversity of Russian folk

storytelling and lays the foundation for the many legends, fairy tales, and moral narratives that follow in the remaining volumes.

* * *

The Fiend

Long ago, an old man and his wife lived in a village with their beautiful daughter, Marusia. Every year, when the feast of St. Andrew the First-Called arrived, the village girls gathered together in one cottage. They baked pampushki and other festive food, sang songs, danced, and celebrated for many days. In the evenings the young men joined them with musicians, bringing drinks and making the gathering even merrier.

Among all the girls, Marusia was the most graceful dancer. One evening a handsome stranger entered the cottage. He was richly dressed, handsome, and cheerful. After greeting everyone politely, he produced a purse filled with gold, ordered plenty of drinks, nuts, and gingerbread, and generously treated everyone. He danced wonderfully, but it soon became clear that he admired Marusia more than any of the other girls. He remained beside her throughout the evening.

When the celebration ended, he asked Marusia to accompany him a short distance home. As they walked together, he told her that he wished to marry her. Marusia gladly agreed, asking only where he lived. The stranger replied that he served as a clerk for a merchant in a neighboring place. They parted affectionately, and Marusia hurried home to tell her mother about the unexpected proposal.

Her mother listened carefully but advised caution. She suggested that on the following evening Marusia should take a ball of thread with her. When she accompanied the stranger home again, she was to slip a loop over one of his buttons and quietly unwind the thread behind him so she could later discover where he lived.

The next evening Marusia followed her mother's advice exactly. The stranger again remained constantly at her side, and when the festivities ended he once more asked her to see him home. While saying goodbye, she secretly fastened the loop over one of his buttons and quietly unwound the ball of thread as he walked away.

After he disappeared, Marusia followed the thread. At first it led along the road, then across hedges and ditches, until it reached the village church. The thread ended at the locked church door. Curious and uneasy, Marusia walked around the building until she found a ladder leaning nearby. She placed it beneath a window and climbed up to look inside.

There she witnessed a horrifying sight. The handsome young man stood beside a grave inside the church, where a corpse had been left overnight before burial. Instead of praying, he was tearing at the dead body and devouring it like a wild beast.

Terrified, Marusia tried to climb down quietly, but in her fear she accidentally made a slight noise. Afraid that the monster had heard her, she fled home in panic, scarcely able to breathe until she reached safety. Although her mother asked whether she had

seen her suitor, Marusia only answered that she had, keeping the dreadful secret to herself.

The following day Marusia hesitated to attend the gathering again, but her mother encouraged her not to stay home while she was still young. Reluctantly she went. The stranger was already there, behaving exactly as before, laughing, dancing, and entertaining everyone as though nothing had happened.

When the evening ended he again asked Marusia to accompany him. She tried to refuse, but the other girls laughed at her shyness and persuaded her to go.

As soon as they were alone, the stranger questioned her.

“Did you come to the church last night?”

“No,” she answered.

“Did you see what I was doing?”

“No.”

He looked at her coldly.

“Very well. Tomorrow your father will die.”

With those words he disappeared.

Marusia returned home full of fear. The next morning she found her father dead exactly as the stranger had foretold.

The family mourned him deeply. That evening Marusia, unable to bear being alone, went again to the gathering. The stranger greeted her kindly and pretended to share her sorrow, although he himself had caused it.

Again he insisted that she accompany him home.

Once outside he repeated his questions.

“Were you in the church?”

“No.”

“Did you see what I was doing?”

“No.”

“Very well. Tomorrow your mother will die.”

The next morning Marusia discovered that her mother had indeed died.

Now completely orphaned, she spent the day weeping. As night approached she again sought the company of the other girls because she feared remaining alone in the empty house. They comforted her, but once more the stranger persuaded her to accompany him after the gathering.

For the third time he questioned her.

“Were you in the church?”

“No.”

“Did you see what I was doing?”

“No.”

“Then tomorrow evening you yourself will die.”

Marusia spent the night with her friends. In the morning she remembered her aged grandmother, who had become blind through extreme old age, and decided to seek her advice.

After hearing the whole story, the old woman understood the danger immediately.

She instructed Marusia to visit the priest and ask for one unusual favor. If she died, her body was not to be carried out through the doorway. Instead, the earth beneath the threshold

was to be dug away, and her coffin dragged through the opening. She also wished to be buried where four roads met, at a crossroads.

Marusia obeyed her grandmother's instructions. She begged the priest to fulfill these wishes if she died. Then she returned home, bought herself a coffin, lay down inside it, and peacefully gave up her life.

The priest faithfully carried out her last requests. After burying her parents, he buried Marusia at the crossroads exactly as she had desired.

Some time later the son of a wealthy seigneur happened to ride past the grave. Growing upon it was the most extraordinary flower he had ever seen. Amazed by its beauty, he ordered his servant to dig it up with its roots and transplant it into a flowerpot at his home.

The flower flourished there and became even more beautiful. One night a servant happened to remain awake. At midnight he witnessed an astonishing miracle. The flower trembled, fell gently to the floor, and transformed into a lovely young woman. She walked through the house, found food and drink, quietly ate her supper, then stamped her foot upon the ground. Instantly she became a flower again, returned to the stem, and stood quietly in the window.

The servant told his master everything the following morning. That night both remained awake together. Again, exactly at midnight, the flower became the beautiful maiden. This time

the young seigneur seized her gently by the hands before she could escape. He gazed upon her beauty in amazement and immediately fell in love with her.

The following morning he asked his parents for permission to marry her.

Marusia agreed on one condition only: for four years she should never be required to attend church.

The young man accepted without hesitation, and they were married. They lived happily together for two years and had a little son.

One day guests visited their house. During the feast the men began praising the beauty of their wives. The young seigneur proudly declared that no woman in the world could equal his own wife.

Some guests replied that although she was beautiful, she behaved like a heathen because she never entered a church.

The remark troubled him deeply.

The next Sunday he insisted that Marusia accompany him to church despite her reluctance.

She finally obeyed.

As soon as she entered the church she saw, sitting in one of the windows, the same dreadful Fiend.

“So,” he said, “you have finally come. Tell me, were you here that night?”

“No.”

“Did you see what I was doing?”

“No.”

“Very well. Tomorrow your husband and your son shall die.”

Marusia fled immediately to her grandmother.

The wise old woman gave her two bottles. One contained holy water; the other held the Water of Life. She carefully explained how they should be used.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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