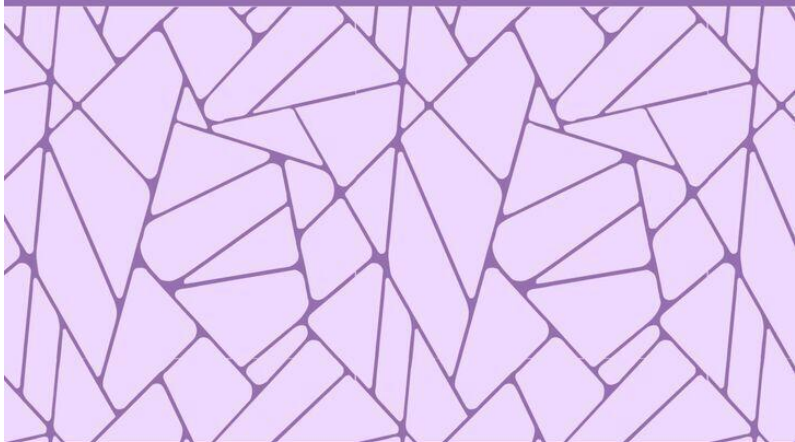


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Viktor Nikitin



**THE WORLD
OF RUSSIAN FAIRY
TALES. BOOK III**

Viktor Nikitin
The World of Russian
Fairy Tales. Book III

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Аннотация

This third volume presents nine 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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ONE-EYED LIKHO.

Once upon a time there was a smith. “Well now,” says he, “I’ve never set eyes on any harm. They say there’s evil (likho) in the world. I’ll go and seek me out evil.” So he went and had a goodish drink, and then started in search of evil. On the way he met a tailor.

“Good day,” says the Tailor.

“Good day.”

“Where are you going?” asks the Tailor.

“Well, brother, everybody says there is evil on earth. But I’ve never seen any, so I’m going to look for it.”

“Let’s go together. I’m a thriving man, too, and have seen no evil; let’s go and have a hunt for some.”

Well, they walked and walked till they reached a dark, dense forest. In it they found a small path, and along it they went — along the narrow path. They walked and walked along the path, and at last they saw a large cottage standing before them. It was night; there was nowhere else to go to. “Look here,” they say, “let’s go into that cottage.” In they went. There was nobody there. All looked bare and squalid. They sat down, and remained sitting there some time. Presently in came a tall woman, lank, crooked, with only one eye.

“Ah!” says she, “I’ve visitors. Good day to you.”

“Good day, grandmother. We’ve come to pass the night under your roof.”

“Very good: I shall have something to sup on.”

Thereupon they were greatly terrified. As for her, she went and fetched a great heap of firewood. She brought in the heap of firewood, flung it into the stove, and set it alight. Then she went up to the two men, took one of them — the Tailor — cut his throat, trussed him, and put him in the oven.

Meantime the Smith sat there, thinking, “What’s to be done? how’s one to save one’s life?” When she had finished her supper, the Smith looked at the oven and said:

“Granny, I’m a smith.”

“What can you forge?”

“Anything.”

“Make me an eye.”

“Good,” says he; “but have you got any cord? I must tie you

up, or you won't keep still. I shall have to hammer your eye in."

She went and fetched two cords, one rather thin, the other thicker. Well, he bound her with the one which was thinnest.

"Now then, granny," says he, "just turn over." She turned over, and broke the cord.

"That won't do, granny," says he; "that cord doesn't suit."

He took the thick cord, and tied her up with it famously.

"Now then, turn away, granny!" says he. She turned and twisted, but didn't break the cord. Then he took an awl, heated it red-hot, and applied it to her eye — her sound one. At the same moment he caught up a hatchet, and hammered away vigorously with the back of it at the awl. She struggled like anything, and broke the cord; then she went and sat down at the threshold.

"Ah, villain!" she cried. "You sha'n't get away from me now!"

He saw that he was in an evil plight again. There he sat, thinking, "What's to be done?"

By-and-by the sheep came home from afield, and she drove them into her cottage for the night. Well, the Smith spent the night there, too. In the morning she got up to let the sheep out. He took his sheep-skin pelisse and turned it inside out so that the wool was outside, passed his arms through its sleeves, and pulled it well over him, and crept up to her as he had been a sheep. She let the flock go out one at a time, catching hold of each by the wool on its back, and shoving it out. Well, he came creeping up like the rest. She caught hold of the wool on his back and shoved him out. But as soon as she had shoved him out, he stood up and

cried:

“Farewell, Likho! I have suffered much evil (likha) at your hands. Now you can do nothing to me.”

“Wait a bit!” she replied; “you shall endure still more. You haven’t escaped yet!”

The Smith went back through the forest along the narrow path. Presently he saw a golden-handled hatchet sticking in a tree, and he felt a strong desire to seize it. Well, he did seize that hatchet, and his hand stuck fast to it. What was to be done? There was no freeing it anyhow. He gave a look behind him. There was Likho coming after him, and crying:

“There you are, villain! you’ve not got off yet!”

The Smith pulled out a small knife which he had in his pocket, and began hacking away at his hand — cut it clean off and ran away. When he reached his village, he immediately began to show his arm as a proof that he had seen Likho at last.

“Look,” says he, “that’s the state of things. Here am I,” says he, “without my hand. And as for my comrade, she’s eaten him up entirely.”

In a Little-Russian variant of this story, quoted by Afanasief, (III. p. 137) a man, who often hears evil or misfortune (likho) spoken of, sets out in search of it. One day he sees an iron castle beside a wood, surrounded by a palisade of human bones tipped with skulls. He knocks at the door, and a voice cries “What do you want?” “I want evil,” he replies. “That’s what I’m looking for.” “Evil is here,” cries the voice. So in he goes, and finds a

huge, blind giant lying within, stretched on a couch of human bones. "This was Likho (Evil)," says the story, "and around him were seated Zluidni (Woes) and Zhurba (Care)." Finding that Likho intends to eat him, the misfortune-seeker takes to flight. Likho hears the iron doors creak, and cries to them to stop the fugitive. "But he had already passed out of doors. Only he lost his right hand, on which the door slammed: whereupon he exclaimed 'Here's misfortune, sure enough!'"

2) WOE.

In a certain village there lived two peasants, two brothers: one of them poor, the other rich. The rich one went away to live in a town, built himself a large house, and enrolled himself among the traders. Meanwhile the poor man sometimes had not so much as a morsel of bread, and his children — each one smaller than the other — were crying and begging for food. From morning till night the peasant would struggle, like a fish trying to break through ice, but nothing came of it all. At last one day he said to his wife:

"Suppose I go to town, and ask my brother whether he won't do something to help us."

So he went to the rich man and said:

"Ah, brother mine! do help me a bit in my trouble. My wife and children are without bread. They have to go whole days without eating."

"Work for me this week, then I'll help you," said his brother. What was there to be done! The poor man betook himself

to work, swept out the yard, cleaned the horses, fetched water, chopped firewood.

At the end of the week the rich man gave him a loaf of bread, and says:

“There’s for your work!”

“Thank you all the same,” dolefully said the poor man, making his bow and preparing to go home.

“Stop a bit! come and dine with me to-morrow, and bring your wife, too: to-morrow is my name-day, you know.”

“Ah, brother! how can I? you know very well you’ll be having merchants coming to you in boots and pelisses, but I have to go about in bast shoes and a miserable old grey caftan.”

“No matter, come! there will be room even for you.”

“Very well, brother! I’ll come.”

The poor man returned home, gave his wife the loaf, and said:

“Listen, wife! we’re invited to a party to-morrow.”

“What do you mean by a party? who’s invited us?”

“My brother! he keeps his name-day to-morrow.”

“Well, well! let’s go.”

Next day they got up and went to the town, came to the rich man’s house, offered him their congratulations, and sat down on a bench. A number of the name-day guests were already seated at table. All of these the host feasted gloriously, but he forgot even so much as to think of his poor brother and his wife; not a thing did he offer them; they had to sit and merely look on at the others eating and drinking.

The dinner came to an end; the guests rose from table, and expressed their thanks to their host and hostess; and the poor man did likewise, got up from his bench, and bowed down to his girdle before his brother. The guests drove off homewards, full of drink and merriment, shouting, singing songs. But the poor man had to walk back empty.

“Suppose we sing a song, too,” he says to his wife.

“What a fool you are!” says she, “people sing because they’ve made a good meal and had lots to drink; but why ever should you dream of singing?”

“Well, at all events, I’ve been at my brother’s name-day party. I’m ashamed of trudging along without singing. If I sing, everybody will think I’ve been feasted like the rest.”

“Sing away, then, if you like; but I won’t!”

The peasant began a song. Presently he heard a voice joining in it. So he stopped, and asked his wife:

“Is it you that’s helping me to sing with that thin little voice?”

“What are you thinking about! I never even dreamt of such a thing.”

“Who is it, then?”

“I don’t know,” said the woman. “But now, sing away, and I’ll listen.”

He began his song again. There was only one person singing, yet two voices could be heard. So he stopped, and asked:

“Woe, is that you that’s helping me to sing?”

“Yes, master,” answered Woe: “it’s I that’s helping you.”

“Well then, Woe! let’s all go on together.”

“Very good, master! I’ll never depart from you now.”

When the peasant got home, Woe bid him to the kabak or pot-house.

“I’ve no money,” says the man.

“Out upon you, moujik! What do you want money for? why you’ve got on a sheep-skin jacket. What’s the good of that? It will soon be summer; anyhow you won’t be wanting to wear it. Off with the jacket, and to the pot-house we’ll go.”

So the peasant went with Woe into the pot-house, and they drank the sheep-skin away.

The next day Woe began groaning — its head ached from yesterday’s drinking — and again bade the master of the house have a drink.

“I’ve no money,” said the peasant.

“What do we want money for? Take the cart and the sledge; we’ve plenty without them.”

There was nothing to be done; the peasant could not shake himself free from Woe. So he took the cart and the sledge, dragged them to the pot-house, and there he and Woe drank them away. Next morning Woe began groaning more than ever, and invited the master of the house to go and drink off the effects of the debauch. This time the peasant drank away his plough and his harrow.

A month hadn’t passed before he had got rid of everything he possessed. Even his very cottage he pledged to a neighbor, and

the money he got that way he took to the pot-house.

Yet another time did Woe come close beside him and say:

“Let us go, let us go to the pot-house!”

“No, no, Woe! it’s all very well, but there’s nothing more to be squeezed out.”

“How can you say that? Your wife has got two petticoats: leave her one, but the other we must turn into drink.”

The peasant took the petticoat, drank it away, and said to himself:

“We’re cleaned out at last, my wife as well as myself. Not a stick nor a stone is left!”

Next morning Woe saw, on waking, that there was nothing more to be got out of the peasant, so it said:

“Master!”

“Well, Woe?”

“Why, look here. Go to your neighbor, and ask him to lend you a cart and a pair of oxen.”

The peasant went to the neighbor’s.

“Be so good as to lend me a cart and a pair of oxen for a short time,” says he. “I’ll do a week’s work for you in return.”

“But what do you want them for?”

“To go to the forest for firewood.”

“Well then, take them; only don’t overburthen them.”

“How could you think of such a thing, kind friend!”

So he brought the pair of oxen, and Woe got into the cart with him, and away he drove into the open plain.

“Master!” asks Woe, “do you know the big stone on this plain?”

“Of course I do.”

“Well then if you know it, drive straight up to it.”

They came to the place where it was, stopped, and got out of the cart. Woe told the peasant to lift the stone; the peasant lifted it, Woe helping him. Well, when they had lifted it there was a pit underneath chock full of gold.

“Now then, what are you staring at!” said Woe to the peasant, “be quick and pitch it into the cart.”

The peasant set to work and filled the cart with gold; cleared the pit to the very last ducat. When he saw there was nothing more left:

“Just give a look, Woe,” he said; “isn’t there some money left in there?”

“Where?” said Woe, bending down; “I can’t see a thing.”

“Why there; something is shining in yon corner!”

“No, I can’t see anything,” said Woe.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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