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Viktor Nikitin



**THE WORLD
OF RUSSIAN FAIRY
TALES (BOOK IV)**

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**The World of Russian
Fairy Tales (Book IV)**

«Издательские решения»

Nikitin V.

The World of Russian Fairy Tales (Book IV) / V. Nikitin —
«Издательские решения»,

This fourth volume presents seven 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.

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THE BLIND MAN AND THE CRIPPLE.

In a certain kingdom there lived a king and queen; they had a son, Prince Ivan, and to look after that son was appointed a tutor named Katoma. The king and queen lived to a great age, but then they fell ill, and despaired of ever recovering. So they sent for Prince Ivan and strictly enjoined him:

«When we are dead, do you in everything respect and obey Katoma. If you obey him, you will prosper; but if you choose to be disobedient, you will perish like a fly.»

The next day the king and queen died. Prince Ivan buried his parents, and took to living according to their instructions. Whatever he had to do, he always consulted his tutor about it.

Some time passed by. The Prince attained to man's estate, and began to think about getting married. So one day he went to his tutor and said:

«Katoma, I'm tired of living alone, I want to marry.»

«Well, Prince! what's to prevent you? you're of an age at which it's time to think about a bride. Go into the great hall. There's a collection there of the portraits of all the princesses in the world; look at them and choose for yourself; whichever pleases you, to her send a proposal of marriage.»

Prince Ivan went into the great hall, and began examining the portraits. And the one that pleased him best was that of the Princess Anna the Fair — such a beauty! the like of her wasn't to be found in the whole world! Underneath her portrait were written these words:

«If any one asks her a riddle, and she does not guess it, him shall she marry; but he whose riddle she guesses shall have his head chopped off.»

Prince Ivan read this inscription, became greatly afflicted, and went off to his tutor.

«I've been in the great hall,» says he, «and I picked out for my bride Anna the Fair; only I don't know whether it's possible to win her.»

«Yes, Prince; she's hard to get. If you go alone, you won't win her anyhow. But if you will take me with you, and if you will do what I tell you, perhaps the affair can be managed.»

Prince Ivan begged Katoma to go with him, and gave his word of honor to obey him whether in joy or grief.

Well, they got ready for the journey and set off to sue for the hand of the Princess Anna the Fair. They travelled for one year, two years, three years, and traversed many countries. Says Prince Ivan—

«We've been travelling all this time, uncle, and now we're approaching the country of Princess Anna the Fair; and yet we don't know what riddle to propound.»

«We shall manage to think of one in good time,» replied Katoma. They went a little farther. Katoma was looking down on the road, and on it lay a purse full of money. He lifted it up directly, poured all the money out of it into his own purse, and said—

«Here's a riddle for you, Prince Ivan! When you come into the presence of the Princess, propound a riddle to her in these words: „As we were coming along, we saw Good lying on the road, and we took up the Good with Good, and placed it in our own Good!“ That riddle she won't guess in a lifetime; but any other one she would find out directly. She would only have to look into her magic-book, and as soon as she had guessed it, she'd order your head to be cut off.»

Well, at last Prince Ivan and his tutor arrived at the lofty palace in which lived the fair Princess. At that moment she happened to be out on the balcony, and when she saw the newcomers, she sent out to know whence they came and what they wanted. Prince Ivan replied—

«I have come from such-and-such a kingdom, and I wish to sue for the hand of the Princess Anna the Fair.»

When she was informed of this, the Princess gave orders that the Prince should enter the palace, and there in the presence of all the princes and boyars of her council should propound his riddle.

«I've made this compact,» she said. «Anyone whose riddle I cannot guess, him I must marry. But anyone whose riddle I can guess, him I may put to death.»

«Listen to my riddle, fair princess!» said Prince Ivan. «As we came along, we saw Good lying on the road, and we took up the Good with Good, and placed it in our own Good.»

Princess Anna the Fair took her magic-book, and began turning over its leaves and examining the answers of riddles. She went right through the book, but she didn't get at the meaning she wanted. Thereupon the princes and boyars of her council decided that the Princess must marry Prince Ivan. She wasn't at all pleased, but there was no help for it, and so she began to get ready for the wedding. Meanwhile she considered within herself how she could spin out the time and do away with the bridegroom, and she thought the best way would be to overwhelm him with tremendous tasks.

So she called Prince Ivan and said to him—

«My dear Prince Ivan, my destined husband! It is meet that we should prepare for the wedding; pray do me this small service. On such and such a spot of my kingdom there stands a lofty iron pillar. Carry it into the palace kitchen, and chop it into small chunks by way of fuel for the cook.»

«Excuse me, Princess,» replied the prince. «Was it to chop fuel that I came here? Is that the proper sort of employment for me? I have a servant for that kind of thing, Katoma dyadka, of the oaken shapka.»

The Prince straightway called for his tutor, and ordered him to drag the iron pillar into the kitchen, and to chop it into small chunks by way of fuel for the cook. Katoma went to the spot indicated by the Princess, seized the pillar in his arms, brought it into the palace kitchen, and broke it into little pieces; but four of the iron chips he put into his pocket, saying—

«They'll prove useful by-and-by!»

Next day the princess says to Prince Ivan—

«My dear Prince, my destined husband! to-morrow we have to go to the wedding. I will drive in a carriage, but you should ride on a heroic steed, and it is necessary that you should break him in beforehand.»

«I break a horse in myself! I keep a servant for that.»

Prince Ivan called Katoma, and said—

«Go into the stable and tell the grooms to bring forth the heroic steed; sit upon him and break him in; to-morrow I've got to ride him to the wedding.»

Katoma fathomed the subtle device of the Princess, but, without stopping long to talk, he went into the stable and told the grooms to bring forth the heroic steed. Twelve grooms were mustered, they unlocked twelve locks, opened twelve doors, and brought forth a magic horse bound in twelve chains of iron. Katoma went up to him. No sooner had he managed to seat himself than the magic horse leaped up from the ground and soared higher than the forest — higher than the standing forest, lower than the flitting cloud. Firm sat Katoma, with one hand grasping the mane; with the other he took from his pocket an iron chunk, and began taming the horse with it between the ears. When he had used up one chunk, he betook himself to another; when two were used up, he took to a third; when three were used up, the fourth came into play. And so grievously did he punish the heroic steed that it could not hold out any longer, but cried aloud with a human voice—

«Batyushka Katoma! don't utterly deprive me of life in the white world! Whatever you wish, that do you order: all shall be done according to your will!»

«Listen, O meat for dogs!» answered Katoma; «to-morrow Prince Ivan will ride you to the wedding. Now mind! when the grooms bring you out into the wide courtyard, and the Prince goes up to you and lays his hand on you, do you stand quietly, not moving so much as an ear. And when he is seated on your back, do you sink into the earth right up to your fetlocks, and then move under him with a heavy step, just as if an immeasurable weight had been laid upon your back.»

The heroic steed listened to the order and sank to earth scarcely alive. Katoma seized him by the tail, and flung him close to the stable, crying—

«Ho there! coachmen and grooms; carry off this dog's-meat to its stall!»

The next day arrived; the time drew near for going to the wedding. The carriage was brought round for the Princess, and the heroic steed for Prince Ivan. The people were gathered together from all sides — a countless number. The bride and bridegroom came out from the white stone halls. The Princess got into the carriage and waited to see what would become of Prince Ivan; whether the magic horse would fling his curls to the wind, and scatter his bones across the open plain. Prince Ivan approached the horse, laid his hand upon its back, placed his foot in the stirrup — the horse stood just as if petrified, didn't so much as wag an ear! The Prince got on its back, the magic horse sank into the earth up to its fetlocks. The twelve chains were taken off the horse, it began to move with an even heavy pace, while the sweat poured off it just like hail.

«What a hero! What immeasurable strength!» cried the people as they gazed upon the Prince.

So the bride and bridegroom were married, and then they began to move out of the church, holding each other by the hand. The Princess took it into her head to make one more trial of Prince Ivan, so she squeezed his hand so hard that he could not bear the pain. His face became suffused with blood, his eyes disappeared beneath his brows.

«A fine sort of hero you are!» thought the Princess. «Your tutor has tricked me splendidly; but you sha'n't get off for nothing!»

Princess Anna the Fair lived for some time with Prince Ivan as a wife ought to live with a god-given husband, flattered him in every way in words, but in reality never thought of anything except by what means she might get rid of Katoma. With the Prince, without the tutor, there'd be no difficulty in settling matters! she said to herself. But whatever slanders she might invent, Prince Ivan never would allow himself to be influenced by what she said, but always felt sorry for his tutor. At the end of a year he said to his wife one day—

«Beauteous Princess, my beloved spouse! I should like to go with you to my own kingdom.»

«By all means,» replied she, «let us go. I myself have long been wishing to see your kingdom.»

Well they got ready and went off; Katoma was allotted the post of coachman. They drove and drove, and as they drove along Prince Ivan went to sleep. Suddenly the Princess Anna the Fair awoke him, uttering loud complaints—

«Listen, Prince, you're always sleeping, you hear nothing! But your tutor doesn't obey me a bit, drives the horses on purpose over hill and dale, just as if he wanted to put an end to us both. I tried speaking him fair, but he jeered at me. I won't go on living any longer if you don't punish him!»

Prince Ivan, 'twixt sleeping and waking, waxed very wroth with his tutor, and handed him over entirely to the Princess, saying—

«Deal with him as you please!»

The Princess ordered his feet to be cut off. Katoma submitted patiently to the outrage.

«Very good,» he thinks; «I shall suffer, it's true; but the Prince also will know what to lead a wretched life is like!»

When both of Katoma's feet had been cut off, the Princess glanced around, and saw that a tall tree-stump stood on one side; so she called her servants and ordered them to set him on that stump. But as for Prince Ivan, she tied him to the carriage by a cord, turned the horses round, and drove back to her own kingdom. Katoma was left sitting on the stump, weeping bitter tears.

«Farewell, Prince Ivan!» he cries; «you won't forget me!»

Meanwhile Prince Ivan was running and bounding behind the carriage. He knew well enough by this time what a blunder he had made, but there was no turning back for him. When the Princess Anna the Fair arrived in her kingdom, she set Prince Ivan to take care of the cows. Every day he went afield with the herd at early morn, and in the evening he drove them back to the royal yard. At that hour the Princess was always sitting on the balcony, and looking out to see that the number of the cows were all right.

Katoma remained sitting on the stump one day, two days, three days, without anything to eat or drink. To get down was utterly impossible, it seemed as if he must die of starvation. But not far away from that place there was a dense forest. In that forest was living a mighty hero who was quite blind. The only way by which he could get himself food was this: whenever he perceived by the sense of smell that any animal was running past him, whether a hare, or a fox, or a bear, he immediately started in chase of it, caught it — and dinner was ready for him. The hero was exceedingly swift-footed, and there was not a single wild beast which could run away from him. Well, one day it fell out thus. A fox slunk past; the hero heard it, and was after it directly. It ran up to the tall stump, and turned sharp off on one-side; but the blind hero hurried on, took a spring, and thumped his forehead against the stump so hard that he knocked the stump out by the roots. Katoma fell to the ground, and asked:

«Who are you?»

«I'm a blind hero. I've been living in the forest for thirty years. The only way I can get my food is this: to catch some game or other, and cook it at a wood fire. If it had not been for that, I should have been starved to death long ago!»

«You haven't been blind all your life?»

«No, not all my life; but Princess Anna the Fair put my eyes out!»

«There now, brother!» says Katoma; «and it's thanks to her, too, that I'm left here without any feet. She cut them both off, the accursed one!»

The two heroes had a talk, and agreed to live together, and join in getting their food. The blind man says to the lame:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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