

RUSSIAN TALES



Three kingdoms: copper, silver and gold

In days of yore when rivers of milk flowed between gingerbread banks, in a certain kingdom, in a certain realm there was a tsar. And the tsar had a wife — Nastasia the Beautiful with the Golden Hair, and three sons — Pyotr tsarevich, Vassily tsarevich and Ivan tsarevich.

The tsar was preparing to go on a long journey, and this he said to his wife:

“Listen well and heed what I say: take the children only out to the first garden, sometimes go into the second one, and don’t even set foot in the third!”

The tsar left. The tsarina took the children out for a walk with all their nursemaids and nannies. The first day they stayed in the first garden, on the second day they went into the second one, and on the third day the tsareviches begged to be allowed into the third garden.

“We can’t go in there,” said their mother. “Your father forbade us.”

The tsareviches wept and whimpered, begging to be taken into that garden.

Their mother gave in to their pleas and they went into the third garden. Suddenly a vicious Whirlwind picked up the tsarina, and carried her off into the sky no one knew where. It all happened so quickly that the nursemaids and nannies just gasped.

The tsar returned. When he was told that the tsarina had been carried off he became sorely troubled and sad. However, there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Time passed, and the elder boys grew up. The tsar said to them:

“My dear sons, which of you will venture in search of your mother?”

“Bless me, Father, for the journey. I shall go in search of our mother,” said Pyotr tsarevich, the eldest boy.

The tsar gave him his blessing. Pyotr tsarevich chose a horse to ride, picked a body of men to take along, and set out. They rode on and on, and came to a crossroads. On the crossroads lay a huge stone and on it were inscribed the following words:

*If you go straight you'll lose your way,
If you turn right you'll lose your horse,
If you turn left, you'll lose your head.*

Pyotr tsarevich pondered these words, and rode straight on. Before long he found himself in a dense forest. There he found a small glade and set up a tent. What now? That, he did not know.

The tsar waited and waited for his son to come back, all of three years passed since he left, and still Pyotr

tsarevich did not return. The second son then got ready to go.

“Bless me, Father,” he said.

The tsar gave him his blessing, and Vassily tsarevich set out. He, too, came to the crossroads, and he, too, rode straight ahead.

The tsar waited and waited for Vassily tsarevich to come back, all of three years passed since he left, and still there was no news. The youngest brother, Ivan tsarevich, was old enough to go now, and he, too, asked for his father’s blessing, and set out.

Ivan tsarevich came to the crossroads, read the inscription on the stone and thought: “My brothers must have gone straight on and lost their way. I’ve got to rescue them first.” He rode into a dense forest and saw two white tents standing in a glade with golden cupolas on them. His elder brothers were there, sure enough.

“Instead of just wasting your time here, why don’t you order your men to clear a road through the forest,” he said to his brothers.

The soldiers hacked a passage through the trees and everyone came out into the open.

“Brothers, send your men back home,” Ivan tsarevich said. “Just the three of us together will go in search of our mother.”

The elder brothers ordered their men to return home, and the three of them started across the great open spaces into the distant unknown. They asked everyone they met on the way if they had not seen their mother Nastasia the Beautiful with the Golden Hair whom the vicious Whirlwind had carried off, but no one had seen her or