

*The Russian  
Story Book*

*“Containing Tales from the Song-Cycles of  
Kiev and Novgorod and Other Early Sources”*



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Kiev and Novgorod and Other Early Sources”*



**RICHARD WILSON**

**&**

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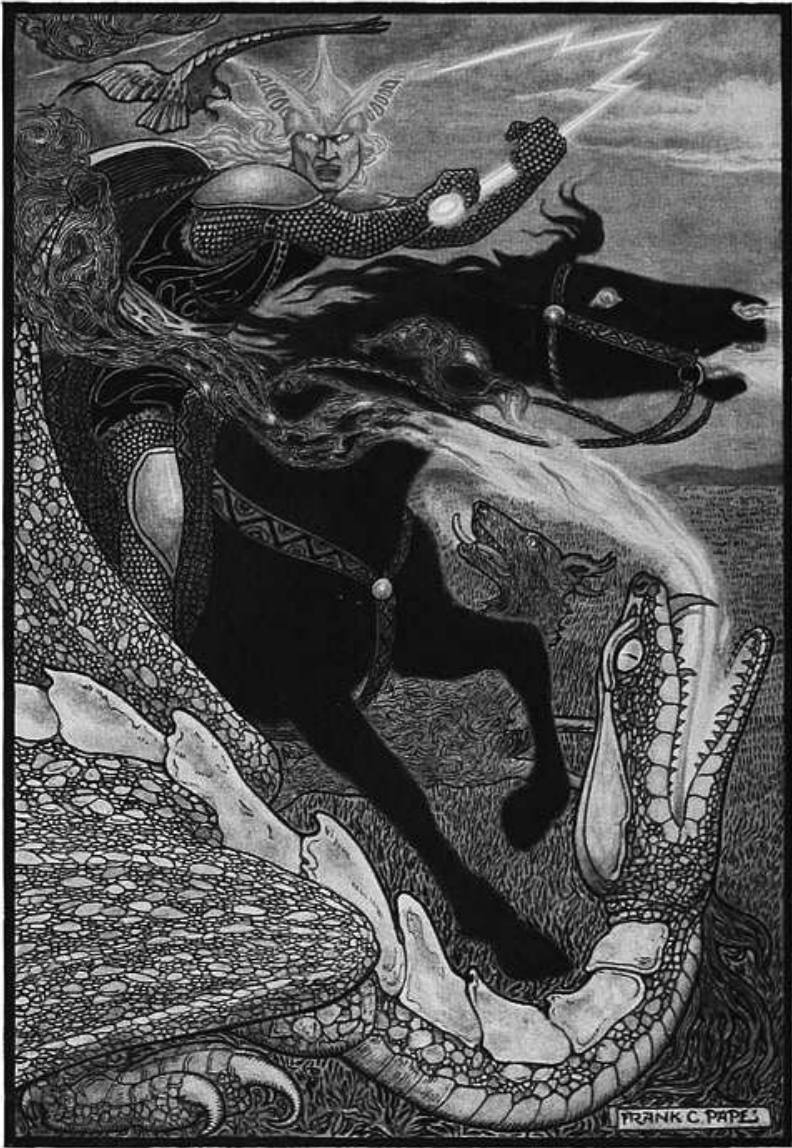


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*Falcon the Hunter*

**THE  
RUSSIAN STORY BOOK**

**CONTAINING TALES FROM THE SONG-  
CYCLES OF KIEV AND NOVGOROD AND  
OTHER EARLY SOURCES**

RETOLD BY

**RICHARD WILSON**

AUTHOR OF "THE INDIAN STORY BOOK"  
WITH SIXTEEN COLOURED PLATES AND LINE  
ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS

BY

**FRANK C. PAPÉ**

# PREFACE



I have gone right into the heart of “Holy Russia,” to Kiev and Novgorod and the borders of the Caspian, in an endeavour to show by means of some of the early legends the ideals and point of view of the Russian nation while it was in the process of being made. The stories of the song-cycles of Kiev and Novgorod tell of a barbaric, though not a barbarian, world, full of high colour and spirited action, of the knock-down blow followed quickly by the hand of friendship freely extended to pick up the fallen foeman—if indeed he has had the hardihood to survive.

The land of Vladimir and Ilya of Murom the Old Cossák is a Christian land, with the Christianity of the Greek Church, and it is before all else an Easter land, where the Christian Festival of the Resurrection means infinitely more than it can ever do in countries which are not ice-bound for several winter months. The country is, moreover, an outpost of Christianity towards the East—uninfluenced by Renaissance or Reformation—and must therefore have developed interesting characteristics entirely different from those of Western lands. I think that such characteristics are clearly shown in these stories, but I must leave those of my older

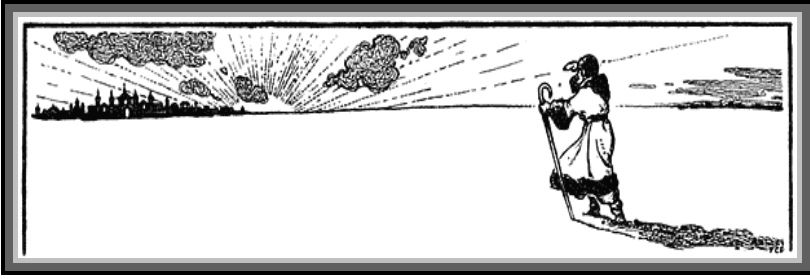


readers who are interested in this matter to find them out and to discover the Arthur, Guinevere and Galahad of Russia; for my first concern is to tell a tale which will please healthy-minded boys and girls in their early teens.

This book might have been written by a Russian who thoroughly understands our language, or by an English author who has spent the best part of a lifetime in studying Russia and the Russians, illustrated by a native artist, and decorated by a Russian designer. When such a volume does appear, it will have a great interest for me. Meanwhile, I submit that there is some artistic unity, also, in a volume of Russian stories, written by an Englishman, illustrated by an English artist, and decorated by an English designer, the whole production being for an English child.

One cannot delve far into these folk-lore records without becoming indebted to Miss I. F. Hapgood's English renderings from the collections of Kirshá Danilóv, P. B. Kirýeevsky, A. T. Gillferding, Rybnikof, P. A. Bezsónof and others, published in New York in 1885; to J. Curtin's literal translations from the *Naródníya Rússyika Shazki* of A. N. Afanásieva; to W. R. S. Ralston's books on Russian folk-song and fable; and to the writings of the Hon. Maurice Baring and Mr. Stephen Graham. To all of these I desire to express my indebtedness for help and guidance, though the responsibility for the telling and interpretation of the tales is entirely my own. If this little collection makes the British child more sympathetic towards Russia and helps it to understand the Russian people to a small degree its purpose will have been achieved.

*R. W. Hampstead, 1915.*



*At the fountain which burst forth beneath  
the hoofs of Cloudfall, fierce Bears still come  
to quaff the waters and gain heroic strength.*



At the fountain which burst forth beneath the hoofs of  
Cloudfall, fierce Bears still come to quaff the waters and gain heroic  
strength.

# ILYA AND CLOUDFALL



**F**or thirty years Ilya sat upon the stove in his mother's cottage, for he was a helpless cripple without arms or legs, and really of no use to any one, either in the house or out of it. But when these quiet years were past and over, Ilya came to his own, as you shall see.

One summer day his father and mother took down the wooden rakes and went out into the sunny meadow round which the tall pines stood to help to make the hay; and Ilya was left alone in the cottage with his thoughts.

All at once he heard a deep voice at the door which said, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." "Amen," responded Ilya at once, and three wayfarers entered after bowing at the threshold. They were old and venerable, and Ilya knew them at once to be singers of holy psalms, who never lacked food and drink among the peasants whose lives they cheered. So, when they asked him for something to drink, he spoke gently to them, partly, however, because he feared the result of their displeasure.

“Venerable masters,” he said, “whatever is within the house is yours, but, to my sorrow, I cannot rise to wait upon you.” Then the holy men looked steadily at him, and before their steadfast gaze Ilya’s eyes fell in humility as before the Holy Cross; and as he looked downwards they said to him, “Arise and wash yourself, for you shall be able to walk and to wait upon us.”

Somehow, Ilya seemed to obey them in spite of himself. He got down from the stove and walked with the legs of a full-grown man of mighty stature. Then stretching out his brawny arms he took the cup, filled it with the drink of the rye, and offered it to the holy guests on bended knee. They took it from him, drank one after the other, and gave it to him again, saying, “Drink in your turn, Ilya.” The young man obeyed without a word, and then awaited the further pleasure of the visitors.

“Ilya, son of weakness,” they said, “how is it with your strength?”

“I thank you with reverence, venerable sirs,” he replied, bowing low before them, “my strength is now such as could surely move the earth.”

The old men turned from him and regarded each other with a look of wisdom so pure and clear and like a shaft of brightest sunlight that Ilya’s eyes sought the earthen floor of the cottage once again.

Then one of the guests, who seemed to be the leader, said in a quiet voice of authority, “Give us to drink once more,” and Ilya obeyed without question. “Drink now yourself, Ilya,” they said, and he did so.

“Ilya, son of weakness,” they said, “how is it now with your strength?”

“I thank you with reverence, venerable sirs,” he said, “my strength is great, but only half the strength I had.”

“That is well,” said the old men; “if it were greater, then moist Mother Earth would be too frail to bear you.”

Then the old men told Ilya to go out into the summer sunlight, and he walked out of the cottage for the first time, followed by his deliverers; and there, standing in the light, the young man received his blessing and his charge.

“Ilya, son of strength,” they said, “it is God Himself who has redeemed you from weakness. Therefore you are bound to defend the faith of Christ against all unbelievers, however bold and daring they may be, remembering always that it is not written that you should come to your death in battle.

“In the whole white world there is none stronger than you except Svyatogor, whom you will meet before long. Avoid conflict with him, and him alone; do not spend your strength on the soil or the meadow or the forest, but set out without delay for the royal city of Kiev.”

Having spoken these words, the old men vanished, and Ilya did not see either how or where they went. He only knew that he stood alone in the light of the sun, and he stretched out his great arms as if he had just awakened from a long refreshing sleep.

Then the young giant went to seek his father and mother, and found them resting in the shade of the pine trees by the side of the meadow. The whole company was asleep, and

taking up one of their axes, Ilya began to hew at the trunks of the pines. It is a matter for wonder that the sound of the crashing trunks which was soon heard did not immediately awake the sleepers, for the young man laid about him lustily during the space of an hour, and at the end of that time had felled a small wood about the extent of a field; which is really not so very marvellous after all, seeing that he had been storing up strength for thirty years. When he had finished this work he drove all the axes lying near the sleepers into a tree-stump with a quiet laugh. "Ah," he said to himself, "they must ask me for these axes if they wish to use them again."

After a while the young man's parents and their labourers awoke from sleep, for by his tree-felling Ilya had taken away the shade, and the hot sunlight was now beating full upon their faces. With blinking eyes they looked around, and when they saw the fallen timber and the axes deeply embedded in the stump of a tree, they began somewhat slowly to be filled with very great wonder, and said to one another, "Who has done this?"

Then Ilya came out of the forest where he had been hiding and enjoying their awakening. The men were now trying in vain to draw out the axes, and he took them easily from the stump, and handed them to the wondering servants without a word being spoken on either side; for the labourers were too much dazed to break the silence by speech.

For a few moments the father and mother gazed at the tall young man, the eyes of the former dwelling upon his stature, his strong limbs, and his mighty shoulders, while the mother gazed steadfastly at the face of her son, which was radiant

with a wonderful light. Then, clasping his hands and closing his eyes, the old man gave thanks to God that he should be the father of so splendid a workman; but Ilya showed no sign of continuing in his peasant's task, for with a low bow of reverence to his parents, he strode away without a word across the open plain.

His mother watched him go in silence, and then she bowed her head as before the Holy Cross; for the light which she had seen in the young man's eyes never shone in the eyes of a woodman or of one content to spend the summer day making hay in the pine-encircled meadow.

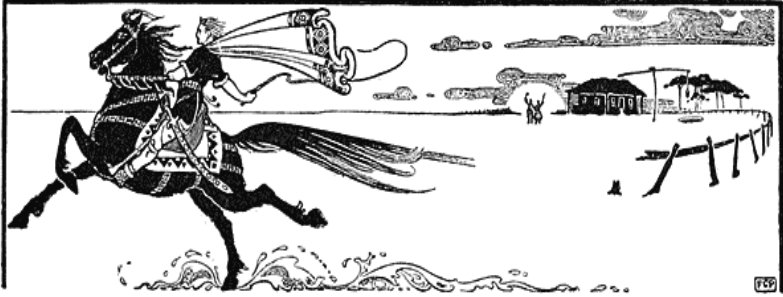
Now, as Ilya went on his way he saw a peasant walking heavily across a field, leading a shaggy brown foal, and, in spite of his manhood, this was the first foal that Ilya had ever seen. He suddenly felt a great desire to have this shaggy steed for himself, and having money in his pocket—though how it had got there he could not tell—he soon made the purchase. He paid little attention to the price asked by the greedy, crafty peasant, which was large enough as a plain matter of horse-dealing, for Ilya was no bargain driver.

“Now,” he said to himself, as he patted the shaggy mane of the little horse, “I must take three months to make this brown foal into a charger; so for that time, at least, I must dwell at home.” He therefore turned back to his father's cottage, and, to the quiet delight of his mother, lived there for the time he had appointed. Ilya did not think out his plans for himself at this time, but had a curious feeling that his way was being made plain before him without his will.

The foal was at once tied up in the beast-stall in his father's stable, and fed on the finest white Turkish wheat to the great surprise of the old man, who, however, made no remark, for the strange things now happening in his household were rather too much for him. When the shaggy brown foal had been fed for three months in this careful and very extravagant way, Ilya left it for three nights in the garden so that the Powers of Heaven might anoint it with three successive dews. After this, he made a trial of the horse, which was now very strong and frisky, and found that it had become a truly heroic charger, capable of trotting and galloping, and while full of fire and spirit, obedient to its master's lightest word. To this charger Ilya gave the name of Cloudfall, and he now made preparations for setting out on his adventures.



# ILYA MEETS SVYATOGOR AND PARTS WITH HIM



Ilya rose early one morning, dressed himself in his best, and respectfully informed his parents that he wished to leave his home. The old people, who now felt that it would be very unwise, as well as useless, to interfere in the proceedings of their wonderful son, gave him their blessing. His father then went off to his duties with a grunt, and his mother turned to her cooking on the stove with a sigh; for the stove always reminded her of the cripple boy who had been of no use to any one.

Meanwhile Ilya had saddled his good steed Cloudfall, and in a short time had ridden far across the open plain. As night was falling he came to a large tent of fair white linen which had been set up near a spreading oak tree. Peeping into this pavilion, he saw a huge bed with the skins turned down, the pillow smoothed, and everything ready for rest. So he

fastened Cloudfall to the oak, crept into the bed, and fell into a deep slumber which lasted for three days and three nights.

On the third day of the sleep of Ilya, Cloudfall raised his head from his grazing and pricked up his ears, for out of the north came a noise like an earthquake. Moist Mother Earth rocked from side to side, the tall pines shook and staggered as if they were about to fall headlong, and the water of the river suddenly heaved and then overflowed its banks. Roused by the sound, the intelligent animal beat loudly with his hoof upon the earth in the hope of rousing Ilya; but the young man slept the sleep of a tired child.

Then Cloudfall put his head through the opening of the tent and snouted above the storm in the speech of Holy Russia, "Ho, ho! Ilya, do you sleep there and take your ease, unmindful of the great misfortune that threatens to o'erwhelm you? The hero Svyatogor is coming to his pavilion where you lodge unasked. Loose me, and let me take to the open plain, and as for yourself, climb up at once into the tall oak tree on the top of yonder hillock."

It would have been *too* wonderful if Ilya had slept when this strange voice sounded in his ear. Up he sprang, fresh from his slumber and wide awake at once, as every young and healthy person must be who has slept well, loosed the thong which bound Cloudfall to the oak, and climbed without further delay into the branches of the tree on the hillock.

When he looked down, he saw Svyatogor for the first time, and there could be no doubt that he was a hero. He was taller than the trees of the wood, and his flowing locks seemed to be somewhat confused with the flying clouds. Upon his broad

shoulder he carried a casket of crystal, and when he drew near to the pavilion by the first oak tree, he stooped and set it gently upon the ground and opened it with a key of gold.

The crystal door swung back without a sound, and out stepped the wife of the hero. In all the white world no beauty like this had ever been seen or told. She was tall and stately, but she stepped as daintily as a white hind. Her eyes were clear and steady as those of the falcon, her eyebrows were as black as a starless night, and the whiteness of her skin dazzled the eyes of Ilya in his oak.

As soon as she had stepped out from the crystal casket, she prepared the table for her lord, spreading upon it a cloth of lawn with drawn thread-work as white as Russia in winter, and placing upon it sweetmeats of various kinds. Then she stepped back to her crystal casket and brought out a flagon, wondrously fashioned, containing mead, whose strength assailed the nostrils of Ilya in his oak on the hillock with a power which passed right through him. In a few moments she sat down with her husband, and the two ate and drank while the laughter of the hero shook the trunk of Ilya's oak and the gentle murmur of his fair companion's merriment rustled the leaves in a tender whisper.

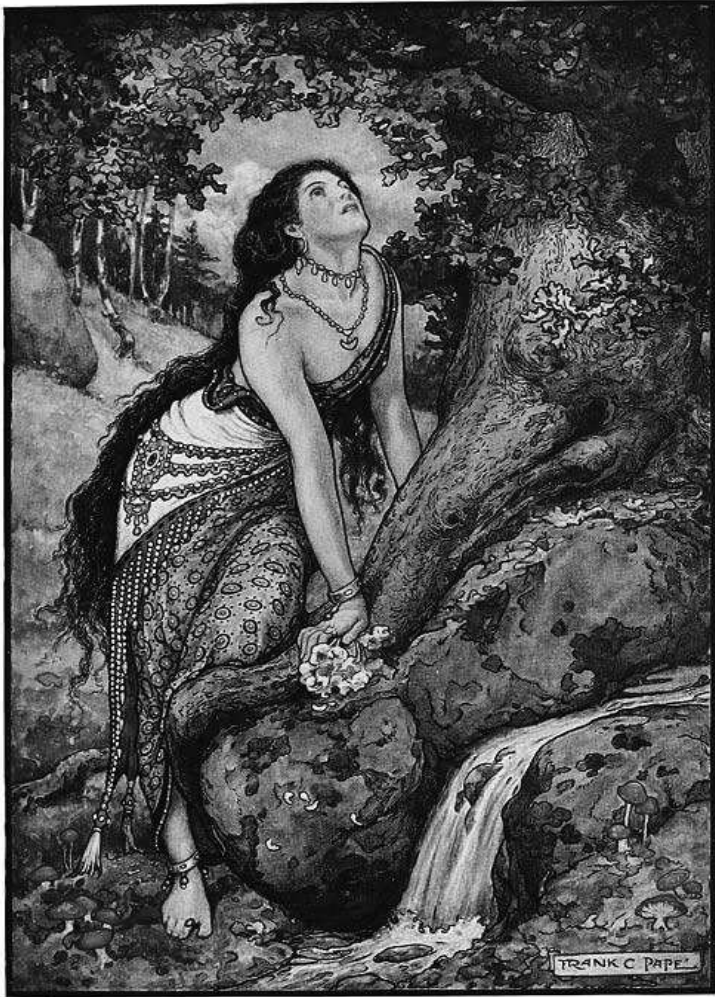
When Svyatogor had eaten well and drunk better, he went into the pavilion, lay down on the broad bed and fell fast asleep. But his beautiful wife roamed about in the open plain, singing softly to herself; and as she walked about she happened to look up, and saw Ilya, who was gazing at her so steadfastly that he seemed to be nothing but eyes.

“Come down,” cried the hero’s wife; “come down, good and stately youth. Come down out of the damp oak, or I will tell my husband that you have been unkind to me.” Now it was not in Ilya’s nature to be unkind to any one, so without further words he slipped nimbly down the trunk of the oak; and as soon as he touched the lap of moist Mother Earth, the woman popped him into the pocket of the sleeping hero, and by so doing roused the latter from his heavy sleep.

The hero stretched himself, yawned, and sat up blinking, for he was not so young as Ilya, and therefore did not wake so readily. Then he arose, placed his wife in the crystal casket, locked it with the golden key, mounted upon his horse, and took his way towards the Holy Mountains.

As the hero rode onward his horse began to bend at the knees and then to stumble, whereupon Svyatogor beat him soundly with a silken whip. The animal stopped short, turned his head and said to his master in a human voice, “I was proud enough to carry a hero and his heroic wife, casket and all, but when I am obliged to add another hero to my load, it is not surprising if I stumble.”

Svyatogor looked round, and for the first time was aware of his bulging pocket. A little further investigation showed him that he was carrying a fine young man with broad shoulders, on which was set the unmistakable head of a hero. In a moment he had drawn Ilya from his deep pocket and was holding him aloft while he questioned him with knitted brows.



“Come down,” cried the hero’s wife’

“Whence come you, young man?” he cried, and at the sound of that terrible voice the mountains shook, the forests waved, and the river found that its usual channel was not steady enough to contain it, while it occurred to Ilya that it would be best to tell the truth. So he said boldly enough, though his position could scarcely be described as dignified:

“It was the noble lady in the crystal casket who bade me come down from the oak, and who placed me in the pocket of your hero-ship.” Then the youth’s eyes were filled with terror, for a fierce frown suddenly creased the brows of Svyatogor, who turned in his saddle, after having seated Ilya before him, and hurled the crystal casket into the rushing, rocking stream.

“Lie there, faithless one,” he shouted; “it was surely of little avail to take you out locked up in a glass case if you were to speak to the first goodly young man you meet.” Then with a huge gesture of disgust he urged on his steed and took his way along the side of a rocky mountain, talking pleasantly to Ilya as if nothing had happened out of the ordinary. He asked the young man about his parents, his home, and the dearest wish of his heart, which he found was to meet himself, the famous hero Svyatogor.

“Yes, I am he,” said the rider as lightly as his huge size permitted, “and I would gladly come among you people of Holy Russia, but moist Mother Earth is too soft to bear me up, and I am forced to ride on the rocky crags and high precipices of the great mountains which are strong enough to bear the weight of myself and my steed. I will take you with me to the Holy Mountains, for you are a young man after my own heart.” And as they rode onward he told Ilya how a hero lived and how he did the deeds which roused the wonder and the fear of all men.

Suddenly Svyatogor said to Ilya, “When we come to my home, I will present you to my father. But before you meet him you must take care to heat a piece of iron in the stove, and when he comes with outstretched hand to greet you, take

further care not to place your hand within his own, but let him grasp the heated iron.”

Ilya promised to follow the instructions of his friend, and before long they came across the craggy peaks to the Holy Mountains, and on the summit of one of them Ilya saw a wonderful palace of white stone. The hero rode forward to the gateway, where he was met by his aged father, whose beard swept his knees like a snow-drift. “Welcome, my dear child,” said the old man, to whose tenderness the giant on the mighty steed was still a loving youngster. “Welcome, and thrice welcome! Have you been far afield?”

“I have been in Holy Russia, my father,” was the reply. “And what saw you in Holy Russia?” asked the old man. “Nothing but melting snow and moist land,” said Svyatogor, “too moist indeed for the feet of my steed. But stay, I did meet with some one of note, and I have brought him with me.”

The old man quickly raised his head, but the movement was merely one of habit, for his eyes were sightless. Sadly he dropped his chin once more upon his breast, and said, “Bring to me the hero of Holy Russia that I may greet him.”

In the meantime Ilya had found a piece of iron, and having also found a furnace near the gate-way, he quickly made the iron red-hot. Then he grasped the glowing metal in his hand and went forward to greet the blind father of his friend. The old man held out his hand, but Ilya did not clasp it. He placed in its palm the red-hot iron which the old man grasped as if it had been the hand of a friend returned after a long journey. As he felt its burning glow he said, “Thy hands

are the hands of a hero, O Ilya, son of strength. Now you are indeed worthy to become the younger brother of Svyatogor. Come within the palace of white stone and rest until the call comes, which comes to all true men of deeds, to sally forth upon yet another journey of adventure.”

So Ilya and his elder brother went into the palace of white stone and rested as long as they could, which was not really long, for one morning the sun shone and each found the other at the gate looking with longing eyes upon the world.

Now as he looked outward, Ilya saw to his surprise and pleasure that a horse was feeding near the outer wall of the palace of white stone. He looked more closely and found to his great delight that it was none other than his own good steed Cloudfall. Quickly he ran to the horse and gaily he greeted it, and before long he was mounted upon its back and racing to and fro over the moist grass before the palace of white stone. As he reached the gate for the third time, he found Svyatogor mounted also, and ready to set out with him in search of adventure. Then they rode out along the ridge of the Holy Mountains, and before long they came to a great casket with a lid lying by its side, and upon the lid was written the inscription, “This casket shall fit him for whom it has been hewn from the rock.”

The inscription was a plain invitation to one of adventurous spirit, and in a moment Ilya had leapt from his horse and lay at full length within the casket. But it was too long and too wide for him, and he rose saying, “It is not for me that this casket was hewn from the rock.”



“The casket was meant for me,” said Svyatogor, quietly stepping into it and lying down. His words were true enough, for his heroic body fitted it as if he had been measured for it. “Take the cover, Ilya,” he said, “and lay it over me.” But his younger brother had no desire to perform an entombment of this kind and he said:

“I will not lift the cover, elder brother, and shut you up in such a manner. Surely you would amuse yourself with what is to me a jest of the poorest kind, if you would prepare for your burial in this way!”

Svyatogor spoke not a word, but reaching forth his hands lifted the lid and covered the casket with it. Then he tried to raise it again, but found that it was easier to get into such a casket than to get out of it. He strove with all his mighty strength to lift the lid, but even this was of no avail, and he cried out through an aperture which still remained between the cover and the side of the casket, “Alas, my brother! It is clear that Fate, who is stronger than heroes, has entangled me at last. I cannot raise the lid. Try to lift it and live to say that you have rescued the prince of heroes.”

Ilya thereupon put forth all his strength but, strong as he was, he could not raise the lid. “Take my great battle-sword,” said Svyatogor, “and strike a blow across the cover.” Ilya grasped the sword, which his brother had unbuckled, before he lay down, but was not able to raise it from the earth, so great was its weight. “I cannot lift it,” he said in disgust and despair, “to say nothing of wielding it.” “Bend down to this rift,” replied his elder brother, “that I may breathe upon you with my heroic breath.” Ilya obeyed the command, and when Svyatogor had breathed warmly upon him, he felt new

strength rise within him, so that he was three times the man he had been.

He was now able to raise the sword and struck the lid of the casket a mighty blow, so that all the Holy Mountains re-echoed with the sound. Sparks of flame leapt from the lid of the casket, and an iron ridge was formed upon the stone in the path of that tremendous stroke, so as to strengthen the cover rather than weaken it.

“I stifle, younger brother,” cried the imprisoned hero. “Try the effect of another blow upon the lid of the fatal casket.” Then Ilya smote the cover lengthwise, and the sound of the blow re-echoed more loudly among the Holy Mountains; but the only effect was to raise another ridge of iron upon the lid. Again the imprisoned hero spoke imploringly.

“I die, little brother. Bend down again so that I may breathe once more upon you, and this time give you *all* my heroic strength.”

Then Ilya spoke, and as the words came from his lips he felt as if a voice within him framed them in despite of his own desires.

“My strength is enough, elder brother; if I had more, then moist Mother Earth would not be able to bear me.”

“You have done well, younger brother,” said the voice of Svyatogor, “in that you have disobeyed my last command. Had I breathed upon you again, it would have been with the breath of death. And now, farewell! Take my great battle-sword, which you have fairly won, but tether my good steed

to my iron-bound tomb. None but Svyatogor may ride that horse.”

Then Svyatogor spoke no more, and stooping to the crevice Ilya was no longer able to hear the whisper of his breathing. So he bound the good steed to the casket, girt the great battle-sword about his waist, and rode forth upon Cloudfall into the open plain. But as he turned away, he saw the tears of the imprisoned Svyatogor flowing in a crystal stream through the crevice in the iron-bound casket on the lonely hills.



# ILYA AND NIGHTINGALE THE ROBBER



**T**his is the story of the first of the nightingales, those sweet singers of the evening, each of whom, as the old books tell with certainty, sprang from a poppy seed. And the sower of the first seeds of the blood-red poppy was Ilya the Old Cossák, who rode the shaggy bay steed Cloudfall.

As for Cloudfall, the shaggy bay steed, it is well that you should try to picture him to yourselves. He had a mane of very great length, and a tail ten times as long as his mane, while the shaggy hair of his rough coat was of three colours or tints. He wore a bridle of leather plaited so as to be of enormous strength, twelve saddle-cloths and twelve felts (so cold it was in Holy Russia), and over these coverings a strong leather saddle bound with metal. He had twelve girths made of finest silk, not for display and youthful vanity, but for strength and easiness of movement. His stirrups were of engraved steel brought from Damascus, where the good sword blades are marked with strange devices; the buckles