FAIRY TALES OF THE RUSSIANS AND OTHER SLAVS

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Fairy Tales of the Russians and Other Slavs.

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The Swan-Geese
From Afanasiev’s *Russian Folk Tales* (Афанасьев, Александр. 
Народные Русские Сказки: Полное Издание в Одном Томе)
Translated by Ace and Olga Pilkington

There once lived an old man and an old woman. They had a daughter and a little son. “Daughter, daughter,” said the mother one day, “we are going to work. When we come back, we will bring you a sweet roll, we will make you a dress, we will buy you a scarf. Be a good girl, take care of your brother, and don’t leave the yard.” However, when the grown-ups had left, the girl forgot all about her duties. She set her little brother on the grass under the window while she, herself, went out into the street. She walked and played, and never worried about her brother at all.

Suddenly, swan-geese appeared. They swooped down and took the little boy away on their wings. When the girl came home, her brother was nowhere to be seen. She looked here and there, but could not find him. She called him, cried, complained that she would be harshly punished by their mother and father when they returned, but the boy didn’t answer. She ran out into the field and there caught sight of swan-geese disappearing above a black forest. She knew that swan-geese were evil birds who kidnapped little children. The girl thought that they had taken her brother. She started chasing them. She ran and ran until she came upon a stove. “Stove, stove, tell me where the swan-geese went,” asked the girl. “Eat my rye pie, and I’ll tell you,” replied the stove. “Oh, at my father’s, we don’t eat even wheat pies, let alone rye!” responded the girl, so the stove wouldn’t tell her anything.

The girl kept running. Soon, she came upon an apple tree. “Apple tree, apple tree, tell me where the swan-geese went,” asked the girl. “Eat one of my forest apples, and I’ll tell you!” said the apple tree. “Oh, at my father’s, we don’t like even orchard apples, let alone forest ones,” replied the girl and kept on running. Soon, she came upon a river of milk with banks of kisel. “Milk river with banks of kisel, tell me where the swan-geese went,” she asked. “Eat some of my kisel with milk, and I’ll tell you,” responded the river. “Oh, at my father’s, we don’t even like cream that much, let alone plain milk!” The river told her nothing.

The girl would have been running for a long time along the fields and across the woods if not for a hedgehog. When she saw him, she wanted to push
him aside, but was afraid to hurt herself, so she asked him instead, “Hedgehog, hedgehog, have you seen where the swan-geese went?”

“They went in that direction,” said the hedgehog and pointed out the right way. The girl ran where she was told to go, and soon came upon a wooden hut on chicken legs. The hut was turning round and round. Inside the hut, the girl saw Baba Yaga—her face was scary, and one of her legs was made of clay. The girl also caught a glimpse of her brother sitting on the bench and playing with golden apples. She carefully stole into the hut, took her brother, and ran away as fast as she could. But the swan-geese were sent to bring them back.

The birds were gaining on the poor children. What were they to do? There was the milk and kisel river again. “Mother-river, hide me,” pleaded the girl. “Eat some of my milk and kisel, and I will,” replied the river. The girl had nothing else to do but eat some. The river put the children under one of its banks. The swan-geese flew by. The girl climbed up, thanked the river, and continued running home. By that time, the swan-geese had returned and were flying directly toward them. What were the children to do? They came upon the apple tree. “Mother-apple tree, hide us,” pleaded the girl. “Eat my forest apple, and I will,” said the tree. The girl quickly ate an apple. The tree covered the children up with branches and leaves. The swan-geese flew by without suspecting anything. The girl came out, thanked the apple tree, and continued running home. Soon, the swan-geese came closer than ever. Hitting the girl with their wings, they almost took her little brother out of her hands. Luckily, there was a stove on the road. “Lady stove, hide us,” pleaded the girl. “Eat my rye pie, and I will,” replied the stove. The girl took the pie into her mouth and jumped into the stove just as the swan-geese came again. They flew around the stove and cried angrily, but could not get to the girl and her brother. Disappointed, they flew back to Baba Yaga. At last, the girl and her brother could run all the way home. And it was good that they came in when they did, because very soon after, her father and mother returned.
Ilya of Murom the Peasant Hero
From Isabel Florence Hapgood’s *The Epic Songs of Russia*

In the hamlet of Karacharov, by Murom town, dwelt Ilya, the old Cossack. Thirty years he sat upon the stove, having neither arms nor legs, because of his grandfather's sin. And when thirty years were past, in summer, at the time of haying, his father and mother went out to clear the forest-girdled meadows, and left Ilya alone in the cottage. Then, there came to him three wayfarers, Christ and two of his apostles, in the guise of poor brethren, strolling psalm singers, and asked him if he would give them something to drink. "Alas! You wayfarers, aged men, dear friends!" said Ilya, "full gladly would I give you something to drink, but I cannot rise, and there is none in the cottage with me." And the men answered, "Arise and wash yourself; so shall you walk and fetch us something to drink."

Then, he arose and walked, and having filled a cup with kvas, brought it to the aged men. They received it, drank, and gave it again to Ilya, saying, "Drink now after us, Ilya, son of Ivan." When he had drunk, the old men said, "How is your strength now, Ilya?" Ilya answered, "I thank you humbly, you aged men. I feel a very great strength within me so that I could even move the earth." Then the men looked at each other and said, "Give us to drink yet again." And Ilya did. And when they had drunk, they gave the cup to him the second time, and inquired, "How is it with you now, Ilya?"

"The strength I feel is very great," said Ilya, "yet but as half the former strength."

"Thus let it be," spoke the men, "for if we give you more, Mother Earth will not bear you up." And they said, "Go forth now, Ilya." So Ilya set his cup upon the table, and went out into the street with all ease, and the aged men said, "God has blessed you, Ilya, with this strength of His. Therefore, defend the Christian faith, fight against all infidel hosts, bold warriors and daring heroes, for it is written that death shall not come to you in battle. Stronger than you there is none in the white world, save only Volga, (and he will take you not by might but by craft), and Svyatogor, and, stronger yet, beloved of Moist Mother Earth, Mikula Selianinovich, the Villager's Son. Against these three do not attempt to fight. But do not live at home, do not labor here; instead, go to royal Kiev town." And then, the men vanished.

So, Ilya went to his father in the clearing, and found him with Ilya’s mother, and the laborers reposing from their toil. He grasped their axes and...
began to hew, and what his father with the laborers could not have done in three
days, that Ilya achieved in the space of one hour. Having thus felled a whole field
of timber, he drove the axes deep into a stump, from which no man could draw
them.

When his father and mother with their laborers woke and beheld the axes,
they marveled, saying, "Who has done this?" Then Ilya came back from the forest,
and drew the axes from the stump, and his father gave thanks to God that his son
should be so famous a workman. But Ilya strode far over the open steppe, and as
he went, he beheld a peasant leading a shaggy brown foal, the first he had seen.
What the peasant demanded for the foal, that Ilya paid. For the space of three
months, he tied the foal in the stall, feeding it with the finest white Turkish
wheat, and watering it from the pure spring. After these months were
past, he
bound the foal for three nights in the garden, anointing it with three dews. When
that was done, he led the foal to the lofty paling, and the good brown began to
leap from side to side, and was able to sustain Ilya's vast weight; for he had
become a heroic steed. All this Ilya did according to the commands of the aged
psalm singers who had healed him.

Then Ilya saddled his good steed Cloudfall, prostrated himself, received
the farewell blessing of father and mother, and rode forth far over the open plain.