

"The Tale of Iván Tsarévich, the Bird of Light, and the Grey Wolf",
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Russian Folk Tale

THE TALE OF IVÁN TSARÉVICH, THE BIRD OF LIGHT, AND THE GREY WOLF

There was once, in a certain kingdom, a certain state, where there lived Tsar Výslav Andrónovich, who had three sons: the first was called Dmítri Tsarévich, the second Vasíli Tsarévich, and the third Iván Tsarévich. This Tsar had a garden so rich that in no other kingdom was there any better, and in that garden many rare trees grew with fruits and without fruits. And the Tsar had an apple-tree which he especially loved, and on that apple-tree all the apples that grew were of gold. But it happened that the Bird of Light began to fly to visit Tsar Výslav. The feathers of the bird were all gold, but the eyes were like crystal of the East. It flew into the garden every night and sat on the apple-tree beloved of Tsar Výslav, and used to pluck down the golden apples and fly away. Tsar Výslav Andrónovich was deeply afflicted, and he called to him his three sons and said to them: “My beloved children, which of you will go into my garden and catch the Bird of Light? He who captures it alive, I will in my lifetime give him the half of my kingdom, and at my death he shall have it all.”

Then his children, the Tsarévichi, said in a single voice: “Gracious lord, our father, Your Imperial Majesty, we will, with the greatest pleasure, try to catch the Bird of Light alive.”

On the first night Dmítri Tsarévich went into the garden and sat under the apple-tree from which the Bird of Light used to steal the apples; but he went to sleep, 79 and he never heard when the Bird of Light flew up and again plucked off many apples.

In the morning Tsar Výslav Andrónovich called his son Dmítri to him, and he asked him: “Well, my beloved son, did you see the Bird of Light, or did you not?” And he answered: “Father, gracious lord, this night it did not come.”

So the next night Vasíli Tsarévich went to keep watch in the garden. He sat under the same apple-tree, and sat there one hour and went to sleep so soundly that he never heard the coming of the Bird of Light, which flew on to the tree, perched on it, and plucked many apples.

In the morning the Tsar called his second son and questioned him, and he answered: “Gracious lord, my father, this night the Bird of Light did not come.”

And on the third night Iván Tsarévich went into the garden to watch, and sat under the same apple-tree; and he waited one hour, a second hour, and a third hour; and then the whole garden lit up as though it shone with many fires, and the Bird of Light flew in and sat on the apple-tree and began to pluck the apples. Iván Tsarévich stole under it so warily, and seized it by its tail, only he could not keep hold of it; and had only one feather out of its tail.

In the morning, when Tsar Výslav awoke from his sleep, Iván Tsarévich went to him, and gave him the feather of the Bird of Light. Tsar Výslav was very glad that his youngest son had succeeded, although he had only a single feather; and this feather was so marvellous and bright that you had only to take it into some dark attic and it shone as bright as the red sun. Tsar Výslav put the feather into his cabinet as an article which

he must keep for ever; and from that time forward the Bird of Light never flew into the garden.

Tsar Vyslav once again called his children unto him and said, “My beloved sons, do ye journey forth: I will 80 give you my blessing. You must seek for the Bird of Light and bring it to me alive; and what I promised you before, he who captures the Bird of Light shall have.”

Dmítiri and Vasíli were envious of their younger brother Iván that he had succeeded in pulling the feather out of the Bird of Light’s tail. But Iván Tsarévich asked leave of his father and his blessing. Tsar Vyslav tried to keep Iván back, but he could not, and he let him go at his unrelaxing prayer. Iván Tsarévich received his father’s blessing, took his horse, and went on his journey, journeying forth, not knowing whither he was going.

And as he went on the road and way—it may be near, it may be far, it may be high, it may be low, the tale is soon told, but the deed is not soon done—at last he reached an open field and green meadows. And in the open field there stood a stone column, and on the column these words were written:

“Whosoever goes on straight from this column, he shall have hunger and cold. Whosoever goes to the right, he shall have health and life, but his horse shall be slain. And whosoever goes to the left, he shall himself be slain, but his horse shall have life and be healthy.”

Iván Tsarévich read this inscription, and he went to the right, bethinking himself, if his horse were to be slain, anyhow he would remain alive. So he went on one day, and a second and a third day, and suddenly a fierce grey Wolf met him and said: “All hail to thee, warrior! Doughty of might, Iván Tsarévich, hast thou read how it is written on the column that thy horse shall be slain? So why hast thou ridden this way?” And the Wolf, speaking these words, cleft the horse of the young Iván Tsarévich in two and went far aside.

Iván Tsarévich wept bitterly for his horse, and he went on on foot. And he went one whole day and grew 81 very, very tired; and when he wanted to sit down and to rest, suddenly the grey Wolf came up to him and said: “I have pity for you, Iván Tsarévich, that you are tiring yourself going on foot. Come, sit on me—on the grey Wolf—and say whither I shall take you and wherefore.” Iván Tsarévich told the grey Wolf where he wanted to go, and the grey Wolf flew off with him swifter than any horse; and, in a short time, as it might be in a single night, he conducted Iván Tsarévich to a stone wall, stopped, and said: “Now, Iván Tsarévich, jump off me—off the grey Wolf—and go through this stone wall. There is a garden behind the wall, and in that garden the Bird of Light is sitting in a golden cage. You must take the Bird of Light, but you must not touch the golden cage, or they will capture you at once.”

Iván Tsarévich slipped through the stone wall into the garden, saw the Bird of Light in the golden cage, and was very pleased. He took the Bird out of the cage, and was going back, and then he thought and said to himself: “Why should I take the Bird of Light without the cage? Where shall I put it?” So he turned back, and as soon as ever he had taken the golden cage there was a clamour and a clangour in the garden as though there were ropes attached to the cage. All the watchmen woke up, ran up into the garden,

seized Iván Tsarévich with the Bird of Light, and took him to their Tsar, who was called Dolmát.

Tsar Dolmát was very angry with Iván Tsarévich, and shrieked in a wrathful tone: “Are you not ashamed of yourself, young man, to come stealing? Who are you—of what land? Who was your father? How do they call you on earth?”

Iván Tsarévich answered him: “I am the son of Tsar Výslav Andrónovich, and they call me Iván Tsarévich. Your Bird of Light flew into the garden every night and stole the golden apples from the apple-tree ⁸²my father loved, and for that reason my father sent me to seek the Bird of Light and to take it to him.”

“Oh, thou brave youth, Iván Tsarévich!” Tsar Dolmát cried. “I would certainly have given you the bird, but what did you do? If you had come to me, I should have given you the Bird of Light as an honour; but, now, would it be well, were I to send you into all kingdoms to proclaim how you came into my realm and dealt dishonourably? Now listen, Iván Tsarévich. If you will do me this service, if you will go across thrice nine kingdoms into the thrice-tenth realm, and will there obtain me from Tsar Afrón the golden-maned horse, I will forgive your sin, and I will give you the Bird of Light, and will do you great honour.”

And Iván Tsarévich became very sorrowful, and left Tsar Dolmát, found the grey Wolf, and told him of everything.

“Hail to thee, warrior, doughty of might!” the grey Wolf said to him. “Why did you not listen to my words? Why did you take the golden cage?”

“I am guilty,” Iván Tsarévich said to the Wolf.

“Well, so be it,” said the grey Wolf. “Sit on me—on the grey Wolf. I will take you wherever you wish.”

Iván Tsarévich sat on the grey Wolf’s back, and the Wolf chased as fast as a dart and ran may-be far, may-be near, and at last he reached the kingdom of Tsar Afrón at night-time; and when he had come to the white-stoned stables of the Tsar, the grey Wolf said to Iván Tsarévich: “Get down, Iván, go into the white-stoned stables, and take the golden-maned horse; only there hangs a golden bridle on the wall which you are not to touch, or it will go ill with you.”

Iván Tsarévich went into the white-stoned stables, took the horse, and went back. But he saw the golden bridle on the wall, and when his glance fell on it he took it from the hook. And as soon as he touched it there was ⁸³a clangour and a clamour throughout all the stables as though there were ropes attached to the bridle. All the watchmen woke up, ran into the stable, seized Iván Tsarévich with the golden-maned steed and took him to their Tsar Afrón.

Tsar Afrón was very angry with Iván Tsarévich, and asked him who he was, who was his father, and what was his name. When Iván had told him also of his errand, he said: “I would have certainly given you the golden-maned horse if you had asked me for it, but since you have dealt thus dishonourably with me, you must do me this service, and then I will give you the golden-maned horse with the bridle: you must ride across thrice-nine lands into the thrice-tenth kingdom and gain me Princess Eléna the Fair, whom I have for long loved with all my heart and soul, but cannot gain. In return for this I will forgive you, and give you what you sought as an honour: but if you do not do me this

service I will proclaim throughout all the realms of the world that you are a dishonourable thief.”

Iván Tsarévich went out of the palace and began to weep bitterly: then he came to the grey Wolf and related how it had gone with him.

“Hail to thee, brave warrior, doughty of might!” the grey Wolf said. “Why did you not listen to my words, and take the golden bridle?”

“I have been guilty before you,” said Iván Tsarévich.

“Well, so be it,” the grey Wolf went on. “Sit on my back, on the grey Wolf: I will take you wherever you require.”

So Iván Tsarévich sat on the grey Wolf’s back, and the grey Wolf scoured as fast as a dart, and at last he arrived at the kingdom of Princess Eléna the Fair, to the golden palisade which surrounded the wonderful garden; and the Wolf said to the Tsarévich: “Iván Tsarévich, slip off my back, off the grey Wolf, and go 84 behind on that road and wait for me in the open field under the green oak.” Iván Tsarévich went as he was bidden, and the grey Wolf sat near the golden palisade, waiting until Princess Eléna the Fair should come into the garden to walk.

In the evening, when the little sun was setting fast to the West, Princess Eléna the Fair went into the garden to take a walk with all of her maids of honour and servants and attendants and all the *boyáryni*^[17] around. When she came to the place where the grey Wolf sat behind the railing, suddenly the grey Wolf leapt across the grating to the garden, seized Princess Eléna the Fair, leapt back and ran away with all his might and strength. He then went into the open field under the green oak where Iván Tsarévich was waiting, and said, “Iván Tsarévich, come sit on my back, on the grey Wolf swiftly.” Iván Tsarévich sat on him, and the grey Wolf scoured off with them both fast to the kingdom of Tsar Afrôn.

All the maids of honour and servants and attendants and *boyáryni* ran swiftly into the palace and began to set a hunt on foot, but however many the hunters that hunted, they could not hunt down the grey Wolf, and so they all turned back home again frustrated.

Iván Tsarévich, seated on the grey Wolf’s back with Princess Eléna the Fair, fell in love with her and she with him: and when the grey Wolf arrived at the garden of Tsar Afrón, the Tsarévich grew very sad and began to weep tears.

The grey Wolf asked him, “Why are you weeping, Tsarévich?”

And Iván Tsarévich answered him, “O my friend, the grey Wolf, how shall it be to me, the doughty youth, not to weep, not to be afflicted? I love Princess Eléna the Fair with all my heart, and now I must give her up to Tsar Afrón in exchange for the golden-maned horse: 85 and, if I do not give her up, then Tsar Afrón will dishonour me throughout all the kingdoms.”

“I have served you well, Iván Tsarévich,” the grey Wolf replied, “and I will serve you yet this service. Listen, Iván Tsarévich, I will turn myself into the fair Princess Eléna, and you will take me to Tsar Afrón and be given the golden-maned horse: he will then take me as his queen, and when you sit on the golden-maned horse and you ride far away, then I will ask Tsar Afrón leave to walk in the open field, and when he lets me go with the maids of honour and servants and serving-maids and attendants and the *boyáryni*, then think of me, and I shall be with you once again.”

His speech finished, the grey Wolf struck the grey earth and he turned himself into Princess Eléna.

Iván Tsarévich took the grey Wolf and went into the palace of Tsar Afrón together with the supposed Eléna the Fair. Then the Tsar was very joyous in his heart that he had received such a treasure, which he had been desiring for long, and he gave the golden-maned horse to Iván Tsarévich. Iván Tsarévich sat on the horse, and he went behind the town and he placed Eléna the Fair on it, and they went away, taking their road to the kingdom of Tsar Dolmát.

The grey Wolf stayed one day with Tsar Afrón, and a second day and a third in the stead of fair Princess Eléna. And then he asked leave of Tsar Afrón to go and walk in the open field, that he might drive out the ravening sorrow from his heart. Then Tsar Afrón said to him: “O my fair Queen Eléna, I will do anything for you,” and he promptly bade the maids of honour, the servants, the attendants and the *boyáryni* to go with him and the fair Princess into the open field to walk.

Iván Tsarévich went on his way and rode with Eléna the Fair, and they had almost forgotten the grey Wolf, 86 when he suddenly recollected: “Oh, where is my grey Wolf?”

Then, from some source unknown, he stood in front of Iván Tsarévich and said, “Sit on me, Iván Tsarévich, on the grey Wolf, and the fair Princess can go on the golden-maned steed.”

Iván Tsarévich sat on the grey Wolf, and so they went on to the realm of Tsar Dolmát, may-be far or near; and when they reached that kingdom then they stopped three versts out of the town, and Iván began to beseech the grey Wolf: “Listen to me, my beloved friend, the grey Wolf; you have served me so many services, serve me a last: can you not turn yourself into the golden-maned horse?”

Then the grey Wolf struck the grey earth and became the golden-maned horse; and Iván Tsarévich left the Fair Eléna in the green meadow, sat on the grey Wolf and went into the palace to Tsar Dolmát; and as soon as ever Tsar Dolmát saw Iván Tsarévich, that he was riding the golden-maned horse, he came out of his palace, met the Tsarévich in the open courtyard, kissed him on his smooth cheeks, took him by his right hand and led him into the white-stoned palace. Tsar Dolmát for such a joy bade a feast be prepared, and they sat at the oaken tables by the chequered table-cloths, and they ate, drank and made merry for two days. On the third day Tsar Dolmát delivered to Iván the Bird of Light with the golden cage. The Tsarévich took the golden Bird, went outside the town, sat on the golden-maned horse together with the Princess Eléna, and went back to his own country.

Tsar Dolmát thought the next day he would take his golden-maned horse into the open fields, and as soon as ever he had angered the horse, it reared and was turned into a great grey Wolf who raced off.

When it came up with Iván Tsarévich it said, “Sit 87 on me, on the grey Wolf, and Princess Eléna the Fair she can ride on the golden-maned horse.”

Iván Tsarévich sat on the grey Wolf and they went a third journey. Soon the grey Wolf took Iván Tsarévich to the place where he had cleft his horse in two, and said: “Now, Iván Tsarévich, I have served you well, faithfully and truly: on this spot I cleft

your horse in two, and up to this spot I have brought you again: slip off me, off the grey Wolf; now you have your golden-maned horse, I can serve you no more.”

The grey Wolf spoke these words and went into the forest; and Iván Tsarévich wept bitterly for the grey Wolf, and went on his road with the fair Eléna on the golden-maned horse. And before he reached his own kingdom and when he was only twenty *versts* off, he stopped, got off his horse, and together with the fair Eléna went under a tree: he tied the golden-maned horse to that same tree, and he took the cage with the Bird of Light with him; and lying on the grass engaged in loving conversations they went to sleep.

Now it happened at this time that the brothers of Iván Tsarévich, Dmítiri and Vasíli, were riding out in different states and could not find the Bird of Light. They were just returning to their kingdom with empty hands, and they were provoked. And they lit upon their sleeping brother with the fair Princess Eléna. When they saw the golden-maned horse and the Bird of Light in the golden cage on the grass they were delighted, and thought that they would slay their brother Iván Tsarévich. Dmítiri took his sword out of his sheath and cleft Iván Tsarévich, and then he roused the fair Princess Eléna and began to ask her: “Fair maiden, from what kingdom art thou, who was thy father, how do they call thee on earth?”

And the fair Princess Eléna, seeing Iván Tsarévich dead, was sore afraid, and with bitter tears spake. “I ⁸⁸am Princess Eléna the Fair; and Iván Tsarévich found me, whom ye have slain, whom ye have given over to an evil death: if ye were good champions, ye would have gone with him into the open field and have slain him in fair fight. But ye have slain him in his sleep, and how shall ye receive praise? Is not a man asleep as one dead?”

Then Dmítiri Tsarévich put his sword to the breast of fair Princess Eléna: “Listen, Eléna the Fair, you are now in our hands: we will take you to our father, Tsar Výslav Andrónovich, and you are to tell him that we found you and the Bird of Light and the golden-maned steed. If you do not say this, we will slay you at once.”

Princess Eléna the Fair was frightened to death, and swore by all the holy relics that she would do as she was bidden. Then Dmítiri Tsarévich and Vasíli Tsarévich began to cast lots who should have the fair Princess Eléna and who should have the golden-maned horse, and the lot fell that the fair Princess Eléna should belong to Vasíli and the horse to Dmítiri.

Iván Tsarévich lay down dead on that spot for thirty days, and in that time the grey Wolf ran up to him and he recognised Iván Tsarévich by his breath, and he wished to help him and revive him, but he did not know how. Then at that time he saw a crow and two nestlings flying round the body, who wished to land there and to eat the flesh of Iván Tsarévich. The grey Wolf sprang from behind the bush, laid hold of one of the nestlings and was going to tear it in two. Then the crow flung himself on earth and sat not far from the grey Wolf on the fields. “Don’t touch my child; it has not done you any harm!”

“Listen, Vóron Vóronovich: I will not touch your son if you will do me a service; to fly across thrice-nine lands into the thrice-tenth realm and bring me the waters of Life and Death.”

⁸⁹Then the crow said, “Grey Wolf, I will do this service; only do not touch my son.” And the crow spoke these words and flew away.

On the third day the crow flew back and brought with him two phials: in one was the water of Life and in the other the water of Death. And he gave these to the grey Wolf; and the grey Wolf took the phials, cut the nestling into two, sprinkled him with the dead water, and the nestling grew together; then he sprinkled him with the water of Life, and the nestling shook himself and flew away.

Then the grey Wolf sprinkled Iván Tsarévich with the water of Death, and his body clove together; and he sprinkled him then with the water of Life, and Iván Tsarévich stood up alive and said: “Oh, what a long sleep I have had!”

And the grey Wolf said to him, “Yes, Iván Tsarévich, you might have slept for ever if I had not been here: for your brothers have plundered you, and they have taken Princess Eléna the Fair and the golden-maned horse and the Bird of Light with them. Now listen, and return to your kingdom as fast as you can: your brother Vasíli is to-day going to marry your bride, Princess Eléna the Fair. You must hasten there as fast as possible. Sit on me, on the grey Wolf, and I will take you there.”

Iván Tsarévich sat on the grey Wolf, and the Wolf ran with him into the kingdom of Tsar Výslav Andrónovich, and, whether it be long or whether it be far or whether it be near, they reached the town. Iván Tsarévich slipped off the grey Wolf and went into the town and arrived at the palace, and waited until his brother had returned with the Princess from the crowning; and they were sitting down at table.

When Eléna the Fair saw Iván Tsarévich, she jumped up at once from her chair and began to kiss his sweet 90lips and to cry out, “O my beloved bridegroom, Iván Tsarévich: this is he, and not that other who sits at table.”

Then Tsar Výslav Andrónovich stood up from his place and began to ask, and began to question the Princess Eléna the Fair what this might mean. Then the fair Princess told him all the real truth, how it had been.

Tsar Výslav Andrónovich was then very wroth with Dmítri and Vasíli and sent them into the darkness of the dungeon. Iván Tsarévich married Princess Eléna the Fair and lived with her friendlywise and lovingly, so that one might never be seen anywhere without the other.