



# *The Story of Tremsin, the Bird Zhar, and Nastasia, the Lovely Maid of the Sea*

Robert Nisbet Bain  
Ukrainian

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*Intermediate*  
*14 min read*

There was once upon a time a man and a woman, and they had one little boy. In the summertime they used to go out and mow corn in the fields, and one summer when they had laid their little lad by the side of a sheaf, an eagle swooped down, caught up the child, carried him into a forest, and laid him in its nest. Now in this forest three bandits chanced to be wandering at the same time. They heard the child crying in the eagle's nest: "Oo-oo! oo-oo! oo-oo!" so they went up to the oak on which was the nest and said one to another, "Let us hew down the tree and kill the child!"--"No," replied one of them, "it were better to climb up the tree and bring him down alive." So he climbed up the tree and brought down the lad, and they nurtured him and gave him the name of Tremsin. They brought up Tremsin until he became a youth, and then they gave him a horse, set him upon it, and said to him, "Now go out into the wide world and search for thy father and thy mother!"

{Note: You can read an illustrated version of this story, plus other mermaid tales, in our collection *Mermaid Tales: The Little Mermaid and 14 Other Illustrated Mermaid Stories*, now available for Amazon Kindle.}

So Tremsin went out into the wide world and pastured his steed on the vast steppes, and his steed spoke to him and said, “When we have gone a little farther, thou wilt see before thee a plume of the Bird Zhar; pick it not up, or sore trouble will be thine!” Then they went on again. They went on and on, through ten tsardoms they went, till they came to another empire in the land of Thrice Ten where lay the feather. And the youth said to himself, “Why should I not pick up the feather when it shines so brightly even from afar?”

And he went near to the feather, and it shone so that the like of it cannot be expressed or conceived or imagined or even told of in tales. Then Tremsin picked up the feather and went into the town over against him, and in that town there lived a rich nobleman. And Tremsin entered the house of this nobleman and said, “Sir, may I not take service with thee as a labourer?”—The nobleman looked at him, and seeing that he was comely and stalwart, “Why not? Of course thou mayst,” said he. So he took him into his service.

Now this nobleman had many servants, and they curried his horses for him, and made them smart and glossy against the day he should go a-hunting. And Tremsin began to curry his horse likewise, and the servants of the nobleman could not make the horses of their master so shining bright as Tremsin made his own horse. So they looked more closely, and they perceived that when Tremsin cleaned his horse he stroked it with the feather of the Bird Zhar, and the coat of the good steed straightway shone like burnished silver.

Then those servants were filled with envy, and said among themselves, “How can we remove this fellow from the world? We’ll saddle him with a task he is unable to do, and then our master will drive him away.”—So they went to their master and said, “Tremsin has a feather of the Bird Zhar, and he says that if he likes he can get the Bird Zhar itself.” Then the nobleman sent for Tremsin and said to him, “O Tremsin! my henchmen say that thou canst get the Bird Zhar if thou dost choose.”

--“Nay, but I cannot,” replied Tremsin.--“Answer me not,” said the nobleman, “for so sure as I’ve a sword, I’ll slice thy head off like a gourd.”

--Then Tremsin fell a-weeping and went away to his horse. "My master," said he, "hath given me a task to do that will clean undo me."--"What task is that?" asked the horse.

--"Why, to fetch him the Bird Zhar."

--"Why that's not a task, but a trifle," replied the horse. "Let us go to the steppes," it continued, "and let me go a-browsing; but do thou strip thyself stark-naked and lie down in the grass, and the Bird Zhar will straightway swoop down to feed. So long as she only claws about thy body, touch her not; but as soon as she begins to claw at thine eyes, seize her by the legs."

So when they got to the wild steppes, Tremsin stripped himself naked and flung himself in the grass, and, immediately, the Bird Zhar swooped down and began pecking all about him, and at last she pecked at his eyes. Then Tremsin seized her by both legs, and mounted his horse and took the Bird Zhar to the nobleman. Then his fellow-servants were more envious than ever, and they said among themselves, "How shall we devise for him a task to do that cannot be done, and so rid the world of him altogether?"

So they bethought them, and then they went to the nobleman and said, "Tremsin says that to get the Bird Zhar was nothing, and that he is also able to get the thrice-lovely Nastasia of the sea." Then the nobleman again sent for Tremsin and said to him, "Look now! thou didst get for me the Bird Zhar, see that thou now also gettest for me the thrice-lovely Nastasia of the sea."

--"But I cannot, sir!" said Tremsin.--"Answer me not so!" replied the nobleman, "for so sure as I've a sword, I'll slice thy head off like a gourd an thou bring her not."--Then Tremsin went out to his horse and fell a-weeping.--"Wherefore dost thou weep?" asked the faithful steed.

--"Wherefore should I not weep?" he replied. "My master has given me a task that cannot be done."--"What task is that?"--"Why, to fetch him the thrice-lovely Nastasia of the sea!"

--"Oh-ho!" laughed the horse, "that is not a task, but a trifle. Go to thy master and say, 'Cause white tents to be raised by the sea-shore, and buy wares of sundry kinds, and wine and spirits in bottles and flasks,' and the thrice-lovely Nastasia will come and purchase thy wares, and then thou mayst take her."

And the nobleman did so. He caused white tents to be pitched by the sea-shore, and bought kerchiefs and

scarves and spread them out gaily, and made great store of wine and brandy in bottles and flasks. Then Tremsin rode toward the tents, and while he was on the way his horse said to him, "Now when I go to graze, do thou lie down and feign to sleep. Then the thrice-lovely Nastasia will appear and say, 'What for thy wares?' but do thou keep silence. But when she begins to taste of the wine and the brandy, then she will go to sleep in the tent, and thou canst catch her easily and hold her fast!"

Then Tremsin lay down and feigned to sleep, and forth from the sea came the thrice-lovely Nastasia, and went up to the tents and asked, "Merchant, merchant, what for thy wares?" But he lay there, and moved never a limb. She asked the same thing over and over again, but, getting no answer, went into the tents where stood the flasks and the bottles. She tasted of the wine. How good it was! She tasted of the brandy. That was still better. So from tasting she fell to drinking. First she drank a little, and then she drank a little more, and at last she went asleep in the tent. Then Tremsin seized the thrice-lovely Nastasia and put her behind him on horseback, and carried her off to the nobleman.

The nobleman praised Tremsin exceedingly, but the thrice-lovely Nastasia said, "Look now! since thou hast found the feather of the Bird Zhar, and the Bird Zhar herself, since also thou hast found me, thou must now fetch me also my little coral necklace from the sea!" Then Tremsin went out to his faithful steed and wept sorely, and told him all about it. And the horse said to him, "Did I not tell thee that grievous woe would come upon thee if thou didst pick up that feather?" But the horse added, "Come! weep not! after all 'tis not a task, but a trifle." Then they went along by the sea, and the horse said to him, "Let me out to graze, and then keep watch till thou seest a crab come forth from the sea, and then say to him, 'I'll catch thee.'"

--So Tremsin let his horse out to graze, and he himself stood by the sea-shore, and watched and watched till he saw a crab come swimming along. Then he said to the crab, "I'll catch thee."--"Oh! seize me not!" said the crab, "but let me get back into the sea, and I'll be of great service to thee."--"Very well," said Tremsin, "but thou must get me from the sea the coral necklace of the thrice-lovely Nastasia," and with that he let the crab go back into the sea again.

Then the crab called together all her young crabs, and they collected all the coral and brought it ashore, and gave it to Tremsin. Then the faithful steed came running up, and Tremsin mounted it, and took the coral to the thrice-lovely Nastasia. "Well," said Nastasia, "thou hast got the feather of the Bird Zhar, thou hast got the Bird

Zhar itself, thou hast got me my coral, get me now from the sea my herd of wild horses!"--Then Tremsin was sore distressed, and went to his faithful steed and wept bitterly, and told him all about it. "Well," said the horse, "this time 'tis no trifle, but a real hard task. Go now to thy master, and bid him buy twenty hides, and twenty poods (40 lbs.) of pitch, and twenty poods of flax, and twenty poods of hair."

--So Tremsin went to his master and told him, and his master bought it all. Then Tremsin loaded his horse with all this, and to the sea they went together. And when they came to the sea the horse said, "Now lay upon me the hides and the tar and the flax, and lay them in this order--first a hide, and then a pood of tar, and then a pood of flax, and so on, laying them thus till they are all laid."

Tremsin did so. "And now," said the horse, "I shall plunge into the sea, and when thou seest a large red wave driving toward the shore, run away till the red wave has passed and thou dost see a white wave coming, and then sit down on the shore and keep watch. I shall then come out of the sea, and after me the whole herd; then thou must strike with the horsehair the horse which gallops immediately after me, and he will not be too strong for thee."--So the faithful steed plunged into the sea, and Tremsin sat down on the shore and watched. The horse swam to a bosquet that rose out of the sea, and there the herd of sea-horses was grazing.

When the strong charger of Nastasia saw him and the hides he carried on his back, it set off after him at full tilt, and the whole herd followed the strong charger of Nastasia. They drove the horse with the hides into the sea, and pursued him. Then the strong charger of Nastasia caught up the steed of Tremsin and tore off one of his hides, and began to worry it with his teeth and tear it to fragments as he ran. Then he caught him up a second time, and tore off another hide, and began to worry that in like manner till he had torn it also to shreds; and thus he ran after Tremsin's steed for seventy miles, till he had torn off all the hides, and worried them to bits. But Tremsin sat upon the sea-shore till he saw the large white billow bounding in, and behind the billow came his own horse, and behind his own horse came the thrice-terrible charger of the thrice-lovely Nastasia, with the whole herd at his heels. Tremsin struck him full on the forehead with the twenty poods of hair, and immediately he stood stock still.

Then Tremsin threw a halter over him, mounted, and drove the whole herd to the thrice-lovely Nastasia. Nastasia praised Tremsin for his prowess, and said to him, "Well, thou hast got the feather of the Bird Zhar, thou hast got the Bird Zhar itself, thou hast got me my coral and my herd of horses, now milk my mare and put

the milk into three vats, so that there may be milk hot as boiling water in the first vat, lukewarm milk in the second vat, and icy cold milk in the third vat.” Then Tremsin went to his faithful steed and wept bitterly, and the horse said to him, “Wherefore dost thou weep?”--“Why should I not weep?” cried he; “the thrice-lovely Nastasia has given me a task to do that cannot be done. I am to fill three vats with the milk from her mare, and the milk must be boiling hot in the first vat, and lukewarm in the second, and icy cold in the third vat.”

--“Oh-ho!” cried the horse, “that is not a task, but a trifle. I’ll caress the mare, and then go on nibbling till thou hast milked all three vats full.” So Tremsin did so. He milked the three vats full, and the milk in the first vat was boiling hot, and in the second vat warm, and in the third vat freezing cold. When all was ready the thrice-lovely Nastasia said to Tremsin, “Now, leap first of all into the cold vat, and then into the warm vat, and then into the boiling hot vat!”

--Tremsin leaped into the first vat, and leaped out again an old man; he leaped into the second vat, and leaped out again a youth; he leaped into the third vat, but when he leaped out again, he was so young and handsome that no pen can describe it, and no tale can tell of it. Then the thrice-lovely Nastasia herself leaped into the vats. She leaped into the first vat, and came out an old woman; she leaped into the second vat, and came out a young maid; but when she leaped out of the third vat, she was so handsome and goodly that no pen can describe it, and no tale can tell of it. Then the thrice-lovely Nastasia made the nobleman leap into the vats. He leaped into the first vat, and became quite old; he leaped into the second vat, and became quite young; he leaped into the third vat, and burst to pieces. Then Tremsin took unto himself the thrice-lovely Nastasia to wife, and they lived happily together on the nobleman’s estate, and the evil servants they drove right away.

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