

# The Tale of Tsar Saltan, of His Son, the Glorious and Mighty Knight Prince Guidon Saltonovich, and of the Fair Swan-Princess

by Alexander Pushkin

Three fair maidens, late one night,  
Sat and spun by candlelight.  
"Were our tsar to marry me,"  
Said the eldest of the three,  
"I would cook and I would bake—  
Oh, what royal feasts I'd make."  
Said the second of the three:  
"Were our tsar to marry me,  
I would weave a cloth of gold  
Fair and wondrous to behold."  
But the youngest of the three  
Murmured: "If he married me—  
I would give our tsar an heir  
Handsome, brave, beyond compare."

At these words their chamber door  
Gently creaked— and lo, before  
These three maidens' very eyes  
Stood their tsar, to their surprise.  
He had listened by their gate  
Whither he'd been led by fate,  
And the words that he heard last  
Made his heart with love beat fast.  
"Greetings, maiden fair," said he—  
"My tsaritsa you shall be,  
And, ere next September's done,  
See that you bear me a son.  
As for you, fair sisters two,  
Leave your home without ado;  
Leave your home and follow me  
And my bride that is to be.  
Royal weaver, YOU I'll make,  
YOU as royal cook I'll take."

Then the tsar strode forth, and they  
Palacewards all made their way.  
There, he lost no time nor tarried  
That same evening he was married;  
Tsar Saltan and his young bride

At the feast sat side by side.  
Then the guests, with solemn air,  
Led the newly wedded pair  
To their iv'ry couch, snow-white,  
Where they left them for the night.  
Bitterly, the weaver sighed,  
And the cook in passion cried,  
Full of jealousy and hate  
Of their sister's happy fate.  
But, by love and duty fired,  
She conceived, ere night expired,  
In her royal husband's arms.

These were days of war's alarms.  
Ere he rode forth for the strife,  
Tsar Saltan embraced his wife,  
Bidding her to take good care  
Of herself and coming heir;  
While he battled on the field,  
Forcing countless foes to yield,  
God gave unto her an heir—  
Lusty, large of limb, and fair.  
Like a mother eagle, she  
Guarded him most jealously;  
Sent the news of God's glad gift  
To the tsar, by rider swift.  
But the royal cook, and weaver,  
And their mother, sly deceiver,  
Sought to ruin her, so they  
Had him kidnapped on the way,  
Sent another in his stead.  
Word for word, his message read:  
"Your tsaritsa, sire, last night  
Was delivered of a fright—  
Neither son nor daughter, nor  
Have we seen its like before."

At these words, the royal sire  
Raved and raged in furious ire,  
"Hang that messenger!" roared he,  
"Hang him on the nearest tree!"  
But, relenting, spared him, and  
Sent him back with this command:  
"From all hasty steps refrain  
Till the tsar comes home again."

Back the messenger rode fast,  
Reached the city gates at last.  
But the royal cook, and weaver,  
With their mother, sly deceiver,  
Made him drunk; and in his sleep  
Stole the message from his keep  
And, before he could recover,  
They replaced it by another.  
So, with feet unsteady, he  
Reached the court with this decree:  
"Have the queen and have her spawn  
Drowned in secret ere the dawn."  
Grieving for their monarch's heir,  
For the mother young and fair,  
Solemnly the tsar's boyards  
Told the queen of this ukaz,  
Of the cruel doom which fate  
So unkindly had in wait.  
This unpleasant duty done,  
Put the queen and put her son  
In a cask, and sealed it fast;  
Tared it well, and then they cast  
Cask and burden in the sea—  
Such, forsooth, the tsar's decree.

Stars gleam in the dark blue sky,  
Dark blue billows heave and sigh.  
Storm clouds o'er the blue sky creep,  
While the cask rides o'er the deep.  
Like a widowed bride distressed,  
Sobbed the queen and beat her breast,  
While the babe to manhood grew  
As the hours swiftly flew.  
Morning dawned, the queen still waited  
But her son the billows hailed:  
"O, you wanton waves so blue —  
Free to come and go are you,  
Dashing when and where you please,  
Wearing rocks away with ease —  
You, who flood the mountains high,  
You, who ships raise to the sky—  
Hear my prayer, o waves, and spare us—  
Safely onto dry land bear us."  
So the waves, without ado,  
Bore the cask and prisoners two

Gently to a sandy shore,  
Then, receding, splashed no more.  
Son and mother, safe and sound,  
Feel that they're on solid ground.  
From their cask, though, who will take them?  
Surely God will not forsake them?  
Murmuring: "I wonder how  
We could break our prison now?"  
Up the son stood on his toes,  
Stretched himself, and said: "Here goes!"—  
Thrust his head against the lid,  
Burst it out—and forth he slid.

Son and mother, free again,  
Saw a hillock on a plain;  
On its crest, an oak tree grew;  
Round them flowed the ocean blue.  
Quoth the son: "Some food and drink  
Wouldn't come amiss, I think."  
From the oak, a branch he rent  
And a sturdy bow he bent.  
With the silken cord that hung  
Round his neck, the bow he strung.  
From a slender reed and light,  
Shaped an arrow, true in flight.  
Then explored the isle for game,  
Till he to the sea-shore came.

Just as he approached the beach,  
Our young hunter heard a screech..;  
Of distress at sea it told.  
He looked round him, and, behold,  
Saw a swan in evil plight;  
Circling over it—a kite,  
Talons spread, and bloodstained beak  
Poised, prepared her death to wreak,  
While the helpless bird was splashing,  
With her wings the waters lashing.  
But his shaft, with baneful note,  
Struck the kite full in the throat.  
Bleeding, in the sea it fell,  
Screeching like a soul in hell.  
He, with lowered bow, looked on  
As, with beak and wings, the swan,  
Dealing ruthless blow on blow

On the cruel kite, her foe,  
Sped its death, till finally  
Lifeless it sank in the sea.  
Then, in Russian accents, she  
Murmured plain as plain could be:  
"O, tsarevich, champion peerless,  
My deliverer so fearless—  
Grieve not that because of me  
Your good shaft is in the sea:  
That you'll have to fast three morrows—  
This is but the least of sorrows.  
Your kind deed I will repay—  
I will serve you too, one day;  
'Tis no swan that you set free,  
But a maiden charmed, you see;  
'Twas a wizard, not a kite,  
That you slew, O noble knight;  
I shall ne'er forget your deed—  
I'll be with you in your need.  
Now go back and take your rest—  
All will turn out for the best."

Then the swan-bird flew from view  
While, perforce, the luckless two,  
Famished, laid them down to sleep,  
Praying God their souls to keep.  
Driving slumber from his eyes  
As the sun rose in the skies,  
Our tsarevich, much amazed,  
At a spacious city gazed,  
Girdled by a wide and tall,  
Strong-embattled snow-white wall.  
Churches golden-domed stood there,  
Holy cloisters, mansions fair.  
"Mother mine, awaken!" cried he—  
"Oh!" she gasped; he said: "I see  
Things have only just begun—  
My white swan is having fun,"  
Citywards their steps they bent,  
Through the city gates they went.  
Belfries thundered overhead  
Loud enough to wake the dead.  
Round them poured a mighty throng,  
Choir boys praised the Lord in song;  
Nobles, splendidly arrayed,

Came in coaches, gold inlaid.  
All the people cheered them madly,  
As their prince acclaimed him gladly,  
With his mother's blessing, he,  
Acquiescing graciously,  
That same day began to reign  
In his newly-found domain,  
Sat in state upon the throne  
And was crowned as Prince Guidon.

Breezes o'er the ocean play,  
Speed a barque upon its way;  
Sails all spread, it skims the seas,  
Running swiftly 'fore the breeze.  
Sailors, merchants, crowd the deck,  
Marvel loud and crane their necks.  
Wondrous changes meet their view  
On an island which they knew!  
There, a golden city grand,  
Newly built, and fortress stand,  
Cannons with a mighty roar  
Bid the merchants put to shore.  
When the merchants land, Guidon  
Bids them be his guests anon;  
Feasts them first with meats and wit  
Then he says: "Now, masters mine—  
Tell me what you have for sale,  
Whither bound, and whence you hail?"  
Said the merchants: "If you please.  
We have sailed the seven seas;  
Costly furs, prince, were our ware.  
Silver fox and sables rare.  
Now our time is overstayed,  
East—due East—our course is laid,  
Past the Island of Buyan,  
Back to gracious Tsar Saltan."  
"Gentles," murmured Prince Guidon,  
"May fair breezes speed you on,  
And, when Tsar Saltan you see  
Bow down low to him for me."  
Here the merchants made their bows,  
And the prince, with pensive brows,  
Watched their ship put out from shore  
Till it could be seen no more.  
Suddenly, before Guidon

Swam the graceful snow-white swan.  
"Greetings, my fair prince," said she—  
"Why are you so sad, tell me?  
Why are you so dismal, say,  
Like a gloomy, cloudy day?"  
"Grief is gnawing at my breast,"  
Answered Prince Guidon, distressed.  
"I have only one desire—  
I should like to see my sire."  
"Is that all?" was her reply—  
"Listen—would you like to fly,  
Overtake that ship at sea?  
Why, then—a mosquito be!"  
Then she flapped her pinions two,  
Loudly thrashed the waters blue,  
Drenching him from head to toe  
Ere he could say yes or no.  
And he hovered, then and there,  
A mosquito, in the air.  
Buzzed, and flying rapidly,  
Overtook the ship at sea,  
Settled noiselessly, and stole  
Out of sight, into a hole.

Merrily the breeze is singing,  
O'er the waves a ship is winging  
Past the Island of Buyan  
To the realm of Tsar Saltan.  
Now his longed-for land so dear  
Stands out in the distance, clear,  
Now the ship at anchor rests  
And the merchants, honored guests,  
Palacewards their footsteps make  
With our gallant in their wake.  
There, in regal raiment, sate  
Tsar Saltan in royal state.  
On his head—his jeweled crown;  
On his face—a pensive frown,  
While the royal cook, and weaver,  
And their mother, sly deceiver,  
Sitting on his left and right,  
Stared at him with all their might.  
Tsar Saltan, with royal grace,  
Gave the merchants each his place,  
Then he said: "Now, masters mine,



Sailed you far across the brine?  
Are things well where you have been?  
What strange wonders have you seen?"  
Quoth the merchants: "If you please,  
We have sailed the seven seas;  
Peace reigns overseas, serene.  
There, we saw this wondrous scene:  
There's an island in the sea,  
Shores as steep as steep can be;  
Cheerless once, deserted, bare—  
Nothing but an oak grew there.  
Now it has a new-built city,  
Stately mansions, gardens pretty,  
Churches tall with domes of go  
Fair and wondrous to behold.  
Prince Guidon reigns there, and  
Sends his compliments to thee.'  
Here the tsar said, in amaze:  
"If but God prolong my days,  
I shall visit this strange isle,  
Guest with this Guidon a while."  
But the royal cook, and weaver,  
With their mother, sly deceiver,  
Did not wish to let their tsar  
See this wondrous isle so far.  
"What a wonder," quoth the cook,  
Winking at the others"Look:  
There's a city by the shore!  
Have you heard the like before?  
Here's a wonder, though, worth telling—  
There's a little squirrel dwelling  
In a fir tree; all day long,  
Cracking nuts, it sings a song.  
Nuts—most wondrous to behold!  
Every shell is solid gold;  
Kernels—each an emerald pure!  
That's a wonder, to be sure."  
Tsar Saltan thought this most curious,  
Our mosquito waxed most furious  
And, with his mosquito might,  
Stung his aunt's right eye, in spite.  
Turning pale, she swooned from pain—  
But her eye ne'er saw again.  
Sister, serving maids and mother,  
Chased him, tripping one another,

Screamed: "You cursed insect, you!  
Only wait!" But he just flew  
Through a casement, o'er the main,  
Swiftly to his own domain.

Pensively Guidon once more  
Gazes seaward from the shore.  
Suddenly, before his sight  
Swam the graceful swan, snow-white.  
"Greetings, my fair prince," said she—  
"Why are you so sad, tell me?  
Why are you so dismal, say  
Like a gloomy, cloudy day?"  
"Grief is gnawing at my breast,"  
Answered Prince Guidon, distressed—  
"There's a wonder, I confess,  
That I'm burning to possess.  
'Tis a wonder well worth telling—  
Somewhere, there's a squirrel dwelling  
In a fir tree; all day long,  
Cracking nuts, it sings a song.  
Nuts, most wondrous, I am told;  
Every shell is solid gold,  
Kernels—each an emerald pure.  
But can I of this be sure?"  
Here the swan said in reply:  
"Yes—this rumor does not lie;  
Marvel not—though this may be  
Strange for you, 'tis not for me.  
Grieve not—I will gladly do  
This slight service, prince, for you."  
Home he sped with cheerful stride,  
Gained his palace courtyard wide.  
There, beneath a fir—behold!—  
Cracking nuts all made of gold,  
Emeralds left and right a-flinging,  
Sat that wonder-squirrel, singing:  
"Through the garden there she goes,  
Tripping on her dainty toes."  
With its tail the squirrel sweeps  
Shells and stones in tidy heaps,  
While a charmed and happy throng  
Listened to the squirrel's song.  
Struck with wonder, Prince Guidon  
Whispered softly: "Thank you, swan!"

God grant you felicity  
And such joy as you gave me."  
Then a squirrel's house he built.  
Crystal, glass, and silver gilt;  
Set a guard, a scribe as well,  
Who recorded every shell.  
Thus the prince's treasures grew,  
And the squirrel's glory too.

Breezes o'er the ocean play  
Speed a barque upon its way;  
Sails all spread, it skims the seas,  
Running swiftly "fore the breeze  
Past a craggy island, where  
Stands a city, proud and fair.  
Cannons with a mighty roar  
Bid the merchants put to shore;  
When the merchants land, Guidon  
Bids them be his guests anon;  
Feasts them first with meats and wine,  
Then he says: "Now, masters mine—  
Tell me what you have for sale,  
Whither bound, and whence you hail?"  
Said the merchants: "If you please,  
We have sailed the seven seas,  
Selling horses, Prince Guidon—  
Stallions from the steppes of Don.  
We are overdue, you know,  
And we still have far to go—  
Past the Island of Buyan,  
Back to gracious Tsar Saltan."  
"Gentles," murmured Prince Guidon—  
"May fair breezes speed you on  
O'er the ocean, o'er the main,  
Back to Tsar Saltan again,  
When your gracious tsar you see,  
Give him compliments from me."

Bowing low before him, they  
Left Guidon and sailed away.  
He, though, hastened to the shore,  
Where he met the swan once more,  
Told her that his heart was burning,  
For his sire, his soul was yearning...  
In the twinkling of an eye

He became a tiny fly,  
And he flew across the sea  
Where, 'twixt sky and ocean, he  
Settled on the deck and stole  
Out of sight into a hole.

Merrily the breeze is singing,  
O'er the waves a ship is winging,  
Past the Island of Buyan,  
To the realm of Tsar Saltan,  
Now his longed-for land so dear,  
Stands out in the distance, clear,  
Now the ship at anchor rests,  
And the merchants, honored guests,  
Palacewards their footsteps make  
With our gallant in their wake.  
There, in regal raiment, sate  
Tsar Saltan in royal state.  
On his head—his jeweled crown,  
On his face—a' pensive frown,  
While the one-eyed cook, and weaver,  
And their mother, sly deceiver,  
Sit around the tsar and stare  
At him with a toad-like glare.  
Tsar Saltan, with royal grace,  
Gave the merchants each his place,  
Then he said: "Now, masters mine—  
Sailed you far across the brine?  
Are things well where you have been?  
What strange wonders have you seen?"  
Quoth the merchants: "If you please,  
We have sailed the seven seas;  
Peace reigns overseas, serene.  
There, we saw this wondrous scene:  
On an island, far away,  
Stands a city, grand and gay—  
Churches tall, with golden domes,  
Gardens green and stately homes;  
By the palace grows a fir  
In whose shade, O royal sir,  
Stands a crystal cage; and there  
Dwells a squirrel, strange and rare—  
Full of frolic; all day long,  
Cracking nuts, it sings a song,  
Nuts, most wondrous to behold—

Every shell is solid gold,  
Kernels—each an emerald bright;  
Sentries guard it day and night,  
It has slaves, like any lord,  
Yes, and scribes each nut record.  
Troops in passing give salute  
With their martial drum and flute.  
Maidens store these gems away  
Under lock and key each day;  
Coins are minted from each shell,  
Coins with which they buy and sell.  
People live in plenty there,  
Not in huts, but mansions fair.  
Prince Guidon reigns there, and he  
Sends his compliments to thee."  
Here the tsar said, in amaze:  
"If but God prolong my days,  
I shall visit this strange isle  
Guest with this Guidon a while."  
But the cook, and royal weaver,  
With their mother, sly deceiver,  
Did not wish to let the tsar  
See this wondrous isle so far.  
And the weaver, smiling wryly,  
Thus addressed the tsar, most slyly:  
"Wherein lies this wonder, pray?  
Squirrels cracking nuts all day—  
Heaping emeralds, we're told,  
Left and right a-throwing gold!  
Nothing strange in this see I!  
Be this true, or but a lie,  
I know of a better wonder.  
Lo! The ocean swells in thunder,  
Surges with a mighty roar,  
Overflows a barren shore,  
Leaving, wonderful to see,  
Thirty stalwart knights and three,  
All in mail a-gleaming bright,  
Marching proudly left and right;  
Each one brave beyond compare,  
Tall of stature, young and fair,  
All alike beyond belief,  
Led by Chernomor, their chief.  
That's a wonder, now, for you,  
Marvelously strange, but true."

Wisely, though, the guests were mute—  
They with her did not dispute.  
But the tsar waxed very curious,  
And Guidon waxed very furious,  
Fiercely buzzed and settled right  
On his aunt's left eye, in spite.  
Turning pale, she gave a cry—  
She was blinded in her eye.  
Screams of anger filled the air—  
"Catch it! kill that insect there!  
O you nasty insect, you!"  
But Guidon just calmly flew  
Through the casement, o'er the main,  
Swiftly to his own domain.

By the blue sea he is pacing,  
On the blue sea he is gazing.  
And once more, before his sight  
Swam the graceful swan, snow-white.  
"Greetings, my fair prince," said she,  
"Why are you so sad, tell me?  
Why are you so dismal, say,  
Like a gloomy, cloudy day?"  
"Grief is gnawing at my breast,"  
Answered Prince Guidon, distressed—  
"There's a wonder, I confess,  
That I'm longing to possess,"  
"Tell me then, what is this wonder?"  
"Somewhere swells the sea in thunder,  
Breakers surge, and with a roar,  
Sweeping o'er a barren shore,  
Leave behind, for all to see  
Thirty stalwart knights and three,  
All in mail a-gleaming bright,  
Marching proudly left and right;  
Each one brave beyond compare,  
Tall of stature, young and fair.  
All alike beyond belief,  
Led by Chernomor, their chief."  
In reply, the snow-white swan  
Murmured: "Is this all, Guidon?  
Wonder not— though this may be  
Strange for you, 'tis not for me,  
or these sea-knights, prince, are none  
But my brothers, every one.

Do not grieve; go home and wait,  
Meet my brothers at your gate."

He obeyed her cheerfully,  
Climbed his tower and scanned the seas  
Lo! the waters, with a roar.  
Seethed and swept the barren shore,  
Leaving, wonderful to see,  
Thirty stalwart knights and three,  
All in mail a-gleaming bright,  
Marching proudly left and right,  
Two by two; and Chernomor,  
Hoary-headed, went before,  
Leading them in martial state  
Right up to the city gate,  
Prince Guidon, with flying feet,  
Ran in haste his guests to greet;  
Crowds pressed round in unbelief.  
"Prince," proclaimed the hoary chief—  
"It is by the swan's request  
And, at her express behest,  
We have come from out the sea  
Your fair city's guards to be.  
Henceforth, from the ocean blue,  
We will always come to you  
Every day, on guard to stand  
By your lofty walls so grand.  
Now, however, we must go—  
We're not used to land, you know:  
We'll return, I promise you."  
And they disappeared from view.  
Breezes o'er the ocean play  
Speed a barque upon its way;  
Sails all spread, it skims the seas,  
Running swiftly 'fore the breeze,  
Past a craggy island, where  
Stands a city, proud and fair.  
Cannons with a mighty roar  
Bid the merchants put to shore;  
When the merchants land, Guidon  
Bids them be his guests anon;  
Feasts them first with meat and wine,  
Then he says: "Now, masters mine—  
Tell me what you have for sale,  
Whither bound, and whence you hail?"

Said the merchants: "If you please,  
We have sailed the seven seas;  
Swords of Damask steel we've sold,  
Virgin silver, too, and gold.  
Now we're overdue, you know,  
And we still have far to go—  
Past the Island of Buyan,  
Back to gracious Tsar Saltan,"  
"Gentles," murmured Prince Guidon—  
"May fair breezes speed you on,  
O'er the ocean, o'er the main,  
Back to Tsar Saltan again.  
Yes, and when your tsar you see,  
Give him compliments from me."

Bowing low before him, they  
Left the prince and sailed away.  
He, though, hastened to the shore  
Where he met the swan once more;  
Told her that his heart was burning,  
For his sire, his soul was yearning...  
So she drenched him, head to toe.  
In a trice, he shrank, and lo!  
Ere or he could even gasp,  
He had turned into a wasp.  
Then he buzzed, and rapidly  
Overtook the ship at sea;  
Gently settled aft, and stole  
Out of sight into a hole.

Merrily the breeze is singing,  
O'er the waves a ship is winging  
Past the Island of Buyan  
To the realm of Tsar Saltan.  
Now his longed-for land so dear  
Stands out in the distance, clear.  
Now the ship at anchor rests,  
And the merchants, honored guests  
Palacewards their footsteps make  
With our gallant in their wake.  
There, in regal raiment, sate  
Tsar Saltan in royal state.  
On his head—his jeweled crown,  
On his face—a pensive frown,  
Near him—royal cook, and weaver

And their mother, sly deceiver.  
With four eyes, though they be three,  
Stare at him voraciously.  
Tsar Saltan, with royal grace,  
Gave the merchants each his place.  
Then he said: "Now, masters mine—  
Sailed you far across the brine?  
Are things well where you have been?  
What strange wonders have you seen?"  
Quoth the merchants: "If you please,  
We have sailed the seven seas;  
Peace reigns overseas, serene,  
There we saw this wondrous scene:  
There's an island far away—  
On this isle—a city gay;  
There, each dawn brings in new wonders:  
There, the ocean swells and thunders,  
Breakers, with a mighty roar,  
Foaming, flood its barren shore,  
Leaving, wonderful to see,  
Thirty stalwart knights and three  
All in mail a-gleaming bright  
Marching proudly left and right,  
Each one brave beyond compare  
Tall of stature, young and fair,  
All alike beyond belief;  
Hoary Chernomor, their chief,  
Marches with them from the deep,  
Counts them off, by twos, to keep  
Guard of this fair isle; and they  
Cease patrol nor night nor day.  
Nor can you find guards so true,  
Vigilant and fearless, too.  
Prince Guidon reigns there, and he  
Sends his compliments to thee."  
Here the tsar said, in amaze:  
"If but God prolong my days,  
I shall visit this strange isle,  
Guest with this Guidon a while."  
Silent were the cook and weaver.  
But their mother, sly deceiver,  
Said, as she smiled crookedly:  
"You may think this strange—not we!  
Fancy! Idle mermen play  
Sentry—go on land all day!

Be this true, or but a lie,  
Nothing strange in this see I—  
Stranger things exist, mark you—  
This report, though, is quite true:  
There's a young princess, they say,  
That she charms all hearts away.  
Brighter than the sun at noon,  
She outshines the midnight moon,  
In her braids a crescent beams,  
On her brow, a bright star gleams.  
She herself is sweet of face.  
Full of majesty and grace.  
When she speaks, her voice doth seem  
Like the music of a stream.  
That's a wonder, now, for you—  
Marvelously strange, but true."  
Wisely, though, the guests prefer  
Not to bandy words with her.  
Tsar Saltan, he waxed most curious,  
Our tsarevich waxed most furious,  
But decided that he'd spare  
Granny's eyes for her gray hair.  
Buzzing like a bumble-bee,  
Round his granny circled he,  
Stung her nose with all his might,  
Raising blisters red and white.  
Panic once more filled the air:  
"Murder! catch that insect there!  
Help! O don't you let it go!  
Catch it!—hold it!—kill it!—O!  
O, you nasty insect, you!  
Just you wait!" Guidon, though, flew  
Through the casement, o'er the main  
Back to his domain again.

By the sea, the prince now paces,  
On the blue sea now he gazes,  
Suddenly, before Guidon  
Swam the graceful snow-white swan.  
"Greetings, my fair prince," said she  
"Why are you so sad, tell me?  
Why are you so dismal, say,  
Like a gloomy, cloudy day?"  
"Grief is gnawing at my breast,"  
Answered Prince Guidon, distressed

"Every youth has his own bride—  
Only I unmarried bide."  
"Who is she you wish to wed?  
Tell me, now." Guidon then said:  
"There's a fair princess; they say  
That she charms both young and old—  
Brighter than the sun at noon,  
She outshines the midnight moon;  
In her braids, a crescent beams,  
On her brow, a bright star gleams.  
She herself is sweet of face,  
Full of majesty and grace.  
When she speaks, her sweet voice seems  
Like the flow of tinkling streams.  
Is this true, though, or a lie?"  
Anxiously, he waits reply.  
Silently, the snow-white swan  
Pondered; then she said: "Guidon—  
Yes—this maiden I can find;  
But a wife's no mitten, mind,  
From your lily hand to cast,  
Or unto your belt make fast;  
Listen now to my advice:  
Weigh this matter well—think twice,  
So that on your marriage morrow  
You do not repent in sorrow."  
Here Guidon with ardor swore  
That he'd thought of this before;  
That 'twas high time he was married,  
Too long single had he tarried;  
That for this princess so fair  
He would any perils dare,  
Sacrifice his very soul,  
Barefoot, walk right to the pole.  
Sighing thoughtfully, the swan  
Murmured: "Why so far, Guidon?  
Know, your future bride is here—  
I am that princess, my dear."  
Then she spread her wings, to soar  
O'er the waves towards the shore.  
There, amid a clump of trees,  
Folded them with graceful ease,  
Shook herself, and then and there  
Turned into a maiden fair—  
In her braids, a crescent beamed,

On her brow, a bright star gleamed;  
She was sweet in form and face,  
Full of majesty and grace.  
When she spoke, her sweet voice seemed  
Like the flow of tinkling streams.  
He embraced the fair princess,  
Folded her unto his breast.  
Hand in hand with her he sped  
To his mother dear, and said,  
Falling on his bended knees:  
"Mother darling— if you please,  
I have chosen me a bride—  
She will be your love and pride,  
Your consent we crave to wed,  
And your blessing, too," he said—  
"Bless our marriage, so that we  
Live in love and harmony."  
O'er the kneeling pair, she stands,  
Holy icon in her hands,  
Smiling through her happy tears,  
Saying: "God bless you, my dears."  
Prince Guidon did not delay—  
They were married that same day,  
Settled down, a happy pair,  
Lacking nothing but an heir.

Breezes o'er the ocean play,  
Speed a barque upon its way;  
Sails all spread, it skims the seas,  
Running swiftly 'fore the breeze,  
Past a craggy island, where  
Stands a city proud and fair.  
Cannons with a mighty roar  
Bid the merchants put to shore,  
When the merchants land, Guidon  
Bids them be his guests anon;  
Feasts them first with meat and wine,  
Then he says: "Now, masters mine—  
Tell me what you have for sale,  
Whither bound and whence you hail?"  
Said the merchants: "If you please,  
We have sailed the seven seas,  
Contraband, prince, was our ware,  
And our profits— rich and rare,  
We have far to travel yet—

Homewards— East— our course is set,  
Past the Island of Buyan,  
Back to gracious Tsar Saltan."  
"Gentles," murmured Prince Guidon—  
"May fair breezes speed you on,  
O'er the ocean, o'er the main,  
Back to Tsar Saltan again.  
Pray remind your tsar from me,  
That his gracious majesty  
Said he'd visit us some day:  
We regret his long delay.  
Give him my regards." Thereon  
Off the merchants went. Guidon  
This time stayed with his fair bride,  
Never more to leave her side.

Merrily the breeze is singing,  
O'er the waves a ship is winging  
Past the Island of Buyan  
To the realm of Tsar Saltan.  
Now his longed-for land, so dear,  
Stands out in the distance, clear.  
Now each merchant is the guest  
Of the tsar, by his behest.  
On his royal throne of state,  
Crowned in glory, there he sate,  
While the royal cook, and weaver,  
And their mother, sly deceiver,  
With four eyes, though they be three,  
Stared at him voraciously.  
Tsar Saltan, with royal grace,  
Gave the merchants each his place.  
Then he said: "Now, masters mine—  
Sailed you far across the brine?  
Are things well where you have been?  
What strange wonders have you seen?"  
Quoth the merchants: "If you please,  
We have sailed the seven seas.  
Peace reigns overseas, serene.  
There, we saw this wondrous scene:  
On an island, far away,  
Stands a city grand and gay—  
Churches tall with golden domes,  
Gardens green, and stately homes.  
Near its palace grows a fir

In whose shade, O royal sir,  
Stands a crystal house; and there  
Dwells a squirrel strange and rare,  
Full of frolic; all day long,  
Cracking nuts, its sings a song.  
Nuts, most wondrous to behold—  
Shells of purest yellow gold,  
All its kernels— emeralds bright.  
Sentries guard it day and night.  
There we saw another wonder—  
Every morn, the breakers thunder  
And the waves, with mighty roar,  
Overflow the barren shore,  
Leaving, wonderful to see,  
Thirty stalwart knights and three.  
Each one brave beyond compare,  
Tall of stature, young and fair.  
All in mail a-gleaming bright,  
Marching proudly left and right:  
All alike beyond belief,  
Led by Chernomor, their chief.  
Nor will you find guards so true,  
Vigilant and fearless, too.  
Prince Guidon reigns there in glory,  
He is praised in song and story.  
And his wife is fair, O sire—  
Gaze on her—you'll never tire.  
Brighter than the sun at noon,  
She outshines the midnight moon;  
In her braids, a crescent beams,  
On her brow, a bright star gleams.  
Prince Guidon sends his respects,  
Bade us say he still expects  
You to visit him one day  
And regrets your long delay."

All impatient, Tsar Saltan  
Gave command his fleet to man,  
But the royal cook, and weaver,  
And their mother, sly deceiver,  
Did their best to keep their tsar  
From this wondrous isle so far.  
He, to their persuasions deaf,  
Bade the women hold their breath.  
"I'm your tsar and not a child!"

Shouted he in passion wild—  
"We will sail today. No more!"  
Stamped his foot and slammed the door.

From his casement, silently,  
Prince Guidon gazed at the sea.  
Scarce a ripple stirred the deep  
As it sighed as though in sleep.  
On the far horizon blue  
Sails came one by one in view.  
Tsar Saltan's fleet, at long last,  
O'er the seas was sailing fast.  
At this sight, Guidon rushed out,  
Uttering a mighty shout:  
"Mother dear, come hither, do—  
You, my fair princess, come too—  
Only look out yonder—there  
Sails my father, I declare!"  
Through his spyglass, Prince Guidon  
Sees the royal fleet sail on;  
While on deck, his father stands,  
Spyglass also in his hands.  
With him are the cook, and weaver,  
And their mother, sly deceiver;  
Wonder in their gaze, they stare  
At this isle so strange and fair.  
In salute the cannons roared,  
Carols sweet from belfries soared.  
To the shore Guidon then ran,  
There to welcome Tsar Saltan,  
And the royal cook, and weaver,  
And their mother, sly deceiver.  
Citywards the tsar led he—  
Not a single word said he.

Now the palace came in sight,  
Sentries, clad in armor bright.  
Tsar Saltan looked on to see  
Thirty stalwart knights and three—  
Each one brave beyond compare,  
Tall of stature, young and fair,  
All alike beyond belief,  
Led by Chernomor, their chief.  
Then he reached the courtyard wide,  
Where a lofty fir he spied.

In its shadow—lo, behold,  
Cracking nuts of solid gold,  
Sat a little squirrel, singing,  
Emeralds into sacklets flinging.  
Golden nutshells lay around  
On the spacious courtyard ground.  
Further on the guests now press,  
Meet the wonderful princess:  
In her braids, a crescent beams,  
On her brow, a bright star gleams;  
She is sweet of form and face,  
Full of majesty and grace,  
Tsar Saltan's own wife beside her.  
He gazed on and recognized her.  
And his heart began to leap,  
"Am I dreaming in my sleep?"  
Gasped the tsar in stark surprise,  
Tears a-streaming from his eyes,  
He embraced his wife in pride,  
Kissed his son, his son's fair bride;  
Then they all sat down to feast  
Where their laughter never ceased,  
While the cook, and royal weaver,  
And their mother, sly deceiver,  
Fled and hid beneath the stairs  
But were dragged out by their hairs.  
Weeping, each her crimes confessed,  
Begged forgiveness, beat her breast.  
So the tsar, in his great glee  
Sent them home across the sea,  
Late at night, with tipsy head,  
Tsar Saltan was put to bed.  
I drank beer and mead there—yet  
Only got my whiskers wet.