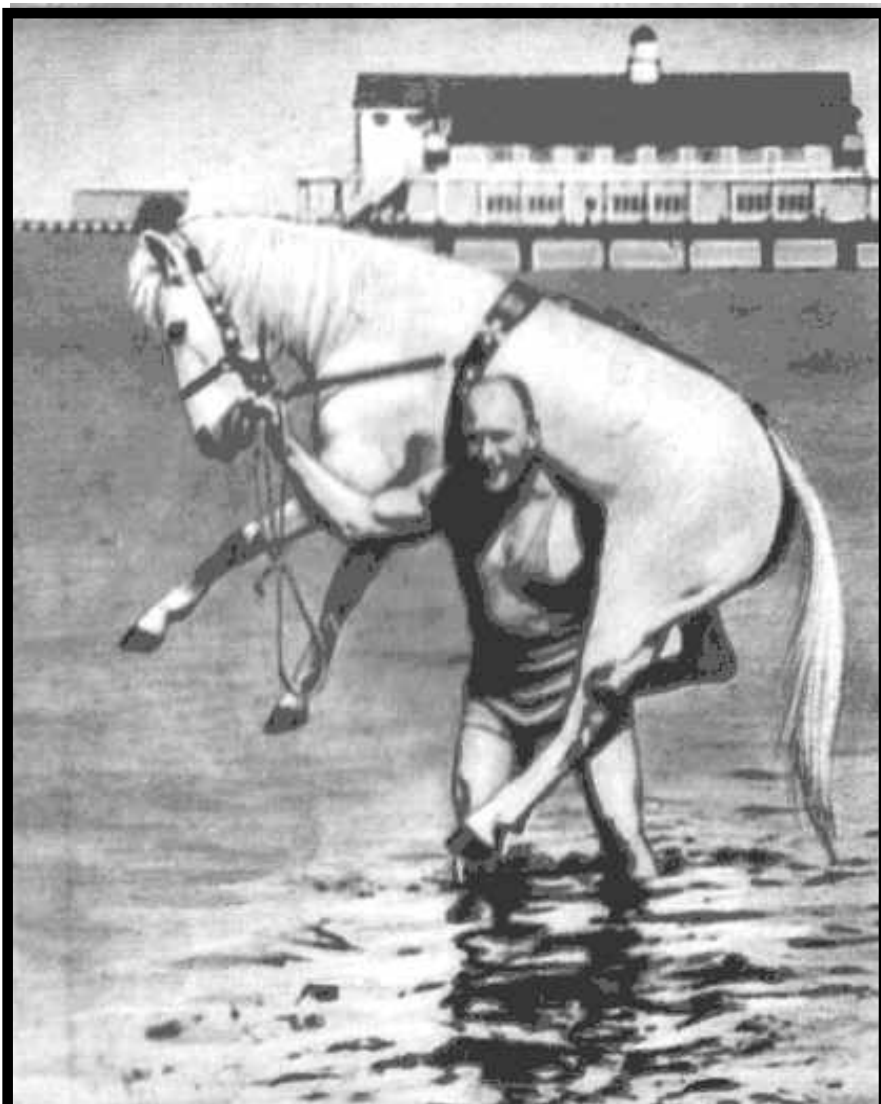


## Victory, a Russian Tale

*Translated from the Russian  
by Elena Meath.*

In the village Volchanovka, near to Samarsk, lived a peasant called Dmitry Petrov. Many stories were spread about his extraordinary strength. One day, he took his horse to the blacksmith to be shod. When the blacksmith turned around to the forge to get a shoe, Petrov took the anvil and hid it under his coat, amazed the blacksmith rushed around looking for the missing anvil: "It was here a minute ago! Did the devil take it?" Smirking, Petrov kept the heavy anvil hidden under his coat. Of course, it's difficult to verify the truth of this incident, however, Petrov was reputed to be the strongest man in the region. In time he started to believe the stories himself and boasted of his strength. A villager named Zass told Petrov that his son could duplicate any of Petrov's feats of strength, and so confident was he of the outcome, he wagered a horse. When Shura (a diminutive version of Alexander) came back home, his father told him of the bet and told him to leave the farm work for the winter and train. He asked Shura what equipment he needed to win the competition against Hercules Petrov next spring. Shura was surprised



**Shura, years later giving a new meaning  
to a donkey ride at the seaside**

and excited. His father not only believed in him but was also ready to help him to become the strongest man in the area. He asked his father to buy real dumb-bells, weights and order steel bars and chains from the blacksmith. Shura studied many of the systems available from professional strength athletes, training hard all winter. Shrove-tide heralded the eagerly-awaited contest between Alexander Zass and Dmitry Petrov. Villagers came from miles around. A

local, Klim Ivanivich, was elected as referee for this competition. Petrov went confidently in to the circle, looking scornfully at his younger, smaller adversary - and started his first exercise. He bent a metal bar which was half a metre long and a centimetre and half thick. Shura did the same easily. Then they took long metal bars twice as thick. Petrov twisted it around his body and then untwisted it. This trick was not so easy for Shura and blood emerged

from under his fingernails. He started to black out from exertion but he still twisted the bar. Wooden blocks were brought in the circle; the competitor was to stand on them for the next test, which was to lift, one-handed, a rock bound with wire. Petrov started first, his fingers grasped the wire, and the rock flew up. Shura repeated the feat. The crowd gasped in astonishment at the young athlete and clapped. "Now try to repeat what I do." Alexander said, taking a thick steel chain. Shura twisted the chain and pulled, breaking a link. Petrov was obviously upset. He took the

chain, twiddled it in doubt, and threw it to the ground. Shura had won and yet Petrov wasn't satisfied. "I am not conquered yet," said Petrov "Zass just surprised me with his tricks." Petrov now wanted to test the youngster's bravery, Shura was perplexed but was willing to continue, even though he had been declared the winner. Petrov produced a large studded bar which he bent around his neck; the sharp edges cut him as he knotted the bar like a necktie. Covered with blood and supported by his friends' approval, he rested for a little while

with this dreadful tie on his neck, before, without visible effort, untying the knot. "Now let Zass try," wheezed Petrov, "If he can untie the knot, then victory is his." Shura found it a challenge impossible to refuse. Petrov told Shura to kneel and twisted the bar around his neck. Shura struggled, finding it difficult to move as Petrov had knotted the bar behind his head, but, finally, he turned the knot to the front and untied it. The victory was complete. This was Shura's first victory: the first of many.

Alexander Zass lifting a girder with his teeth!

