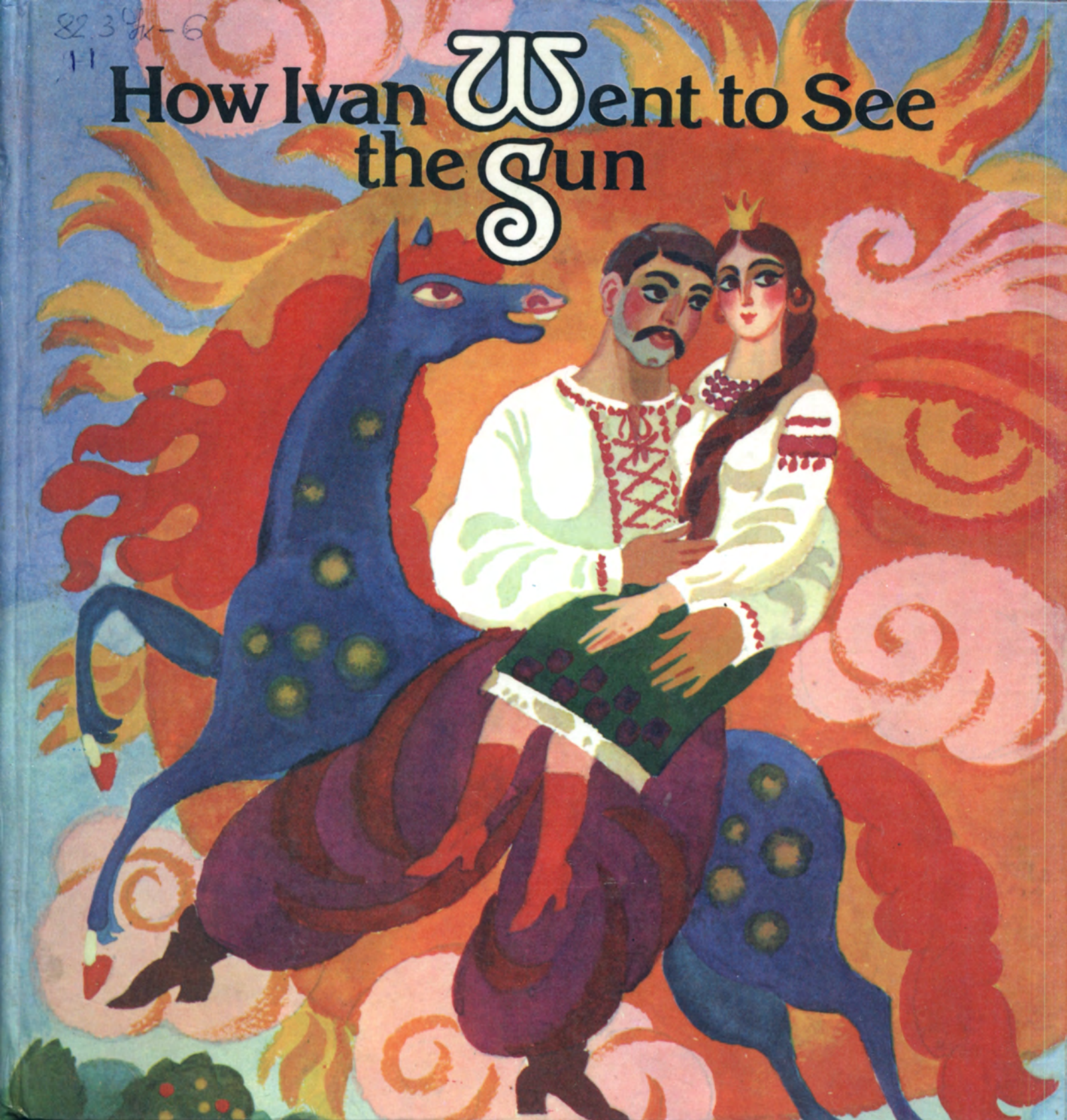


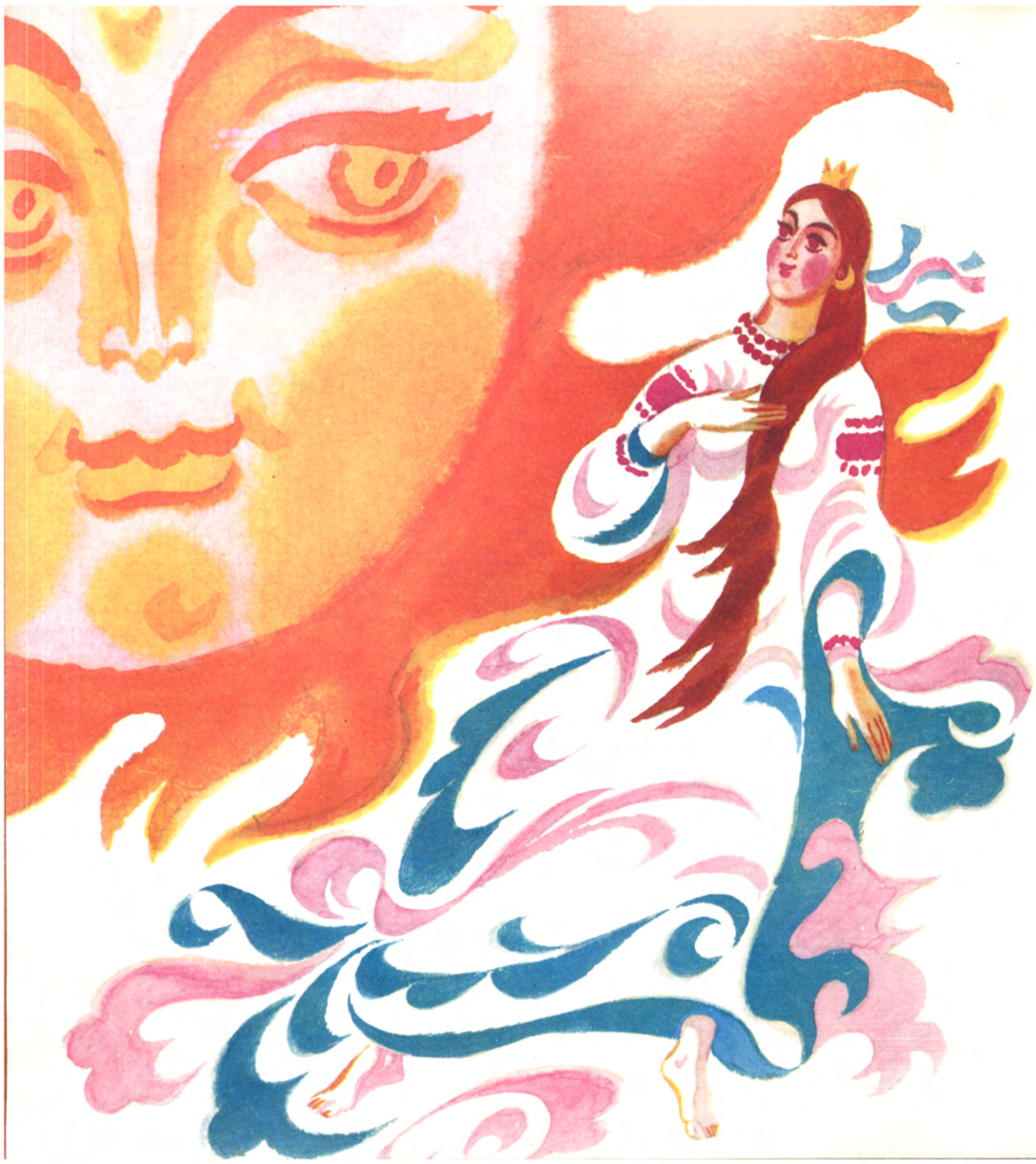
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How Ivan Went to See the Sun







How Ivan **W**ent to See the **S**un *Ukrainian Folk Tales*



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KIEV

ЯК ІВАН ХОДИВ ДО СОНЦЯ

Українські народні казки

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KOTIHOROSHKO

Once upon a time there lived a man and his wife who had six sons and one daughter. One day the sons went to plow the family's plot of land and asked their sister to bring them something to eat for the midday meal.

"But how shall I know where you are plowing?" she asked.

To which they replied:

6 "We'll make a track with the plowshare from our house right to the field we'll be plowing. So all you have to do is follow the track and you'll find us."

Now beyond that field, in a forest, there lived a dragon. He rolled up the track like a carpet, and made his own track leading right to the doors of his palace. When the girl set out with the meal for her brothers, she followed the track till she came to the palace. And there the dragon snatched her up.

Once back home in the evening, the sons said to their mother:

“We worked hard plowing all day long. Why couldn’t you bring us something to eat?”

“What do you mean? Why, Olenka was supposed to bring you your meal. Could she have lost her way?”

“Let’s go and find her,” the brothers said.

The six of them followed the track, and in the end came to the dragon’s palace, where they found their sister.

“My dear brothers, where am I to hide you? When the dragon comes back, he’s sure to eat you up!”

Presently the dragon arrived.

“Well, well, it’s human flesh I smell”, he said. “Did you come in peace, boys, or to fight me?”

“We surely came to fight you,” they replied.

“Let’s go to the iron thrashing floor and fight it out then.”

The fight did not last long. The dragon struck the six of them down and drove them into the iron floor. After that he pulled them out of the iron floor, more dead than alive, and threw them into a deep dungeon.

In the meantime the man and his wife waited for their sons and daughter to return — but all in vain. One day, as the woman went to the river to do her wash, she came across a pea rolling along the road. She picked it up and ate it.

After some time a son was born to her, and the parents named him Kotihoroshko meaning Rolling Pea.

The boy grew not by the day, but by the hour — he was not many years old yet, but had grown into a huge boy. One day, as father and son were digging a well, they came upon a boulder. The father went off to call the neighbors to help him lift the boulder. While the father was away, Kotihoroshko picked up the boulder and tossed it out of the well. When the neighbors arrived and saw what he had done, they were awe-struck. They were so frigh-

tened by his strength that they wanted to kill him. But when he took that same boulder, tossed it into the air and caught it in his bare hands, they took to their heels.

Father and son continued digging the well until they came upon a large piece of iron. Kotihoroshko pulled it out of the ground and hid it.

One day Kotihoroshko asked his parents:

“I must have some brothers and a sister living somewhere, or so I’ve heard.”

“Yes, son,” they said. “You had a sister and six brothers.” And they told him what had happened to them.

“Well, I must go and find them,” he said.

“No, son, don’t go,” his parents implored. “Your six brothers left and perished, and you will hardly manage to find them by yourself.”

“No, I must go. They are my own flesh and blood, so how can I not free them?”

He took the piece of iron he had dug out of the ground and went to the blacksmith.

“Forge me a large cudgel from this iron,” he said to him.

The smith got down to work and forged him a cudgel so large he could barely drag it out of the smithy. Kotihoroshko picked up the cudgel easily, tossed it up into the air, and said to his father:

“I’ll go and take a nap, and you wake me when the cudgel comes flying back twelve days hence.”

He went to bed. On the thirteenth day the cudgel came flying down from the sky. When his father woke him, Kotihoroshko jumped to his feet and stretched out one finger in the path of the cudgel. When it hit his finger, the cudgel broke in two. Said he:

“No, that’s not the cudgel I need to free my brothers and my sisters. I must have another one forged.”

He took the pieces and went to the smith.

“Here, reforge this, please, into something that will suit me.”

The smith made him a still bigger cudgel. Kotihoroshko took it and tossed it into the air as before and lay down to sleep for twelve days. On the thirteenth day the cudgel came down from the sky with a roar that made the earth tremble. After Kotihoroshko was roused from his sleep he jumped to his

feet and stretched out one finger in the path of the falling cudgel. When the cudgel hit his finger, it bent slightly.

“Well, this cudgel seems good enough to free my brothers and sisters with. Mother, bake me some loaves of bread and roast some rusks for my journey.”

He picked up the cudgel, put the bread and rusks into a bag, said his farewells, and left.

He followed the track of the furrow and soon entered a forest. He walked on and on through it until he came to a large castle. He entered the courtyard, then the palace, but the dragon was not at home just then; only a girl was there.

“Good day, lass,” Kotihoroshko said.

“Good day, young man. Why have you come here? When the dragon returns, he’s sure to devour you.”

“Well, maybe he will, and maybe he won’t! And who are you?”

“I am the only daughter of my parents. When the dragon seized me, my six brothers came to rescue me but failed.”

“Where are they?” Kotihoroshko asked.

“The dragon threw them into a dungeon, and I don’t know whether they are alive or if their bones have turned to ashes by now.”

“Perhaps I could free you?” Kotihoroshko said.

“You — free me?” she asked in surprise. “Six together have already failed, so how could you possibly do it all by yourself?”

“We’ll see,” Kotihoroshko said.

He sat down on a windowsill and waited for the dragon to arrive.

Finally the dragon came flying home. As he entered the palace he said:

“Well, well, isn’t it human flesh I smell?”

“You surely do, since I am here,” Kotihoroshko replied.

“Hey, laddie, did you come here in peace or to fight me?” the dragon asked.

“Peace with you?” Kotihoroshko said. “Nothing of the sort. I came to fight you.”

“Let’s go to the iron thrashing floor then!”

“All right, let’s go!”

When they arrived there, the dragon said:

“You start first!”

“Oh no, you start first,” Kotihoroshko said.

The dragon hit Kotihoroshko so hard that he knocked him ankle-deep into the thrashing floor. Kotihoroshko pulled himself out and swung the cudgel with such might that he drove the dragon into the thrashing floor right up to his knees. The dragon freed himself and hit Kotihoroshko, driving him into the thrashing floor up to his knees. But when Kotihoroshko struck the dragon the second time, he drove him in right up to his waist, and with the third blow he knocked the life out of him.

Then he went to the deep dungeon and released his brothers who were almost dead by then. He took them and his sister, along with all the gold and silver that there was in the dragon’s palace, and they went home.

All this time, however, he did not tell them that he was their brother. In this manner they had walked along quite a few roads when they sat down under an oak tree to rest. Kotihoroshko was very tired after the fight with the dragon, and soon fell asleep. In the meantime his brothers held counsel:

“People will surely laugh when learn that the six of us couldn’t get the better of the dragon, while he did it alone. Then it also looks like he’ll keep all the dragon’s riches for himself.”

After a lot of thinking they made up their mind that while he was fast asleep they would tie him to the oak tree with sturdy ropes of bast, and leave him at the mercy of the wild beasts. They did as they had decided: they bound him to the tree and left.

Kotihoroshko did not feel anything while he was sleeping. He slept through the day and the night, and when he awoke, there he was, bound to a tree. So he gave the tree such a mighty wrench that he uprooted it, hoisted it on his shoulder, and started homeward.

As he approached his home, he heard his brothers asking their mother:

“Tell us, Mother, did you have any more children after we left?”

“Of course,” she said. “I had a son — Kotihoroshko, a fine strapping lad. He set off not long ago to find you and set you free.”

“So it’s him we bound to the tree!” the brothers said. “Let’s run there fast and untie him.”

Upon hearing this, Kotihoroshko got so angry he hurled the oak tree against the house, nearly shattering it to pieces.

“All right, if that’s the kind of people you are, I’ll go out into the wide world.”

Swinging his cudgel onto his shoulder, he left his home village again.

On and on he walked until he saw a mountain on either side of him, and in between there stood a man who was pushing the mountains apart with his hands and feet.

“God’s aid to you!” Kotihoroshko said.

“And to you, too!” the man replied.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m pushing the mountains apart to make way.”

“And whither are you going?” Kotihoroshko asked.

“My fortune to seek.”

“That’s what I am doing, too. What is your name?”

“Vernihora Move-a-Hill, and yours?”

“Kotihoroshko. Let’s go together!”

“All right.”

As they walked on, they saw a man in a forest swinging his arms left and right, and with every sweep he uprooted several oak trees.

“God’s aid to you!” they said.

“And to you as well!” the man said.

“What are you doing?”

“Uprooting trees to make more space.”

“And whither are you going?”

“My fortune to seek.”

“As are we. What’s your name?”

“Vernidub Pull-an-Oak, and yours?”

“I’m Kotihoroshko and this is Vernihora. Join us!”

“All right!”

As the three of them walked on, they saw a man with huge whiskers standing on a river bank. When he twirled one of his whiskers, the waters parted, making a dry passage across the bottom of the river.

“God’s aid to you!” they said.

“And to you as well!” the man said.

“What are you doing?”

“I am parting the waters so I can cross to the other bank.”

“Whither are you going?”

“My fortune to seek.”

“As are we. What’s your name?”

“Krutivus Whirl-a-Whisker, and what’s yours?”

“I’m Kotihoroshko, this is Vernihora, and this is Vernidub. Would you like to join us?”

“Oh yes, with pleasure.”

They went on, and the going was easy: when a mountain stood in their way, Vernihora toppled it; when they came upon a forest, Vernidub uprooted the trees; and when a river obstructed their path, Krutivus rolled the waters aside. Before long they entered a large forest and came upon a little hut. They entered it, but there was nobody home.

“We’ll spend the night here,” Kotihoroshko said.

Come morning, Kotihoroshko said to Vernihora:

“You stay home and prepare us a meal, and we’ll a-hunting go.”

After they had left Vernihora went about preparing the meal, and when it was ready, he lay down for a nap.

Shortly afterward someone knocked at the door.

“Open up!”

“You’re no grand lord. Open the door yourself,” Vernihora said.

The door opened and someone cried again:

“Carry me over the threshold!”

“You’re no grand lord. Climb over it yourself.”

Presently a little old man with a beard trailing a *sazhen* behind him crawled over the threshold. The next moment he grabbed Vernihora by the hair and hung him upon a nail that was sticking out of the wall. Then he ate and drank everything Vernihora had prepared, tore a strip of skin off his back, and left.

Vernihora wriggled and turned on the nail until he freed himself and hastily got a meal of sorts together. When his friends returned, he was just finishing.



“Why, are you late with the dinner?” they asked.

“Well, I dozed off for a bit.”

They ate and went to sleep. Come morning, Kotihoroshko said:

“Now you stay at home, Vernidub, and we’ll a-hunting go.”

After they had left Vernidub made the meal, and when it was ready, he lay down for a nap.

Shortly afterward someone knocked at the door.

“Open up!”

“You’re no grand lord. Open the door yourself!”

“Carry me over the threshold!”

“You’re no grand lord. Climb over it yourself.”

Presently a little old man with a beard trailing a *sazhen* * behind him crawled over the threshold. The next moment he grabbed Vernidub by the hair and hung him up on the nail. Then he ate and drank everything Vernidub had prepared, tore a strip of skin off his back, and left.

Vernidub wriggled and turned on the nail until he freed himself, and hastily set about preparing the meal. Soon his friends returned.

“Why are you late with our dinner?” they asked.

“Well, you see, I took a little nap and...”

Vernihora kept silent: he suspected what had happened.

On the third day Krutivus stayed home, and the same thing befell him as well.

“I see you’re all too lazy to cook properly!” Kotihoroshko said. “Tomorrow I’ll stay at home and the three of you can go hunting.”

So the next day they went hunting, while Kotihoroshko stayed at home to cook. After he had prepared the meal he lay down for a rest.

Presently someone banged on the door and shouted:

“Open up!”

Kotihoroshko got up and opened the door, and there before him stood a little old man with a beard trailing a *sazhen* behind him.

“Carry me over the threshold!”

Kotihoroshko carried him over the threshold, and the next moment the little old man started pushing and shoving Kotihoroshko.

“Hey, what’s the idea?” Kotihoroshko asked.

“You’ll see right away what the idea is,” the little old man said and was about to grab Kotihoroshko by the hair.

“So that’s what a sort you are!” Kotihoroshko said, grabbed him by the beard, picked up an ax, dragged the old man to the forest, split an oak tree, thrust the old man’s beard into the crack, pulled the ax out, and left the oldster’s beard pinned in the crack.

“If you are in the habit of grabbing people by their hair right away, old codger, you can just cool off here until I come back.”

He went to the hut and found his companions already there.

“What about our dinner?” they asked.

“It’s been ready for ages,” Kotihoroshko replied.

After they had eaten Kotihoroshko said:

“Now let’s go outside and I’ll show you something you’ve never seen in your life before!”

He took them to the oak tree, but the tree was gone, and so was the little old man: he had pulled the tree up by the roots and made off.

Then Kotihoroshko told his friends what had happened to him, and they confessed how that little old man had hung them on a nail and torn strips of skin off their backs.

“Oh, if he is such a nasty character, let’s go and search for him,” Kotihoroshko said.

They followed the trail the old man had left dragging the oak, and soon came to a deep, fathomless hole. Said Kotihoroshko:

“Vernihora, climb down there!”

“Oh, let the devil take him!”

“What about you, Vernidub?”

But neither Vernidub nor Krutivus wanted to climb down there.

“All right then, I’ll climb down myself,” Kotihoroshko said. “Let’s all plait a rope.”

After they had plaited the rope Kotihoroshko wound one end of it round his wrist, and said:

“Now lower me!”

They lowered him for a long, long time until he reached the bottom and found himself in the nether world. Kotihoroshko wandered about there until he came to a large palace. When he entered it, he saw that it shone and glittered and sparkled with gold and precious stones. Walking from chamber to chamber, he came upon a princess more beautiful than any the world had ever seen.

“Oh, good man!” she cried. “What brings you here?”

“I’m looking for a little old man with a beard trailing a *sazhen* behind him,” Kotihoroshko replied.

“Right now he is busy trying to free his beard. Don’t go near him, or he’ll kill you like he has so many before.”

“He won’t.” Kotihoroshko said. “It was I who pinned his beard in that oak tree. Oh yes, and what are you doing here?”

“I am a princess,” she replied. “This little old man stole me and holds me captive here.”

“Well, I’ll free you then. Take me to him.”

She took him to the old man who had freed his beard by then. Upon seeing Kotihoroshko, the old man said:

“Have you come here to fight me or to make peace?”

“To make peace? Hardly,” Kotihoroshko said. “I’ve come to fight you.”

So they started to fight. It was a long and fierce battle, but in the end Kotihoroshko bested the little old man and killed him with his cudgel. Then he and the Princess gathered all the gold and precious stones into three sacks, and went back to the hole through which he was lowered into the nether world.

“Hey, brothers, are you still there?” Kotihoroshko shouted from below.

“Yes, we are!”

He tied one sack to the rope and tugged it for them to pull up.

They pulled it up and lowered the rope once again. He tied the second sack to it, and shouted:

“This is for you, too!”

He tied the third sack to the rope as well, and then tied the Princess to the rope and shouted from below:

“And this is for me.”

The threesome pulled up the Princess, and then it was Kotihoroshko’s turn to be pulled out of the hole.

But his friends decided otherwise. “Why should we pull him out?” they reasoned. “Let the Princess be ours as well. We’ll pull him up halfway and then let him drop to his death”.

Kotihoroshko, however, smelled a rat, so he tied a large boulder to the rope instead, and shouted:

“Now, pull me up!”

They pulled the boulder halfway up and then let go of the rope. It hit the bottom with a bang and a thud.

“Now I see what a pack of scoundrels you are!” Kotihoroshko shouted in a rage from below.

So he had no choice but wander about the nether world. He wandered there until suddenly dark clouds covered the sky and heavy rain and hail descended. Kotihoroshko hid beneath an oak tree. Presently he heard baby griffins squeaking in their nest up the tree. He climbed the tree and covered them with his coat. When the rain stopped, a large griffin, the father of the little nestlings, arrived. Seeing that they had been covered with a coat, he asked:

“Who was it that covered you?”

“We’ll tell you if you promise not to devour him,” they said.

“All right, I promise.”

“There’s a man beneath the tree — he’s the one who covered us.”

The griffin flew down to Kotihoroshko, and said:

“Whatever you wish, I will do for you. This is the first time I have found my children safe and sound, because every time I leave my fledglings, a rain-storm breaks, and they drown in their nest.”

“Carry me to the other world,” Kotihoroshko said.

“Oh, that will be quite difficult for me!” the griffin said. “But all right, fly we must. Take along with you six vats of meat and six vats of water. When I’m flying and turn my head to the right, throw a piece of meat into my mouth, and when I turn my head to the left, give me some water to drink, because otherwise I won’t make it to the other world but ~~will drop~~ to the ground.”

So Kotihoroshko took six vats of meat and six vats of water, climbed onto the griffin's back, and they flew off. Every time the griffin turned his head to the right, Kotihoroshko gave him a piece of meat, and when he turned his head to the left, he gave him some water to drink. They flew thus for a long time. When they had almost reached the other world, the griffin turned his head to the right but — alas! — there was not a single piece of meat left in the vat. Without much ado Kotihoroshko cut a chunk of flesh out of his leg and threw in into the griffin's beak. Once they had reached the other world, the griffin asked:

“That was a tasty piece of meat you gave me in the end. What was it?”

Kotihoroshko showed the griffin his mangled leg, and said:

“That's where it came from.”

The griffin coughed up the piece of flesh, flew off to fetch some healing water, put the flesh back in place, sprinkled it with the healing water, and the leg was as good as before.

Then the griffin flew back home, while Kotihoroshko went to seek his treacherous friends. They were now living in the palace of the Princess' father, quarreling and fighting all the time, because each wanted to marry the Princess.

When Kotihoroshko showed up, they were frightened out of their wits.

“Since you betrayed me, I must punish you,” Kotihoroshko said.

And their punishment was death.

Kotihoroshko married the Princess then, and they lived happily ever after.





THE REALM OF STONE

Once upon a time, beyond blue seas and mountains of glass, there lived a man who was so poor he felt the pinch of want at every step.

He who is on the downhill side of life always is oppressed with cares. And this pauper was no exception. One of his headaches was how to provide for his son, Yurko by name. At school the children always teased his boy: “Yurko, Yurko, want some meat for you to eat?” He surely did, but where could he get it?

One day the boy got fed up with the teasing, and said:

“I will eat as much meat as I possibly can!”

He dropped out of school and applied for work as a butcher’s assistant. Now he could eat his fill of meat! He started to grow quickly and gained in strength. By the time he became an adolescent he was as strong as an oak.

“Well, Yurko, you might as well stay with me,” his master said one day. “You won’t find any better job than mine. I’ve become accustomed to you, and you to me. Also, I’ve got a daughter, you’ll marry her, and when I grow old, you’ll take over my butcher’s shop.”

“No,” Yurko said, “I’ll go out into the wide world to seek my fortune.”

And that’s exactly what he did. With the money he had earned at the butcher’s, he bought himself a knife, ax and whetstone. He put some food into a canvas bag, bowed to his master on parting, and set out on his journey.

He walked on and on for a day, a second day, and a third. Whenever he stopped in a village, the girls cast glances at him, for he was a surprisingly handsome lad. But Yurko did not tarry anywhere for long. Shortly he came to a desert without a single tree or stream or brook. That desert was devilishly hot besides!

Worn out as he was, he kept on walking.

One day he came across a lion, eagle and ant in the desert. They were standing around a dead horse, each wanting to taste of the meat.

Lion roared:

“I am king of the animals! The horse is mine!”

“No, I was the first to spy the horse,” Eagle screamed.

“No, it was me who saw the horse first,” Ant said.

They kept on quarrelling like this, without coming to any agreement.

The very moment Yurko came upon the scene, Ant bit Lion’s muzzle so viciously it made him howl with pain.

At the sight of a human the battle of words ceased, and they turned to Yurko.

“Settle our quarrel!” Lion roared.

“Settle our quarrel!” Eagle screamed.

“Settle our quarrel,” Ant squeaked.

The lad looked at them, then at the dead horse, and said:

“Listen to me. I will settle your quarrel if you agree to my judgment.”

“We will!”

“All right.”

He took out his knife and ax, rolled up his sleeves, and hacked the horse to pieces. Then he pulled out the innards and wrapped them up in the horse’s skin, cut the meat off the bones and put it separately, then heaped the bones in a third pile.

“Since you prefer soft food, you can have all the innards,” he said to Eagle.

“And you can have this”, he said to Lion, pointing to the heap of meat.

“And you, Ant, can crawl under the bones and gnaw them until your teeth turn blunt. Does my arrangement suit you?”

“Let it be your way!”

Yurko was about to leave when Lion stopped him:

“Kind man, you have brought order into our midst, for which boon I wish to repay you.” Lion pulled three hairs out of his mane, adding: “Here, hide these hairs on you. When you twist them and think of turning into a lion, your wish will come true at once.”

Yurko took the hairs, reasoning that he would have nothing to lose and perhaps something to gain when things came to such a pass that he might have to transform himself into a lion.

Eagle also came hopping along, and said:

“I, too, wish to reward you!”

He pulled a feather out of his wing, and said:

“If you have to fly across a sea or river, just draw this feather across the back of your ear, and you will turn into an eagle that very instant. If you want to turn into a human being again, just say, I’ve had enough of being an eagle.”

Yurko thanked Lion and Eagle and was about to leave, when Ant squeaked:

“Hey, and what about me? Am I any worse than the others? Or do you think I do not know how to be grateful for a piece of sage advice? Here, take a hair from me, too. Hide it on you: it will stand you in good stead one of these days. This hair contains such mighty power that when you stroke it with your finger you will instantly turn into an ant. The world is big, and life is long...”

Yurko thanked Ant as well, bowed on parting, and went on his way.

He walked through the desert until twilight, when suddenly he saw an ocean spreading before him to left and right as far as the eye could see.

What am I to do now? he thought. Should I turn back?

The thought made him sad, but then he tapped his forehead with a finger, recalling: "What do I have the eagle's feather for? I'll try it — maybe something will come of it!"

He took out the feather, drew it across the back of his ear, and — wonder of wonders! — became an eagle that very instant.

He flew for a good two hours before he reached the opposite shore, where he saw a tall palace of silver and gold rising above the ocean. One of the palace windows was open, and in it stood a beautiful maiden the likes of which he had never seen before.

This is the abode of a czar, and that is his daughter, the czarivna, Yurko concluded.

He wheeled over the palace and then flew into the maiden's chamber.

The Czarivna quickly shut the window and ran to her father.

"Father, come and look what a wonderful eagle flew into my chamber."

The Czar went to have a look, and said:

"That really is a fine eagle. Maybe we should put him in our aviary — we have no such bird there."

"Oh no! He is mine, because he flew into my chamber."

"Oh well, let it be your way," the Czar said with a laugh, and had a golden cage made for the eagle.

The Czarivna took a great liking to the bird and fed it regularly. One day she fell ill and went to bed without her evening meal. When twilight descended, the eagle looked about, came out of the cage, and turned into the lad he actually was. He sat down at the table, ate the meal, drank of the wine, and then walked over to the Czarivna's bed to admire her beauty. As soon as dawn broke, he turned into an eagle again, went into the cage, and closed it.

In the morning, as the maidservant was taking away the empty dishes, she praised the Czarivna:

"How good it is that you ate your supper!"

22 The girl looked at the table: indeed, the food was gone. Who could have

eaten it? she wondered. The room was locked after all. I'll have to watch and see.

After the arrival of the evening meal, of which there was enough for two, she ate a little bit and left the rest. Then she went to bed and stayed awake. But sometime around midnight she fell sound asleep. That was exactly what Yurko had been waiting for. He climbed out of the cage, turned into his old form, had a hearty meal, admired the beauty of the maiden for some time, and then turned into an eagle again.

The next morning the maidservant again praised the Czarivna for her good appetite.

This time the Czarivna was firmly set on staying awake to find out what was going on in her chamber during the night.

After the evening meal was brought, she ate little of it, then she went to bed and pretended to have fallen asleep.

Caught off guard, Yurko came out of the cage and sat down at the table. Having eaten the meal, he stopped by her bed to admire her beauty. But she saw everything. When he was about to turn into an eagle and return into the cage, she seized him by the hand:

“Who are you? What made you come here? Sit down and tell me everything.”

Yurko gave a smile, sat down at her bedside, and told her his story. After she had heard it out, she said:

“I have fallen so much in love with you that I cannot imagine life without you! But I am afraid my father will not agree for anything in the world to see us married. He is the Czar and will force me to marry some king or prince.”

“I believe things will work out somehow.”

They agreed that Yurko would remain an eagle in the daytime, while they'd meet at night.

From then on the Czarivna was served a double evening meal.

“Our daughter used to eat little before,” her parents wondered. “But now she eats a double portion!”

The change in her was obvious: her beauty grew with each passing day.

Thus the sweethearts wooed each other for about six months. But however long a secret might be kept, it must come to an end. The Czarivna believed that their relationship could not go on in that manner forever and decided to tell her father about it. In the end she plucked up enough courage and went to him. But Yurko, too, came along as an ant, clinging to her skirt.

“A good morrow to you, Father!”

“Good morrow to you, my daughter! How do you feel?”

“Healthy and happy. I wanted to talk to you. Father, haven’t you thought it’s time for me to be wed?”

The Czar literally jumped for joy.

“My dear daughter, I have been expecting to hear you say that for a long time. There are czar’s sons, young czars, and dukes ready and waiting to seek your hand. Choose anyone you wish. I will agree. I know you will chose an honest man for husband.”

So her father started recalling what czars had sons and what czars were young themselves and not yet married. He named so many that she could not remember them all.

“Father, you said that you would agree to my choice, and I have already chosen. But he is not among those you mentioned.”

“So who is he?” the Czar asked.

“I have chosen a wise and decent lad,” she said and told him about Yurko.

When the Czar heard that his daughter wanted to marry a commoner, he jumped to his feet, drew his sword, and if she had not run out of the room, he would have chopped her head off.

“Begone!” he shouted. “Get out of my sight! You have disgraced me by asking leave to marry a commoner!”

Shortly after the daughter returned and made her peace with him. In the end, the father softened, and said:

“I won’t give him your hand in marriage, but still I want to see the lad you love so much.”

No sooner had he uttered these words than lo and behold! Yurko was standing before him. The Czar’s jaw dropped from amazement. Here was a lad, dazzlingly handsome, the likes of which was rarely seen. And how astoundingly fast he had appeared. Said the Czar:

“All right, daughter! We have enough riches. Our realm is big enough. So if you really love him, let it be as you wish!”

The young people were full of joy and smothered the old man with kisses. Then the day of the wedding arrived. It was royally lavish and grand.

But we won't waste our time on the wedding; we will proceed with our tale. Yurko achieved what he had sought for so long: a beautiful maiden for his wife and a realm to rule.

One day he took his wife by the hand and went with her for a walk. The trees and grass were a luxuriant green, the flowers swayed in the breeze, the birds twittered and warbled. It seemed to Yurko that his life had burst into bloom.

They walked deep into the forest. Suddenly they were assailed by such a foul smell that it made them dizzy.

“I'd like to know where this evil smell is coming from,” Yurko said. “Let us go this way.”

Shortly thereafter they came across a deep hole. Here the stench had its source.

“Let us turn back. The smell might be harmful to you,” Yurko said to his wife.

But she sauntered to the edge of the hole, for she saw a wondrously beautiful flower growing there. As she bent down to pluck the flower, a bearded old man appeared, grabbed her by the hand, and pulled her into the hole.

Yurko ran after him, but the old man blocked his way:

“Don't dare set your foot in here! If you do, you will meet a vicious end!”

“And what about my wife?”

“She is no longer yours. You will never see her again!”

Grief-stricken, Yurko returned home and told the old Czar what had happened.

“I will go and seek my wife even if I die in my quest!”

The Czar tried to convince him not to go:

“Since my daughter disappeared, you will remain a comfort to me in my old age. I consider you my son!”

But Yurko stood his ground, took the clothes in which he had roamed the world before he became the Czar's son-in-law, bowed to the Czar on parting,

and went directly to the hole in the forest. However intently he looked down into the black void, he could not see its bottom. Without thinking twice, he jumped into the hole.

How long he fell he could not remember. It might have been a day or two. When he hit the bottom, he lost consciousness. Finally, he came to his senses, looked about, and realized that he had landed in a strange underworld realm. He saw a forest, a meadow, and grass, but there were no people, animals or birds anywhere in sight — they had all turned to stone.

What kind of realm could that be? Yurko wondered, bewildered.

By and by he was strong enough to rise to his feet and set off to seek his wife.

Everywhere he looked along the way he saw only stone.

Toward evening he reached a palace guarded by men of stone with weapons of stone in their hands.

Yurko opened the door and entered the palace. Not a single soul caught his eye. It was all so depressing that he was practically on the verge of tears. As he walked from room to room, finally he came to a chamber which seemed to be lit from above by the sun. In the brightest spot he saw a throne on which a bearded old man was dozing. Judging from his face, he must have been two or even three thousand years old.

And who was sitting there by his side? Yes, it was her, Yurko's wife. She was combing the old man's beard, stroking his gray head, and crooning to him like a mother singing lullabies to her child.

Yurko stole up to his wife, and asked:

“What are you doing here?”

She raised a finger, and whispered in reply:

“Hush, or else you'll awake the ruler of this realm.”

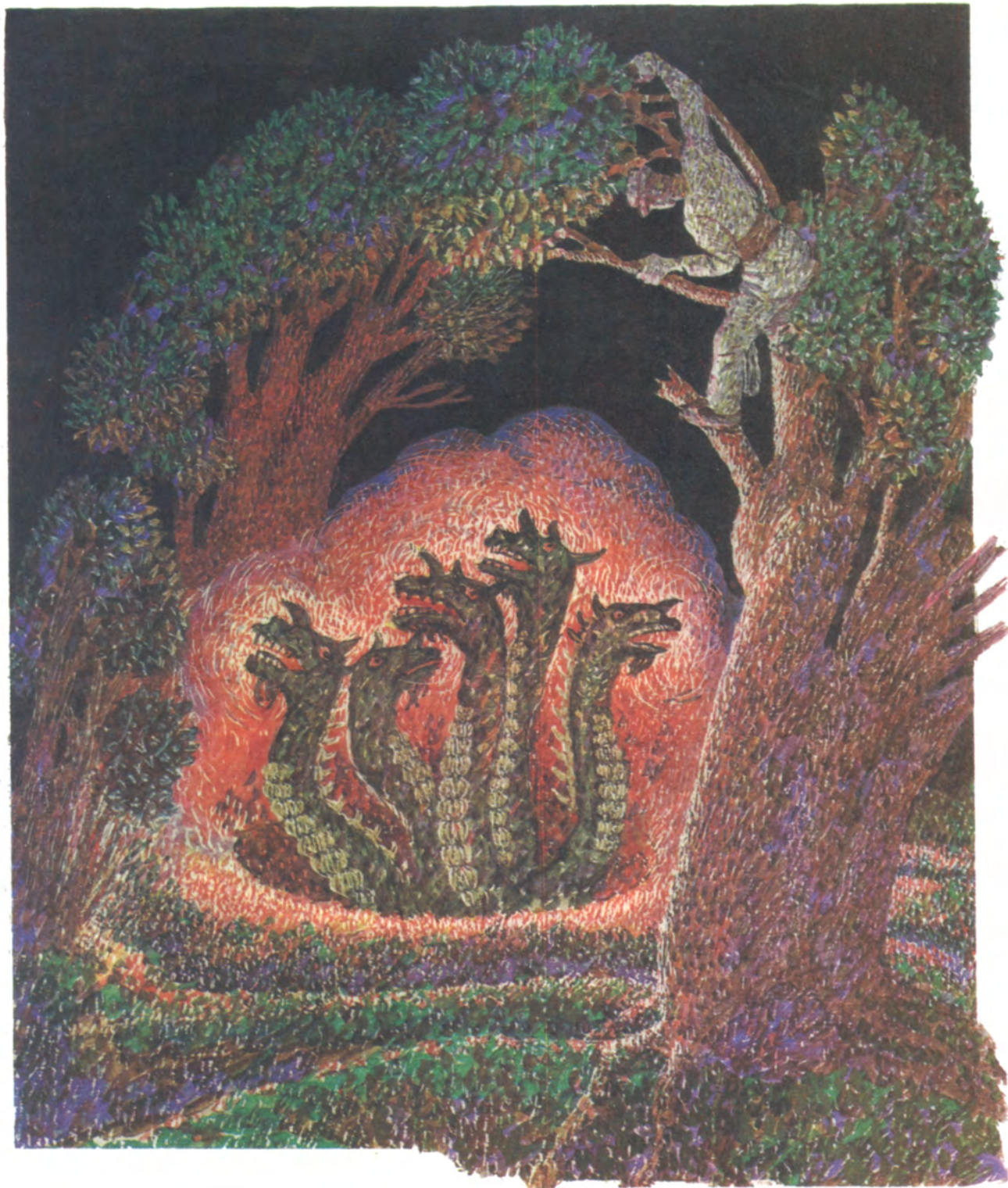
Yurko embraced his wife and kissed her. The reunion made her joyous and put her off guard.

Presently the old man opened his eyes, and asked:

“And who is this, pray tell?”

“He is my husband. I told you all about him.”

“Yes, she is my wife,” Yurko said. “I've come to take her back to her father.”



The old man gave a bitter smile, and said:

“Oh, my son, I’d like to do that myself. But it’s impossible. You will never see your homeland again. Here you are fated to live and to die. Sit down at my side, son, and I will tell you about this realm.”

Yurko complied, and the old man embarked on his tale.

“This realm, in which people, animals and birds have been turned to stone, was once rich and full of life. I am its Czar. But the Dragon Sorcerer became envious of my realm and turned its subjects into stone. Then he punished me worst of all by depriving me of death. So I must suffer until the day a wise man appears and frees me. There is an iron gate here that leads to the world of the living. Oh yes, there is one more thing you should know: the hole you jumped into does not exist anymore — it has been covered and is already overgrown with grass. Only the iron gate remains. But it has been locked with a diamond key, and the key isn’t here. Only a wise man can obtain it. Some seven hundred miles from here is the Black Realm. But it is very difficult to reach: first you must walk five hundred miles down an ordinary road, then crawl on all fours for another hundred miles, and the remaining hundred miles you must run through a tunnel so narrow you can barely stick your finger into it. If this path were to be covered by a wise man — and there is no one so wise in all the world, as far as I know — it would not yet mean victory, because the key lies in the dragon’s head in a diamond casket. Well, what do you say to that, Yurko?”

“I will try to cover this path!”

He said goodby to his wife and the old man and set out on his way.

The first hundred miles he covered as an eagle that day. Further on the road grew narrower and narrower and finally ran into a huge hole. Yurko turned into his old form and covered the next hundred miles on all fours.

The narrow tunnel was the most difficult part of the trek. He turned into an ant and exerted himself to the utmost until he reached the end of the tunnel.

When he entered the Black Realm, he turned into an eagle and flew on. He expected to see villages and people, but there were none. At last he spied a wonderful common pasture with herds of cattle which would make any farmer green with envy. But all the cattle were black.

Perhaps that's the reason this land is called the Black Realm, Yurko concluded. He soared over a tall tree and then lit in its crown. Under the tree shepherds had built a campfire and were having their midday meal just then.

"What will happen with us now?" one of them said. "Soon we'll die, too, because of the dragon. He's gobbled up countless swine as it is, but there is no one to kill him. Our poor Czar keeps driving herd after herd of swine into the dragon's lair, so the monster can eat his fill and leave our people in peace."

"The Czar is unable to hire a swineheard anymore, because whoever sees those horrors makes himself scarce at once."

"Yes, that's true. It's been three days now that the Czar has had no swineherd, so the dragon has been fasting for three whole days. If this goes on for another day, the monster will start devouring our people."

The shepherds fell silent, overcome by grief.

All right, I'll drive the swine to the dragon's lair, Yurko decided. He took off from oak tree and flew to the Czar's palace where he turned into his old form and went straight to the Czar.

"Good morrow to you, Your Most Illustrious Highness!" he said.

The Czar did not so much as raise his head.

Yurko bowed a second time, and said:

"Good morrow to you, Your Most Illustrious Highness!"

The Czar raised his head then, and asked:

"Good morrow to you, too, my lad! What can I do for you? People are afraid to come to my palace. Everyone runs away, fearing lest they be forced to drive the swine to the dragon."

"That's just the reason I came. Let me be your swineherd. I'll drive the herds into the lair and kill that accursed dragon."

The Czar was overjoyed:

"My lad, if you will serve me faithfully, half of my czardom will be yours, and I will give you my daughter in marriage!"

To which Yurko replied with a smile:

"Your Most Illustrious Highness, let us talk about that after I fulfil this task. As for now, take me into your service as a swineherd."

The Czar agreed to hire him. After Yurko had rested for some time, he drove the swine to the dragon. The Czar told him where he had to go: in such

and such a place there was a mountain, and in the mountain was the dragon's lair.

As he drove the swine, he entered a forest and then turned the herd in the opposite direction from the lair. While the swine were grazing, he watched out for the dragon. Shortly thereafter he saw smoke belching out of a hole, followed by roaring flames. The dragon emerged into the daylight and looked about, but there were no swine in sight!

That same instant each of his heads gave a roar, spewing forth flames on all sides, after which the dragon crawled back into the lair.

Yurko climbed down the oak tree from which he had observed all this and returned to the herd which he drove back home.

"Well, how many swine did the dragon devour?" the Czar asked.

"None."

"I will not have this! Tomorrow you must drive the herd there by all means, because otherwise my realm will suffer. The dragon hasn't eaten anything for three days now!"

The next day Yurko did drive the herd to the lair. The dragon tore the heads off a hundred swine and devoured them, after which, gorged as he was, he crawled back into his lair.

Yurko drove the remainder of the herd back home.

"Well, how many did he devour?"

"A hundred."

"Then drive the herd there again tomorrow! The beast must be fed until he bursts. Surely this will happen one of these days!"

On the third day the dragon devoured ninety, on the fourth eighty... He was eating less and less each day.

Yurko sat in the oak tree, watching and studying the habits of the beast.

Then he decided to act. One day as the dragon was tearing a swine to pieces, Yurko turned into a lion and jumped into the midst of the herd. On seeing the intruder, the dragon gave such a mighty roar it made the earth tremble, and the herd stampeded away.

Fuming with rage, the dragon pounced on the lion, but the lion was not caught sleeping. The moment the dragon started to spout flames, the lion

jumped behind his back, and at the best opportunity — snap! — bit off one of the dragon's heads.

The dragon thundered in rage, but the lion kept pouncing at him from the back, biting off one head after another. The dragon was thrashing about in blood up to his knees by then. In the end, the lion grew really angry, jumped on the dragon's back, turned into his old form, drew his knife, and cut off the last of the dragon's heads.

Thus Yurko destroyed the dragon. He cleaved the biggest head in two, and a fox came running out of it. That same instant Yurko turned into an eagle, gave chase to the fox, and grabbed it in his talons.

Then he turned into his old form again, sliced open the fox's head, and lo! there was the casket. He opened the casket and found the diamond key in it.

Yurko pocketed the key and drove the herd back to the palace.

"Well, how many swine did the dragon devour this time?" the Czar asked.

"Three, but they were the last swine he'll ever eat."

"What are you talking about?" the Czar asked, thinking that the lad had gone out of his mind from fright.

"I killed the dragon!"

The Czar quickly gave orders to have horses hitched to a britzka, and hurried to the forest to see for himself whether the dragon was really dead.

From afar he heard crows clamoring and saw them pecking the eyes out of the dragon's heads.

Back at the palace, the Czar embraced Yurko, planted a kiss on his cheek, and said:

"Ask whatever you wish — gold, my realm, my daughter..."

He burst into tears for joy.

"I do not want either your gold, your realm, or your daughter," Yurko said, setting the Czar's heart at rest. "There is only one thing I would ask of you: burn the contract by which I must remain in your service for a year."

The Czar flung the contract into the oven at once and implored that Yurko be his guest for a few days before parting.

Yurko granted his host's request, then he parted politely and set out on his journey to the realm of stone. He flew to the tunnel, and there he grew depressed, thinking: If I turn into an ant, how will I drag the key through the

tunnel? But presently he noticed that the tunnel had become broader. So he turned into an eagle at once. By the time he had reached the middle of the tunnel, it had become much broader and Yurko could walk through it as a human being.

His wife had been crying her eyes out, thinking Yurko had died. But the moment she saw him she cried out for joy, rousing the old man from his sleep.

“Well, son, so nothing came out of it?”

Instead of answering, Yurko showed him the key.

“Is it the one we need?”

“Exactly!”

“Well, it’s time we went back home, because your father will die of grief otherwise,” Yurko said to his wife.

“Wait, I am coming with you! Yurko, you saved me from an eternal curse. Now we’ll open the gate, and I will be redeemed from the curse. My realm will come back to life, and I will give it to you to rule.”

With that the old man took them to a hill, and said:

“Look, here was the hole into which you jumped. It does not exist any longer. But let us proceed.” He took them through forests, past cliffs, and up to a huge iron gate.

“But how is it possible to open such a gate with this tiny key?” Yurko asked.

The old man took the key, and said:

“Look here: in the cliff by the gate there is an iron door fastened with a golden padlock.”

The old man opened the padlock with the diamond key. Behind the door lay an enormous iron key which Yurko could barely lift.

Then the three of them joined efforts and inserted the key into the keyhole of the gate. They did not have to open it. The key turned with a squeak, and the gate opened of itself.

Beyond the gate stretched the road into the world of the living, from which Yurko and his wife had come.

But the old man stopped him, saying:

“Turn round and look at what is taking place in my realm.”

They turned round and saw birds, animals and people coming back to life, along with nature and the silky grass pushing out of the ground. The realm

rose higher and higher — they did not have to go uphill to get to their homeland.

In the place where the vast desert had spread out, there appeared a rich and glorious realm.

The three of them went to see the old Czar, Yurko's father-in-law. Upon their arrival they met a multitude of people.

“What has happened.”

“The old Czar has died.”

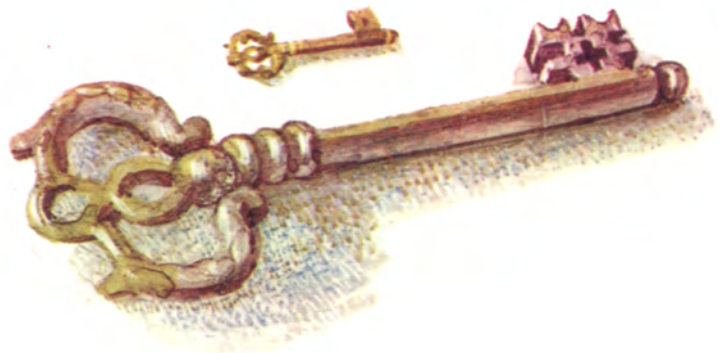
When the old man heard about this, he hastened to the dead Czar, and started to mutter incantations over him and to rub him with the diamond key. Moments later everyone saw the Czar sit upright so full of joy that he burst into tears.

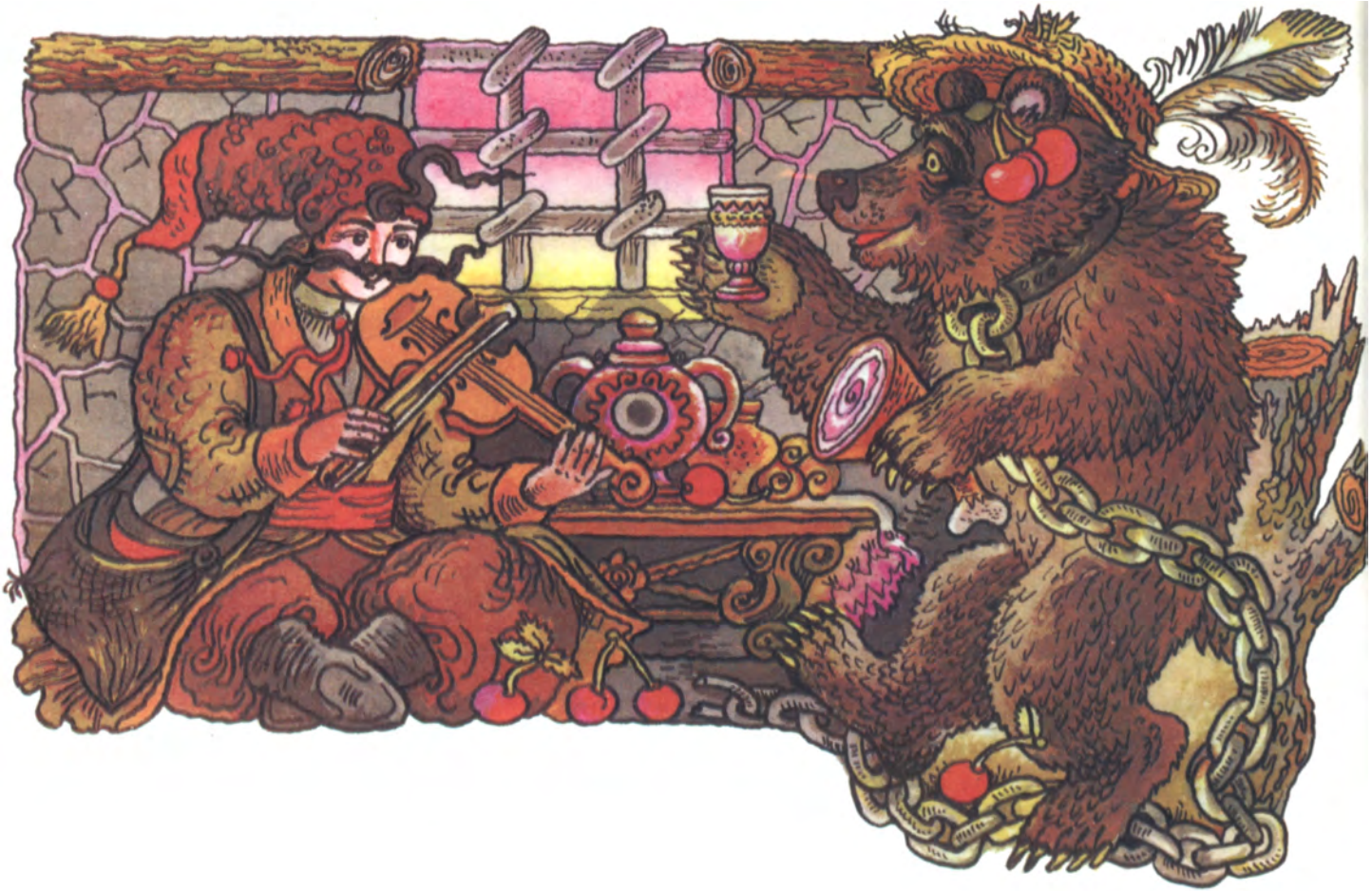
A grand feast was held to which all the subjects of the realm were invited. Anyone the Czar's heralds met was seen to the palace and sat at the table.

They ate and drank and made merry. The bearded man two thousand years of age enjoyed the feast the most, eating, drinking and making merry as if he were a young man. He revelled in the dancing until he got entangled in his long beard, collapsed to the ground, and crumbled to dust.

However, this event did not mar the feast.

The guests and hosts made merry until they got bored of it all.





MAMARIHA THE COSSACK

After having served the wealthy for twenty-five years, Mamariha the Cossack had earned neither an ox, a horse, nor a kind word in reward. So he entered the service of the Czar, and after twenty-five years he had earned neither an ox, a horse, nor a kind word from the Czar either. He returned home and shortly thereafter set out into the wide world, wherever God willed. As he walked down a highroad for a week or two, he came across a young man.

“Good day,” the young man said in greeting. “Who might you be?”

“I am Mamariha the Cossack. Twenty-five years I worked for the wealthy and earned neither an ox, a horse, nor a kind word in reward. And the Czar did I serve for twenty-five years and earned neither an ox, a horse, nor a kind word there either. So now I’m on my way wherever God wills. And who might you be?”

“I worked as a cook for a lord,” the young man replied. “One day as I was carrying a stack of expensive plates and dishes, I tripped and fell, and broke the crockery. Yesterday the lord had a pile of canes prepared to flog me, so I just ran away. If you will take me as your younger brother, I will serve you.”

They made friends with each other and set forth. After a week or so they came across another young man carrying a whip.

“Good day, brothers,” he said. “Who might you be?”

“I am Mamariha the Cossack.”

“And I worked as a cook for a lord,” Mamariha’s sworn brother said. “When he wanted to flog me, I ran away, and that’s how I came to be here.”

“Well, accept me as a third brother in your company.”

“And who might you be?”

“I am a *chumak* carter,” the man replied. “One day as I was driving a caravan of twelve oxen pulling salt and fish, some highwaymen attacked me, took away my money and animals, and I fled with only my life and this whip.”

They accepted him as their brother. On their way they begged for food to sustain themselves. On and on they walked until they came to a place where three roads crossed. Mamariha the Cossack looked about, and said:

“Well, my brothers, this is where we must part. Each can choose the road he prefers. I will take the one to the left.”

They bid farewell to one another, the second brother going one way, and the third brother choosing the remaining direction. Farther on Mamariha the Cossack walked alone. In this way he roamed the world for about ten years. One day he walked into a forest in which he wandered for a long time or a little less until he came upon a cottage. He tugged at the door handle, but the door was latched.

“Open up,” he said.

Instead of an answer he heard two women giggling inside. However much he asked to be admitted, they would not let him in. So he broke down the door and entered the cottage.

“Good day!” he said on entering.

“Just who do you think you are to come bursting into my home like that?” said a man, rising from the stove on which he was resting. “Now I’ll get up and take a pestle and give you such a pounding you’ll remember me for the rest of your days. Who are you anyway?”

“I am Mamariha the Cossack.”

“Oh, forgive me for not letting you in. You are my elder brother after all.”

“And what kind of a brother might you be to me?” Mamariha the Cossack wondered.

“Remember the man who ran away from his lord and was then adopted as a brother by you?”

Now the brother was invited to the table and offered meat and drink.

“Have you settled down yet, brother?”

“No, I haven’t.”

Well, they ate and drank, and the host said:

“You know what, brother. I have two wives, so take whichever you like best.”

“Oh no, thank you, brother. That is not what I want.”

He stayed for three days at his brother’s, had a rest, and then said:

“Farewell, brother, I will be going wherever God wills.”

On and on he walked for three or four days when he saw a lord chasing a hare with hounds. The hare was heading straight at Mamariha the Cossack. He killed it with a stick and sat down beside it. The hounds came running up, looked about, and settled at his side. Shortly thereafter the lord came running up.

“Good day, peasant!” he said. “Did you see a hare around here anywhere?”

“No,” Mamariha the Cossack replied. “I have here only the hare I killed just now.”

“Who are you?” the lord asked.

“I am Mamariha the Cossack.”

“Oh, brother, forgive me if I have offended you in any way,” the lord said.

He jumped down his horse, took Mamariha by the hand and planted a kiss on his cheeks. "You are my elder brother. Remember how the two of you adopted me as a third brother?"

"Of course, I remember."

"Well, let me invite you to my home then. I am very well off now. Mount my horse, brother, and we shall ride there."

"Thank you for the offer, brother. But I've gotten out of the habit of riding horses after all these years."

As they walked along, the lord took Mamariha's hand, holding the horse by the reins with the other hand.

"I see you haven't settled down yet, have you, brother? I've been married and living here for eighteen years now."

The lord took Mamariha to his home, and introduced him to his family:

"This is my wife. And this is my sworn brother I met in the steppe by the road."

Then they invited him to the table, treated him to meat and drink, and did not know how best to entertain him for the sheer joy of seeing him again.

"Well, brother, now I want to give you a half of the house I have," the host offered. "Then I'll find you a wife. You can live in these apartments and I'll build myself a new house, or the other way around."

"Thank you for your kindness, brother. Thank God you have made good, but I prefer to possess what I have earned myself."

Mamariha the Cossack stayed at his sworn brother's home for an entire month, after which he said:

"Well, I guess I'll have to be moving on, brother."

The host weeped and implored, trying to make Mamariha the Cossack stay, but the guest was adamant:

"No, thank you, but I must leave."

"What if you accept a good horse for your journey?"

"Thank you for the horse," Mamariha said.

His sworn brother gave him some two or three hundred *karbovantsi*, * bid him farewell, and Mamariha the Cossack went roaming the world again.

* Monetary unit (coin or note, sing. *karbovanets*) = 100 kopecks.— Tr.

Whether his journey was long or short we do not know, but one day he saw in front of him three men fighting near a grave. He ran over there quickly, and asked:

“Good day, gentlemen. Why are you fighting?”

“For our father’s inheritance. You see, we are three brothers.”

“And what kind of an inheritance do you have?”

“A horse by the name of Heaver, a haircloth pouch which can give you any meat and drink you wish, and a pair of boots in which you can walk on water. That’s all of our inheritance. But each wants what the other claims to be his, so in the end we began to fight. Oh yes, who might you be?”

“I am Mamariha the Cossack.”

“Help us, Mamariha the Cossack, to divide our inheritance.”

“I will help you, because no one can settle your problem better than I. So do you agree to listen to me?”

“We agree, if you give us each an equal share.”

“All right, so listen what I will say. Walk a furrow and a half away from here, and when I wave my hand, all of you run back here: the one that comes first takes what he likes best, the second does the same, and the last will have what remains.”

When they had walked a furrow and a half away, Mamariha the Cossack waved his hand. Seeing that Heaver was saddled, Mamariha the Cossack threw the haircloth pouch over his shoulder, put on the boots, and jumped into Heaver’s saddle.

“My lord,” Heaver said, “how am I to carry you — above the trees or over the reeds?”

“Above the trees,” Mamariha the Cossack said.

As the brothers came running back, they saw what happened and raised their hands in anger. Mamariha the Cossack shouted back to them from on high:

“Nobody could settle your problem better than I.”

The brothers scratched their pates, and went back home. Mamariha the Cossack urged his mount on until it grew tired. They descended to the earth, he pitched a tent, untied the haircloth pouch, and said:

“Haircloth pouch, give me meat and drink!”

The next moment a table appeared out of nowhere, with all kinds of meat and drink which he enjoyed to his heart's content. When he was through with the meal, he said:

“Pouch, clear the table!”

Everything vanished back into the pouch as if it had never been there at all.

“Well, where do we go next, my lord?” the horse asked.

“I don't know,” Mamariha the Cossack replied. “Since I left home, I have been roaming around for over twenty years.”

“So where do you intend to go now?”

“I don't know. Let it be wherever God wills.”

“Well then, let us go to a foreign land,” Heaver said. “A certain king is giving his daughter's hand in marriage. He has an oak tree growing in his courtyard. Whoever fells that tree will get the King's daughter and his realm as a reward. Why don't you fell that tree?”

“Well, whether I can or not I do not know, but I might try just the same.”

They rode on and on for some three or four days until they came to a forest. While riding through the forest, they heard axes hacking, saws swishing, and planes scratching, but there was not a single living soul in sight. Mamariha the Cossack quietly rode closer, got off Heaver, and led him by the bridle, listening intently. Presently he spied a pouch of wire hanging on an oak tree. He grabbed his whip and cracked it so loudly that the echo resounded through the entire forest. Then he shouted:

“Get back into the pouch!”

All the sounds vanished into the pouch, and everything became quiet again. Mamariha the Cossack climbed the oak tree, took down the pouch, jumped into the saddle and raced on. When he arrived in the kingdom, he sent word to the King as to what country he had arrived from, so the King had him summoned to the palace.

“Well, what has brought you to my kingdom?”

“Your Highness, I have heard that you are giving your daughter in marriage to the one who would fell your oak tree.”

“That is true,” the King confirmed. “If you fell the tree, you will become my son-in-law. But mind you, apart from felling it, you must uproot it, chop

it to pieces, stack the logs, and set them afire. If you fail to do all that, your head will be impaled just like the ones you see over there.”

The King treated him to meat and drink, after which he said:

“All right, now get down to work. See that oak tree near the porch — go there and fell it.”

Once they reached the oak tree, Mamariha the Cossack untied the pouch of wire and said:

“All right, boys, get inside that oak and start hacking at it closer to the roots.”

They disappeared into the oak, while he lay down for a nap. Whether he slept for a long or short time we do not know, but some time later he was called for his meal.

“You boys take a little rest, while I go and have something to eat.”

The boys did as they were told. When the Princess came out of the palace and looked at the oak tree to see whether he had felled it, she saw that he had not even touched it.

“The man who’s come here is unbelievably lazy,” she said to her father. “The others buckled down to work at once, but he has not even begun.”

“Never mind,” the King said. “His head will be beside the others soon enough.”

After the meal Mamariha the Cossack returned to the oak tree and asked:

“Well, boys, did you have a little rest?”

“Oh yes, master, we did.”

“Get back to work then.”

Whether shortly or long after that the oak tree crashed to the ground so thunderously it made the earth tremble and the rocks rumble. The King came running out onto the porch, and saw the tree lying on the ground.

“Hey, daughter, come out here,” the King said. “This one has done it after all. Go and summon him to my apartments for a meal.”

“Well done, Mamariha the Cossack,” the King said when the Cossack arrived at his call. “Now you’ll be my son-in-law. I had to make over a hundred heads roll to see that oak tree felled.”

After paying his respects, the King treated him to a glass of vodka and had



an amicable chat with him. After the meal Mamariha the Cossack returned to the felled oak tree to finish the job.

“Well, boys, did you have a rest?” he asked his pouch of wire.

“We did.”

“Now mind you, stack the logs today, because it is already late, set the logs afire and scatter the ashes before the wind.”

The boys got down to work. Within an hour they had stacked the logs as high as a bell tower and set them afire. Soon the ashes were scattered before the wind.

“And now, boys, get back into the pouch.”

They got into the pouch, and Mamariha the Cossack tied it up. On seeing how he had coped with his task, the King said to his daughter:

“No, this man is not as simple as it might seem.”

With the first flush of morning, Mamariha the Cossack went to market, bought himself a fiddle, some walnuts, and half a quart of fiery alcohol, put it all into his bag, and went to the King. It was evening when the King ordered Mamariha the Cossack brought to supper.

After the meal was over the King ordered his gendarmes:

“Throw him into the room with the bear — Brownie will wed him all right.”

So they seized Mamariha the Cossack, threw him into the room with the Bear, and locked the door on him. On finding himself in the room, he greeted the Bear.

The Bear gave a nod in response. Mamariha the Cossack paced up and down the room for a while, then he took the fiddle out of his bag and the haircloth pouch off his shoulder.

“Haircloth pouch, give me meat and drink.”

The next moment a table appeared out of nowhere, with all kinds of meat and drink. He sat down at the table, and ate.

“Please, Bear, join me at the table.”

The Bear came closer to the table, and said:

“What kind of a character are you? I’ve gobbled up so many people in here, but I never saw a man setting a table with meat and drink which even the King has never seen.”

Well, Mamariha the Cossack loaded the plates with food which the Bear ate eagerly. Then he filled the glasses with the alcohol, wished the Bear good health, and downed the liquid.

“What is that you’re drinking?”

“Oh, it’s vodka; good stuff.”

“Why do you drink it?”

“To feel bolder.”

“Give me some; I’ll try it, too.”

Mamariha the Cossack filled a glass. The Bear opened his mouth, the Cossack poured the vodka down the Bear’s throat, and made him chase it down with some food.

“Well, I didn’t quite get the taste of it,” the Bear said.

Mamariha the Cossack poured him a second glass. The Bear downed it and ate some food. Then Mamariha the Cossack took his fiddle and started playing. The Bear burst forth in dance.

“Here, drink another glass to feel bolder.”

The Bear downed this glass as well and danced even more violently.

“It’d be fine, Mamariha the Cossack, if you taught me to play just like you do.”

“I can teach you right away if you are eager to learn.”

“Of course, I am. Come on, teach me.”

Mamariha the Cossack untied his pouch of wire, took iron wedges and a sledge hammer out of it, and drove the wedges into the thick trunk of half an oak that was lying in the room.

“Well, push your paws into this cleft so I can straighten your claws and teach you to play just as well as I do.”

The Bear began pushing his paws into the cleft.

“You just push them in as deep as you can,” Mamariha the Cossack said.

Then he knocked out the wedges, and the Bear’s paws got pinned in.

“Let me go, Mamariha the Cossack. You’ve already straightened my claws.”

“Oh no, it’s not yet time to let you go. First I’ll clear the table, and then I’ll show you! Clear everything away, haircloth pouch!”

The table disappeared into the pouch. Mamariha the Cossack hung the pouch on a peg, took a wire scourge out of the wire pouch, and started to scourge the Bear's back.

"Hey, let me go, Mamariha the Cossack!" the Bear roared. "Why are you beating me?"

"You seem to have forgotten how many of my kind you have devoured. Now I'll satisfy your hunger so that you'll never want to devour us anymore."

Then he started to thrash him so viciously the Bear's fur went a-flying. The Bear roared with pain and implored him to stop, but Mamariha the Cossack continued to work him over. He kept at it until he got tired, and then lay down for a rest. After he had rested he resumed the thrashing. Half of the animal's fur had been whipped off clean on the sides. Then Mamariha the Cossack lay down and fell asleep.

At dawn the King's servants walked up to the little barred window in the door to have a look at what had happened inside. They called out to the Bear.

"Hush, because the lord is asleep," the Bear said. "If he wakes up, he'll start thrashing me again."

On hearing that, the servants walked away from the window.

"Judging from what the Bear said, the Cossack must be still alive."

"No, that cannot be; let us go and look again."

This time about four servants went to have a look. They walked up to the door, unlocked it, entered the room and saw the Bear's paws pinned in the oak trunk.

"Keep silent, because the lord is asleep," the Bear said. "Get out, because when he wakes up, he will start to beat me again."

The servants went to the King, and reported:

"Your Majesty, Mamariha the Cossack is sleeping, and the Bear's paws are pinned in the oak trunk."

"No, I cannot believe it," the King said. "Who could have pinned his paws in the trunk? Let's go and have a look."

The King took some six men and went to the room. Indeed, the Bear's paws were pinned in the trunk, his fur was scattered knee-deep about the room, and Mamariha the Cossack was asleep. When they had entered Mamariha the Cossack got up.

“Now just where did you lock me up for the night, my lord? Did you want the bear to gobble me up? Well, I treated him to such a hearty meal he’ll never want to eat our kind anymore.”

“All right, Mamariha the Cossack, let the Bear go.”

“That I can do on your command.”

He took the wedges and hammer out of his pouch, knocked the wedges into the crack and widened it.

“All right, Brownie, pull your paws out!”

The Bear pulled out his paws, and Mamariha the Cossack put his tools back into the pouch.

“Now let us go, Mamariha the Cossack, and you’ll be my son-in-law, the likes of which the world has never seen.”

He took him to the palace and treated him to a sumptuous meal.

“Well, my daughter, this will be your husband and my son-in-law. If he survived a night with the Bear, we have no other choice but to accept him.”

Right then Mamariha the Cossack was dressed in the finest attire and taken to the church to be wed. After the wedding the King showed the newlyweds their apartments, and said:

“This is where you will be living.”

Then the King gave half of his kingdom to Mamariha the Cossack.

“But I don’t want just a half of it,” the Cossack said. “You have a small kingdom, so give it all to me. Just half does not suit me.”

“No, I cannot give you all of it,” the King said. “When I die, it will all be yours, but for now each of us will have a half.”

“No, I don’t want a half.”

“As you like, but I won’t give you the other half until I die.”

So Mamariha the Cossack led his horse Heaver out of the stable, took his wife by the hand, and said to the King:

“Fare thee well. If you don’t want to give me your whole kingdom, I will go with my wife to another land.”

He mounted his horse and seated his wife behind him.

“How am I to carry you, my dear lord?” Heaver asked.

“Carry me above the trees!”

Off raced the horse, leaving only a dust cloud in its wake. Heaver raced on for a day or two until they came to the Black Sea. He raced above the Black Sea, with not a patch of land around and only the black rolling waves below, when suddenly they came upon a rock amidst the waves. They descended to the rock for a rest, Mamariha the Cossack pitched a tent, then took the haircloth pouch off his shoulder, and said:

“Haircloth pouch, give us meat and drink!”

That same instant a table appeared out of nowhere, with such meat and drink as the princess had never ever seen at her father’s palace. They ate and drank their fill.

“Pouch, clear everything away,” Mamariha the Cossack said then.

The table disappeared in a trice as if it had never been there before. Then they went to rest.

“Put your head on my knees and sleep,” his wife said to him.

He put his head on her knees and was soon fast asleep. But she stealthily pulled her knees out from under his head and moved aside, leaving him sleeping on the ground. Then she took the two pouches, and made for Heaver. No sooner had she put her foot in a stirrup than Heaver asked:

“Where am I to carry you, my lady?”

“Carry me to my father’s palace!”

Off they went at lightning speed.

Mamariha the Cossack had a good sleep and woke up to see that his pouches and wife were gone. The only thing she had not snatched was his boots.

“Oh, thank God, if the boots are still around, that isn’t the end of Mamariha the Cossack yet!”

He pulled on the boots and set forth over the water. He crossed the sea, then his journey took him overland. Since he had grown hungry by then, he looked about and saw a crab cherry bush with berries on it. He plucked one berry, tossed it into his mouth, and instantly a horn grew out of his head. He plucked another berry, tossed it into his mouth, and a second horn appeared.

“Oh, that’s the end of Mamariha the Cossack. How am I to live with such horns? Enough of eating the berries. The more I eat, the longer the horns grow.”

46 He moved away from the bush and saw another bush laden with berries.

“What if I try these, too?” he asked himself. “It won’t make things any worse than they already are.”

He plucked a berry, ate it, and one horn fell off his head. Then he plucked another berry, ate it, and the second horn dropped off as well. He picked berries from both bushes and continued on his way to the kingdom where his wife lived. He came up to the porch, and cried out:

“Berries for sale!”

The princess heard the vendor’s shout and sent her servant outside.

“Go and see what kind of berries they are.”

The servant came out, and said:

“Good day!”

“Good day.”

“What kind of berries have you, where are they from, and are they fresh?”

“They’re fresh, delicious berries.”

“Oh, how early they have ripened from where you come! Our cherry trees are only in bloom now. Are they expensive?”

“Yes, expensive and delicious!”

“How much do you charge?”

“A silver rouble a berry.”

The servant returned to the princess, and informed her:

“The berries he offers are good.”

The princess gave her servant fifty rubles in silver, and said:

“Here, take the money and buy me some berries.”

Mamariha the Cossack took the money and gave the servant the berries. When the servant brought the berries to the princess, she put three berries into her mouth, and suddenly there were two horns sticking out of her sides and one out of her belly. She was struck with horror.

“Oh my God, what is this? Let me eat some more.”

She tossed another three berries into her mouth, and another three horns grew out of her body. The berries were so delicious she could not help eating all of them, and in the end she had as many horns sticking out of her as she had eaten berries. On seeing this horror, the servants ran to the King.

“Go and look what has happened to the Princess!”

When the King ran into the chamber, he shuddered with horror.

“What has happened? What did you eat?”

“I bought some berries from a peasant, and when I ate them, this is what happened.”

The King ordered the cherry vendor caught at once.

The soldiers searched for him high and low, but the culprit could not be found anywhere, and the Princess's horns remained. The King sent out messages to foreign lands, inviting doctors who could take the horns off. They came from foreign kingdoms and from his own realm. But no matter how much they examined the Princess, there was nothing they could do — the horns stayed put! Whatever ointments they applied, the result was the same. The doctors set off for their realms, but the cherry vendor walked around the market, bragging:

“I can remove those horns without any medicines.”

The King was immediately informed of this.

“Where is that fine man — bring him before me.”

When he was brought before the King, he was asked:

“Can you really remove the horns without any medicines?”

“I can.”

“Good. I'll give you my kingdom, and my daughter will be your wife.”

“Have two cartloads of wood chips brought to the square. All of the townspeople will have to go twenty-five *versts* * out of town, because I will be using such a treatment that whoever enters the town will die. Now take her to the heap of wood in the garden.”

She was taken to the garden, and all the people left town. He set fire to the wood, cut himself three sticks of oak, steamed them, and then drew them across the Princess's horns which made her scream with pain.

“This is Mamariha the Cossack, your husband, administering the treatment. What have you done with Heaven?”

“He is alive and standing in my stable. Please do not torture me.”

“And what about the pouches — the one of haircloth and of wire?”

“Father hid them. You can have everything back, but please don’t torture me.”

“Do you promise never to leave me?”

“I promise to stay with you till the end of my days.”

So he took one berry, placed it in her mouth — and one horn dropped off her head at once. Then he gave her two berries — and three horns fell off. Then she got rid of another three horns. He gave her more and more, and after she had eaten about forty all her horns dropped off and she became her former self.

“Now mind you remember what being a wife means.”

They returned to the royal apartments, found there meat and drink, and had a hearty meal. An hour later the townspeople came running back. When the King saw his daughter, he exclaimed:

“Thank God, thank God!”

Then a stately banquet was held.

“From what land do you come and who are you?” the King asked him.

“I am Mamariha the Cossack, your first son-in-law. So there is no need for me to marry your daughter again.”

“Is it really you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, now I’ll give my whole kingdom to you.”

Thus Mamariha the Cossack came to rule the realm. He respects his wife, and his wife respects him, and they live happily in that realm to this day.





THE CZAR OF THE SEA

Once there lived a merchant and his wife. He was comfortably wealthy and had a son. They reared the boy to manhood, saw him wed, and died shortly afterward: the merchant was the first to die, and then his wife passed away. Thus the son and his young wife were left all alone in the world. What should I put my hand to? the son thought. What trade should I take up?

50 After some careful thinking he made up his mind: My father, God rest his

soul, did not sit around at home, but traveled to distant lands where he acquired his wealth. So I shall do the same.

He had three ships laden with wares of sundry kinds, took leave of his wife, and sailed for distant lands, not noticing that his wife was already with child.

In the foreign lands he made excellent bargains on the goods he sold, and six years later he bought other wares and had not three but dozen ships laden. He set off for home then. Some of the ships sailed ahead of him, others behind, while his ship sailed in the middle. When his ship reached the very center of the sea, she stopped all of a sudden, and no matter how hard the crew tried to make her move on, she would not budge an inch.

So the merchant had a diver go down and see what the ship was caught on. The diver swam under the hull and saw an old man sitting on the bottom of the sea. He was holding the ship fast. The diver asked him:

“Why are you holding our ship?”

“Go and tell your master that if he wants to return home, let him give me what he does not know he has at his house. If I don’t get it, I will drown all of you.”

The diver surfaced, and then informed his master:

“There is an old man sitting on the bottom of the sea and holding our ship fast. He tells you to give him what you do not know you have at your house. He’ll let go of the ship if you give it to him; otherwise, he’ll drown all of us.”

Said the merchant:

“Dive back down there and tell him to give me at least three hours to think of what I have at home.”

The diver went down and asked that the old man give them three hours to think over his request.

“I can as well give you three days, not just three hours,” the old man said.

The diver surfaced and reported the message to the master. The merchant fell to thinking and wrote down everything he had at his house. He listed absolutely every thing — but what he did not know was that in his absence a son had been born to him. The boy was seven years old, in school already, and had learned to read. After the merchant had recalled everything he could, he sent the diver back into the sea, with the words:

“Tell the old man that I will give him what I do not know I have at my house.”

The diver went down again reported his master’s message to the old man.

“I cannot take him on his word only,” the old man said. “Let him write me a note in his own blood.”

The merchant cut the tip of his finger and wrote a note in blood to the effect that he would surrender what he did not know he had in his house, and sent the diver back to the old man.

No sooner had the old man received the note than he let go of the ship, which sailed so fast that she overtook the first ships. The old man of the sea took the note and went to the merchant’s home town, where he threw the note onto the road. To the note he had added in his own hand: “You, my fine lad, have been given into my service by your father. This is the note he wrote in his own blood and gave to me. But don’t let that worry you, because I will come for you not now but in five years. So when you reach the age of twelve, abandon your father and mother and come to me.”

On his way home from school the boy picked up the note, read it and said:

“Well, I have no choice: I cannot go against my father’s word and make him a liar.”

He felt sorry for his compassionate mother and father. Although he had never seen his father, he loved him devotedly and was loath to leave him. But he kept his sadness to himself, without saying a single word to his mother lest he grieve her.

One day the father came sailing into the harbor of his town with twelve ships, and informed all and sundry of his relations concerning his arrival. They all, as well as his wife and son, came to meet him. When he saw his dear wife, he embraced and kissed her, but he did not see his son holding out his arms, as he wished to be kissed, too. When he noticed him at last, he asked his wife:

“Who is this boy?”

“He is our son. I bore him after you left. Have you really forgotten that when you left I was with child?”

Only now did he realize that he had given away his own son to the old man of the sea. He heaved a sigh, and said:

“So that’s what the deal was all about?”

The son knew at once what had made his father so sad.

“Don’t be sad, Father,” the boy said. “I won’t leave you now — I will live with you until I am twelve, so we shall be together for another five years.”

The mother did not understand what he meant, and asked, so the boy told her everything. Both the father and mother were inconsolably sad. Oh, did they feel pitifully sorry for their son! How they lavished their love upon him! For him it was like living in paradise.

When the boy reached the age of twelve, he said to his parents:

“Roast me some rusks. It’s time I left and entered the service of the old man of the sea.”

They roasted him some rusks, put them into a little sack, and bid him farewell.

He walked to the highroad and followed it until he came to the sea, where he stopped to have a rest. Presently he saw on the shore a strange bush wreathed with lots of red berries. He took a closer look, wondering what sort of bush it could be. I haven’t seen anything like it before, he concluded. My father has a huge garden with all sorts of plants in it, but there is nothing like this bush in it. What could it be?

In fact, it was a guelder rose bush. As he looked at it, he noticed eleven ducks flying, with a twelfth duck trailing far behind. They were heading straight toward him, so he hid quickly behind the bush. The eleven ducks lit on the shore near his hideout, and the next moment they turned into beautiful maidens. They took off their clothes and went into the sea to bathe. After they had bathed they turned into ducks again and flew away.

Shortly after the twelfth duck lit on the shore. She, too, turned into a maiden, the most beautiful of them all, disrobed and walked into the sea to bathe. The merchant’s son rushed quickly from his hideout, snatched the maiden’s clothes, and hid behind the bush again, watching her with bated breath. After she had bathed, she waded to the beach and — oh horrors! — the clothes were gone. Said she:

“Who is here? If you are an old man, be a dear father to me. If you are an old woman, be a dear mother to me. If you are of middle age, be a dear brother or sister to me. And if you are a young man, be a true husband to me!”

He stepped forth at once and gave her the clothes. She was overjoyed to the point of being stunned, because before her stood the most handsome lad the world had ever seen.

“Who are you, young man?” she asked.

“I come from such and such a land. When my father was crossing the sea on his ship, an old man stopped the ship and told him that he must surrender what he did not know he had at home. (You see, I was born while my father was away, so he did not know about my existence.) Otherwise my father and his men would have been drowned. Since my father did not know what had happened back home, he gave me away. So now I am on my way to enter into the service of the old man of the sea.”

“That’s good!” the maiden said. “The gray-haired man who stopped the ship is my master, and I am his servant. There are twelve of us in his service. Probably you saw the other eleven ducks flying ahead of me: they are my girl friends. The old man wants to marry me off to you. Mind you, if you are cunning enough, it will be your good fortune; but if you fail to outtrick him, sore trouble will be yours. Your head will be impaled like the heads of your eleven predecessors. The old man wanted to marry off all his servant girls, but of all their eleven suitors, none could outwit him. So they all perished.”

Then she told him how to find the old man of the sea.

“Walk down this road until you come to a footpath on your left. Follow the footpath until you come to a place that is full of snakes. But do not fear them. Walk on without looking back. They’ll let you pass, but if you once look back, that will be the end of you. Walk on from there until you come to a pack of fierce beasts. Just keep on walking, without looking back, and they, too, will let you pass. After you have left all these places behind you, you will see a hut on chicken’s feet to your right in a meadow. Go there: that is where I live. So long, my friend! But mind your step: if you are careful, you will have good fortune, but if you are not, your head will be impaled like the other eleven!”

With that she turned into a duck again and flew away.

The merchant’s son walked on and on down the road until he reached the footpath; he followed it until he came to the spot with snakes hissing all around. But he walked boldly forward, and the snakes did not touch him.



Then he reached the place that was full of fierce beasts. He walked boldly on as before, and the beasts let him pass. When he came to the meadow and spied the hut on chicken's feet, he was filled with joy. He walked up to the hut and rapped on the door. His sweetheart appeared on the threshold, saw him into the hut, and served him meat and drink.

"There are twelve of us in the old man's service," she said after he had eaten. "He himself lives in a luxurious palace and practices witchcraft, while us he has placed in huts around himself at a distance of twelve *versts* from his palace. Each hut is twelve *versts* from the other. You should try to have a rest a bit, because soon a winged messenger will arrive from the old man (that's how he sends his orders). But mind you, when that messenger arrives, you keep mum regardless of what he tells you. Behave as if you weren't here at all. Then we'll see what has to be done next."

She made him a bed and extinguished the light.

No sooner had they dozed off than the messenger came flying, and shouted:

"The old man has ordered that tomorrow the twelve of you appear before him, all alike in face, dress and boots. Each of you must have a copper cane, because the old man's son-in-law has arrived."

Thereupon the messenger flew away.

"Well, my dear, now is the time to get down to work," the bride-to-be said to the merchant's son.

She forged him a mace of copper, and said:

"Now follow such and such a road. Upon reaching the iron gate, you will see chained lions. When you approach them and they rush at you, yell at them, 'Be still, you accursed beasts! I am on my way to enter the service of the old man of the sea!' and they will let you pass. When you find yourself at the palace door, smash it to bits with the mace. The old man will yell in response, 'Who is there?' and you answer boldly, 'It's me, grandpa, coming to enter your service!' Then he'll take you to the place where we will be lined up, all of us alike as peas in face, clothes and boots. I will be standing at the end of the line with the heel of my left boot turned to one side. Although you will recognize me at once, do not show it: walk down the line a couple of times as if you didn't know who is who and are examining each of us closely. The

old man will be yelling at you and hurrying you to choose your intended (if you fail to choose correctly, your head will be on the pale), but don't heed him; say, 'Oh, no, grandpa, haste makes waste. This is not like picking apples from an apple tree: you bite into one, and if it's good, you eat it, and if it's bad, you throw it away. I'll have to live with my chosen one to the end of my days!' When you pass me for the third time, pick me out of the line. Now, goodbye, my dear!"

And she flew away.

He went to the place his sweetheart had directed him. On reaching the old man's palace, he saw two lions chained to the gate posts. As soon as they saw him, they rushed at him with a roar.

"Be still, you accursed beasts!" he shouted at them. "I'm on my way to enter the service of the old man of the sea."

The lions let him pass. When he came to the palace door, he swung his mace and smashed the door to bits.

"Who is there?" came the old man's question.

"It's me coming to enter your service!"

"It's time, high time you did, young man. All right then, come with me, and you can choose your bride: if you fail, your head will be on that pale over there."

They left and walked to a field surrounded by trees, where stood the twelve girls looking alike as peas. The merchant's son recognized his intended at once, but he did not show it. The first time he walked down the line he did not choose anyone.

"Why are you wasting time?" the old man asked. "Isn't any one of them to your liking? Choose, and make it fast!"

"Oh no, grandpa, haste makes waste. This is not like picking apples from an apple tree: if it's good, you eat it; if it's bad, you throw it away. I'll have to live with my chosen one to the end of my days."

After walking down the line a second time, he did not make his choice either. The old man shouted at him the louder, to which the merchant's son rejoined:

"Oh no, grandpa, haste makes waste! I'll have to live with my chosen one to the end of my days!"

He walked down the line a third time, and then took his intended by the hand.

“Good, you recognized her this time! Now go and have a good time, there’s some money for that purpose. Come here again tomorrow. If you choose her after three attempts, she is yours; if not, your head will be on that pale.”

The merchant’s son took the money and went to enjoy himself. Around midnight he came to his sweetheart. She treated him to a light meal, and said:

“Well, it’s good that everything ended happily today. I pray that the other two days will be just as good. Now lie down here under the bench again and keep mum as if you weren’t here at all, regardless of what you hear or what you will be told.”

No sooner had they gone to bed and extinguished the light than the messenger came flying and rapped on the window:

“The old man orders that tomorrow the twelve of you appear before him, all alike in face, dress and boots, and that each of you have a silver cane.”

Thereupon the messenger disappeared.

“Well, my dear, it’s time we get down to work.”

She forged him a mace of silver, and said:

“Tomorrow go down the same road as you did today. When you approach the gate and the lions rush at you, shout at them again, ‘Be silent, you accursed beasts! I am on my way to enter the service of the old man of the sea!’ They will let you pass. When you reach the palace door (tomorrow it will be much sturdier than today), bring down your mace with all your might to shatter the door. When you beat it down, the old man will shout, ‘Who’s there?’ to which you must respond, ‘It’s me, grandpa, coming to enter your service!’ He’ll take you to the same place we were lined up today. I’ll be standing last in the line, with the little toe on my left foot turned up under the leather. Although you will recognize me at once, do not take me out of the line but walk down it a couple of times, and lead me out on the third attempt. If the old man shouts at you, tell him as boldly as you can what you told him today.”

With the first flush of dawn the next day she said goodby to him and flew away. He went to the old man’s palace again. On reaching the gate, he saw the lions rushing at him with a roar.

“Be still, you accursed beasts!” he shouted at them. “I’m on my way to enter the service of the old man of the sea.”

The lions let him pass. When he came up to the palace door, he swung his mace with all his might and smashed the door to bits.

“Who is there?” came the old man’s voice from inside.

“It’s me, grandpa, coming to enter your service.”

“It’s time, high time you did! All right, come with me, and you can choose your bride: mind you, if you fail, I’ll add your head to the eleven heads sticking on the pales.”

“Be it as you will.”

They walked to the field, where the twelve girls stood in a line. The merchant’s son recognized his intended at once, but walked past her one time, then a second time. The old man shouted at him:

“You dullard! What’s the matter? Isn’t any one of them to your liking?”

To which the lad replied as he did the day before:

“Oh no, grandpa, haste makes waste. This is not like picking an apple from an apple tree: if it’s good, you eat it; if it’s bad, you just throw it away. I’ll have to live with her till the end of my days.”

When he walked down the line a third time, he took her by the hand, and led her out of the line.

“Oh, well!” the old man said. “Now go and enjoy yourself. Come here tomorrow again: if you choose correctly tomorrow, too, she will be yours.”

The old man gave him lots of money. The merchant’s son enjoyed himself till midnight and then went to his sweetheart. After the meal they retired to bed. No sooner had they extinguished the light than the old man’s messenger came flying and rapped on the window:

“The old man orders that tomorrow the twelve of you appear before him, all alike in face, dress and boots, and each with a golden cane.”

“All right!” she said.

Immediately she forged a mace of gold for her sweetheart, and said:

“Now mind you, my dear, do everything as you did the first two times. When you approach the gate, tell the lions the same thing. On reaching the palace door, smash it with your mace; and when you choose me, walk down the line two times and take me by the hand on the third time.”

In the morning she flew away. The merchant's son went to the palace. On reaching the gate, he saw the lions rushing at him again. So he shouted at them:

"Be still, you accursed beasts! I'm on my way to enter the service of the old man of the sea."

They let him pass. Once at the palace door, he swung his mace and smashed the door to bits.

"Who's there?" the old man asked.

"It's me, grandpa, coming to enter your service."

"It's time, high time you did! All right, off we go to choose your bride."

The merchant's son walked down the line once without showing in any way that he had recognized her (which he had at once), while the old man shouted at him. He walked down the line a second time, not having made his choice either. This made the old man shout even the louder. The lad walked down the line a third time, and only then did he take his beloved out of the line.

"All right, let her be yours to the end of your days."

They were betrothed, and then the wedding was celebrated. The old man loaded twelve ships with silver and gold for the merchant's son, and the new-weds sailed off to join the lad's parents.





HOW IVAN WENT TO SEE THE SUN

Once upon a time there lived in this world a lad, Ivan by name. When the first fuzz of a beard appeared on his lips, he decided to marry. But without a patch of land, a horse or a cow even the finest lad is worth less than a bag of chaff. So Ivan went to the market and bought himself a foal. He fed it with the choicest grass, gave it spring water to drink, and waited until it grew. The foal grew into a fine colt all right, but still the lad had no cart, no plow, no harrow to call his own.

So Ivan went to the lord where he lived and said:

“Take me into your service.”

“All right,” the lord agreed. “You will tend my horses.”

The lad went to the stables where many grooms worked. They were all as vicious as a pack of curs and for some reason took a dislike to Ivan from the first day. They chose the oldest and most unmanageable horses for him to take care of, and said:

“Curry them!”

Much as Ivan brushed and curried them day and night, they did not gladden the eye. The other grooms went to the lord to complain:

“Just go and have a look how dirty the horses he tends are. Chase him out of here...”

“Hey, you lazybones!” the lord cried at Ivan. “Don’t you see how the other grooms love their horses?” He picked up a whip and gave Ivan a sound beating, threatening in the end: “If you don’t curry them until they shine like a mirror, I’ll beat you black and blue!”

Ivan did not sleep but worked like an ox currying the horses. However, the grooms stealthily threw dust on the horses and soiled them with dung. Then they went to the lord to complain again, and he gave Ivan another beating.

Such treatment made Ivan bitter. He went sadly to his colt, sat down on the edge of a water trough and grew pensive.

“What makes you so sad, my friend?” the colt asked in a human voice.

“What’s there to be merry about when I’ve just been whipped, because my horses are dirtier than the other grooms’?”

“Don’t be sad, for I’ll tell you what to do,” the colt said. “Cut some hair off my mane and make yourself a curry comb.”

Ivan thus made himself a curry comb and brushed the horses with it. Now his horses shone radiantly. When the lord saw them, he gave a smile, and the other grooms were all whipped.

“You lazybones, don’t you see how my horses must be brushed?! Tomorrow I’ll come for your heads.”

Thus the lord stropped their hides daily.

Once, when the grooms were driving the horses to the river, they came upon a very old woman who asked them:

“Why are your backs so bruised?”

“The lord is whipping us, because our horses are dirtier than Ivan’s.”

To which the old woman said:

“Buy me a pair of red-leather boots, and I’ll tell you what you should do.”

So the grooms bought the boots and went to the old woman in the dead of night. She advised:

“Whisper in your lord’s ear that Ivan can find out why the sun is so merry when he rises and so sad when he sets. That’ll send him searching to the end of the earth never to return. You’ll get some peace then.”

The grooms went to the lord and told him the lie:

“Our Lord, this Ivan lad is a surprisingly wise fellow. He can find out why the sun is so merry when he rises and so sad when he sets.”

The lord had Ivan summoned, and asked him:

“Now tell me, Ivan, why is the sun always merry when he rises and sad when he sets?”

“How should I know?”

“Don’t you lie to me — you must know! Now go and find out, and don’t you dare come back until you do, because otherwise I’ll have your head right then and there.”

The lord will surely shorten my days, Ivan concluded.

“Why are you so sad again, my friend?” the colt asked him. “What woe has befallen you?”

After the lad had told everything, the colt comforted him:

“Don’t be sad; we’ll go to the Sun.”

So they set out on the journey. They went on for a day and a second, and on the third day they came to two elm trees. Their twigs and branches were interlocked in combat and they fought each other so furiously their leaves were flying. They bent down to the lad, and asked:

“Where go you, lad?”

“To the Sun.”

“What for?”

“To find out why he is so merry when he rises and what makes him sad when he sets.”

“Ask him how long we’ll be fighting each other like this when you get there.”

“I will.”

They went on, traveling for a day and another, and on the third day they came across a woman chasing ducklings out of some thorn bushes.

“Where go you, lad?” the woman asked him.

“To the Sun.”

“What for?”

“To find out why he is so merry when he rises and what makes him sad when he sets.”

“Ask him how long I’ll be chasing these ducklings out of the thorn bushes.”

“I will.”

They went on, traveling for a day and another, and on the third day they came to a river spanned by a golden bridge. No sooner had they stepped on the bridge than a fish called out:

“Hey lad, where go you?”

“To the Sun.”

“What for?”

“To find out why he is so merry when he rises and what makes him sad when he sets.”

“Ask him how long I’ll be holding this bridge on my back.”

“All right, I’ll ask him,” the lad promised.

They crossed the river and found themselves at the foot of a huge mountain. They walked up the mountain for a day and another, and on the third day they came to a crystal palace. A woman in a rose kerchief came running out to meet them halfway. It was the Sun’s mother, who said with alarm:

“Run away from here as quick as you can, because when my son comes home for his midday meal, you will be burned to a handful of ashes.”

Ivan told her what trouble had brought him to the Sun.

“Well, if things are as bad as you say, crawl under this bench, and I’ll ask my son about these things myself,” she said and hid them.

Shortly the Sun rolled in.

“There is a human being in my palace, isn’t there?” he asked right away.

“You are just imagining things, my son.”



While the Sun partook of the meat and drink, his mother said:

“You know, I had all sorts of dreams this night. In one of them I saw a strange man who wanted to know why you are so merry when you rise and so sad when you set. I didn’t know the answer.”

The Sun laughed, and said in reply:

“When I rise I am merry, because I can see a long distance away. The moment I rise a charming beauty of a girl surfaces from the sea. She smiles at me, which makes me happy, and when she calls me, I go to her. I admire her the whole day through. In the evening the girl disappears from sight, and this makes me sad.”

Then the mother asked:

“Tell me, son, how long will those two elm trees by the roadside be fighting each other?”

“They’re not elm trees at all but two brothers who’ve been fighting each other for a thousand years now. They’ll never stop, because they mistreated their father and mother, refused them food in their old age, did not have their clothing washed, and chased their weak old parents out of their home before their death.”

“In my dream I also saw a woman chasing ducklings out of thorn bushes. When will she manage to chase them out?”

“Never. Those aren’t ducklings at all, but her poor children. She drove them to their deaths, giving them no food and sleep and refusing to wash their little shirts. She’ll be chasing them as long as I shine in the clear sky.”

Then the mother asked:

“I also dreamed of a fish holding a golden bridge on its back. It asked how long it will be holding the bridge.”

“Until it throws the first traveler that steps on the bridge into the river.”

The Sun finished his meal, kissed his mother’s hand, and left. Ivan and the colt emerged from their hideout, thanked the mistress of the house heartily, and then walked down the mountain.

When they arrived at the river, they heard the fish ask:

“What did the Sun say?”

“Hush,” the colt whispered. “Tell it when we’re on the far bank.”

Ivan clapped the palm of his hand on his mouth, and once they were on the other bank, he said:

“The Sun said that you’ll be holding the bridge until you throw the first traveler that steps on the bridge into the river.”

“But you were just that traveler. Oh, if only I’d known,” the fish cried out in grief.

By the thorn bushes the woman asked:

“Well, what did the Sun say?”

“He said that these aren’t ducklings at all but your children whom you brought to their deaths by starving them, robbing them of sleep, and leaving their shirts dirty. Now you’ll have to chase them out of the thorn bushes for all eternity.”

The woman burst into bitter tears, while Ivan and the colt went on. When they came to the elm trees, the latter stopped lashing out at each other, and asked as well:

“What did the Sun say?”

“You’ll be fighting forever, because you mistreated your mother and father once. You did not give them food in their old age, left their clothing dirty, and before their deaths you chased them out of their home.”

Upon hearing this, the elm trees tore at each other’s leaves the more viciously.

In the end, Ivan came to his lord and told him why the Sun was so merry when he rose and why so sad when he set.

“You may remain in my service,” the lord said.

But the lad scratched his pate, and said:

“I’ve had enough of this service. It is time for me to marry.”

So Ivan went to his colt and told it that he intended to become engaged to the girl the Sun had mentioned.

“If that’s your wish, then off we go again. But don’t forget to take along a saw, ax, and a long string,” the colt advised.

They traveled for seven days and seven nights until they came to the sea.

“Whoa!” the colt exclaimed. “We’ve arrived at the place we need. Now build a little cottage as white as snow.”

Ivan rolled up his sleeves, got down to work, and built such a beautiful cottage no king would have been ashamed to live in it.

“And now,” the colt said, “tie the string to the door handle and hide in the shrubs. Mind you, hold on tight to the other end of the string. When the girl enters the house, pull the string and the door will shut. After that walk up to the door, holding onto the string all the time.”

When the sun rose, the girl surfaced from the sea. She was more beautiful than could be imagined or divined. She went into the cottage, just as Ivan had expected she would do. He pulled the string and the door shut behind her. The girl grew frightened and cried:

“Let me out!”

“Oh no, my dear, I won’t let you out,” Ivan said, stepping into the cottage. “You must become my wife.”

“Your wife? But the Sun is in love with me, so I must love him, too.”

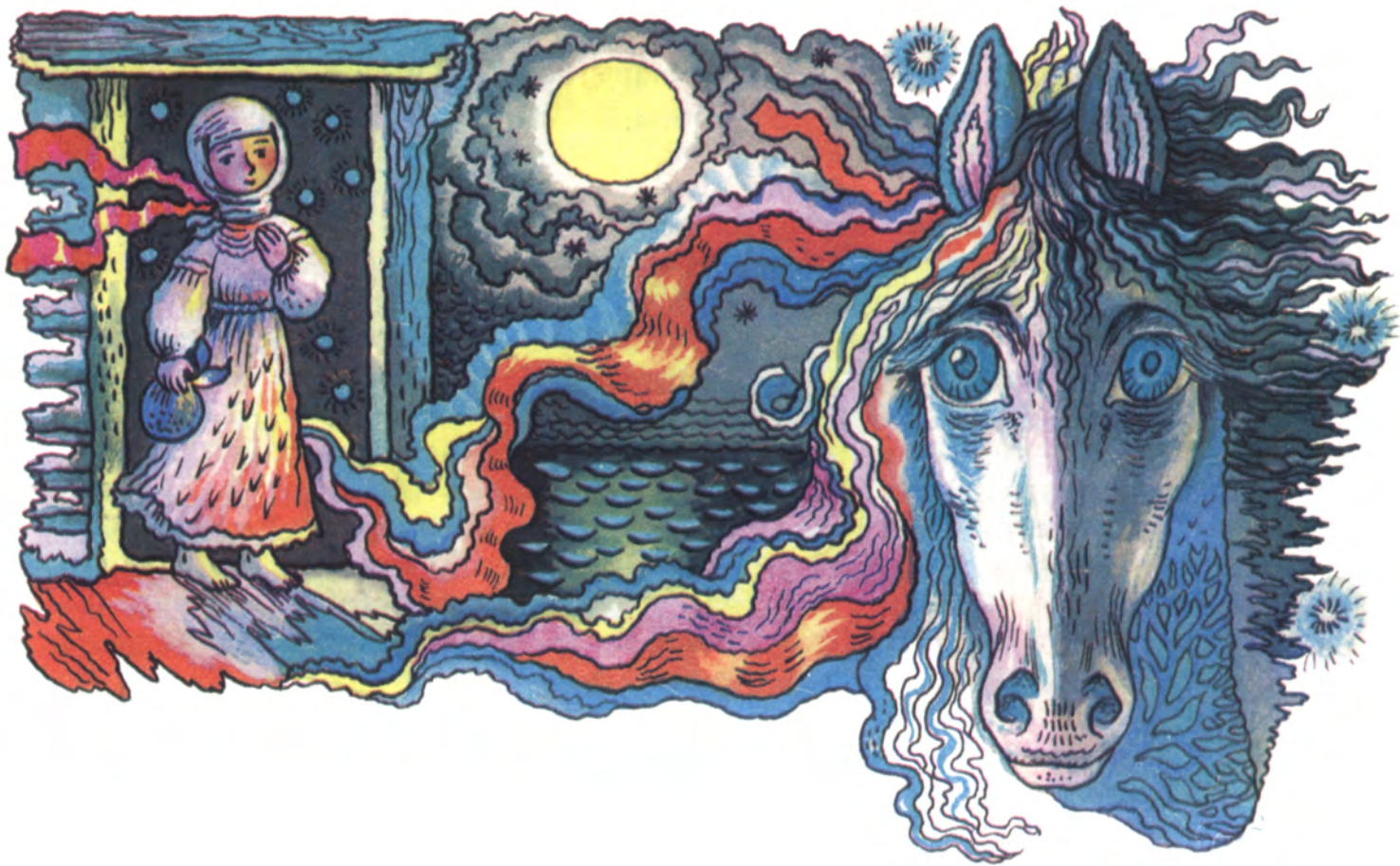
“I love the Sun, and will also be loyal to him.”

“If that is so, take me by the hand and lead me to him for his blessing.”

Ivan married the girl, and they live to this day in concord and happiness.

Every morning they stand on the seashore and the Sun greets them, and in the evening they see the Sun off for the night.





MARE'S HEAD

Once upon a time there was a man who had a daughter, and he took for wife a woman who had a daughter also. The woman did not like the man's daughter. She scolded the poor girl and humiliated her, at times setting the man against his own child. Whenever the two girls went to a spinning bee, the woman's daughter merely flirted and joked with the boys until they burned her hemp or snapped her yarn in two, but the man's daughter worked all the time, spinning or doing other things, without wasting a single

moment in idleness. On their way back home in the morning, when they came to the stile by their house, the woman's daughter would say to the man's daughter:

"Let me hold the spindles for you, sister, while you climb over the stile."

The girl would give her the spindles filled with yarn, and her stepsister would then quickly run into the house to her mother.

"Look how much I've spun, Mother," she would say. "But that worthless creature just larked with the boys."

That was all the stepmother needed to pounce on the hapless girl and call her a lazybones.

At that the poor girl only wept.

By and by the woman began to hate her stepdaughter even more. Finally, things came to such a pass that one day she said to the man:

"Take your daughter to the forest and let the beasts devour her there. That idler is a stranger to toil and spinning — so let her perish."

The man resisted for a long time, since he felt sorry for his daughter. But what could he do against that woman, for she had him under her thumb. He was dreadfully afraid of her.

"All right, daughter, get your things ready and let's go," he said to the girl.

The news threw the woman into a frenzy of delight, and she bustled about the house, preparing food for her stepdaughter on the journey.

"Here's some flour for you, daughter: in one bundle you'll find wheat flour for boiling dumplings, and in another some millet for *kulish* gruel and a piece of fatback."

The girl took the provisions, shed a tear, and followed her father.

On and on they went until they came to the forest; before long they spied a footpath.

"Let's walk along it," her father said. "Wherever it leads, there will be your home."

On they went, and the further they walked into the forest, the thicker it became. Then they came to a dale in which they spied an apiary and an earthen house.

They went into the house.

"Good day!"

An old man got up from the stove, and said in answer:

“Hail to you, good people!”

He asked who they were and what had brought them there. The girl’s father told him everything and then asked him to give his daughter refuge.

“You may stay here, girl,” the host said. “The two of us will live together. In summer I’ll work at the apiary, while you can plant a garden here, busy yourself in it, and grow things for the winter. Although I take my beehives to the village in winter, I live here nonetheless, so with you around it will be merrier.”

After chatting some more with their host, the girl’s father said to his daughter:

“Have a look at what your mother gave you, and prepare something for supper while I go and chop wood.”

When she untied the bundles, she saw with bewilderment that one had ashes in it, and the other a brick from the stove. The discovery made her burst into tears.

“Don’t cry, girl,” the host said. “Go to my larder, and you will find everything you need there; take some wheat flour and fatback and boil some dumplings.”

She went to the larder, took the flour, kneaded the dough, kindled the stove, and prepared the supper.

The master of the house went to his village, as he had to take some beehives and food there, while the girl’s father said he’d stay for the night and return home early the next day. He said this only to comfort his daughter lest she burst into tears again. But once outdoors, he took a small block of wood, tied it to a corner of the earthen house, and trudged off home.

With every gust of wind, the block went thump-thump against the corner, making the girl inside the house believe:

“That’s my daddy chopping wood.”

Another gust of wind made the block go thump-thump, and she said:

“That’s my daddy chopping wood.”

Supper was ready, but her father had not yet come in. She waited and waited, and in the end she went outdoors to see where he was.

She walked round the house — but her father was nowhere to be seen. So she went back into the house. In no mood to sup alone, she paced up and down the room for a while and then decided: I'll go outside and let anyone in who responds to my invitation.

Standing at the threshold, she called out:

“Whoever is there in the forest and beyond, come and sup with me!”

Silence. Then she called out a second time:

“Whoever is there in the forest and beyond, come and sup with me!”

Silence again. So she called a third time:

“Whoever is there in the forest and beyond, come and sup with me!”

Presently there was a rumble, as Mare's head came pounding along in response to her call.

“Girl, girl, open the door!”

She complied.

“Girl, girl, carry me across the threshold!”

She did as she was asked.

“Girl, girl, put me on the stove!”

She granted this wish as well.

“Girl, girl, give me some supper!”

She served the supper.

“Girl, girl, crawl into my right ear and come out of my left!” The moment she looked into the right ear she saw goods and wares of sundry kinds. What was not there? She saw all sorts of costumes, horses, carriages, gold and silver! And money galore...

“Take as much as you need and want,” Mare's head said. “That's the reward for your obedience.”

She took with her everything she wished, and crawled out of the left ear. At that instant, Mare's Head vanished into thin air.

In the morning, the master of the house returned. When he went inside, he simply did not recognize his home or the girl: everything was clean and bright as in a glorious chamber; the girl was sitting in a dress of silk and gold cloth like a fine lady, with servants attending to every wish at the wink of her eye or the turn of her head. As soon as the man entered, the girl told him what had happened in his absence and gave him some money.



“That is your reward for giving a hapless orphan refuge.”

Then she ordered a carriage to be harnessed and set off for her father’s home. Everyone stared at her in amazement, barely recognizing her, and when she told them everything, her stepmother clasped her hands in surprise, for she had schemed to have her stepdaughter removed from God’s fair world, but it had worked out altogether differently. The girl stayed there a few days more, gave her father some money, set off for town, where she bought herself a house and lived like a lady. As soon as she left, the woman went after her husband:

“Now take my daughter to the place where you took yours: let her become a lady, too.”

“All right, tell her to get ready. I’ll take her there.”

The woman immediately started preparing provisions — not ashes and brick, as she had given her stepdaughter, but flour, millet, and all sorts of sweetmeats. Then she gave her daughter her blessing, saying:

“Mind you obey your father: wherever he takes you, follow him.”

They left, and before long they entered the forest. It was black as black in there, with oak trees so huge no man could have embraced them, and nowhere was there even a little footpath in sight. It was as if no human had ever set foot in the forest, which made it a gloomy place indeed.

On and on they walked until they saw a house standing on a chicken’s leg. They entered the house.

“God help you!”

No reply followed. They looked to see if there was anyone up on the stove — there was nobody there.

“Well, stay here, daughter, while I go and chop wood and you make supper.”

The man went outdoors, tied a small block of wood to the corner of the house as he had done before, and went home. Whenever there was a gust of wind, it made the block bang against the corner, and the girl inside the house would say:

“That’s my daddy chopping wood.”

She had long prepared supper, but her father did not reappear. So she went outside and called:

“Whoever is there in the forest and beyond, come and sup with me!”

No one answered. She called a second and a third time. Still there was naught but silence. Presently there was a rumble as Mare’s Head came pounding along.

“Girl, girl, open the door!”

“You’re no fine lady — open it yourself.”

“Girl, girl, carry me across the threshold!”

“You’re no fine lady — you can walk in yourself.”

“Girl, girl, put me on the stove!”

“You’re no fine lady — get up there yourself.”

“Girl, girl, give me something to eat!”

“You’re no fine lady — get it yourself.”

“Girl, girl, crawl into my right ear, and come out of my left.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Since you don’t want to obey me, I’ll gobble you up,” Mare’s Head said.

So Mare’s Head snatched the girl, scrambled onto the stove, got into the farthest corner, gobbled up the girl, tied her bones into a bundle, and hung the bundle on a clothes peg.

The woman waited and waited for her daughter, expecting to see her arrive as a fine lady in a carriage.

Now she had a little bitch which was of the kind that spoke the truth.

One day, as the bitch was running around the yard, it barked:

“Bow-wow, bow-wow! The man’s daughter’s a lady, but the woman’s daughter’s no more than a bundle of bones.”

The woman listened and listened until she lost her temper and broke the bitch’s leg. But the bitch continued to hop around on three legs, barking:

“Bow-wow, bow-wow! The man’s daughter’s a lady, but the woman’s daughter’s no more than a bundle of bones.”

The woman broke another of its legs, but the bitch would not quiet down and carried on as before until the woman had broken all its legs. The bitch rolled on the ground, but still barked out the truth. The woman got so angry in the end that she killed the bitch.

“That’s so you won’t go barking any more nonsense, you foul beast!” she cried.

When the man came home, his wife said:

“Why don’t you go and visit my daughter: perhaps she is no longer among the living.”

The man went to the forest, found the house where he had left his step-daughter, and entered it — but there was no one in the house. He looked on the stove and saw a bundle hanging there. When he opened it, he saw that it was full of bones.

“That foul beast spoke the truth after all,” he said.

The man went home, and showed his wife the bones. At that she gave him the length of her tongue:

“Why, you wretch, you took her to the beasts on purpose just to get rid of her.”

From that day forth the poor man did not know a moment’s peace to the end of his days.

Once there were a Czar and Czarina who had a well in their yard, and in that well there was a pail, and that’s the end of my cheerless tale.





THE POOR MAN AND THE RAVEN CZAR

Somewhere or other there lived a poor man. All he possessed was a hut, a small plot of land, and a pair of shaggy black oxen. Oh yes, I almost forgot. He also had a wife and a brood of children. He himself did not know how many kids there were in his cramped hut, but they were always crying and screaming for something to eat.

One day he took his youngest son and the oxen to his small plot of land. The boy sat down under a bush and played with the flowers, while the man plowed his land.

He had barely plowed two furrows when the sky grew overcast, and it became almost as dark as at night.

The man looked up into the sky to see what dark cloud had blocked the sun and saw a huge black bird hovering over him. The beak of the bird was as sharp as a red-hot spearhead; its talons were like hooks; and its wings were so wide they screened the sun.

The man was frightened out of his wits when the bird lit upon his plot. The bird's wings covered the man, his son, the shaggy oxen and the plow as well.

The man was even more frightened when the bird spoke in a human voice:

"Tell me, man, what shall I take from you — your son or your oxen — for my children who are very hungry?"

"Take me," the man said. "I'm old and have had all the misery I want."

"I won't take you," the horrible bird said. "You've smoked too much tobacco and your meat is so cured with smoke it might make my children sick! Give me your son or your shaggy oxen."

The man thought what he should do. He had a lot of children, so if he surrendered one there would be enough of them left anyway. As to the oxen, he had only two of them. If that horrible bird took them away, how would he plow his plot of land, and how would he keep his family provided with firewood and bread?

"Don't try to be too clever too long," the bird pressed him. "Tell me which you will give me — the child or the cattle?"

Presently the bird started scraping the ground with its talons. At the sight of those horrible claws the man felt sorry for his son. Whatever may happen, he thought, I won't give my son into those terrible claws.

"Take the oxen", the man said sadly.

"It's your good fortune that you decided to give me the oxen instead of the boy," the bird said. "Otherwise I would have removed both you and the oxen from this world. I want you to know that I shall pay you handsomely for your oxen. Send one of your sons to my palace, and I will give him anything he asks for."

“And where is your palace?” the poor man asked.

“Your son will find my palace in a silver glade beyond green mountain meadows, beyond dense forests. He must only ask where the Raven Czar lives.” With these words he picked up the shaggy oxen and the plow with his claws and flew away.

The man returned home broken-hearted.

“Where are the oxen?” his wife asked.

He told her what had happened to him, which made her sad.

“What will become of us now?” she said, crying. “What hope have we of a harvest when you haven’t plowed our plot and sown it with wheat?”

“Don’t your cry, Mother,” the eldest son said. “I’ll go to the Raven Czar at once and make him pay for the oxen. If I don’t return, at least there’ll be an extra crust of bread for the others.”

This made his mother weep even more bitterly.

“Don’t go anywhere! That terrible bird won’t spare you. Come what may, there’ll always be a crust of bread, for you, too.”

But the eldest son would not listen to her. So she baked him a loaf of bread, put an onion into his bag, and saw him off on his long journey.

Off he went to seek the green mountain meadows and dense forests where stood the palace of the Raven Czar in a silver glade.

He crossed one meadow and another until he reached a dense forest. He had grown hungry by that time, so he sat down under a shrub, took the loaf of bread and the onion out of his bag, and started to eat. No sooner had he taken his first bite than a limping black crow came up to him, skipping and hopping on one leg.

“Good luck to you!” the crow said.

“And good luck to you!” the lad replied.

The crow settled beside him and watched him munching on his bread and onion.

“Could you give me a piece of your bread? I’m terribly hungry!” the crow said.

“Go and find yourself something to eat. I’m terribly hungry myself and I’ve got a long journey ahead of me, I have nothing to give you,” the lad said, for he was hardhearted and a miserly sort.

“Whither are you going?” the crow asked.

“I am looking for a silver glade in which stands the palace of the Raven Czar.”

“Take me on your shoulder, for I’m in a hurry to get there myself. My wings and legs won’t serve me any longer! I’ll show you the way.”

“How can I carry you when I’m so tired I can barely drag along my own two legs,” the lad said indifferently.

The limping crow made a hop, flapped its wings, took off, and flew away.

“How do you like that sly creature! It wanted to take a free ride on my shoulder!” the lad said angrily. He put the rest of the loaf into his bag and set forth to look for the silver glade and the palace of the Raven Czar. But neither the silver glade nor the palace did he find. He lost his way in the forest and could not get out of it.

It the meantime the poor man and his wife waited for their son to come home. Days and nights passed, but there was no news of the lad.

So the middle son said:

“Mother, bake me a loaf of bread and put it into my bag along with an onion. Give me also a staff for the journey, and I will go seek my brother. Perchance I will find the silver glade and the Raven Czar’s palace.”

“Don’t go anywhere!” his mother implored him. “We will pull through somehow even without the Raven Czar’s reward. If fate is kind to your brother, he will return.”

But she failed to persuade her son. So preparations were made to see off the middle son as well.

He crossed green mountain meadows and walked through dense forests. On his way he saw crows wheeling in the sky and thought that he would come upon the palace of the Raven Czar or his brother any minute now.

In the dense forest he grew hungry, sat down, took the loaf of bread and the onion out of his bag, and began to eat. Suddenly a limping crow appeared before him and asked him to throw it a crust of his bread.

“Your Czar took our oxen away from us, so let him feed you,” the middle son said.

“Then take me on your shoulder at least, so that I, limping and hungry as I am, shall not perish in this forest!” the crow begged.



“Let your Czar take you on his shoulder,” the lad replied.

The crow hopped, flapped its wings, and flew away.

The middle son followed the crow’s flight in surprise, rose to his feet, and continued on his journey.

But neither the silver glade nor the palace of the Raven Czar did he find. He lost his way in the forest and could not get out of it.

The poor man and his wife waited for their sons in vain — there was no sight or sound of them.

So the youngest son said to his mother:

“Mother, get my bag ready for me, too. Perchance I will bring home the Czar’s reward and will find my brothers.”

The poor woman burst into tears and begged and pleaded with her son not to go anywhere. But to no avail. She had to see him off as well.

The youngest son crossed high mountain meadows and walked through dense forests. He sat down by the same shrub his brothers had sat under and began to eat. No sooner had he cut off a second slice of bread than a limping crow showed up, skipping and hopping on one leg.

“Give me a morsel,” the crow said.

The crow had not yet finished asking when the lad sliced off a large piece and gave it to the crow, saying:

“Here you are, my dear! There’s plenty left for me. Besides, I’m not so keen on eating without company.”

“Could you give me a piece of your onion?” the crow asked.

“Why not? If you want it, I’ll give it to you eagerly.”

The crow ate of the bread and onion, thanked him nicely, and asked:

“Whither are you going, lad? You have wandered into such a forest from which no living creature has yet found its way out.”

“You see, I must find a silver glade. In that glade stands a silver palace, and in that palace lives the Raven Czar. My brothers must be in that palace, too.”

“Take me on your shoulder, because I can’t hop, and my wings are so weak!” the crow begged.

“All right, why not? I’ve never carried a crow on my shoulder before,” the lad said with a smile, and put the crow on his shoulder.

They set out on their journey. As the crow sat on the lad's shoulder, it whispered into his ear from time to time:

"Turn right, turn left. And now go straight ahead."

Thus they traveled for two days and two nights. They walked through the dense forest and then through another. Suddenly it grew lighter and they came upon a large glade. And what a glade it was! The grass, the flowers, and even the stones in it were all of pure silver.

In the middle of the glade rose a steep cliff, also of silver, and at the top of the cliff stood a beautiful palace. The lad stood there, spellbound. He had never seen anything so beautiful, even in his dreams. He and the crow sat down by the edge of the glade and ate all that remained of the food.

Then the crow said:

"There, at the top of the cliff, stands the palace of my Czar. You'll find your way there by yourself. For the kindness you showed to me, I will give you some advice. If my Czar asks you what reward you want for your oxen, don't request anything but the thing he always puts under his head when he goes to sleep."

And with these words the crow disappeared.

The lad climbed to the top of the cliff, where he was met by guards who escorted him directly to the silver throne on which sat the Raven Czar.

"How did you find your way here?" the Raven Czar asked the lad.

"Good people helped me," the lad replied, not wanting to give away the limping crow.

"Well, since you have found me, I'll have to keep my word. Take a look around all my chambers, and then tell me what you like best. This I will give to you."

For three days and three nights the lad walked through the Czar's chambers, but he had not been through even a tenth part of the palace. So he went to the Raven Czar, and said:

"Your Royal Highness, your chambers are marvelous indeed. I have seen much in them, and I have taken a liking to many of the things. But what am I to do with all that wealth? I shall not walk through your chambers any longer, so I ask you: give me the thing you always put under your head when you go to sleep."

Upon hearing this, the Raven Czar flew into a rage and ordered the heads of all the crows who had accompanied the boy through the chambers chopped off.

“One of them has betrayed me!”

Then the Raven Czar tried to convince the lad to take anything but that which he wanted the most.

“But that is the only thing I really want!” the lad stood his ground.

“I’ll give you oxen and as much gold as the oxen can haul off in a wagon!”

“No, give me only the thing you always put under your head when you go to sleep.”

“I’ll give you everything that is in my chambers.”

But the lad insisted on his request being fulfilled.

The Raven Czar had no choice but to keep his word. He took from under his pillow a little coffee mill of the kind with which coffee beans are ground in the chambers of lords, and gave it to the boy.

“Here you are! Now get out of my sight lest I peck you to death!” the Raven Czar shouted in fury.

The frightened lad dropped the coffee mill into his bag and took to his heels. He stopped running only after he had reached the dense forest again. There he sat down, took out the mill, placed it before him, and started to rummage about in his bag for something to eat. But the bag was empty.

The limping crow gave me a bad piece of advice, he thought. I should have taken some of the Raven’s Czar’s riches.

Having nothing else to do, he examined the mill carefully. He was curious to learn what kind of thing this was, for which the Raven Czar had been prepared to sacrifice all his riches to keep it. In appearance the mill looked simple enough.

“Looks like I’ll die of hunger here,” the lad said with a low heart. “How I’d wish to see a table laden with meat and drink as I saw in the chambers of the Raven Czar,” he said, and turned the handle of the mill.

That same instant there appeared before him a table covered with all manner of delicious meat and drink.

“Hey, look what my mill can do!” the lad exclaimed for joy. But the next

moment he was sad again: “How can I eat all this by myself while my father, mother, brothers and sisters are hungry back at home?”

He turned the mill handle once again, and said:

“Let all my brothers and sisters and my parents be here at once!”

That same instant all his dear ones — his father and mother, brothers and sisters — appeared at the table.

They did not leave the table until they had eaten everything.

Then they returned home, safe and gay, and lived in plenty for many a day.

Whatever they wished, the mill produced it for them.

If you don't believe me, go and ask them yourself. Perhaps they will tell you everything.





THE MAGIC EGG

Unce upon a time Lark was King, and Mouse was his wife and the Queen. They had a field which they sowed with wheat. When the harvest was taken in, they started dividing it. In the end, there was one grain left.

Said Mouse:

“Let it be mine!”

To which Lark objected:

“No, let it be mine!”

They started to ponder: what should they do? They might have sought advice, but as they were the sole arbiters, they had no one to turn to.

Said Mouse:

“Well, I’d better bite it in two.”

The King agreed to such an arrangement. But no sooner had Mouse taken the grain in her teeth than she scampered off into her hole. At this, King Lark gathered all the birds to fight Mouse, while the Queen gathered all the other animals. And thus war broke out. When the beasts entered the forest, they could do nothing to the birds, because the birds took refuge in the trees, but when the birds tried to beat the beasts on the wing, the beasts hid in their burrows and dens. Thus they fought the whole day through and then went to rest.

The Queen looked around, and noticed that the insects were not taking part in the war. She willed that they come by evening. Shortly thereafter the insects arrived.

The Queen ordered them to climb the trees during the night and nibble the feathers from the birds’ wings.

At the crack of dawn the next day the Queen cried:

“All up and off to war!”

The birds that took wing fell to the ground where the beasts tore them to pieces.

One eagle, however, saw that trouble was about and remained sitting in a tree. Presently a hunter came by, and on seeing the eagle in the tree, aimed his bow at it. The eagle begged him piteously in a human voice:

“Don’t kill me, kind fellow. I might do you a good turn one day!”

The hunter aimed again, but the eagle begged as before:

“You’d do better to take me and feed me. You’ll see that I will be of use to you!”

But the hunter was bent on shooting the eagle and took aim a third time. The eagle begged again:

“Oh, my dear brother! Do not kill me, but take me with you — I shall be of great use to you some day!”

Finally the hunter believed the eagle: he climbed the tree, took the eagle down, and headed for home.

On the way the eagle said:

“Take me to your home and feed me with meat until the feathers on my wings have grown.”

Now the man had two cows and a bull. He immediately slaughtered one of the cows for the eagle. The bird fed on the meat for a year, and then said:

“Let me out to fly, and I will see whether my wings have grown enough.”

The man let him out of the house. The eagle flew around until midday, and when he returned, he said to the man:

“I still don’t have enough strength yet — slaughter another cow for me!”

The man obeyed and slaughtered the other cow. The eagle fed on the meat for yet another year, and then soared into the sky again. He flew all day, and after returning in the evening, he said to the man:

“Slaughter the bull, too!”

The man started wondering whether he should slaughter the bull or not. In the end he said:

“I’ve lost more than that in my time, so never mind!”

So he slaughtered the bull. The eagle fed on the bull’s meat for another year, and then he took wing again. He flew so high he reached the very clouds.

When he came back to earth, the eagle said to the man:

“Thank you for feeding me. And now get on my back.”

“What will happen to me?” the man asked.

“Just do as you are told!” the eagle said.

The eagle carried him all the way up to a cloud and threw him off his back. The man went hurtling down, but the eagle did not let him reach the ground — he caught him in mid-air, and asked:

“Well, what did you feel?”

To which the man replied:

“I felt I was no longer alive.”

“That’s exactly how I felt when you aimed at me the first time,” the eagle said. “Get on my back again!”

The man did not want to, but he could only obey. Up went the man to the cloud and into it, and the eagle threw him off his back again. But he caught him just about two *sazhens* from the ground, and asked:

“Well, man, what did you feel?”

To which the man replied:

“I felt as if my bones were falling apart.”

“That’s exactly how I felt when you aimed at me the second time. All right, get on my back again.”

The man obeyed.

This time the eagle carried him up, into and above a cloud, where he threw him off his back; but he caught him right above the ground, and asked:

“What did you feel when you were falling to the ground?”

“It was as if I did not exist at all in this world.”

“That’s exactly how I felt when you aimed at me the third time. Well, now we are even, you and I. So get on my back once more and I will take you to my home.”

On and on they flew until they arrived at the home of the eagle’s uncle. Said the eagle:

“Go inside, and if he asks whether you have seen me, his nephew, tell him: ‘If you give me the magic egg, I will bring him to you.’”

Upon entering the house, the man was asked:

“Did you come willingly or unwillingly?”

To which the man replied:

“A good Cossack goes about everything willingly.”

“Have you heard anything about my nephew? It’s been three years now since he set off for war, but I have not heard a word or received any message from him.”

“If you give me the magic egg, I will bring him to you,” the man replied.

“I’d rather not see him at all than give you the magic egg.”

The man left the house, and informed the eagle:

“Your uncle told me he’d rather not see you at all than give me the magic egg.”

“Let’s fly on!” the eagle said.

On and on they flew until they came to the home of the eagle’s brother. There the man answered the same questions as before — and there, too, he was refused the magic egg.

Then they flew to the home of the eagle’s father, and the eagle said to the man:

“Go into the house, and if he asks you about me, tell him that you’ve seen me, and if he gives you the magic egg, you’ll bring me to him.”

Upon entering the house, the man was asked:

“Did you come willingly or unwillingly?”

“To which he replied:

“A good Cossack goes about everything willingly.”

“Have you seen my son?” he asked. “It’s been four years now since he set off to war, and perhaps he was killed in it.”

To which the man replied:

“I saw him, and if you give me the magic egg, I will bring him to you.”

“What do you want with the magic egg?” the eagle’s father asked. “I’d rather give you lots of money instead.”

“I don’t want money,” the man said. “Give me the magic egg!”

“Bring him here, and you shall have what you ask for at once.”

When the man returned with their son, the parents were so overjoyed that they gave him the magic egg right then and there, saying:

“Mind you don’t break it along the way. When you get home, build a large enclosure, and then break open the egg.”

The man went on his way, and as he walked, he grew terribly thirsty. Presently he came upon a well. As he bent down to drink the water, he accidentally broke the egg against the well curb. Suddenly droves of cattle began to rush out of the egg. He tried to round them up, but no sooner would he get them rounded up at one end than they strayed off at the other. The poor man shouted and raved, but he could not do anything.

Presently a She-Dragon appeared and said to him:

“What will you give me if I drive the cattle back into the egg?”

“What do you wish?”

“Give me what has appeared in your home since you left it,” she said.

“All right, you shall have it!” he replied.

The She-Dragon neatly drove the cattle into the egg, patched it up, and gave it back to the man.

When he arrived home, he learned that a son had been born to him in his absence. He clasped his hands in despair:

“Oh, it is you, my son, that I have given to the dragon!”



He and his wife were woebegone, and then said:

“There is nothing we can do — sadness won’t help us. We’ll have to face it somehow.”

The man built a large enclosure, broke the egg, let the cattle loose, and grew rich.

And so they lived until their son came of age.

One day the son asked:

“Is it true, Father, that you gave me away to a dragon? Oh well, never mind!”

With that he went to the She-Dragon.

When he came to her, she said:

“If you perform three tasks for me, I will let you go in peace; if not, I will devour you. First, I want you to grub up that meadow over there in a single night, plow it, sow it with wheat, harvest the crop, and stack it in sheaves. Then bake a loaf of bread from the wheat. Have it on my table by morning.”

The lad went to a pond, sadness racking his heart. Not far away stood a stone pillar, in which the bewitched daughter of the She-Dragon was entrapped. He went to the pillar and burst out sobbing.

“Why are you sobbing?” the She-Dragon’s daughter asked him.

“How can I help it?” he replied. “The She-Dragon has saddled me with a task I will never be able to accomplish, and she has told me to do it all in one night.”

“What is it?” the dragon’s daughter asked.

He told her. To which she replied:

“If you take me for your wife, I will do everything she has commanded.”

“All right,” he agreed.

“Lie down and sleep then, and tomorrow morning get up and take the loaf of bread to the She-Dragon,” she said.

The girl went to the meadow and gave a loud whistle: in an instant the meadow started to divide into furrows all of its own accord — it was plowed and sown with wheat, and by dawn the loaf was ready. He brought it to the home of the She-Dragon, and put it on the table.

The She-Dragon awoke, went outdoors, and looked at the meadow: lo! there was only stubble and shocked sheaves.

“Well, I see you have carried out my task!” she said to the lad. “Mind you carry out the second one as well!”

Then and there she commanded:

“Raze that mountain yonder and make the Dnieper River flow over it, build granaries along the bank so that merchant barques can berth alongside, and sell the grain to the merchants. I want you to have all that done when I wake up tomorrow morning!”

He went again to the pillar and burst into tears.

“Why are you weeping?” the dragon’s daughter asked him.

He told her everything the She-Dragon had commanded him to do. To which the girl replied:

“Lie down and sleep, and I will do it all for you.”

She went to the mountain and gave such a loud whistle that the mountain started to raze itself, the Dnieper flowed over it, and granaries appeared on the banks.

She only came to him to rouse him from sleep so he could sell the grain to the merchants, who loaded it into their barques.

The She-Dragon woke up next morning and saw that everything she had commanded was done.

So she set him a third task:

“Catch the golden hare and bring it to my home early in the morning.”

He went back to the pillar and again burst into tears.

“Why are you weeping?” the dragon’s daughter asked him.

He told her everything.

“That’s no joking matter, because no one knows how to catch the golden hare. Still, let’s go to that cliff yonder. Stand by the burrow, while I crawl inside and chase the hare out. Mind you, whatever or whoever comes out of the burrow, grab it, for it will be the hare!”

She crawled into the burrow. Moments later a hissing viper appeared, and the lad let it go. The girl came out, and asked:

“Well, did anything crawl out?”

“Nothing but the viper,” he replied. “I was afraid it might bite me and let it go.”

“Oh my, what have you done!” she said.” It was the golden hare! Well, I’ll go inside once again, but mind you: whatever or whoever comes out and tells you there’s no golden hare in here, don’t believe a word of it, but seize him.”

She went into the burrow, and presently an old woman appeared and asked the lad:

“What are you looking for here, son?”

“For the golden hare,” he replied.

“Of all the places to look for it. There is no golden hare around here, son,” she said, and left.

The girl came out of the burrow, and asked:

“Well, is there any hare? Did anything come out of the burrow?”

“Not much — just an old woman,” he replied. “She asked me what I was looking for. I told her, and she said there wasn’t any hare around here, so I let her go.”

“Why didn’t you grab her? It was the golden hare!” she said. “Well, I can’t catch the hare anywhere now, unless perhaps I turn into a hare myself. You take me to the dragon’s home and put me on a stool. But mind you don’t let her take me into her hands, because if you do, she’ll recognize me and tear both of us to pieces.”

Then the girl turned herself into a golden hare, and the lad brought it to the She-Dragon, put it on the stool before her, and said:

“Here is the hare, so let me go now.”

“All right, you may go!” the She-Dragon said.

The lad left.

No sooner had the She-Dragon gone out of the house than the golden hare turned into a girl again and joined the lad. Both of them fled for their lives. Meanwhile the She-Dragon realized that the hare had been none other than her own daughter, so she decided to hunt them down and tear them to pieces. She did not do this herself, but sent her husband instead. He gave chase to the girl and the lad. The earth trembled as he came hot on their heels.

“That’s the Dragon coming after us,” the girl said.” I’ll turn myself into wheat and you into an old man guarding it. If he asks whether a girl and a lad passed this way, tell him you saw them when this wheat was being sown.”

Shortly afterward the Dragon swooped down and asked:

“Did you see a girl and a lad pass this way?”

“Yes, I did,” the old man replied.

“When was it?”

“When the wheat was being sown.”

“What do you mean? This wheat is ripe for the sickle, but they disappeared only yesterday.”

The Dragon went home, while the wheat turned into a girl again and the old man into a young lad, and they fled on.

The Dragon came home, and his wife asked him:

“Well, did you catch them? Did you come across anyone?”

“No, I only met an old man guarding a field of wheat, and when I asked him whether a girl and a lad had passed by, he told me he saw them when the wheat was being sown. But the wheat was ripe for the sickle, so I came back home.”

“Why didn’t you tear the old man and the wheat to pieces?” the She- Dragon said. “It was the two of them in disguise! It seems I must go after them myself, since you are good for nothing!”

So off she went and the earth rumbled and trembled in her wake.

“Oh my, this will be the end of us!” the girl cried. “It’s the She-Dragon herself coming after us! You know what, I’ll turn you into a river and myself into a perch.”

No sooner was it said than it was done.

The She-Dragon swooped down onto the river bank and said:

“So you thought you’d get away from me, did you?”

In a trice she turned into a pike and gave chase to the perch. But whenever the pike caught up with the perch, the perch stuck out its bristling fins and the pike could not gobble it up. The chase went on for a long time, but in the end, the pike failed to catch the perch. So the pike decided to drink up all the water in the river. It drank and drank until it had drunk so much that it burst.

Then the girl turned the two of them into their former selves, and said:

“Well, there is no one we need be afraid of now. Let us go to your home. Once there, you’ll kiss everyone, but mind you don’t kiss your uncle’s

daughter, because if you do, you'll forget me, and I will have to find another place to live in your village."

He entered his home, greeted everyone, and then thought: Why shouldn't I greet my uncle's child as well? They might think ill of me. So he went and kissed his uncle's daughter. The moment he did he forgot about the first girl.

Six months passed, and the lad decided to marry. A beautiful girl was chosen to be his wife, and he completely forgot the girl who had saved him.

On the eve of the wedding all the village girls were invited to the bride's house to make *shishki* wedding pastries. The girl who had fled with him from death was also invited, although no one knew who she really was. The girls started to knead the *shishki*, but the stranger made two doves, a hen and a cock, and put them on the floor, where they came to life. Said the hen to the cock:

"Have you forgotten how I grubbed the field for you, how I sowed it with wheat, baked a loaf of bread from that wheat, and you took it to the She-
Dragon?"

"I forgot, I did!" the cock-dove said.

"Have you forgotten how I razed the mountain and let the Dnieper flow over it so that the merchant barques could berth alongside the granaries and you could sell the wheat to the merchants?"

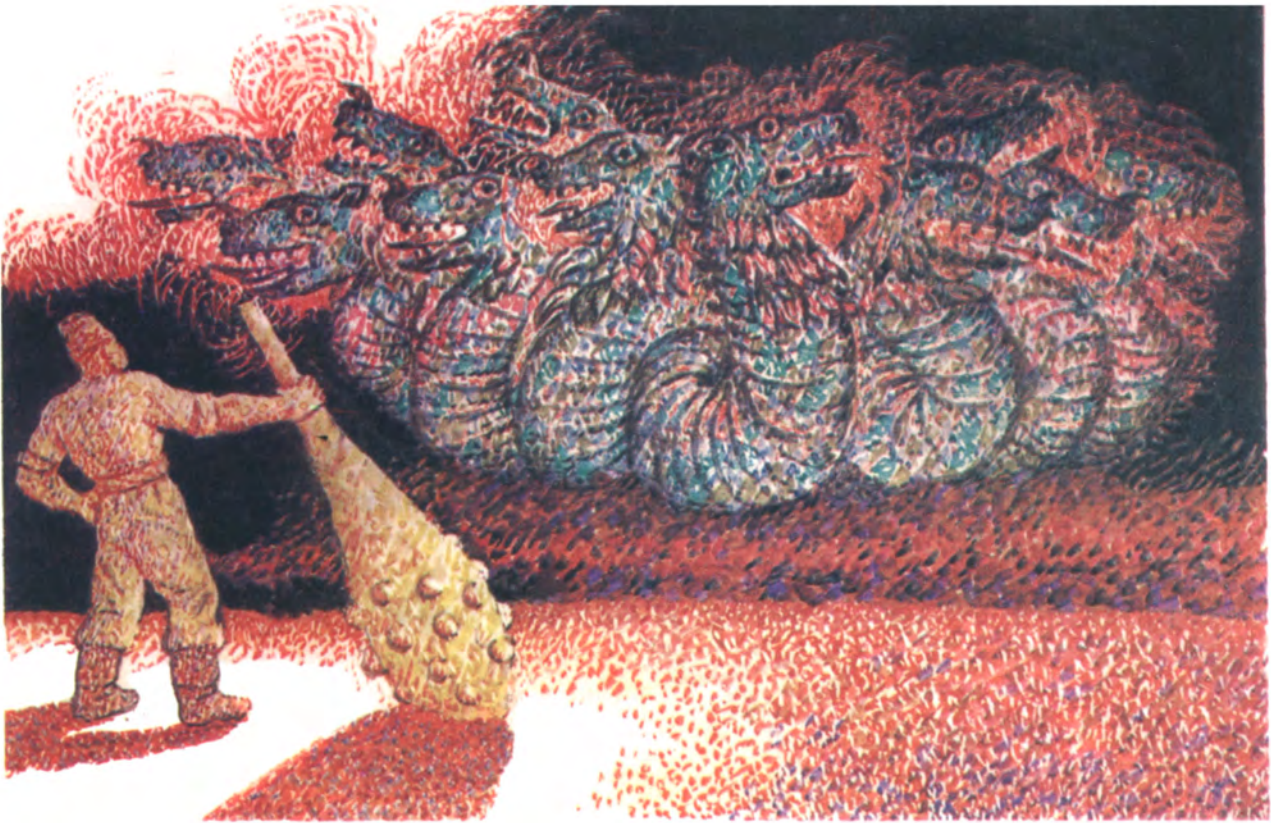
"I forgot, I did!" the cock-dove replied.

"Have you forgotten how we went after the golden hare together and how you thought no more of me thereafter?"

"I forgot, I did!"

That instant the lad remembered everything. He left his bride-to-be and took the first girl to wife, and they lived happily ever after.





IVAN THE PEASANT'S SON

In far back times there lived a czar and czarina who had no children. But in their old age a son was born to them, which made them overjoyed. When the boy came of age, they decided to marry him off. But the son said:

“I won’t marry till you find me a horse that eats glowing embers, drinks flames, and makes the earth rumble for twelve *versts* around, shaking it so hard the leaves fall from the oak trees when it gallops past.”

The Czar called all his knights, and inquired:

“Has anyone of you heard of a horse that eats glowing embers, drinks flames, and makes the earth rumble for twelve *verst*s around, shaking it so hard the leaves fall off the oak trees when it gallops past?”

They all said they had neither seen nor heard of such a horse and did not know where to find it.

So the Czar sent messengers throughout the entire world to proclaim that whoever had heard of or could procure such a horse should appear at the court forthwith.

One such message reached a remote place and was read there. A peasant came home and said to his wife:

“That’s the message that arrived here. If such a brave lad were to be found, he’d have to go to the Czar!”

Now that peasant had a son, and the son said:

“I know just where such a horse can be found.”

“You just stay put,” his father said. “The moment you walk out of the gates, the other boys beat you up, and here you are blabbering about knowing where such a horse can be found!”

The lad dressed and said:

“Come with me, Father.”

When they had gone out, the son took hold of an oak tree, bent it to the ground, and then let it go. The father watched all this with popped-eyed wonder.

“Well, I believe you now, son. That I do,” the father said, frightened out of his wits.

They both went to the district office. The father left the boy outside, entered the office, and said:

“Permit me, sirs, to say a few words.”

“You may. Speak up.”

“You see, I have a son who can find such a horse for the Czar.”

At that the officials cried out:

“Lock him and his brat up, too! What could the son of such an oaf possibly be anyway? We heard that the moment your boy walks out of his gate he’s beaten by the other children!”

So the peasant and his son landed in a cooler. But while they sat there, the officials reflected:

“Why did we kick up all that fuss? After all, we won’t be held responsible if the boy is lying.”

So they released the father and his son. Thereupon the Czar was sent a message. He read it, but did not believe that a peasant’s son could cope with the task. Nonetheless, the Czar ordered to have a carriage sent for the boy.

Servants brought the boy to the Czar at the palace, and the Czar summoned him into his presence.

“Can you find me such a horse?”

“Yes, I can!”

“What do you need for that purpose?”

“I need a good stallion and a sturdy club.”

The Czar wrote a note to his chief herder.

“Go to my chief herder in the pasture, give him this note, and he will pick out a horse for you.”

The boy went to the herder and gave him the note.

“Wait for a while,” the herder said. “When I drive the herd to water, you may choose whichever horse you like.”

The boy began to pick and choose, but whatever horse he took by the tail, the tail came off, and whatever horse he took by the mane, the mane came off as well.

In the end he skinned twelve horses without having made his choice. So he set off for home. On his way he saw a tumbledown hut in which lived a poor old woman. Presently thunder clouds rolled across the sky. The old woman came out of the hut, and said:

“Do help me, lad, because everyone passes me by, poor old woman that I am.”

The boy covered the roof with the horse skins lest it leak. The old woman thanked him, and he went on his way.

The Czar came out of his palace and saw that the boy had not chosen a horse for himself yet.

“Ivan the Peasant’s Son, go to my stables,” the Czar said. “Perhaps you can find yourself a horse there.”

The boy went to the stables, but whatever horse he put his hand on would fall to the ground. There simply was no mount to satisfy him, and that's all there was to it.

When night descended, the boy went out into the steppe, gave a mighty whistle, and lo! a horse came running up.

“Why have you called me, my dear master?”

“It's time we set forth.”

“Well, it shall be as you say.”

As he led the horse into the Czar's stables, his mount proved too huge for the doors and walls — it nearly toppled them all to the ground. In the end he barely managed to lead the horse in. He tethered it, treated it to the finest wheat, and then retired to bed.

The Czar arose early in the morning and had Ivan the Peasant's Son roused from his sleep to find out whether he had seen the horse he needed in his dreams at least.

Said Ivan:

“Oh, but I have such a horse already; it's standing in your stables.”

They went to the stables, and when the Czar saw the huge horse, he was seized with fright.

“Well, make me a club now,” Ivan said. “It must be heavy enough for two pairs of oxen to pull it from the forest.”

He was brought the club which he hurled high into the sky and then went to sleep for a day and a half. When he awoke, the club came hurtling down. He stuck his little finger in the path of the club. When it hit his finger, the club smashed into smithereens.

“This club is no good,” he said. “Let me have another one, heavy enough for four pairs of oxen.”

They cut down a centennial oak, made a club of it, and brought it to him with four pairs of oxen. He flung it high into the sky as before and went to sleep for three days. When he awoke, he heard the club coming down with a roar. So he stuck out his middle finger, and when the club hit his finger, it plunged into the ground one and a half *arshin* * deep.

“Well, this one will be good enough,” he said.

As Ivan prepared to leave on his quest, the Czar said:

“If you find the horse for me, I will reward you with whatever you wish and never ever do any injustice to you. My word is firm.”

The lad set forth, but the Czar still did not believe that a peasant’s son could find such a horse, and so he had two knights of noble blood sent after Ivan to accompany him.

Before long Ivan the Peasant’s Son heard the earth tremble behind him.

“That must be a dragon flying this way or else some knights riding.”

The knights caught up with him. He greeted them and asked:

“Who are you?”

“The Czar sent us to ride with you.”

“Well, what shall we do now? One of us has to be in charge, because otherwise there won’t be any order whatsoever: we must submit to the command of one of us.”

The knights of noble blood immediately started to argue as to who of the two should be in command.

But Ivan the Peasant’s Son said:

“No, this argument won’t get us anywhere. Let us do it this way as we ride along: he who throws the club the furthest will be in command.”

One of the knights threw the club. They rode on for one day and another — but they did not see the club. It was only on the third day that they came across it. Then the other knight flung the club ahead. They rode on for a day and another and a third day, but still, the club was nowhere in sight. They found it only in a week. Then it was Ivan’s turn to throw. They rode after the club for a week, but there was no club. Then for a second and a third week, but there was no club yet.

“We must have missed it on our way,” the knights said.

“That’s impossible,” Ivan rejoined. “My club has probably landed somewhere by now.”

They rode for one more week, when finally they saw a huge house surrounded by a copper wall, with a copper bridge leading to it. Presently they spied the club, which had swooped over the wall and knocked off a corner of

the house. This was the home of horrible dragons. They were not in that day, for they were waging war in a distant land.

Said Ivan the Peasant's Son to one of the knights of noble blood:

"Today you stand guard on the bridge, and you" — he turned to the second knight — "will sleep by the horses, while I will sleep in the house." To the one who was to stand on guard on the bridge, he said: "Now mind you keep your eyes peeled. Don't you go dozing off."

The first knight made his rounds for a while, but since he was tired after the long journey, he lay down on the bridge and fell asleep. Presently Ivan the Peasant's Son awoke and saw that it was midnight and time to go and relieve the guard. He dressed, went to the bridge and saw the guard fast asleep. Ivan pricked up his ears and heard the earth tremble. It was a six-headed dragon flying along on his mount.

"Hold on your way and don't snort," the dragon said to his mount. "There is no one who can best us, save Ivan the Peasant's Son. But even a raven will not bring his bones here, because the lad is still too young."

"A raven might not bring my bones here, but a brave lad can come here himself," Ivan the Peasant's Son rejoined.

"Have you come in peace or to fight me?" the dragon asked.

"To fight you," the lad replied.

"All right," the dragon said. "Come here and strike me then."

"Oh no," Ivan the Peasant's Son replied. "You strike me first, because no one in the entire czardom is superior to you."

The six-headed dragon struck out with all his might, but it only made Ivan the Peasant's Son budge an inch. Now when the lad struck the dragon with his club, he took off all six heads at a single blow!

Ivan hacked the dragon to pieces, burned the bones, cast the ashes to the wind, and went back into the house. In the morning he asked the knight who had stood guard by the bridge:

"Well, did you guard the bridge vigilantly?"

"I did so that not a single bird could fly past it," the knight said.

That evening Ivan the Peasant's Son sent the second knight to guard the bridge, while the first knight was sent to the stables.

That knight, too, dozed off at his post. When it was time to relieve him, Ivan

the Peasant's Son awoke and went to the bridge. Presently he heard the earth tremble. It was a nine-headed dragon flying along on his mount.

"Hold on your way and don't trip," the dragon said to his mount. "In half the world there is no one who can best us, save Ivan the Peasant's Son. But even a raven couldn't bring his bones here, because he lives so far away!"

"That's a lie," Ivan the Peasant's Son said. "A brave lad can come here himself."

"Have you come in peace, or to fight me?"

"A brave lad should come not to make peace with you, but to fight you instead!"

"All right, come up here and strike me!"

"Oh no," Ivan the Peasant's Son said, "you strike me first, because there is no one superior to you in half the world."

The nine-headed dragon struck out with such force that it drove Ivan into the ground up to his ankles. But when Ivan struck out, the blow took off seven of the dragon's heads. With the second blow, the remaining two heads came off as well. Ivan chopped the dragon into pieces, burned the bones, and cast the ashes to the wind. Then he went back into the house to catch up on his sleep. In the morning he asked the second knight:

"Well, did you guard the bridge vigilantly?"

"I did so that not a single mouse could crawl by."

On the third night he called the two knights, hung his gauntlet on the wall, and told them:

"I'll go myself to guard the bridge this time. While I'm away, watch my gauntlet: if sweat drips from it, you may make merry, but if drops of blood fall from it, set my horse free."

He took up his station at the bridge. At midnight the ground started to tremble for twelve *versts* around, and the leaves dropped off the oak trees. That was the most horrible dragon flying along on his mount which could eat glowing coals and drink flames. As the dragon came a-flying, he said to his mount:

"Hold on your way and don't trip, because there is no power in the entire world to best us, save Ivan the Peasant's Son. But he's still young and only good

enough to lie around on the stove. He won't come here, and even a raven can't bring his bones, because he lives so far away."

To which Ivan the Peasant's Son rejoined:

"A raven might not bring my bones, but a brave lad can come here himself."

"So shall we fight or make peace?"

"It's not to make peace that I have come here, but to fight you."

"Come and strike me then," the dragon said.

"Oh no, you must strike me first, because you are the strongest in the entire world."

When the dragon struck Ivan the Peasant's Son, the lad went pale. They fought and they fought until only three of the dragon's heads remained. Ivan the Peasant's Son had been driven into the ground up to his waist by then, and he could be bested any minute now.

"Listen, you," the dragon said suddenly. "Did you have a father?"

"I did."

"Did your father have any oxen?"

"He did."

"Did he plow with them?"

"He did."

"And did he let them rest?"

"Of course."

"So let us rest, too."

As Ivan the Peasant's Son relaxed for a moment, he threw his club at the stables and brought down its walls. His mount came galloping to him and pawed the earth around him.

The two knights had woken up by then and saw that the gauntlet was dripping blood. But they were afraid to come to the rescue of Ivan the Peasant's son, thinking it better not to risk their lives for his sake.

Ivan's mount had pawed up enough of the earth around him in the meantime, and Ivan the Peasant's Son said to the dragon:

"This time I will kill you for sure!"

To which the dragon said:

"Be that as it may, but there is one thing I must tell you before I die: al-



though you might take my magic horse which the Czar needs you will fail to bring it to him. I have three sisters, a mother, and a father, Czar Herod, and they will remove you from this world all the same.”

Ivan knocked off the dragon’s three remaining heads, and then fell to thinking about what to do next. By that time the old woman whose roof he had mended with the horse skins learned that he was in sore trouble (she knew all the goings-on in the world) and sent her little dog to Ivan to tell him:

“On your way home you’ll want to drink so badly that you won’t be able to utter a word. On your right you will see a spring with crystal-clear water. Don’t drink a drop of it, but strike it crosswise with your club instead, and you will see what happens. As you travel on, you will grow hungry. There will be a sycamore by the roadside, and under it a table with loaves of bread, apples and all kinds of meat and drink. Do not eat any of it, but strike it crosswise with your club, and you will see what happens. On you will travel, and you will want to sleep. Under a sycamore which you will come upon you will see some beds. Do not lie down upon them, but strike them with your club instead, and you will see what happens.”

Ivan heard out the message of the little dog, thanked it kindly, took the magic horse and the two knights who accompanied him, and set out on his journey back home. On their way they grew thirsty. And indeed, they saw a spring by the roadside on their right. The two knights wanted to have a drink.

“Wait a bit,” Ivan said. “I’ll have a look first.”

He swung his club and struck the water — and instantly it turned to blood. It was really the dragon’s sister who had turned herself into a spring. On they rode, and Ivan killed the other two sisters who had turned into food and beds. Presently the sky became overcast. When they looked more intently, they saw that it was not a cloud, but the dragon’s old mother swooping down on them. One of her jaws reached to the sky, and the other was right above the ground.

Said Ivan the Peasant’s Son:

“Well, let’s fight her together, because I won’t manage to overcome her all alone.”

But fighting was the last thing on the minds of the two knights — they just took to their heels. Ivan realized that he would not be able to get the better of the she-dragon. This is the end of me, he thought. But the next moment

he recalled that there was a huge smithy not far away beyond the mountains and forests. He spurred his horse and rode toward it at a wild gallop, the two knights hot on his heels, since they had no other choice.

They rode up to the smithy.

“Open up!”

The blacksmiths opened the smithy’s twelve iron doors which closed of themselves once the fugitives had rushed in. The she-dragon settled at the smithy and started to lick through its doors with her fiery tongue.

Realizing that the situation was critical, Ivan the Peasant’s Son turned to the smiths:

“Forge me a huge plow as tall as this ceiling, and make me tongs just as big. Do it as fast as you can.”

The smiths got down to work in a jiffy, because the she-dragon was burning through door after door. There were only three doors left when the smiths finished forging the plow and tongs.

The she-dragon had licked through the last door, and when she stuck her head through it, Ivan squeezed her jaws together with the red-hot tongs. Then he hitched her to the plow and whipped her into a field at a run to plow the land — he turned over soil in clods as big as a house. As he plowed, he kept lashing her viciously and squeezing her jaws shut harder and harder with the red-hot tongs. Her strength spent itself and she burst to pieces.

Thereupon he cast what was left of her into the sea, let his mount loose into the tilled field, and drove the two knights away.

“Get out of my sight, you cowards!” he said. “Of noble blood you may be, but you have been no more than a headache all this time.”

He himself rode off on the horse he had taken from the dragon. On and on he rode until he came upon an old man. He rode past without greeting him. But after a while it occurred to him that this may have been disrespectful. So he decided to return and show the old man the respect he deserved.

He turned around and rode back to the old man.

“Hello, old man,” Ivan said. “I beg your forgiveness for having passed by without greeting you.”

“You did the right thing when you decided to return,” the old man said. “Never pass old people by without greeting them. As you ride along, a

hunched old codger with a peg leg will come skipping up to you and say, 'Well, my lad, you might have a fine horse, but still you won't manage to outrun me.' Don't fall for his wiles. Moreover, whoever you come across on the way don't deny them your company."

Ivan rode on when he saw a scraggly old man limping his way on a peg leg.

"Oh, what a fine horse you have, my lad," the old man said. "But however puny I might seem to you, still your mount can't outrun me!"

"Oh no, I'm in no mood to meet your challenge. You can stick to your opinion, though."

But no sooner had Ivan the Peasant's Son spoken than the old scraggly man knocked Ivan out of the saddle with a sharp arrow, stuck his peg leg into the stirrup, and galloped off on the magic horse. This all happened in the twinkling of an eye, and Ivan the Peasant's Son did not even have time to turn his head before the deed was done. Actually, this was none other than Czar Herod himself, the father of the dragons.

Ivan the Peasant's son was terribly wroth.

"Well, you won't get away with that," he said. "Accursed Herod, I will seek you out on foot wherever you may be!"

He picked up his club and walked on. But he felt the wound from Herod's arrow swelling more and more with every step he took. And what was worse, his strength had started to ebb.

It's too bad, Ivan the Peasant's Son thought. Czar Herod must have hit me with a poisoned arrow.

"Now I'll never beat Czar Herod," he said to himself. "He'll best me with only a touch of his claw."

Ivan the Peasant's Son was dragging along when he came upon an old man with a beard that reached right to the ground. After exchanging greetings they inquired whither each was going, and the old man said:

"I'll go with you!"

"Who might you be?"

"I can fend off dogs."

Ivan the Peasant's son shrugged his shoulders in surprise, but recalling the advice of the first old man, he kept his peace.

On they walked until they came upon another old man.

“I am Frost,” he introduced himself.

On they walked when they came upon a third old man. After exchanging greetings they inquired whither each was going, and the third traveler said:

“I can mow the sea and stack it in sheaves.”

“So join us, too!”

Farther on they met a fourth man who “ate and never had his fill,” then a fifth man who “drank and could never slake his thirst.” Then there was a sixth man “who liked to run and never had enough of running,” after which there came a seventh traveler who “could hit anything twenty *versts* away with his whip,” and, finally, an eighth man who “saw twenty *versts* ahead.”

Thus the nine of them walked into the realm of Czar Herod. The very sight of them made Czar Herod’s eyes pop, because no one had ever dared to come near the frontiers of his realm, let alone enter it with impunity. So he ordered seven thousand two-headed hyenas unleashed against the uninvited guests.

The hyenas came racing at them like a dark thunder cloud.

“Well, brothers, those dogs will tear us to pieces,” Ivan the Peasant’s Son said. “I’m weak and can barely drag along my stumps, so I can’t fight them.”

“But you’ve forgotten about me, the Dog Beater,” the first old man said.

He killed all the hyenas and stacked them up. Czar Herod saw that the hyenas had failed to stop the intruders — they were still walking through his realm. They came to Herod’s palace and entered the courtyard, which was covered by a big arched roof of iron. The moment they were in there came a crash. The door had slammed shut behind them. Ivan the Peasant’s Son and his companions were thus trapped in what looked like a huge iron chamber. Czar Herod ordered his servants to build fires around the walls outside so the prisoners would be roasted to death. The servants piled mountains of timber around the walls and set it afire. But Frost went into action, and soon the walls of the iron chamber were covered with a thick layer of hoar frost inside. When the servants had burned all of the timber, Czar Herod said:

“All right, open the door and shovel out the ashes of my enemy, Ivan the Peasant’s Son.”

The door was opened, but lo! everyone inside was still alive.

Said Ivan:

“You are rather cruel, Oh Czar, to have placed us in such a chilly room — we almost froze from the cold.”

“I’ll chop your head off anyway,” Herod said. “I know for certain that you have been poisoned and cannot fight me.”

But in his mind Herod reasoned: I still have plenty of time to kill him; for the time being I’ll torture him a bit more.

“Well, I’ll set you a task then,” Czar Herod said. “If you succeed, I’ll set you free. But if you fail, your heads will roll. Now mow me the sea within one night and stack it in sheaves, or else...”

Herod retired, while Sea Mower got down to work, mowed the sea, and stacked it in sheaves by dawn. The next morning Herod saw to his surprise that there was not a single drop of the sea left. “Hum, this must be a miracle,” he said, and then set Ivan another task:

“I’ll prepare a dinner of all the cattle I have. If you eat it, you’ll be spared; if not, your heads will roll.”

But Ivan the Peasant’s Son had one thought preying on his mind all the time: Oh, if only my wound would heal faster — I’d show you a thing or two about torture.

Herod had a captive slave girl who was exquisitely beautiful. She knew all sorts of healing herbs, and began secretly to take care of Ivan’s wound.

Herod had the dinner prepared in so many kettles there was no room for them all in the courtyard. He had more than a thousand barrels of *horilka* * brought to the feast. Ivan and his companions sat down at the table and ate no more than one ox. Such a course of events made Ivan sad: “We won’t eat all this food in three-years.” But presently he recalled that Glutton and Guzzler were among his companions. Oh, did they shovel down the meat and drink! The more they ate and drank the more they asked for. The two simply could not get their fill.

Herod saw that nothing could beat Ivan and his retinue. He was of a mind to do them in, but then decided to torture them some more.

“I wonder who will be the first to bring me water from the sea tomorrow —

my fleet-footed daughter, or one of you?" he said. "If it is you, you will remain alive, if not..."

Ivan, though, had only one thought preying on his mind: Oh, if only my wound would heal faster... The slave girl guessed what was worrying him, and said:

"Don't be sad; you'll be healthy soon enough."

They all went to bed. At the crack of dawn Herod's fleet-footed daughter put on her seven-league boots and invisible cap, picked up a pail, and off she dashed to the sea. She was gone already, but Ivan and his companions were still sitting around, wondering who should perform this task. Presently they recalled that they had Hotfoot in their midst. Hotfoot ran to the sea, scooped up the water, and had already outdistanced Herod's daughter on her leg back home when she threw some sleeping powder under his feet. He fell to the ground then and there and dozed off by his pail.

Ivan the Peasant's Son and his companions could see that Herod's daughter was already returning, whereas Hotfoot was not yet anywhere in sight. Sharpeye, who could see twenty *versts* ahead, looked into the distance and saw that Hotfoot was fast asleep. So Whiplasher, who could hit anything twenty *versts* away with his whip, unwound the whip and whacked the sleeping Hotfoot across his back. Up got Hotfoot, grabbed the pail, and raced so swiftly that he brought the water back faster than Herod's fleet-footed daughter.

Now Herod realized that there was no task difficult enough to best these men, so he drew his sword and ordered that Ivan and his companions be dragged out onto the iron thrashing floor. As Ivan was being led out, the slave girl whispered to him:

"Your wound has healed already."

Czar Herod was just about to bring down his sword on Ivan's head when Ivan grabbed him and threw him with all his might onto the spire of the castle, where Herod was impaled and met his death. Ivan took then the mount Herod had stolen from him by deceit. The slave girl also made preparations to leave with him, and the eight old men said:

"Well, Ivan the Peasant's Son, we have served you as best we could, and now we will be on our way to serve other good people, too."

They kissed Ivan on parting and left.

Ivan returned to his czardom. Being always as good as his word, he brought the Czar the horse that ate coals, drank flames, and made the ground tremble for twelve *verst*s around and the leaves fall off the oak trees when it galloped past. At the court were the two knights the Czar had sent to accompany Ivan. When they saw the girl Ivan had freed from Herod's bondage, they said to the Czar:

"It is not fitting for Ivan, the son of a common peasant, to marry such a beauty: she can become the wife only of a knight of noble blood!"

"You are absolutely right!" the Czar agreed, and said to Ivan:

"You, Ivan, are a peasant's son, and so it is unfitting to allow such a beauty to marry you. She can be the wife only of a knight of noble blood."

At that Ivan the Peasant's Son turned pale with rage, and rejoined:

"I freed her from bondage. She loves me, I love her, and I will not give her to anyone!"

"Oh yes, you will!" the Czar said.

"You yourself promised to reward me with whatever I wished and never ever to do me any injustice. I killed three giant dragons as well as their sisters, the old she-dragon I chased into the sea, and removed Czar Herod from this fair world — so if you intend to pay for my kindness in this way and break your word, I will wipe you out along with all you kith and kin in a single blow!"

When Ivan raised his club, all the trees bent low to the ground and the Czar's palace trembled to its foundations. The Czar was scared out of his wits and did not utter a single word of objection.

Ivan the Peasant's Son married the beauty, and they lived happily ever after.

But never again did Ivan take either the Czar or his lords at their word.





THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Once upon a time there was a czar who had three sons. Two of them were clever, while the third was a fool. The Czar was well advanced in years. One night he had a beautiful dream, in which he saw a spring with water that made anyone who washed himself with it young. He woke up early, told his sons about his dream, and said:

“The one who finds this water for me will receive half of my czardom in reward.”

Said the oldest son:

“I will bring you the water, Father.”

Right then he had the shipbuilders build a ship for him, took along several soldiers, and sailed off in quest of the fountain of youth.

A year passed and the first son had not returned yet, so the second son said to his father:

“Le me go for the water, Father.”

The second son left as well.

Another year passed, and there still was no sign of the first two sons, so the third son said:

“Father, let me go for the water.”

“Don’t bother me, you fool,” the father said. “My clever sons haven’t managed to find it yet, and here you are trying to be smarter than they.”

But the fool begged and pleaded until the Czar gave him leave. The lad took only two soldiers with him.

They sailed across the sea for a month, then for a second month, but still there was no land anywhere in sight. As they sailed on, they saw a mountain so huge it was terrible to behold.

Said the Czarevich to his soldiers:

“We’ll stay here for the night.”

They sailed up to the mountain, moored the ship, and spied a light up on the mountain. The Czarevich walked toward the light and saw an old man there.

“Good evening, father!”

The old man returned the greeting and asked whence he hailed. The Czarevich told him about his father’s dream of the fountain of youth.

“Indeed, there exists such a fountain,” the hermit said. “I have been living here for a hundred years now, but I have never seen either animal, bird or insect around here, and you are the first human being to appear before my eyes. What can I give you as a gift? All right, take this oar — if you stroke it but once, you will cover a hundred miles.”

He thanked the old man who told him on parting:

“Sail along this mountain and you will come upon two of my brothers who will give you something as well.”

He thanked the hermit again and sailed off.

They came upon the second old man toward evening.

“Good evening, father!” the Czarevich said in greeting.

The old man returned the greeting and asked him the same questions as the first old man.

The Czarevich told him the whole story.

“Indeed, there exists such a fountain,” the old man said. “I have been living here for two hundred years now, and you are the first guest ever to visit me. I must give you something as a present. Take this flute. When you come to that fountain (and it’s on an incredibly high mountain), blow the flute, and the mountain will slip down into the valley.”

The Czarevich took the flute and made ready to leave, when the old man said:

“Go to my eldest brother, and he, too, will give you something in reward. When you achieve your goal, come and visit me again.”

The Czarevich gave his word and sailed off to the third old man.

“What distant voyage have you embarked on, Czarevich?” the old man asked on meeting him.

The Czarevich said he was on a quest for the fountain of youth.

“Indeed, there is such a fountain, and it is not far away. Here, take these three bottles. As you are filling the first one, a mouse will appear, so drop the bottle; as you are filling the second, a rat will appear, so drop it, too; but when you fill the third, the water will be pure, so hide this bottle on you!”

On parting, the old man added:

“My dear, Czarevich, I’ve been living here for three hundred years now, but I have never seen either animal, bird or insect here, and you are the first human being to appear before my eyes. So I ask you, Czarevich, to visit me once more on your way back.”

Well, the Czarevich sailed on to the mountain which was incredibly high, over a thousand *sazhens*. He ordered the ship to be brought closer to shore, produced the flute, and blew it. The mountain slipped down into the valley. The Czarevich went ashore with one soldier and headed for the fountain. As he was filling the first bottle, a mouse appeared, so he dropped the bottle; he

filled the second bottle, and a rat appeared, so he dropped the bottle as well; the third bottle he filled with pure water and took it with him.

On his way back to the ship he saw a gorgeous palace covered with silver and gold. The sight of it suprised him utterly, and he said to the soldier: "My father is rich but he does not have such splendor. Let us go there and have a look at it."

They walked to the palace, opened the door, and entered the chambers. In one chamber there was hay, in another there was rye and wheat in large sacks, and in the third chamber they saw a table, and on it were three bottles of wine and three loaves of bread. The Czarevich sat down at the table, drank of one bottle and broke the first loaf, then he drank of the second bottle and broke another loaf, after which he drank of the third bottle and broke the third loaf. He ate his fill and then saw a lady lying asleep in a bed.

However much he roused her she did not awake. What could he do? So he took a quill and left a note, saying that he had been there for a visit. Then he returned to the ship and sailed for home, happy to have found the fountain of youth.

With every stroke of the oar, he covered a hundred miles. On and on they sailed until they came to a huge mountain upon which he saw his brothers from afar. They were feeding on plants and roots for lack of any other food.

The Czarevich shouted to them across the water:

"Look here, I got the water from the fountain of youth for Father. Get on my ship, and I will give you something to eat."

The brothers came on board, and the three of them sailed on together.

"Father will surely praise our brother for the water," the eldest brother said to the middle brother. "Upon our return we'll ask him to hold a banquet on this occasion; our youngest brother might get drunk, and we'll steal the water from him. I can't imagine how we'll face our father when he learns the truth."

The youngest brother was very tired by then and fall fast asleep. His brothers stole the bottle, substituting a bottle with ordinary water for the bottle with the water from the fountain of youth.

Back home, the youngest son said:

"Here, Father I've brought you the water.



“All right, let me wash myself and see.”

The lad gave him the water, and the Czar washed his face, but alas! he remained as old as he had been.

“Father, how could you have believed a fool!” the two brothers said. “It was we who actually found the fountain of youth, not him.”

They gave him the water from the fountain, he washed his face, and lo! the Czar became young again.

From then on the Czar developed such a hatred of his youngest son that he could not stand the sight of him.

Once the Czar went for a walk with his wife and forgot to take along the keys to the treasury. The youngest son took three money belts and stuffed them with gold ducats. (In the meantime the Czar had ordered the eldest brother to do away with the youngest son.) The lad girded one money belt around his naked middle, the second over his shirt, and the third over his waistcoat. He was about to leave when the executioner entered his chamber.

“Czarevich, you have been invited to a hunt,” the executioner said. This news comforted the Czarevich.

“I’ll be with you in a minute,” he said, thinking that his father had become kinder to him.

After they had walked far into the forest, the executioner said:

“Do you know, Czarevich, what my orders are?”

“No, what are they?” the Czarevich asked.

“I have been ordered to kill you.”

“You know what, let’s do it this way,” the Czarevich suggested. “We have a hound here, so we’ll take out its heart, and I’ll let you chop off my little finger as proof of my death. I’ll never confess to Father about this, and he will never be the wiser.”

And that’s exactly what the executioner did.

The Czarevich bandaged the hand from which the finger had been chopped off and went to roam the wide world. The executioner took the heart and finger to the Czar.

The Czarevich wandered far away from home, and in the end entered the service of a merchant who had three houses of stone. The new salesclerk took

to selling the merchant's goods and wares cheap, which attracted a lot of customers. By evening he had sold everything and closed the store. Then he took off one of his money belts, added the gold ducats to the day's proceeds, and went to the merchant.

"Why have you come?" the merchant asked.

"I've sold all the wares in the store."

"That's incredible. The goods and wares in the store have been lying there for over two years," the merchant said with surprise. "How could you possibly have sold them in only one day?"

Back at his quarters, the lad counted the ducats that still remained, and said:

"If only I could sell the goods in the other two stores just like that..."

In the meantime the sleeping lady he had left a note for had awoken and wrote to his father that she wished to see the Czarevich.

Caught unawares, the Czar summoned the executioner, and asked him:

"Perhaps you did not do away with my son after all?"

The executioner confessed that he had not had the heart to kill the Czarevich. So the Czar let it be known throughout the land that he was to be informed of the whereabouts of a man with a little finger missing. The priests announced the Czar's will throughout the churches, and soon the merchant informed the Czar that he had such a man in his employ. Right away a carriage was sent for the lad.

When the father was reunited with his son, he smothered him with kisses.

Then the Czarevich boarded his ship and sailed off to pay a second call on the lady. He sailed up to the mountain, produced the flute, and blew it. The mountain slipped down into the valley, he went ashore, and took the lady along with him.

Back at his father's palace, the Czarevich was married. The newlyweds stayed for some time with his parents and then departed to their palace on the mountain.

Soon a boy was born into the Czarevich's family.

One day, when the infant burst out weeping, the Czarevich, having nothing to amuse the infant with, gave him the flute. After that the father shouldered his shotgun and left for the forest to hunt, forgetting about the flute.

When he returned home, he saw that the mountain had become so huge again that he could not possibly scale it.

As he thought about how to tackle this predicament, he recalled his three sisters. They must be somewhere nearby, he reasoned, and went to seek them.

He found the home of the first, the youngest sister, and as he walked into her courtyard he was apprehended by a mouse with a gun. The sister came outdoors and called off her guard. The Czarevich told her what had befallen him, and asked:

“Do you know where my second sister lives?”

“The mouse will take you there,” she said.

The mouse took him to the home of the second sister, where he was apprehended by a rat with a gun. The second sister came outdoors and called off her guard. The Czarevich told her what had befallen him, and then asked:

“I would be glad to know where my eldest sister lives.”

“These two creatures will show you the way,” she said.

At the home of the eldest sister he was apprehended by a cat with a gun. The cat meowed, and the sister came out and called off her guard. The Czarevich told her the whole story: how he had sailed off to find the fountain of youth, how he had married, and how he had left home to hunt and the mountain had risen to its former height during his absence.

“I’ll give you these three creatures to help you. If they don’t find the flute for you, nobody will.”

He took them to the mountain, and said to Mouse, Rat and Cat:

“Come on, climb up there.”

At the foot of the mountain the creatures had to cross a river first. Cat told Mouse and Rat to climb on her back, and thus they swam across the river. On top of the mountain Cat said to Mouse:

“You gnaw a little hole in the door, and Rat will enlarge it.”

They gnawed through the door to the palace, took the flute and climbed down the mountain. At the stream Mouse settled on the neck and Rat sat on the back of Cat, and thus they started to cross the river. Mouse jumped about

on Cat's head for joy, and as Cat opened her mouth to say, "Sit still," she let the flute slip out of her teeth and it fell into the water.

When they reached the far bank, Cat, Mouse and Rat picked a quarrel, each blaming the others for the loss of the flute.

"Did you get the flute?" the Czarevich asked.

To which they replied that they had lost it.

"If you don't find it, I'll beat your hides off," he said.

The creatures started to walk along the bank when suddenly Cat spied a crayfish and caught it.

"Don't gobble me up, because I have lots of children," Crayfish begged.

"I won't, if you get us the flute," Cat said.

Much as Crayfish searched in the river, he could not find the flute. Crayfish surfaced, and said:

"It's nowhere to be found."

Cat gave Crayfish a good scolding, and threatened:

"Get down there again and search diligently. If you don't find it, I'll tear you to pieces wherever you may be!"

In the end Crayfish found the flute and brought it to Cat who gave it to the Czarevich. No sooner had the Czarevich blown the flute than the mountain slipped down into the valley, and he was able to reach his palace.

From that time on they all lived in concord and plenty.





THE POOR MAN'S FORTUNE



omewhere beyond mountains and forests there lived once a poor man. He had a son from his first wife and a daughter from his second wife. The orphaned boy was made to graze the family's cow and bull calf on the village commons throughout the entire summer. His stepmother did not give him anything to eat, except for a crust of dry bread, so the boy was extremely weak by autumn. The stepmother and her daughter, however, always entertained guests whenever the boy's father left home.

One day as he sadly recalled his dear mother, he burst into bitter tears. Now and then she had given him a piece of cheese or salted meat in addition to the bread and did not starve him, while his stepmother, it seemed, wanted to remove him from this world. His pleasant memories over, he burst into tears again. Presently the bull calf he was grazing spoke to him in a human voice:

“What makes you cry so bitterly, my boy?”

“Whether I tell you the reason or not, you can hardly help me in my grief.”

“In what grief?” the bull calf asked. “Just tell me what makes you weep and what troubles you.”

The boy told that his stepmother was starving him, and he had grown so weak that he could barely move.

“Well, if that is all your trouble, do not weep anymore! Come closer to me, unscrew a horn from my head, and stick it into the ground.”

The boy did as he was told and saw a table set with all kinds of tasty food appear before him. He was overjoyed and ate his fill, for the table had such dishes as he had never seen or heard of before.

The next day he did the same thing and thus had his meals every day. In the end he refused to take the crust of bread from his stepmother whenever he drove the cattle to the commons. The stepmother saw that something was amiss and sent her daughter to find out what the boy was eating on the commons.

The moment he reached the pasture he screwed the horn out of the bull calf’s head and had a hearty meal like the day before. The girl saw all this and told her mother by what miracle the boy was feeding himself and, of all things, eating such dishes as she had never seen in her life! To which the mother said that she knew what to do in this case.

When her husband returned, she talked him into selling the bull calf, arguing that it was too expensive to keep. It would be much better to buy a heifer which would bear them a calf and thus they’d gain instead of losing. In the end she got her way.

On hearing this, the boy went to the barn and wept bitterly. The bull calf saw him weeping and asked what had happened.

“How can I help weeping when my father has sold you to the butcher,” the boy replied.

“That’s no reason for tears,” the bull calf said. “Ask your father to allow you to take me to the butcher.”

The father had nothing against it. The boy took the bull calf and led him away. When they were beyond the village, the bull calf asked the boy: “Take a look round and see whether anybody is following us.”

“No, I don’t see anybody behind us,” the boy replied.

“All right then, climb on my back.”

The boy climbed on the bull calf’s back, and he took off into the sky and raced through the air like the wind until they reached a beautiful meadow. The boy stepped onto the grass, screwed a horn out of the bull calf’s head, and stuck it into the ground. That very moment a table with all sorts of tasty dishes appeared before him.

“Well, boy,” the bull calf said, “you eat of the meat and drink and then have a rest, while I will graze for a while.”

And what happened next? The calf grazed on coarse bull thistle and turned into a mighty bull. Then he said to the boy:

“Climb on my back and hold on fast, because now we’ll fly through a copper thicket. But mind you don’t break a single twig, because in that thicket there lurks a huge copper bull, and if you break but a twig, he’ll appear at once and I don’t know whether I’ll be able to best him.”

However careful the boy tried to be, he still broke a twig by accident. Thereupon the copper bull burst into such a thunderous roar it made the thicket tremble.

“Run as fast as you can to a tree, draw your knife, and hold it over your heart,” the bull said to the lad. “If you see me dropping to my knees and nuzzling the ground, you should kill yourself.”

The copper bull came charging, and the two animals locked horns in fierce combat. Miraculously, the lad’s bull got the better of his adversary.

Then the lad climbed on the bull’s back again and they sped off until they reached a silver thicket. Here they came across a silver bull which was defeated by the lad’s bull as well. After that they proceeded to a golden thicket where a similar combat took place. The lad’s bull emerged the victor again, after which he parted with the lad. But before leaving, he told the lad that he would be taken into service by a czar who would be passing by very soon.

Besides, the bull gave him three bridles — of copper, silver and gold — and explained what he had to do with them.

Indeed, the Czar's carriage appeared on the road shortly afterward. The Czar saw the shepherd and immediately took note that he was a surprisingly handsome lad.

“Would you like to go with me, my son?” the Czar asked. “I shall take you into my service.”

The lad gladly accepted the offer and climbed into the carriage. At the palace the Czar made him an apprentice to the gardener. When they started planting saplings, it so happened that not all what the gardener planted took root, whereas the lad would no sooner plant his second sapling than the first burst into bloom. The old gardener was simply enraptured with joy:

“Now we can present the Czar's daughters with bouquets of different flowers every day!”

On Sundays the Czar and his retainers had the custom of going to church. Once the Czar's youngest daughter fell ill and could not go to church. The lad also stayed at the palace that day. When everyone had left, he shook one of the bridles and in that same instant there appeared before him a copper-maned horse, a copper sword, and beautiful armor of copper. The lad jumped into the saddle and made his mount trample the entire royal gardens.

The Czar's youngest daughter saw all this from her window. When the old gardener returned from church and saw what had happened, he went to the lad at once. The lad was lying in a greenhouse just then, pretending to be asleep. The gardener gave him a sound whipping for neglecting his duties.

The next Sunday the youngest daughter stayed at home again, but this time not because of illness — she simply wanted to see what the young gardener would do. That day he mounted a silver-maned horse and trampled the garden. On seeing the entire garden destroyed, the old gardener again gave the lad a good lashing.

On the third Sunday the lad raced around the garden on a gold-maned horse which also trampled everything. Each time the Czar's youngest daughter observed all this from her window. She saw the harm the lad did to the

garden, but she also noticed that each time, after the havoc was wreaked, the garden became seven times more beautiful than it had been before. However, she did not tell anyone of her observations.

Some time late the Czar's daughters, the czarivnas, reached marriageable age, and so did the lad. The Czar decided to marry them off at one and the same time, because the eldest had already informed him that she wished to be wed. She asked her youngest sister whether she would like a husband as well. The girl had nothing against such an idea, so all the three sisters made it known to their father that he could marry them off. This news made the old Czar very glad, and he had three golden apples and three golden *boubliks* * made. Then he announced through all the realm that the hands of his three daughters could be sought in marriage, so eligible young men could come boldly to the Czar's palace to have a look at the brides to be. Princes, dukes and lords were quick to respond.

The youngest daughter said she would agree to be wed only on the condition that all the retainers and servants be present at the suitors' contest as well.

The Czar gave the daughters a golden apple and *boublik* each to be presented to the suitor of their choice.

The suitors were lined up. The eldest daughter walked down the line and chose a young prince; the second daughter also preferred a prince for husband. Then came the youngest daughter's turn to make her choice. She walked down the line and noticed that one of the servants was absent. So she reminded them of her condition that all the retainers and servants be present, because otherwise she would refuse to make her choice. Of course, it was the gardener's apprentice who was absent. Why should he have been there anyway? Since he was not much reckoned with at the Czar's court, no one had even noticed his absence.

The Czarivna announced then that she did not see the gardener's apprentice in the line. The servants fetched the lad immediately and stood him in the line of suitors. The youngest daughter walked down the line and gave the golden apple and golden *boublik* to the lad.



Her choice made the royal family boil with anger. The Czarivna was reproached abusively for committing a grave error. Here were young princes of the noblest blood, so why had she not chosen one of them? The Czar and Czarina started to threaten and intimidate her. But she stood her ground:

“I chose the one I wished, and so be it!”

What could her parents do? All the three daughters were wed. The Czar treated his youngest child and her husband very severely after that. Instead of beautiful apartments in the palace, they were offered a pigsty to live in.

The day after the weddings the old Czar prepared to go hunting together with his noble sons-in-law. As the gardener’s apprentice-turned-royal-son-in-law wanted to join them, he sent his wife to ask the Czar’s permission that he be provided with some sort of hunting gear. The Czar chased his daughter away once, then a second time, but when she approached him a third time, he gave her a hopelessly rusty musket.

With such a “glorious” hunting piece the gardener’s apprentice set off for the hunt, but he did not dare to stalk game side by side with the princes. He hunted alone and bagged two hares. The princes failed to bag anything at all. When they came across the gardener, they inquired derisively:

“Well, is there any game in your bag?”

“And what about yours?”

“We have nothing.”

“You see, I have two hares here.”

The princes asked him to give them the hares.

“All right, they are yours,” the gardener said. “But you’ll get them only in exchange for your golden apples!”

The princes gave him what he asked and took the hares back to the palace. By that time a grand dinner had been prepared for them.

The gardener returned to his pigsty with the golden apples which he gave to his wife as a present. She was extremely happy to receive such an extraordinary present.

The next day another hunt was staged. This time the gardener shot two wild goats which the princes bartered for their golden *boubliks*.

On the third day the gardener shot two bears, whereas the princes had to return to the palace empty-handed. When they saw him sitting by a campfire in the forest, they whispered to each other:

“We must have those bears by hook or by crook!”

They started to haggle with the gardener.

“I am not asking anything for them, because I have more than enough as it is, thank God,” the gardener said. “But if you insist on having them, you must let me brand the sign of the gallows on each of your backs.”

The princes agreed. The gardener had prepared for such an eventuality beforehand and set to work. He took a red-hot rod out of the campfire and branded the outlines of the gallows on the back of each prince, after which he gave them the bears. The princes took the bears to the old Czar with great joy and pride. The Czar praised them on their successful hunt.

But soon good fortune turned away from the Czar when a neighboring ruler made war on him. The old Czar did not have enough troops to wage war. His youngest son-in-law sent his wife to her father to ask him for a sword and horse, since he, too, wanted to go to war. The Czarivna managed to have his request granted after much pleading — in the end the Czar gave the gardener a rusty sword, and then pointed at a heap of dung on which lay a moth-eaten nag, as if to say that this sorry beast was the only war horse he could offer to his son-in-law.

The gardener accepted with gratitude what had been allotted him and rode behind the Czar’s host. Soon the exhausted nag got stuck in a bog and soiled its master with mud from head to toe. When the Czar and his noble sons-in-law saw that, they burst into laughter and left the gardener stuck in the bog. He failed to pull his sorry mount out of the morass. So he shook his copper bridle — and lo! — before him appeared a copper-maned horse with a set of copper armor for its master. The gardener donned the armor, jumped onto his copper-maned charger, and not only caught up with his arrogant relatives but outdistanced them. In vain did they call out, asking him to wait so they could ride on together. Needless to say, the princes did not recognize their brother-in-law in the rider.

The knight in the copper armor tore into the enemy host and routed it.

Upon arriving at the battlefield, the princes saw that there was no one to battle with. The gardener galloped back to his weak nag, and when the princes were returning home as victors, he was still busy trying to pull his nag out of the mud. Oh, did the lords have a laugh at the sight, but none of them came to the aid of their poor relative.

The next day the neighboring czar again declared war on his foe. This time the gardener galloped to the battlefield on the silver-maned horse and in armor of silver. And again he routed the enemy host.

On the third day the knight appeared in the enemy camp on a golden-maned horse and in armor of gold. He routed the enemy a third time as well. But this time he waited for the Czar and his sons-in-law, the princes, because his little finger was wounded. Nobody recognized the gardener in the knight, however. On seeing the blood-dripping wound, the Czar immediately tore a piece from his handkerchief and bound the knight's finger with it. When the Czar and the princes were returning from the battlefield, they again saw the gardener fussing with his nag in the bog.

A grand banquet was held at the Czar's palace thereupon. In his joy the Czar recalled his youngest daughter — she was his flesh and blood, after all — and told a servant to call her to the banquet.

The servant went to the pigsty and looked into the keyhole before entering. Inside he saw a sleeping man whose hand was hanging down from the bedside, while blood dripped into a bowl from one of his fingers. His wife was sitting on a stool and juggling three golden apples in play. The servant ran back to the Czar to inform what he had seen. The Czar did not believe a single word of it, slapped the servant in the face, and immediately sent another servant to the pigsty. The second servant brought him back the same news, except that he said the youngest Czarivna was playing with golden *boubliks*. Enraged at what he had heard, the Czar slapped this servant as well, but when an identical report was brought to him by the third servant, it was too much for the Czar. He went to the pigsty himself to see whether the servants were telling the truth. On entering the pigsty, he saw that everything he had been told was true. His daughter was playing with the three golden apples and three golden *boubliks*. Right away he recognized the piece of handkerchief with which he had bound the knight's wounded finger. Then the Czar ordered both the gar-

dener and his wife to be brought to the palace. He called his noble sons-in-law before him, and asked:

“Now tell me: where are your golden apples and golden *boubliks*?”

The princes realized that the Czar was not joking, and told him everything. Then the Czar turned to the gardener:

“What did the princes give you for the bears?”

“Nothing at all,” he replied. “I gave them the bears in exchange for their allowing me to brand the sign of the gallows on their backs.”

When the Czar saw that with his own eyes, he flew into a rage. He ordered two gallows to be built in the courtyard, and said to the princes:

“If you permitted the sign of the gallows to be branded on your backs, I will add the ropes to them now.”

And both princes were strung up at once.

As for the youngest son-in-law, he inherited the entire czardom. He lived in happiness and love with his young Czarina and was very considerate to all commoners.

And that, kind people, is the tale of how a poor lad became the Czar, because he was the favored child of fortune.





IVAN HOLIK AND HIS BROTHERS

Somewhere or other, beyond the Thrice-Ten Czardom, in a faraway country, there once lived a czar and hiis czarina, or perhaps it was a prince and his princess, but in any case they had two sons. One day the Prince said to his sons:

“Let us go to the sea and hear the sea folk singing.”

As they walked across a meadow, the Prince got the idea of finding out which of his sons would be the best to rule his realm. Presently they came upon three oak trees. The Prince looked at them and asked his eldest son:

“My dear son, what would you make out of these three oak trees?”

“They’d make a fine granary, or if they were sawed up, they’d make good boards.”

“Well, son,” the Prince said, “you’d be good keeper of the realm.”

Then he addressed his youngest son:

“And what would you make out of these oak trees, my son?”

“My dear father,” the youngest son replied, “if I were to have the will and power, I’d chop down the third oak, put it crosswise on the other two, and string up on it all the princes and lords in the world.”

The Prince scratched his head and kept his peace.

Then they came to the sea and watched the fish play. As they stood there, the Prince suddenly pushed his youngest son into the sea.

“It would be better if you were to perish, you lazybones,” he said.

No sooner had the father pushed his son into the sea than a whale came swimming along and swallowed up the lad. The whale also choked down wagons with oxen and horses that stood on the shore at the time.

When the lad found himself inside the whale, he went from wagon to wagon in search of whatever food he could find to stay alive. One day he found a pipe, some tobacco, and a flint and steel in one of the wagons. He took the pipe, stuffed it with tobacco, lit it up, and began to smoke. He smoked a second pipe, and then a third one. The tobacco smoke made the whale so dizzy it swam up to the shore and fell asleep. At that time a group of hunters was walking along the shore. Upon seeing the whale, one of them said:

“Well brothers, hard as we have searched for game in the groves, we haven’t found anything. Do you see that fish lying over there on the shore? Let’s go and shoot it!”

They shot the wale, then took axes and started to hack it to pieces. As they hacked, they suddenly heard a voice from within:

“Hey, brothers! Chop the fish up all right, but don’t chop a Christian soul to pieces while you’re at it.”

The hunters got scared and took to their heels. The lad crept out of the hole they had hacked, stepped onto the shore, and sat down on the sand. During the year he had spent inside the whale all his clothes had rotten away, so he was quite naked as he wondered what he should do next.

His elder brother had become a mighty lord by then. After the death of his father, he had become the ruler of the land.

One day the judges and senators gathered and decreed that the young Prince should marry. So he set forth to seek himself a bride. A large retinue followed him. On their way they came upon a naked man. The Prince sent a servant to inquire who this man might be.

“Good day!” the servant said when he had come close.

“Good day!”

“Who are you?”

“I’m Ivan Holik.* And who might you be?”

“We come from such and such a land, and are on our way to seek a bride for our Prince.”

“Go and tell your Prince that if he wants to find himself a bride, he will surely fail unless he takes me along.”

The servant returned to the Prince and told him everything. The Prince had a shirt, trousers, and everything else given to the naked man. Ivan Holik jumped into the sea, bathed, and dressed. When he was brought before the Prince, he said:

“Since you have agreed to take me along, you must all obey me. If you do, we will stay in the land of Rus, but if you don’t, all of us will surely perish.”

The Prince gave his consent and ordered every one else to obey Ivan Holik.

On they went until they came across an army of mice. The Prince wanted to ride over the mice, but Ivan Holik stopped him:

“Now wait and let the mice pass lest we touch a single hair on their tiny heads.”

At that everyone turned aside and let the mice pass. The hindmost mouse turned around and said:

“Well, thank you, Ivan Holik, for not letting my host perish. Some day I shall save yours as well.”

On they went until they came across an army of mosquitoes so vast it all could not be taken in by human eyes. Presently the general of the mosquito host flew up, and said:

“Hey, Ivan Holik, let my host drink of your blood! If you allow us to do so,

it will be to your great advantage, but if you do not, you'll surely not be long in the land of Rus."

Right then and there Ivan Holik stripped off his shirt and asked that he be tied up lest he kill a single mosquito. The mosquitoes drank their fill of his blood and flew away.

On went the Prince and his retinue until they came upon a man who had caught two pikes in the sea. Said Ivan Holik to the Prince:

"Let us buy those two pikes and then throw them back into the sea."

"What for?"

"Don't ask me why. Just do as I say."

So they bought the pikes and threw them back into the sea. Once in the water, the pikes turned around, and said:

"Thank you, Ivan Holik, for not letting us perish. We will stand you in good stead some day."

"Well, not everything proceeded as fast as it is told in a tale. On they went for a week or so, when they came to another land, to the Thrice-Ten Czardom, to another realm. That czardom was ruled by a dragon. They saw huge buildings, and the courtyard before the palace was ringed by iron stakes, each with the head of a warrior impaled on it. Right by the gate were twelve stakes without any heads on them. As the Prince and his retinue drew nearer, his heart was cast into dejection, and he said:

"Aren't these stakes intended for our heads?"

"That remains to be seen," Ivan Holik replied.

When they arrived at the palace, they were met by the dragon who seemed to be a kindly enough host; he received thee guests, ordered the entire retinue to be treated to a meal, and saw the Prince to the royal apartments.

Well, they feasted there bountifully, with no bad thoughts on their minds.

Now the dragon had twelve daughters, each as beautiful as the next. He brought them before the Prince and told him which was the eldest, which the next eldest, and so on down to the very last one in the line. The Prince took a fancy to the youngest daughter. Guests and hosts alike feasted till the evening, then took leave of one another and went to bed. Before retiring the dragon asked the Prince:

"Well, which of my daughters is the loveliest?"

To which the Prince replied:

“I like the youngest most of all, and it is her hand that I will seek.”

“Very well,” the dragon said, “but I will not give you my daughter until you have performed all my tasks. If you succeed in everything, you shall have her, but if you fail, you will lose your head along with all your retinue.” Then he ordered: “There are three hundred ricks of sheaves with grain of all sorts in my stackyard. By the light of dawn you must have them thrashed and sorted out straw by straw, chaff by chaff, and grain by grain.”

The Prince returned to the quarters of his retinue for the night, weeping bitterly.

At the sight of his tears Ivan Holik asked him:

“What makes you weep, my Prince?”

“How can I help weeping when the dragon has set me such a task?”

“Do not weep, my Prince,” Ivan Holik said. “Lie down to sleep, and by the light of dawn everything will be ready.”

Then Ivan Holik went outside and whistled for the mice.

Shortly thereafter the mice assembled in great number, and asked:

“Why have you called us?”

“How can I help calling you when the dragon has willed that all the ricks in his stackyard be thrashed by the light of dawn and sorted out straw by straw, chaff by chaff, and grain by grain.”

At that the mice squeaked shrilly and made for the stackyard. There were so many of them that Ivan Holik had no room to move. They set to work with a will. Dawn had not yet flushed when everything was finished. Then they went to rouse Ivan Holik from his sleep. He went to the stackyard and saw the ricks stacked as they had been before, but with the chaff and grain sorted out separately. Ivan Holik asked the mice to make sure that not a single grain remained in an ear of corn. The mice scampered back into the ricks, but they did not find a single grain in the straw. When they crawled out, they said:

“No, there isn’t a single grain anywhere, so do not fear. Well, we have repaid you your service, Ivan Holik. Farewell!”

Ivan Holik stood on guard by the ricks lest any damage be done. Before long the Prince came looking for him. He soon found Ivan and was surprised to see that everything was done just as the dragon had ordered. The Prince

thanked Ivan Holik, and went to call the dragon. When the Prince and the dragon came to the stackyard, the dragon was greatly surprised at what he saw. He called his daughters so they look for any grain that might have been left behind in the straw. The daughters searched and searched, but they did not find a single grain. Said the dragon:

“All right, let us have some meat and drink and make merry till evening, when I will give you another task for tomorrow.”

They made merry till evening, and then the dragon said:

“My youngest daughter went bathing in the sea this morning and lost her ring in the water. Much as she searched she could not find it. If you find it tomorrow and bring it by the midday meal, you shall live. If you fail, it will be the end of all of you.”

The Prince went to the quarters of his retinue and burst into tears. Ivan Holik saw him crying, and asked:

“What makes you cry, my Prince?”

The Prince told him everything.

To which Ivan Holik said:

“The dragon is lying: he himself took the ring from his daughter. When he was flying over the sea this morning, he threw the ring into the water. Go to sleep now. I will go to the sea tomorrow and try to get the ring for you.”

First thing in the morning Ivan Holik went to the sea. He shouted in such a loud voice and gave such a vigorous whistle that the sea was stirred up to a tumultuous storm. The two pikes he had saved not so long before came swimming to the shore, and asked:

“Why have you called us?”

“How can I help calling you? The dragon flew over the sea today and dropped his daughter’s ring into the water. Please, search for it everywhere. If you find it, I shall keep my head, but if you fail, the dragon will remove me from this world.”

Wherever the pikes swam, wherever they searched, there was no ring. So they swam to their mother and told her of their woe.

Said their mother to them:

“I have the ring. I feel sorry for that man, but I feel even sorrier for you.”

So she gave them the ring. The pikes swam to Ivan Holik and said:

“With this we have repaid our debt to you. But please do not think we had an easy time finding the ring.”

So Ivan Holik thanked the two pikes kindly and left. Back at the palace he found the Prince weeping, because in the meantime the dragon had sent for the Prince twice, and there was no ring yet. At the sight of Ivan Holik the Prince jumped to his feet, and asked:

“Well, did you find it?”

“Oh yes,” Ivan Holik said. “Look, there comes the dragon himself!”

“Let him come now!”

The moment the dragon crossed the threshold the Prince was about to go out to meet him, so they bumped foreheads. The dragon fumed with rage.

“Well, do you have the ring?”

“Here it is! I will give it not to you, but to the one from whom you took it.”

“All right!” the dragon said with a snicker. “Let us go, because I have some guests and they have been waiting a long time for you.”

Off they went. When the Prince entered the palace, he saw eleven dragons there. After he had greeted them one by one, he went toward the daughters, produced the ring, and asked:

“Whose ring is it?”

“It is mine,” the youngest daughter said with a blush.

“If it is yours take it, for I have waded through the whole sea in search of it.”

Everyone laughed, but the youngest daughter thanked him.

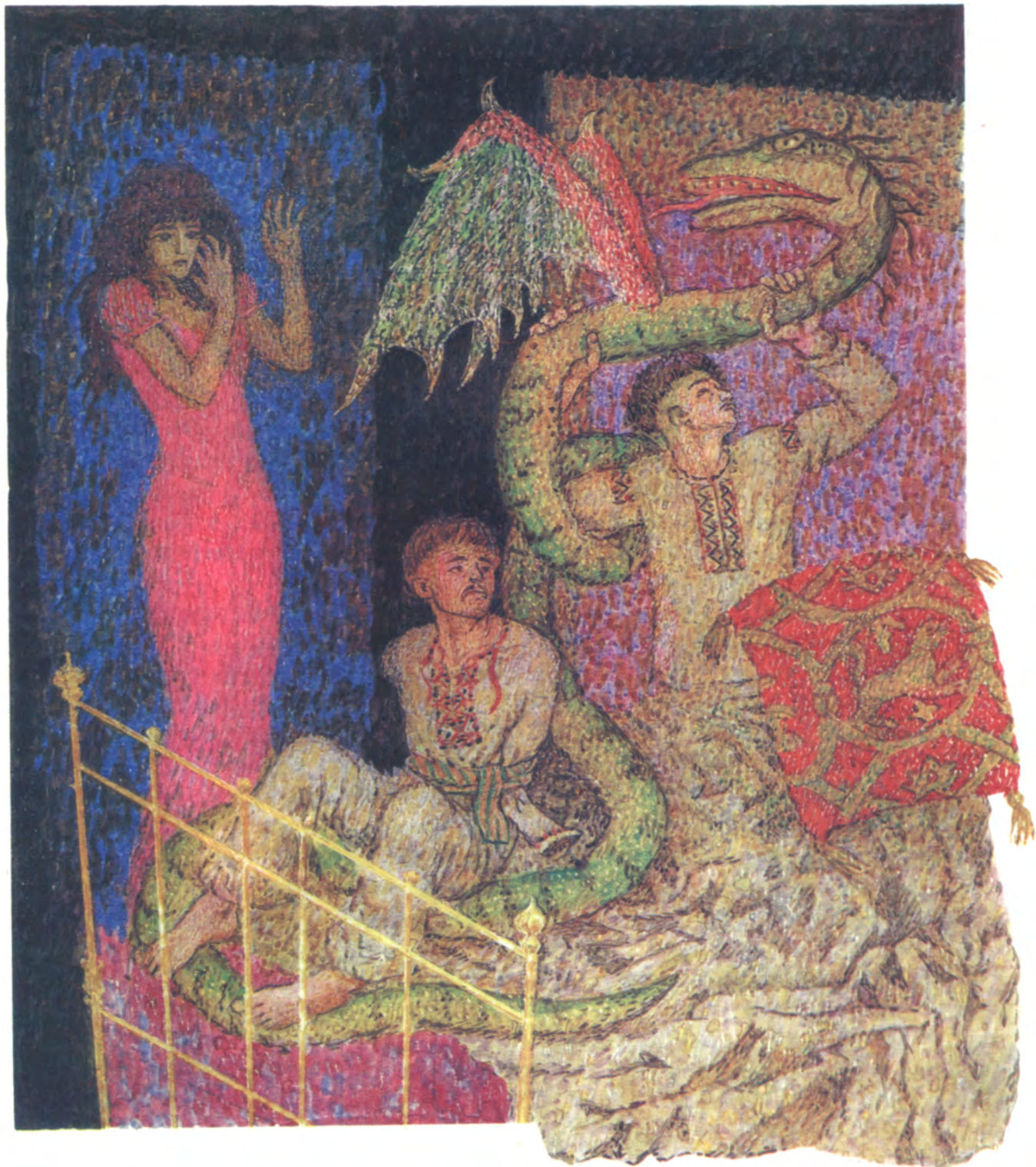
They all went to dinner then, and during dinner the dragon said in the hearing of all:

“I have a bow of about a hundred *poods*. * If you can shoot with it in the presence of all my guests, you shall have my daughter’s hand in marriage.”

After the dinner they all left to have a rest, while the Prince hastened to Ivan Holik, and told him about the next task.

“Now it’s the end of us!” the Prince said.

“That’s a trifle. So don’t you worry!” Ivan Holik said. “When you are



brought the bow, take a look at it and say to the dragon, 'I'd be ashamed to touch a bow any of my servants could bend.' Then have me sent for. After I'll bend it no one will ever be ordered to take it again."

The Prince went back to continue feasting with the dragon's daughters. At length the dragon asked the guests to proceed to the courtyard; behind him his servants were carrying the bow of about a hundred *poods*. At the very sight of it the Prince was filled with fright. The bow was carried into the courtyard, and everyone spilled out of the palace. The Prince walked round the bow, and said:

"I'd be ashamed to touch such a bow. Any of my servants could bend it easily."

The dragons exchanged glances, and said:

"All right, let them try."

"Have Ivan Holik brought here!" the Prince called.

When Ivan Holik arrived, the Prince said:

"Take this bow and shoot with it."

Ivan Holik lifted the bow and set the arrow. But when he bent the bow, a piece of about twenty *poods* broke off.

"Did you see that?" the Prince said. "If I had bent the bow myself, I'd have been put to shame."

Ivan Holik then returned to the quarters of the Prince's retinue, having stuck a piece of the bow into his bootleg. The Prince returned to the dragon's daughters. The dragons, however, stayed behind in the courtyard and put their heads together about what other tricky task to set for the Prince. After deliberating they, too, returned to the dinner table. Upon entering, the dragon whispered something in the ear of his youngest daughter. She left, he following behind her. Then the dragon reappeared, and said:

"It is already late today. Let us postpone everything until the morrow. I have a stallion locked up behind twelve doors. If you can ride him, you shall have my daughter's hand in marriage."

They feasted until evening and then retired. The Prince went to Ivan Holik and told him everything. After hearing him out, Ivan Holik said:

"Why do you think I took a piece of that bow with me? I knew what was coming. Now when they lead the horse up to you, have a look at it and say,

‘I won’t mount this horse lest you put me to shame as you tried to do with the bow. Any of my servants can ride this horse.’ By the way, it won’t be a horse at all, but the dragon’s youngest daughter. You wouldn’t be able to get into the saddle anyway, whereas I will give her a good lesson.”

When they got up in the morning, the Prince went to the dragon’s apartments and greeted everyone. He noticed that of the twelve daughters only eleven were present. The dragon rose and said:

“Well, Prince, let us proceed to the courtyard, for soon the horse will be brought out and we will have a look at it.”

All of them went outside and saw the horse being brought out by two dragons who barely managed to hold it in check. The Prince walked around it, had a good look at it, and said:

“You said you would bring me a stallion, didn’t you? But I see that this is a mare. I will not mount a mare lest you put me to shame as you tried to do yesterday. I will call my servant and have him mount it instead.”

The Prince called Ivan Holik and ordered:

“Get on that mare and trot her around.”

The moment he got into the saddle the dragons let go of the mare. Up and up she went until she carried him right to the clouds, after which she came tumbling to the earth and hit it so hard it made the ground quake. Presently Ivan Holik brought the fragment of the bow into play. The mare reared and wheeled and carried him everywhere, but he kept on flogging her unmercifully. Seeing that her bucking and caprices were all in vain, she began to plead in the end:

“Ivan Holik, do not beat me any more. Whatever you wish, I will do for you.”

“I don’t want anything,” he said. “But when I ride up to the Prince, you must fall to the ground and stretch out your legs before him.”

This made her think for a long time, and finally she said:

“Well, it seems I have no other choice.”

She carried him above the trees, landed near the Prince, fell to the ground, and stretched out her legs before him.

“See what a pity,” the Prince said. “And you wanted me to ride this mare.”

Thus the dragon was put to shame, but there was nothing he could do in vengeance. The whole company strolled through the garden for a while and then went to dinner. During dinner the youngest daughter appeared and greeted them. The Prince could not tear his eyes from her — now she was more beautiful than ever. When dinner was over, the dragon said:

“Well, Prince, now I will bring all my daughters out into the courtyard. If you manage to recognize the youngest among them, we will celebrate your wedding.”

The dragon and his daughters, who had to dress themselves for the occasion, left, while the Prince went to Ivan Holik to seek his advice.

“What shall I do?” the Prince asked.

Then and there Ivan Holik gave a whistle, and the mosquito general came flying. Ivan Holik told him everything, and the mosquito said:

“Since you did us a good turn, we will repay your service. When the dragon brings his daughters out into the courtyard, let the Prince have a look at them, and I will keep flying over their heads. Let him walk around them once while I fly around them. Then let him walk around them a second time, and I will continue flying around them as before. When he walks around them a third time, I will light on her nose. She won’t be able to stand me and will swipe me off with her right hand.”

With this the mosquito flew into the palace. Presently the dragon had the Prince called. When he arrived, he saw ranged before him all twelve daughters, their faces, hair, and dresses completely identical. Much as he looked he could not make out the youngest daughter among them. He walked around them the first time, but he did not see any mosquito flying about. When he went around them a second time, he saw the mosquito flying over the daughter’s heads. From that moment on he kept his eyes glued to the mosquito. As he went around them a third time, the mosquito settled on the nose of one of the daughters. She brushed it off with her hand, so the Prince exclaimed, “She is mine!” and took her to the dragon. Thus, beaten at his own game, the dragon said:

“Since you have recognized your intended, we shall give her to you in marriage today and celebrate the wedding feast.”

They were married on the evening of that same day. During the wedding

party there was merriment and feasting. Guns were fired in salute, and what ever did they do there! When it was time to go to bed, Ivan Holik took the Prince aside and said:

“Well, my Prince do everything in your power to return home tomorrow. There is one more thing I must tell you: do not trust your wife and do not confide in her for seven years. However much she carresses you, do not tell her all the truth, because if you do, you will perish and I along with you.”

“All right, I will not reveal the truth to her,” the Prince promised.

The next morning the newlyweds dressed and went to see the dragon. The Prince started to take leave of his father-in-law, intending to return home right away. But the dragon said:

“You cannot leave us so soon!”

“Do whatever you want, but I will leave today.”

So after the parting meal, the Prince took his wife, ordered the retinue to mount their horses, and left. Well, after they had arrived in their realm, the Prince thanked Ivan Holik for his service and appointed him the first of his counselors. Whatever Ivan Holik decreed was law throughout the entire land. The Prince just sat around doing nothing.

Thus the young Prince lived with his wife a year and two, and in the third year of their marriage she bore him a son. The young Prince was quite pleased. One day as he took his son in his arms, he said:

“What is dearer in the world to me than this child?”

Seeing that the Prince was moved to tenderness, the Princess started to kiss him, and recalling how he had courted her, she asked how he had managed to carry out all of her father’s tasks.

Said the Prince:

“If it were not for Ivan Holik, my head would be on an iron stake to this day.”

At that she did not betray her anger in any way but immediately took leave of him.

Ivan Holik was sitting in his house when the Princess came flying along. Presently she produced a handkerchief bordered with gold, and no sooner had she waved it than Ivan Holik was chopped in two: his legs remained in his

home, while his trunk swept the roof off his house and fell to the ground over seven *versts* away. As he hit the ground, he said:

“Oh, you foolish man! I told you to hold your tongue and not trust your wife for seven years! Well, now it’s the end of me and of you as well!”

As he sat there, he saw an armless man chasing a hare that was running right at him. When the hare reached Ivan Holik, he caught it. Then the two men started arguing over who the hare should belong to. Much as they fought over it, their efforts came to naught. So the armless man said:

“Let’s stop fighting and uproot that oak tree over there. He who throws it the farthest shall have the hare.”

The legless man agreed.

The armless man rolled the legless one over to the oak tree: the legless man pulled the oak out of the ground and gave it to the armless one. The latter lay down on the ground and gave the oak such a mighty kick it went flying three *versts* off. When the legless man threw the oak, it dropped to the ground seven *versts* away. Then the armless man said:

“Take the hare — it’s yours, and now be my elder brother.”

Once they had fraternized, they built themselves a cart and fastened ropes to it where they should be fastened. The armless man hitched himself into the cart and drove the legless one around thus. One day they went to the town where the Czar dwelled. They drove to a church, and the armless man left the legless one in the cart near some beggars who were waiting for the Czarivna to show up. Shortly thereafter she arrived and said to one of her ladies in waiting:

“Give this money to the beggars.”

The lady was about to bestow the alms upon the beggars, when the legless man said:

“Could the Czarivna do us a favor: we’d like to receive the alms from her own hands.”

The Czarivna took the money from the lady and gave it to the legless man. The latter then asked her:

“I mean no offense, Your Royal Highness, but would you tell me why your countenance is so yellow?”

“That is the way God made it,” she replied with a sigh.

“I doubt it, because I know why it is so yellow,” he said. “I can make it so that you will be your former self.”

Presently the Czar drove up and overheard the conversation. He had the legless and the armless men brought to his palace with their cart and willed that they live up to their words.

To which the legless man said:

“Be it as you will, my Czar, but first let the Czarivna speak the truth and tell us why she is as she is.”

So the father asked his daughter, and she confessed:

“You see, it so happens that a dragon visits me and sucks the blood out of my veins.”

“When does he come?” the legless and the armless men asked.

“Right before dawn, when all the guards fall asleep. He comes in through the chimney.”

“Now listen to me,” the legless man said. “We’ll hide in your antechamber, and when he comes, Czarivna, give us a sign by coughing.”

So they hid in the antechamber. Shortly thereafter sparks seemed to flash under the roof and the Czarivna gave a cough. As the two brothers rushed toward the sound, the dragon hid under the cushions. The Czarivna jumped out of her bed, while the armless man lay down on the floor and kicked the legless one onto the cushion. The legless brother grabbed the dragon, and then both of them strangled him until he pleaded for mercy:

“Let me go! I’ll never come here again and will warn dozens of others to stay away!”

Said the legless brother:

“Well then, carry us to the place where one can find healing water so I can have my legs, and my brother his arms, again.”

“Hold on tight to me,” the dragon said. “I’ll carry you there, but don’t torture me anymore.”

They took hold of the dragon, and he carried them to a spring with healing water.

“This is healing water!” the dragon said.

The armless one was about to jump into the water, but his legless brother stopped him with a shout:

“Keep back! You hold the dragon with your legs, and I’ll put a dry stick into that spring. Then we’ll see whether this is really healing water.”

He shoved the stick into the water which consumed it with flames. Oh, did the brothers vent their rage on the dragon! They had beaten him almost senseless when he screamed for mercy:

“Don’t beat me anymore! The healing water is not far from here.”

The dragon took them to another spring. The moment they stuck a dry stick into the water, the stick burst into bud and bloom. Then the armless brother jumped into the spring and came out with arms; the legless one did the same and came out with his legs. The brothers let the dragon go free and warned him sternly against visiting the Czarivna ever again.

After that Ivan Holik went to his brother, the Prince, to see what his wife had done to him in the meantime. As he approached the Prince’s realm, he saw a swineherd by the roadside. The swineherd was sitting on a grave mound, watching over a herd of swine. Thought Ivan Holik: I’ll go to the swineherd and ask him what is going on around here.

When he came up to the swineherd, he looked straight into his eyes and recognized his brother. The swineherd looked at the stranger and recognized him as Ivan Holik. They looked at each other thus for a long time, both unable to utter a word. Ivan Holik was the first to come to his senses, and said:

“So it is you, my Prince, tending swine! That serves you right. I told you not to trust your wife for seven years, didn’t I?”

The Prince threw himself at Ivan Holik’s feet and said:

“Ivan Holik, please forgive me!”

Ivan Holik told him to rise and said:

“It’s a good thing that you’re still among the living. Well, I think you shall rule for some time yet.”

The Prince asked Ivan Holik how he had gotten his legs back. Thereupon Ivan Holik confessed that he was in fact the Prince’s younger brother and told him his entire life’s story. After they had embraced and kissed each other, the Prince said:

“It’s time, brother, for me to drive the swine back home, because the Princess will soon have her tea.

“So let us drive them home together.”

“That’s just when my trouble begins!” the Prince said. “See that accursed hog over there? He leads the herd, and when he comes up to the gate, he stops and won’t budge an inch until I kiss him three times. Just then the Princess and the dragons are having tea on the balcony. They watch this scene and laugh their heads off.”

“That serves you right, too,” Ivan Holik said. “Well, kiss that hog one more time today, and tomorrow you won’t be kissing it anymore.”

When they drove the swine up to the gate, Ivan Holik saw that the hog up front stopped at the gate, spread his legs, and would not go into the courtyard. The Princess looked down on all that, and said:

“There’s my fool driving the swine in. Soon he’ll be kissing that hog.”

The poor fellow had to kiss the hog three times so it would move into the courtyard with a grunt.

“Look at that,” the Princess said. “He’s found himself a helper somewhere.”

The Prince and Ivan Holik drove the swine into the sty, and then Ivan Holik said:

“Now, brother, get me twenty *poods* of hemp and as many *poods* of pitch from your steward, and bring it all to me in the garden.”

“But I’ll never manage to carry it that far,” the Prince said.

“Just go and ask. They may not give it to you in the first place.”

The Prince went to the steward and asked for the hemp. The steward looked at him for a long time, and finally said:

“Well, it seems I have no other choice but to give it to you.”

The steward opened the storehouse, and Ivan Holik weighed out twenty *poods* of hemp and twenty *poods* of pitch, took the hemp in one hand and the pitch in the other, and left.

Then he plaited one *pood* of hemp and tarred it with a *pood* of pitch and kept at it until he had plaited a whip of forty *poods* by midnight. In the meantime the Prince had fallen fast asleep on a heap of straw by the pigsty.

Early in the morning Ivan Holik said to the Prince:

“Well, till this day you have been a swineherd, but henceforth you shall be a prince again. Let’s go and drive the swine out to pasture.”

“Oh no, the Princess has not yet appeared,” the Prince said. “I can only drive the herd out after she has come onto the balcony for tea with the dragons, so she can see how I kiss the hog.”

“This time it’s not you, but I who will be kissing the hog.”

“All right,” the Prince said.

When the Princess appeared on the balcony for her tea, the brothers took the swine out of sty and drove them to the gate. No sooner had they reached the gate than the hog up front stopped and would not budge. The Princess and the dragons looked to see what would happen next when Ivan Holik swung the whip and hit the hog so hard it sent his bones flying in all directions. At that the dragons made themselves scarce. But she, the accursed dragon, did not so much as flinch from fright but grabbed Ivan Holik by his hair. Ivan Holik, for his part, caught her by her braids and whipped her so unmercifully he almost beat the life out of her. From that time forth she gave up her dragonish ways and began to live peacefully with her husband. The two of them lived happily to the end of their days.





THE SEVEN ROOK BROTHERS AND THEIR SISTER

Once there lived a man and a woman who had seven sons. The boys did not live in peace and concord but were constantly at odds with one another, which made their mother very cross.

Once when their father had gone to the forest for firewood and the mother stayed at home with the boys, she got so angry at them for something that, unable to find the proper words to vent her rage, she wished they would turn into rooks. No sooner had the words escaped her lips than the boys really did

turn into rooks and flew off into the forest. There they lit upon an empty hut, in which they settled down. It so happened that in this hut they could again assume human form. Once they had settled in that empty hut, they started to work and keep house together.

One of them was very clever and made shotguns for all his brothers. They went hunting for all sort of game which provided them with meat, while the bread they made of the wheat they grew on their plot of land. Whatever implements they needed around their household they made themselves.

The flight of the sons made their mother cry long and bitterly.

Shortly thereafter she bore a daughter. Thirteen years had passed since the sons left their parents. The girl grew up and began to drive the cattle to the pasture. There the village children teased her, calling her a rook brat, since her brothers had turned into rooks.

One day the girl left the oxen to graze on their own, and went into the wide world to seek her brothers. As she walked through the forest, she went so far into it that getting out of it became impossible. Wandering thus through the thicket, she came upon a cottage where the old mother of the Moon lived.

“Whence do you come, my child?” the Moon’s mother asked. “If you want, you can live with me.”

“This I cannot do, because I’m on my way to seek my brothers,” the girl replied.

“I don’t know where your brothers might be,” the Moon’s mother said. “But when my son comes home, I’ll ask him in what land your brothers live.”

So when the Moon came home, his mother inquired as to the whereabouts of the girl’s seven brothers, to which he replied:

“I haven’t been there yet, but it seems to me they’re in the land where the Sun roams!”

The next day the Moon’s mother, after having given breakfast to the girl, asked her son to take their guest to the Sun. When they came to the Sun’s house, they found the Sun’s old mother at home.

“Where are you bound, my child?” she asked the girl.

“I am seeking my brothers. My mother’s curse turned them into rooks.”

“I haven’t heard anything about that,” the Sun’s mother said. “Maybe my son knows something about it.”

When the Sun came home, his mother inquired for the whereabouts of the girl's seven brothers.

"No, I don't know where they might be," the Sun replied. "Perhaps I've never shone in that part of the world before."

The Sun's mother fed the girl and asked the Sun to take his guest to the Wind's mother. When they came to the Wind's mother, the girl was treated to a meal there, too, and asked where she was bound.

"I am seeking my brothers," the girl replied.

The Wind's mother could say nothing definite, but when her son came home, she inquired for the whereabouts of the girl's seven brothers who had turned into rooks.

"I know where they are," the Wind said. "When a rain drenched me, I took off my shoes and foot clouts and hung them at the fireplace in the seven brothers' home."

"You see, this girl claims they are her brothers," the Wind's mother said. "You must take her to that house tomorrow morning."

In the morning the Wind's mother gave the girl breakfast, and then the Wind sat her on his shoulder and carried her to the brothers' house. They were not in just then, probably having gone into the forest to hunt some game. The Wind left the girl in the house, took his foot clouts, and swept off.

At midday the brothers returned home. The youngest, who was responsible for cooking the meal that day, took the food out of the oven and saw that somebody had eaten of it.

"Hey, look, brothers, somebody's eaten a bit of our food," he said.

"Who could it have been?" the brothers wondered. "We've lived here for years, but apart from us, nobody else has ever showed up!"

They had their meal and left again. The second brother stayed behind to cook the evening meal, because this was what the brothers had agreed upon — they cooked their food for the evening right after midday. After he had cooked the meal he left to join his brothers in the forest. When he had gone, too, the girl, who was hiding under the bed of the youngest brother, crawled out, ate a bit of the food, and hid again, this time under the bed of the second eldest brother. When the brothers gathered in the evening, the second brother said that somebody had eaten a bit of the food again.

“It looks like we had visitors, after all!” he said to his brothers.

“I simply don’t believe it! You must be imagining things!” the third brother said.

The brothers ate their supper and went to bed. One of them had a dream, in which he saw their sister who had come to visit them. In the morning each brother told what he had seen in his dream, and the one who had seen his sister told about it as well. After eating their breakfast and cooking the midday meal, all of them went off to work. The girl came out of her hiding place, ate a little bit of the food, and hid again — this time under the bed of the third brother. At midday the brothers gathered for their usual meal.

“Well, brothers, there’s less food in the pot again,” said the third brother who had prepared the midday meal that day. “It really looks like somebody is nibbling at the food.”

“Who could it be?” the brothers wondered of one accord. “We have been living here for years and haven’t seen a single soul around, except for us.” They had their meal and went to the forest again. The fourth brother stayed behind to cook the supper, and after it was ready, he left as well to join his brothers.

When they gathered for supper, they saw that there was less food in the pot again. They sat down for supper and exchanged opinions on the goings-on in their home:

“It’s really strange. Several times now somebody has nibbled at our breakfasts, dinners and suppers. There must be an explanation for it all. Let’s search our house thoroughly.”

They began to search the house, and in the end looked under the beds. And there, under the bed of the third brother, they spied the girl.

“Come out of there! What are you doing here?” they asked her.

“I am seeking my brothers. My mother’s curse turned them into rooks,” she began her story. “My father told me about it. He was not at home when it happened. He had gone to the forest for firewood.”

“Had it been long since your mother cast the curse which made her forget her children?” she was asked.

“Well, if your brothers were thus turned into rooks, what made you run away from your parents?” one of the brothers asked.



“It’s because the children teased me, calling me a rook brat whenever I drove the oxen to pasture!”

This convinced the brothers that the girl was telling the truth and she was really their sister.

“You know what — stay and live with us,” they told her. “You can cook the meals while we go hunting.”

So she remained with her brothers. They treated her very kindly and dressed her in the finest clothes befitting a pretty young girl. Thus they lived together three years when suddenly misfortune struck and upset their peaceful life. Once, when the brothers were out hunting, they killed a deer which wasn’t a deer at all — it was the daughter of Baba Yaga, the Witch. Baba Yaga vowed revenge. One day when the girl was at home alone, the vile old hag came along with a coral necklace, showed it to the girl through the window, and said:

“Would you care to buy this necklace from me?”

“I would!” the girl replied.

The girl took some money and gave it to the old woman who left right away. No sooner had the girl put the necklace on than it choked her.

When the brothers had gathered for the midday meal, they saw their sister lying breathless on the floor. Since they knew something of the art of healing, they immediately came to her aid: they found the necklace, ripped it off her neck, and the girl began to regain her breath slowly; then they rubbed her down and managed to save her from death in the end. When she was able to stand on her feet again, her brothers warned her never to let anyone know she was in the house in the future.

She stayed at home, keeping house as before. Six months passed when the accursed old hag showed up again, this time with a fine apple.

“Maybe you’d like an apple?” the witch asked. “Here you are!”

As before, the girl gave the witch some money for the apple. Then she took a bite and choked on it: she dropped to the floor, and only the faintest, broken breath escaping her lips betrayed any sign of life in her.

The brothers returned from their plot of land, and seeing that their sister was lying on the floor, they examined her to find what had brought her harm this time. Much as they tried to find the cause of her death, they failed. They

were grievously sorry for their sister — but what could they do? So they built her a coffin of crystal with silver chains, put her in the coffin, but instead of burying her, they hung the coffin by the silver chains between two trees like a cradle. Their grief over the death of their sister was so great that they also passed away shortly thereafter.

One day a young and handsome prince went hunting in that forest with his servant and lost his way. They wandered about the forest for three months without coming across a living soul. Once, quite by accident, they passed near the place where the coffin hung between the trees, and camped there for the night. In the dark the Prince saw something shimmering in between the trees, and said to the servant:

“Let us go and see what is shimmering over there between the trees!”

On arriving at the place, they saw that it was a crystal coffin. When they opened the lid, they saw a lovely maiden lying in the coffin. They listened intently to hear whether she was still breathing by any chance, and found that she was not really dead, because she was still warm to the touch.

The Prince asked his servant to take the chains off the tree so they could lower the coffin to the ground. As one of the chains was being taken off the tree, it suddenly slipped out of the servant’s hand, and the coffin hit the ground so hard that the piece of apple in the girl’s throat popped out. She sat upright and told them what had happened to her. Then they buried the seven brothers who lay on the ground not far away, and the three of them left the forest for the city where the Prince lived.

Before long the Prince married the girl. Everything would have been fine if the Prince had not had a wicked stepmother who hated him infinitely. One day she went after her husband, the Czar:

“Don’t you see what your son has done? He found himself some beggar girl and married her! Can we really tolerate this common waif in our royal apartments?”

The stepmother wanted to remove her daughter-in-law from the world, but much as she tried, she failed, because the Prince loved his wife passionately and guarded her like the apple of his eye.

“If your son won’t do away with his wife, you must do away with both of them!” the stepmother said to the Czar. “Give orders to have them hung or

shot! If you don't do it, I won't be a wife to you anymore, nor you a husband to me."

In the end, the Czar gave in.

"Now listen here, son," the Czar said. "If you won't take your wife back to where you found her and kill her, and bring me her heart, eyes and both arms chopped off up to the elbows as proof, I will have no choice but to have you both executed."

The Prince being a meek sort, burst into bitter tears, took his wife and went with her to the border of the forest. They were followed by the Czar's dog. The Prince shot the dog and removed its heart and eyes, but when it came to finding a substitute for his wife's arms, he was at a loss. So his wife said to him:

"If suffering is my lot, chop off my arms, because otherwise you will have to die!"

There was no end to their tears when the Prince chopped off her arms. How sorry they both felt for the beautiful white arms, but what other choice did they have but to obey the cruel will of the Czar?

The Prince went home and showed his father and stepmother the arms, eyes and heart as proof of his beloved wife's death. His hapless wife went on her way without her arms, bewildered at the thought that she would be unable even to put food into her mouth to survive.

By and by she came across a stream, bent down to drink some water, and then lay down on its bank for a rest. The stump of her arm bandaged with a cloth slipped into the water by accident and lo! her arm grew whole again. At the sight of this miracle she put the stump of the other arm into the water and thus regained her second arm. Then she decided to return to the hut her brothers had once occupied to live there.

As the days passed, sad thoughts gnawed at her heart: what would she do when the child she was expecting would be born to her. Both of them would probably perish then! Were it not for the child, she would have probably chosen to live in that hut forever!

When the time came, she gave birth to two children: both of them boys. And what beautiful twins they were! On the forehead of one there was a birthmark shaped like the sun, and the other had a birthmark shaped like the moon.

After some time the old Czar and his second wife died. The Prince, being

their only heir, ascended the throne. But without his wife to share the joy, he was a very heartbroken ruler indeed. If I only knew her whereabouts, he thought. I'd take her even without arms and feed her with my own hands, since it was me who crippled her.

"Let's go and search for her!" the young Czar said to his servant one day.

They both went into the forest, heading to the place where they had found the crystal coffin. The day was at its ebb just then, and he remembered that close by stood the hut in which the rook brothers had lived. So he and the servant went there to seek shelter for the night. The hut was now occupied by a woman with two boys. The mistress of the house made a bed for the Czar on the plank bed adjoining the stove, and the servant was prepared a place to sleep on the floor. She herself went to sleep on a bench by the wall and made two separate beds for the boys, as she usually did, on the shelf running alongside the stove. A candle was left burning in the hut for the entire night.

The Czar was comfortably sleeping on the plank bed, whereas his servant was at a disadvantage, because the floor was hard, and his was a fitful sleep. Presently one of the twin boys started to weep for some reason and called his mother, who said seemingly to herself:

"Hush, my son, I'll be with you in a moment. I have to get up anyway to put your father's arm back on the bed."

The servant overheard what she said.

In the morning, she rose early to prepare breakfast for her guests. The Czar and the servant ate the breakfast and went to the forest again to the place where they had been the day before. Here the Czar said to his servant:

"Oh, how difficult it is to live in this world! You know, if I were to see my wife right now, a tremendous load would fall from my heart!"

"Would you recognize her if you saw her?" the servant asked.

"Certainly I would!" the Czar replied. "The face of that woman at whose home we spent the night looks somewhat like my wife's, but my wife has no arms."

"So why did she say to her child, 'Hush, my son, I'll be with you in a moment. I have to get up anyway to put your father's arm back on the bed,' when your arm slipped to the floor while you were asleep?"

“Let’s go about it this way,” the Czar said, overjoyed. “We’ll stay here for the day, and in the evening we will go back there for the night!”

The woman grew very sad on seeing that the unexpected guest she had received with such great joy had not recognized her and had returned to the forest, probably never to return and ask her who she was and whence she had come. She had already lost all hope of ever seeing her love, without whom she felt like a lonesome orphan in this world.

But with the advent of night, the guests reappeared. The mistress of the house prepared their beds just as she had done the night before. Her heart fluttered with joy and promised something unusually good. Shortly afterward the Czar let his arm slip intentionally to the floor. She came up to his bed, lifted the arm and put it back on the bed again. Then and there he threw his arms around her, drew her to his side, and asked kindly:

“Why do you take the trouble to care for me so kindly, good lady?”

“You are my husband who chopped my arms off!” she replied at once, happy to have been asked the question.

“Tell me, my dear, how you regained your arms?” the surprised Czar asked.

“It happened by a stream when I bent down to drink some water,” she replied.

“And what about the children?”

“They are our twin boys!”

The Czar took his wife back to the palace. Once they were at home, they vowed never ever to part.





THE TRUE FRIEND

Once upon a time there lived a czar who had only one son. Rich was the Czar's realm, and he did not know what to be more proud of — his realm or his son.

But his riches courted trouble: a king from a neighboring realm, who was overcome with discontent at another's fortune, declared war on the Czar, just at the time when he was about to find a bride for his son.

“Well, son, the cards are stacked against us. Now is not the time for marriage — we must defend our realm. Your marriage must be postponed, although our home is in need of a young mistress. I will set forth with my host for the border, while you stay home as my second in command. Rule the entire realm until I return, but rule it so that there will be no complaints. Be just and judge righteously. Once the war is over, you will be married. But mind you, don’t even think of marrying until I return! You will commit a grave error if you go against your father’s command. So mind you heed my words.”

With this they parted. The old Czar mounted his charger and set out against the enemy at the head of his host, while the son, the Czarevich, remained to rule the realm.

One month passed, and a year passed as well. But there was no end to the war. Ever more troops were thrown into the battle. The enemy was powerful and difficult to vanquish. The Czarevich ruled the realm justly, and there were no complaints. The second year was drawing to its close, but the war continued.

There is nothing good in this, the Czarevich thought. I promised my father not to marry as long as there was war, and I must obey him. But who knows when this strife will end? The years are passing, and I am not getting any younger. And who knows — a girl will hardly fall for an old suitor.

Thus he reasoned for some time, and in the end he decided that there was no sense in waiting and he would marry without his father’s consent.

But first he sought the advise of his assistant and friend who was as old as he. The lad came from a poor family and was remarkably clever. They grew up together from childhood, liking and understanding each other well.

When the Czarevich told of his intention, his assistant said:

“Going against the will of your father is bad. But, on the other hand, a young man must marry. If you take for wife a girl from a royal family, it will bring good not only to you but to our realm as well, and we’d get additional support in the war.”

They concluded that the marriage should not be postponed, and the Czarevich should seek a bride. They knew a lot of suitable young women, but their final choice fell on the daughter of a king from a neighboring realm.

The matchmakers were readied to set out on their journey. The Czarevich

was to ride at the head of a large body of troops, so the family of his intended would see right away that here was a czar's son from a rich and powerful realm, and not some good-for-nothing.

They had not yet reached the border when they met the old Czar returning with the remainder of his troops who had suffered defeat in the war. The Czar was overjoyed to meet his son, believing he was rushing to help him.

"You have appeared at a happy hour, my son," the father said. "With fresh troops we can still win the war!"

"But, Father, these troops are not armed for war."

"Why not? How could you have set out for war without arming the troops?"

"I was not going to war, to tell you the truth. I was on my way to propose to a young princess, because I grew impatient waiting for you."

On hearing that, the Czar fumed with rage:

"So when our realm is in deadly peril and is hanging by a slender thread, marriage is the only thing on your mind?! Know then that you are no son to me any more. Go where you intend to go. I will not hold you back. But I will take your troops, arm them properly, and win the war!"

And that is exactly how it came to be. The Czar armed the troops for battle and won the war, while his son lost his father's grace and was turned out of the land. Only his true friend did not abandon him at this difficult moment.

Thus the two friends were left alone in the middle of a field. Said the Czarevich sadly:

"Our idea had a good start but a bad ending. Father and country — the two of us have neither now!"

"Don't be sad. We have set our minds on something, so let's pursue it. Not everything has been lost. The girl who'll fall in love with you will remain true to you without your riches."

"All right, all right... since we've waded into the river, we must cross it."

And off they went to propose to the King's daughter.

The Czarevich bowed and informed the King of who and what he was, and with what intentions he had come. Nor did he pass over in silence the encounter with his father who had gotten angry with him and renounced him.

When the King heard the lad's story out, he took pity on him.

“There is no need to be sad,” the King consoled him. “Your troubles can still be helped. By and by your father’s anger will cool and he will forgive you. If need be, I will come to his assistance. You, however, must marry!”

And the King agreed to give his daughter in marriage to the Czar’s son. The wedding was performed, and the rulers of the neighboring lands, except those who were still at war, were invited to the wedding party. After the wedding the King said to his son-in-law:

“Live serenely in my home. My realm is big and rich. And do not grieve about anything. I will find out how your father fares and will try to help you make peace with each other. Perhaps he is in need of my assistance.”

Right then and there he sent messengers to the old Czar, writing him about what had happened — that his daughter was married to the Czar’s son, now they were in-laws, and so had to live in peace. “Forgive your son his misdemeanor,” the King asked. “If you need any help against your foes, I will furnish it right away...”

But no help was needed, because the Czar had won the war with the fresh troops by then and had returned home content.

“I am happy to see you,” the Czar said to the messengers. “I am also happy that my son found himself a decent girl and a good match. I thank his father-in-law for the respect granted to me, and forgive my son his misdemeanor. He may return with his wife, my daughter-in-law. Since they have married, let them live happily as a family in my home.”

The words seemed to have been spoken through clenched teeth, and the messengers noticed that what he had said was not coming from a sincere heart.

But what he said was an order; the messengers stayed with their host for several days, thanked him kindly for his treatment, and then returned to their kingdom. Back at their King’s, they told him what they had heard. Everybody was openly joyful, especially the Czar’s son, who was eager to return home right away.

“Wait for a while yet,” the King advised him. “Such things must not be done in haste. Enjoy yourself here for some time, and then we will see you off on your long journey.”

That’s exactly how it happened. The newlyweds lived at the King’s palace for another six months, during which time the heart of the Czar’s son knew

no peace, as he kept thinking about his home. His wife saw how he missed his home country and wanted to leave as quickly as possible. The old King, too, finally agreed to let them go.

After bowing low to the King on parting, the threesome — the Czar's son, his wife, and their true friend — climbed into a golden carriage and set out on their journey, accompanied by an entire host of troops.

On and on they rode until they came to the border of the czardom, and here the true friend of the Czarevich said:

"I never wished you evil, and now I advise you to send the troops back along with the coachman."

"I have always heeded your advice and will do so now, although I am not too eager to send the troops back," the Czarevich said, and ordered the troops to return to their kingdom.

The friend took the coachman's place. Toward twilight they reached a forest, on the edge of which stood an inn.

"We won't go any further today. Here we'll put up for the night," the friend said, and drove the horses into the courtyard.

After they had paid for their rooms, the innkeeper served them well, because he saw that these were guests of high standing.

With the advent of night the newlyweds retired to bed, while the friend took a musket to stand guard the whole night through: the inn stood on the edge of a forest, he reasoned, so anything could happen.

He kept walking round the inn in a night that was as black as black.

Around midnight three crows lit on the thatch of the inn roof and — wonder of wonders! — started to speak in human voices with one another.

"A fine pair of young people has put up for the night this time," the first crow said. "This humble inn has never received such noble guests before."

"Their beauty and nobility is of no avail to them," the second crow said. "They are to perish tomorrow, because the old Czar has learned that his son is coming home and has ordered the bridge they'll be crossing undercut. Once they drive onto it, it will collapse, and they will drown."

"But whoever hears this and tells it to anybody else will turn into a pillar of salt up to his knees," the third crow said.

With this the crows took wing and flew away.

In their place three falcons arrived and started to converse in human voices as well:

“Oh, what a beautiful pair they are! Though they might evade the pitfall on the river, they will hardly escape death. The old Czar is sly and cunning. When he learns that they did not drown, he will send his son a golden coach. But the moment anybody climbs into it, the coach will go up in flames and reduce the passengers to ashes. Whoever hears this and tells it to anybody else will turn into a pillar of salt up to his shoulders.”

The falcons took wing and flew away.

In their place three eagles lit on the roof, and they, too, spoke in human voices:

“Handsome and clever are the newlyweds who have put up for the night here. Well, they might evade their end at the river or in the coach, but they will meet their deaths anyway. As the son approaches the capital city, the old Czar will send him a golden sword on a golden belt as a present, and for his daughter-in-law there will be a golden girdle and a ring of gold. They are expensive gifts, but the moment the newlweds put them on, they will be blasted to dust. Whoever hears this and tells it to anybody else will turn into a pillar of salt from head to toe.”

“I might turn into a pillar, but I’ll tell them about it all the same!” the Czarevich’s friend cried out, but the eagles did not hear him, because they had already taken wing and flown away.

At dawn the threesome had their breakfast; the friend hitched the horses to the coach, and they set out on their way.

On and on they rode until they came to a river spanned by a bridge. The friend reined in the horses, opened the door of the coach, and said:

“Step out, please!”

“What’s the matter?” the Czarevich asked in surprise. “You seem to want to order us around all the time,” he said with a laugh.

“Step out, please,” the friend repeated.

Though subjected to disrespect in front of his wife, the Czarevich heeded the advice of his true friend.

“It’s just his way of doing things,” he said to his wife. “Whenever such a mood comes upon him, you have to obey.”

They crossed the bridge on foot. The friend looked to left and right: there was no ford around. On seeing some poor people, he gave them the horses along with the coach, and crossed the bridge on foot as well.

“What have you done?” the Czarevich wondered. “How dare you give away my goods to others?”

“Just obey me, and everything will be all right,” the friend said, after which he did not utter a word but walked in silence.

The Czarevich and his wife followed, walking on and on when lo! they saw an entire unit of troops coming their way, and in front walked the Czar’s messengers. They bowed to the Czarevich and his wife, and said:

“His Majesty has sent the newlyweds a golden carriage lest they walk on foot.”

The Czarevich was full of joy, because he thought that his father was still angry with him.

“Now I believe for sure that my father pardoned me. See how grandly he meets us at the border!” he said and was about to climb into the carriage.

But his friend blocked his way. In his hand he held an ax — nobody noticed where he had gotten it from — and with that ax he started to hack away at the carriage. The newlyweds were dumbfounded, thinking their friend had gone out of his mind, but they did not utter a single word of reproof.

After their friend had reduced the carriage to splinters, the Czarevich said:

“So far I have obeyed you, and everything has gone all right. But now I am beginning to doubt your judgment. You do everything against the will of myself and my father, putting me to shame in front of persons of high standing. If this continues, I am afraid I will have to part with you. That will be the end of our friendship.

“I wish you only good,” his true friend replied. “You heeded my advice and did not regret it. Promise me that you will pay heed to one more piece of advice from me.”

“No! If your advice will be like this, I will not pay heed to you anymore.”

With that they proceeded to the capital of the old Czar. At the city gates they were met by the Czar himself and a huge procession. The Czar embraced and kissed the newlyweds. To show his joy at the reunion, he offered them

his gifts: for the son, a golden sword and golden belt, for the daughter-in-law, a golden girdle set with precious stones and expensive rings of gold.

The faces of the newlyweds beamed with joy. But in that instant the Czarevich's friend rushed up to them, snatched the sword, belt, girdle and rings from their hands, flung them onto the ground, and hacked them to pieces.

The old Czar, the Czarevich, and all those present grew pale with shock: how dare he ruin such expensive gifts! The Czarevich was flushed with rage, while his wife wept from pity and shame.

"Well, well, we'll look into this matter later on," the old Czar said. "But for now, my dear son, and you, my daughter-in-law, let me see you to your home. I am receiving you with joy like a father should!"

He took them to his royal apartments, and the Czarevich's friend followed behind, uttering not a sound, as if he were dumb.

The old Czar had a large banquet arranged as if he were celebrating his son's marriage for the second time. Ministers, commanders, judges, and all sorts of high-placed government officials were invited to the banquet. They ate and drank and made merry. When the banquet was at its height, the Czar rose to his feet, and said:

"Harken, my honored guests! I, as a father, have pardoned my son's misdemeanor, and have bestowed lavish gifts upon him. But instead of gratitude, my son has disgraced me — my gifts of gold and silver were destroyed before my eyes in the presence of all. Let him be brought to account for this."

"Yes, yes, let him be brought to account!" everybody shouted.

The Czarevich got to his feet, and said:

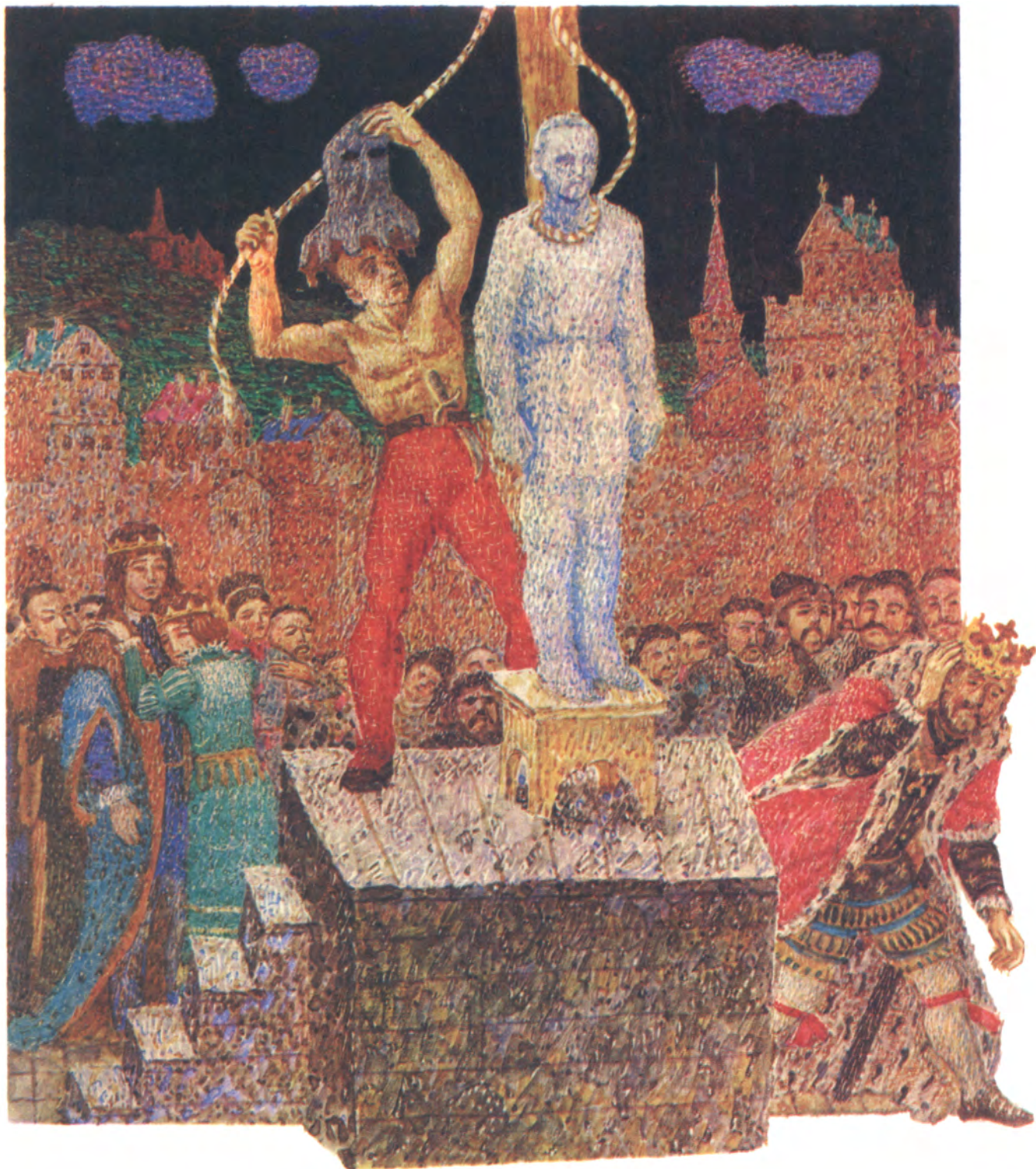
"It was not my wish to disgrace my father and destroy his gifts. It was the doing of my friend. Ask him..."

The guests turned to the friend. He had not uttered a word up till then, but now he rose and spoke:

"Yes, I destroyed everything with my own hands. If there were any more such gifts, I would have destroyed them as well. I do not regret my deeds and am prepared to answer for them."

Then the old Czar said:

"Everyone has heard him confess his crime. So judge accordingly. We will continue the banquet after the trial."



All the judges were unanimous in their decision that the Czarevich's friend deserved to be put to death.

"I am of the same opinion," the Czar agreed. But in his mind he wondered: How did this man learn of my secrets?

The Czar ordered a gallows built in the middle of the courtyard. The condemned friend was led up to it, the judges took their places and read the verdict.

"I am not afraid of death," the Czarevich's friend declared. "I may die, but at least I saved the life of my friend."

With that he stuck his head into the noose, saying, "Hang me!"

"Wait a minute!" the Czarevich exclaimed. "If he says that he saved my life, let him tell us how he did it!"

So his friend told them what he had heard from the crows. But no sooner had he finished than his legs turned into pillars of salt up to the knees.

Then he told them what he had heard from the falcons. The instant he finished he turned into a pillar of salt up to his shoulders.

After he had told what he heard from the eagles, the hangman had no one to execute, for standing in front of him was naught but a pillar of salt.

The people were struck with horror, some cursing the Czar, others pitying the Czarevich's friend. Thus dishonored and disgraced, the Czar fled to another land.

The Czarevich vowed that he would not know a moment's peace until he found a remedy to save his friend.

After six months the Czarevich came across a woman who gave him a piece of advice:

"You know, son, you must find Fate. Though Fate herself won't be able to do anything, her daughter will help you. But I don't know where Fate is, so you'll have to seek her yourself throughout the wide world."

The Czarevich began making preparations to leave, but his wife tried to talk him out of it:

"My dear husband, this is a hopeless task! You won't resurrect your friend but will come to grief yourself instead. Do not go anywhere, but calm down, please."

"No, I'll never calm down until I find that remedy!"

That same day he set off. Wherever he went he asked:

“Where can I find Fate and her daughter?”

Nobody could tell him. After he had roamed the world for about six months, he came to a watermill where he put up for the night. When he was invited to the table to share the evening meal with the host, the miller asked him:

“Whither go you?”

“I am seeking Fate and her daughter,” the Czarevich replied, and told what made him roam the world. “Do you know anything of their whereabouts?”

“I don’t, although I need them badly myself. If you find them, be so kind as to tell them about me, too. Here I am with seven stones to mill the grist —so I have enough and to spare for my livelihood, but still I lack peace of mind. So what can I do to gain it?”

“All right, I will ask them.”

In the morning he continued his journey.

The second evening he asked to stay for the night in the hut of three maidens. Their home was tidy, and in it the maidens sat spinning. They received the traveler, fell into conversation with him, and told him of their troubles. The next morning when he bade them farewell, they asked him:

“Ask Fate about us, too: why does our beauty and industry prevent us from getting married? What must we do to find ourselves husbands?”

“All right, I will ask about you, too.”

He walked on until he came to a big river. There was no ford, and the river was deep. As he stood there talking to himself, the river said in a human voice:

“If you find Fate, ask her about me, too; why is it that I do not teem either with fish or crayfish, although my water is pure?”

“All right, I will ask about you, too.”

The river parted, and the Czarevich walked to the opposite bank.

On and on he walked for another week until he came to a dense forest. Here he came upon a little hut, with a well-kept vineyard beside it. Happy people must live here, the Czarevich thought as he opened the door. Inside he found a woman preparing the evening meal.

“Good evening!” he said to her and bowed.

“Good evening to you, too! What are you seeking, my son?”

“First of all I ask for a night’s lodging.”

“That you may have. Join me at supper. I see that you are very tired.”

The Czarevich sat down at the table, and told her that he was looking for Fate and her daughter.

“If that is so, my son, you have come to the right place. The thing is that I am Fate, but since I have grown old, it is my daughter who acts for me. Right now she is out among the people. But now and then she comes home and works in the vineyard; tomorrow she will be hoeing the plot. Mind you, she does not come to the assistance of everyone. First of all, she finds out whether the person she would help deserves her favor.”

Then the Czarevich told about his grief. There was so much sorrow in his story that the hostess took pity on him.

“All right, son, I will try to help you. Lie down and sleep; in the morning I will tell you what you have to do.”

In the morning he got up and saw that the woman was alone as before.

“Where is your daughter?”

“She has been hoeing in the vineyard for hours. You, too, pick up a hoe and join her. Go about your work without uttering a sound until midday. Keep mum regardless of what she asks you. At midday tell her about your grief.”

The Czarevich picked up a hoe and went to the vineyard. The girl was not so beautiful as he had imagined, but she was amazingly industrious. He bowed in greeting and joined her in her work. He kept on hoeing and hoeing. The girl asked him this and that, but he did not utter a word in reply. At midday she stuck the hoe into the ground, and said:

“Well, I have seen much of the world and had a lot to do with people. Each of them has tried to curry favor with me, stretching the truth and complaining, always asking me of one favor or another. But a man like you I see for the first time. What kind of a person are you? Are you deaf, or what?”

“No, I am not deaf. A great grief is weighing upon my heart, and that is why I keep silent,” he said and told her absolutely everything.

“Well, you could have told me all that long before. Since you have spared no effort for the sake of your friend, you deserve to be helped. Go home now. As you return, your wife will bear you a son. Make a cut in the left arm of your infant, and let the blood flow. Then smear the blood over the knees, shoulders and head of the pillar of salt, and your friend will come to life.”

The Czarevich was overjoyed to have found the remedy, thanking the girl, and was about to leave, when she stopped him:

“Wait a minute. Your work should be repaid by a midday meal at least.”

During the meal their conversation became livelier.

Oh, how good it is that I did not leave at once: I still have some questions, he recalled, and asked:

“You know, I came upon a river in which there are neither fish nor crayfish, although the water is pure. Why is that so?”

“Because no one has drowned in that river so far. Now you be careful: tell this to the river only after you have crossed it.”

“Oh, and there is a hut inhabited by three maidens. Why can’t they find themselves husbands, since they’re so industrious and beautiful?”

“It’s because they do their house-cleaning when the sun is too high in the sky.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, they get up very late, since they work long into the night. People think that they are simply lazy. They should go to bed earlier and rise earlier. Then they’ll find their happiness.”

“Oh yes, there is also a miller. Why is he unhappy, since he has everything in abundance?”

“It’s because he has never given anything to the poor in all his life. Whatever he earns, he hoards up. He thinks he doesn’t have enough of anything. If it were otherwise, he’d have a clear conscience and would be happy.”

After hearing Fate’s daughter out, the Czarevich thanked her for everything, and set off for home.

On and on he walked until he came to the river.

“Well, how did it go?” the river asked.

“Fine.”

“Did you ask about me?”

“I did.”

“So tell me!”

“Let me cross to the other side first, then I will tell you.”

The river parted, and the Czarevich crossed to the far bank. Then he clambered up an oak tree and shouted down:

“Your water does not teem with either fish or crayfish, because nobody has as yet drowned in your waters!”

Upon hearing that, the river overflowed its banks and its waters reached right to the middle of the oak tree. But the water did not rise any higher and subsided into its banks shortly afterward.

The Czarevich climbed down and went on his way. When he came to the maidens’ hut, he told them the reason they could not find themselves husbands. Then he met the miller and told him what he had to do to be happy. On his way he kept wondering whether a child had been born to him back home.

When he returned home, he was barely recognized — so tattered were his clothes and so long had his hair and beard grown in the meantime.

He was immediately informed that a son had been born to him. Dirty, tattered, and barefoot as he was, he ran off to see his wife. Without saying a word, he picked up a knife and rushed over to the infant.

His wife screamed for help, and people came running.

“What are you doing?”

The Czarevich quickly made a cut in the infant’s left arm, took the blood that flowed out, and ran out into the courtyard to the pillar of salt.

He smeared the blood over the knees, shoulders and head of what had once been a human being, and wonder of wonders! the pillar of salt stirred at first, then it swayed — and his friend came back to life!

The people gave a gasp of amazement. When the old Czar learned of this, he dropped dead from shock.

The young Czarevich was chosen Czar and lived happily ever after.

Since the pitcher has broken, we’ll have to use the pail, and this brings us to the end of this wonderful tale.





KIRILO KOZHUMYAKA

Once upon a time Kiev was ruled by a chivalrous prince. Beyond the city there dwelled a dragon to whom the Prince had to pay tribute — either a lad or a maiden every year. One day it was the turn of the Prince himself to surrender his daughter. He had no other choice, since the townspeople had done the same. So the Prince sent his daughter as tribute to the dragon. She was as comely a maiden as had ever been seen, and the dragon fell in love with her. Once she snuggled up to him, and asked:

“Tell me, is there a man in this world who can best you?”

“Oh yes, there is. He’s a tanner and lives in Kiev by the Dnieper River. Whenever he kindles his stove, smoke envelops the sky, and when he goes to the Dnieper to soak hides, he carries not one but twelve hides at a time. After they are soaked I occasionally take hold of them to see whether he’ll be able to pull them out along with me. But to him it makes no difference: once he tugs at the hides, he almost hauls me ashore. He’s the only man I am afraid of.”

The Princess made a mental note of this and fell to thinking how to send the message back home and regain her freedom. There was not a living soul around her, except for a dove she had reared when she was still in Kiev. After much thinking she made up her mind and wrote to her father:

“My dear father, there lives in Kiev a man, Kirilo Kozhomyaka, a tanner as his name suggests. Ask the elders to plead with him so he fight the dragon and free me, a hapless maiden, from slavery. Plead with him, my dear father, both by means of words and gifts lest he take offense at some haphazard remark.”

She tied the note to the foot of the dove, and let it out of her window. The dove took off into the sky and flew to the Prince’s courtyard. The children were playing in the courtyard just then, and noticed the dove.

“Father, Father!” they cried out. “See, that dove came from our sister!”

The Prince was overjoyed at first, but then sadness overwhelmed him at the terrible thought: The accursed monster must have destroyed my child!

Then he coaxed the dove to come closer and saw the note tied to her foot. He took the note and read what his daughter had written. Right away he had all his court elders summoned.

“Is there such a man in town as Kirilo Kozhomyaka?”

“There is, Prince. He lives by the Dnieper.”

“How can he be approached lest he take offense and heed our request?”

They held counsel and then dispatched the oldest courtiers to the tanner. They came to his house, opened the door slightly, and became petrified with fear at what they saw. His back turned to the visitors, Kirilo was sitting on the floor squeezing twelve raw hides at the same time, his huge white beard swaying from side to side. One of the Prince’s envoys coughed to attract his attention.



In that instant the tanner started and — rip! — all twelve hides tore apart in his hands. When he turned round, they bowed from the waist down, saying:

“The Prince has sent us with a request...”

But he did not look their way or heed their words, so angry was he for having torn twelve hides on their account.

Much as they pleaded and begged and got down on their knees before him, it was of no avail. The court elders left him with their heads hanging.

The Prince was grief-stricken and so were the court elders. What were they to do?

“What if we send the younger courtiers?”

The younger courtiers were dispatched, but they fared no better. Kirilo Kozhumyaka held his tongue and breathed hard, as if it wasn't him the courtiers addressed, so ruffled was his temper over the loss of the hides.

Then the Prince got the idea of sending his children to the tanner. When they arrived at Kirilo's home and started to plead and beg, getting down on their knees and, in the end, bursting into tears, the tanner could not hold himself in check and shed a tear as well, saying:

“All right, I will do it for your sake!”

He went to the Prince, and said:

“Give me twelve barrels of pitch and twelve cartloads of hemp!”

He wound the hemp around himself, smeared it thickly with pitch, took along a mace weighing some ten *poods*, and set off for the dragon's lair.

“Well, Kirilo?” the dragon asked. “Have you come in peace or to do battle with me?”

“Peace with you? Oh no, I've come to do battle with you, accursed fiend!”

They locked in such fierce combat it made the earth rumble. Whenever the dragon sank his fangs into Kirilo, he tore off a piece of pitch or hemp. And whenever Kirilo struck out with his mighty mace, he drove the dragon into the ground. The dragon felt as hot as if he were on fire, and while he ran to

the Dnieper for a drink of water and a dip to cool himself off, Kirilo wound more hemp around himself and smeared it with more pitch. Whenever the accursed monster rushed out of the water to pounce on Kirilo, the tanner belabored him unmercifully with the heavy mace. They were fighting so furiously that smoke belched and sparks flew on all sides. Kirilo had fired the dragon red-hot like a smith forging a plowshare: the accursed fiend snorted and choked from the heat of the battle so loudly it made the earth tremble and moan.

On the hills outside Kiev the townspeople were standing petrified, with clenched hands, as they waited to see the outcome of the battle. Presently — crash! — the dragon dropped to the ground so hard it sent the earth rocking. The townspeople on the hill shouted for joy:

“Give it to him, Kirilo! Give it to him, Kozhummyaka!”

After destroying the dragon Kirilo freed the Princess and took her back to the Prince who did not know how to thank him. From that time on the place where Kirilo lived has been called Kozhummyaki.





IRON WOLF

Unce there was a czar who had in his possession a pear tree that bore golden fruit. But the pear tree brought him no gain, because someone stole the harvest every time.

So he made his sons watch the pear tree.

The eldest son came to the pear tree and lay down under it. Presently a mouse crawled up to him, and said:

“Could you give me something to eat, Czarevich?”

He chased the mouse away. Instead of being alertly watchful, he slept through the night, and when he woke up next morning, he saw that the pears were gone.

The second son behaved in a similar manner and slept through the decisive moment when the pears were filched.

The Czar had a third son, Mishko by name, and he was a homely lad. "Father, let me go and watch the pear tree!" he said.

He came to the tree, built a campfire, sat down and started to roast a piece of fatback.

The mouse also crawled up to the lad, and said:

"Mishko, give me a little bread."

The lad gave it a little slice of bread and some fatback.

"Now, lie down to sleep," the mouse said. "I'll rouse you at midnight, when a golden bird with a golden basket will come here to pluck the pears. If you climb the tree silently lest the bird hear you, you might catch it. The bird isn't too shy, it seems."

At midnight the mouse roused the lad. He rose, and looked up the tree where a beautiful golden-feathered bird was sitting. It had placed the basket among the branches and was picking the pears with its beak.

Mishko inched up the tree stealthily, reached for the bird and grabbed it by the tail. But all that remained in his hand was a tail feather — the bird had darted off.

In the morning when Mishko had returned home, the Czar asked him:

"Did you guard the tree well?"

"I did, but that's all there was to it. The thief was a golden bird which I grabbed by the tail, but the bird got loose. So I've brought back only a tail feather and a basket."

The Czar got angry at his elder sons for neglecting their duties, gave them a horse each, and commanded:

"Get out of here! I do not know you, since you failed to guard the pear tree."

The elder sons left their father's home. The youngest son, too, saddled his horse, preparing to leave.

"Where are you going, Mishko?" the Czar asked.

“After the golden bird. I must catch it lest it continue stealing our pears.”

On and on he rode until he came to a city where he saw his brothers carousing in an inn. Mishko did not pay them any mind. He ate his meat, drank some water, and continued on his journey.

He came to a fork in the road, with a sign that read: “If you go straight ahead, you will perish! If you turn left, you will not return! If you turn right, Iron Wolf will devour you!”

Mishko stopped and pondered what to do — return home or ride on to meet his death. None of the roads pointed to life.

In the end he decided to turn right, reasoning that if he were to meet the wolf, he would give him his horse and thus stay alive.

So he turned right and soon came to a huge mountain. Presently he heard something rumbling. He looked up and saw a ferocious wolf running his way with its jaws wide open.

The lad quickly jumped down from his horse, and cried out:

“Don’t devour me, but the horse!”

Iron Wolf devoured the horse, and then asked:

“Where go you, lad?”

“I am seeking the golden bird which has been stealing our pears.”

“Oh, it’s a long way you must travel. You won’t get there alone. Climb on my back and hold fast to my neck.”

They came to another realm which was ruled by a cruel czar.

“Now, Mishko, go to the palace, at the gate no one will see you — I have fixed it so that you can pass unnoticed. You’ll find the bird in a cage in the barn. But don’t touch the cage, because the guards will hear you and catch you.”

Mishko passed through the palace gate at which stood four guards, but no one noticed him. Then he went to the barn and saw the golden bird in the cage. He took the bird out of the cage, and then thought it would be a pity to leave such a beautiful cage behind.

But no sooner had he touched the cage than a sudden clamor burst forth. The Czar’s servants seized Mishko and brought him before the Czar.

“Who are you?” the Czar asked.

Mishko spun a long yarn just to get himself out of this mess.



He was promised to be set free only when he'd swear to bring the Czar a golden-maned horse from another czardom.

The lad returned to Iron Wolf.

"Well, didn't I tell you not to touch the golden cage? It almost spelled your doom. All right, let's go to the other czardom for the horse. What must be must be."

When they arrived at the other czardom, Iron Wolf instructed Mishko:

"The guards at the gate won't notice you. Go to the stable and you'll see the golden-maned horse there. But don't touch the bridle, because otherwise you'll be caught".

The lad passed through the gate, opened the stable door, and saw a beautiful horse inside. He took the horse, but could not keep himself from taking the marvelous bridle as well.

No sooner had he put his hand on the bridle than came a hue and cry, and Mishko was seized.

The Czar fumed with rage:

"You vile thief! So you wanted to steal my golden-maned horse? You deserve to be put to death!"

Mishko had no choice but tell him from what realm he had come and for what purpose.

The Czar pronounced his verdict:

"There is a golden-haired maiden in a certain czardom. If you bring her here, I will pardon you; if you fail, I shall make short work of you, no matter what part of this world you may find yourself in."

Mishko swore that would do everything possible. Then he went back to Iron Wolf.

"So you didn't heed my advice again, did you?" Iron Wolf said and smacked his face. "All right, get on my back and we will go to the third realm for the golden-haired maiden."

Soon they came to the third czardom, and Iron Wolf brought Mishko right up to the palace.

"Wait for me here," Iron Wolf said. "I'll go for the maiden myself, because you won't be able to get her yourself. But mind you, if you get caught, that will be the end of you."

Iron Wolf turned into a beautiful dog and walked about at the gate, fawning around the guards. They took the dog into the Czar's courtyard. Upon seeing the dog, the Czar's daughter, the Czarivna, asked the guard to give it to her.

Then she walked the dog around her garden.

When everyone went inside the palace for the midday meal, the dog looked about to see whether there was anyone in sight, turned into Iron Wolf again, snatched the girl, threw her across its back, and bolted off.

Iron Wolf ran to Mishko; the lad got on the wolf's back, and the three of them fled.

On learning about the disappearance of the Czarivna, the Czar mounted his twelve-legged horse and gave chase. Shortly afterward Mishko started to complain:

"Oh, something is burning in my shoulder!"

To which Iron Wolf advised:

"Pull a hair out of my tail, throw it behind you, and do not look back."

Mishko pulled out a hair and threw it in their wake. That instant an iron mountain sprang out of the ground, and the cruel Czar could not jump it, of course.

On they fled until they came to the mountain where Iron Wolf had once attacked Mishko. Iron Wolf left them there and ran to fetch the golden bird and the golden-maned horse.

Soon he was back, gave the bird and horse to Mishko, and said:

"I will stay here, while you go back to your own land. But mind you, don't doze off anywhere, because this will spell your doom."

Mishko and the Czarivna mounted the horse and rode off. Some time later they came to a large meadow and decided to rest for a while. They dismounted and lay down on the grass. But they were so tired, they fell fast asleep.

Just then a *Pesyholovets* * appeared in the meadow. He cast a spell on Mishko and his mount, turning them into stones, and took the maiden and the bird away. The *Pesyholovets* brought the maiden to his home and tried to force her to marry him. But she refused vehemently, because she had fallen deeply in love with Mishko by then.

* Lit. Doghead, a giant who devours people and has a single eye in the middle of the forehead, similar to the Cyclop in Greek mythology.— Tr.

This continued for some time until Iron Wolf called together all the wolves, of which he was the Czar. The wolves reported which of them had been where, and a wolf with a limp informed his Czar:

“By a roadside I saw a man and a horse turned to stone.”

Which of you knows where the healing and life-giving water can be found?” Iron Wolf asked.

No one knew its whereabouts, except for the lame wolf. The water flowed in the Evil Forest between mountains which were at odds all the time, taking a rest only at midday. Just at midday the lame wolf darted in between the mountains, scooped up some water and brought it back.

Thereupon Iron Wolf sprinkled the rocks with the healing and life-giving water, and Mishko and his mount came back to life.

“Well, Mishko, didn’t I warn you to heed my advice?” Iron Wolf said. “But you didn’t obey me, so you lost the girl and the bird, and almost perished yourself. Now ride down this road to the ninth mountain. There you will find an old woman who will advise you what to do next. Remember the *Pesyholovets* has enormous power and can kill you.”

Upon arriving at the ninth mountain, Mishko bowed to the old woman in greeting. As she was some five hundred years old, she barely opened her eyes at his appearance.

“What can I do for you?” she asked.

He told her everything, and asked then, “Will I be able to redeem the maiden and the bird?”

“If you are lucky, you will. But I am not sure whether you will return alive. Whomever the *Pesyholovets* casts his eye upon even at a distance of fifteen meters dies at once. But do not grieve. Near his house you will see a beech tree. Hidden under the roots of that tree is a wand which contains all his powers. When you find the wand, do not think for long, but break it to pieces at once. Then the *Pesyholovets* will lose his terrible powers and take to his death bed.”

And that is exactly how it happened.

Mishko dug under the beech tree and found the wand which he broke to pieces right then and there. When he entered the house of the *Pesyholovets*, the giant was already on the verge of death. Five minutes later he breathed

his last. Mishko found the maiden, famished and dark with weakness, so cruelly had the *Pesyholovets* tormented her.

Mishko took the maiden and bird, they mounted the golden-maned horse and rode off.

In the realm they had come from they visited the inn where Mishko's brothers had once caroused. The brothers had been reduced to near-beggary by that time and had become street sweepers to keep from starving. They recognized their youngest brother, but hid from his sight from shame.

"Let us kill Mishko," they decided in the end. "We'll take the maiden, bird and golden-maned horse, and bring all this to our father as if it were we who had gained such a great fortune."

So Mishko was pulled from the horse, and the brothers made him swear upon pain of death not to tell his father any of their doings. He had no choice and promised that he'd stay away from home for two years and not tell their father anything. The brothers took away the golden-maned horse, golden-haired maiden and the golden bird, and brought them to their father's palace.

The old Czar accepted the presents and forgave his banished sons.

The maiden, however, was sad, because she pitied Mishko but did not dare tell the Czar what the brothers had done. She kept away from everybody and refused to give her hand to anyone in marriage.

Two years later Mishko returned, a wretched, famished and tattered man. At his sight the maiden was full of joy, rushed to embrace him, and took him then to the old Czar. The Czar was utterly surprised to see that his son had sunk into the mire of poverty.

"I won't tell you anything, Father," Mishko said. "Let the maiden tell you."

She told him everything.

The Czar was wroth and ordered the elder sons torn asunder by two horses. A grand wedding was held for Mishko and the maiden, and the Czar made his youngest son the ruler of the realm.





HERASIM'S DREAM

Unce a man built a house and made three of his sons sleep in it. He placed their beds in three corners and waited to see what his sons would dream of in their sleep.

Ivan dreamed he'd be a cobbler. Mikhailo dreamed that he'd become a tailor. Then the father asked his youngest son:

"And what did you see in your dreams?"

"Nothing at all, Father," Herasim replied.

“What do you mean? If these two saw something in their dreams, you must have seen something as well!”

But the lad insisted:

“I didn’t see anything at all, Father.”

With that the father grew angry and picked up an ax, intending to chop his son’s head off. But the mother burst into tears:

“My husband, do not kill the child. Better take him to the forest, and you will thus abstain from a mortal sin. There the wild beasts will devour him anyway.”

The man heeded his wife’s advice, took the boy to a dark forest, and left him there. The boy was some nine years old then. By and by he managed to get out of the forest and made for a highroad. He sat down by the roadside for a rest. Then he saw the Czar and his daughter, the Czarivna, driving down the road in a carriage. The girl was also nine years old. As the carriage was passing by the boy, the Czarivna said:

“Papa, take that boy with us so I won’t be bored along the way.”

The Czar made the coachman halt, and called to the boy:

“Hey, boy! Come here. What is your name?”

“My name is Herasim.”

“What brought you to this out-of-the-way place?” the Czar asked.

“I wouldn’t tell my father what I saw in my dream, so he took me to the dark forest for the wild beasts to devour me.”

“Will you tell me what you saw in your dream?”

“I didn’t tell my father, so why should I tell you?” Herasim replied.

“Get out of the carriage,” the Czar said. “I won’t take you anywhere if you don’t tell me what you saw in your dream.”

“Papa, don’t chase him away,” the girl begged. “Maybe he didn’t see anything at all in his dream!”

The Czar turned away and kept silent to the end of their journey. When they returned to the palace, the boy became a well-matched playmate of the Czarivna. But three days later the Czar had the urge to ask the boy again:

“Still, tell me what you saw in your dream, boy. If you don’t, I’ll have your head chopped off.”

“Do as you wish, but I will not tell you!”

The Czarivna did not try to make the boy comply this time, but suggested to her father:

“Dear papa, do not chop Herasim’s head off, but have him sealed off in a wall: he’ll die there anyway, and you won’t take a mortal sin upon yourself.”

Since she was his only child, the Czar heeded her advice. He had masons summoned and ordered them to seal the boy inside a wall. But the Czarivna asked the masons to make a secret opening in the wall and leave enough space for the boy to sit and lie down, lest he be forced to stand on his feet all the time.

The masons did everything she asked them.

The Czarivna stealthily brought Herasim food three times a day through the secret opening. Thus she fed the boy for eleven years.

In the eleventh year a pagan czar sent her father a letter with the following message: “If you do not answer my question correctly, I will declare war on you!” The pagan czar sent him a beautiful wooden staff, and the Czar had to guess which part of the wood had grown from the roots up and which from the crown down. The Czarivna heard about the message. The next time she brought Herasim his food, the lad asked:

“Maria, what’s new?”

This was the first time he had spoken to her since he had been imprisoned eleven years before.

“We have bad news,” the Czarivna replied. “A pagan czar wants to declare war on my father. He sent him a wooden staff, and my father has to guess which part of the wood grew from the roots up and which from the crown down. If the answer is wrong, there will be war.”

“Return to your apartments and go to bed,” Herasim said. “In the morning tell your father that you learned the answer in your dream. Let him take the staff to a river. The end of the staff that shows downstream grew from the crown down, and the other end from the roots up.”

The Czar did what his daughter had advised him, and so sent the pagan czar the correct answer.

This made the pagan burn with anger. So he sent three horses of the same color and size for his adversary to guess their correct age.

The second task made the Czar terribly sad, and he told his daughter about it. When she brought Herasim his midday meal, he asked her:



“Maria, what’s new?”

“Oh, the pagan czar sent my father three horses of the same color and size, and he has to guess their correct age.”

“That’s no problem at all!” Herasim said. “Return home and go to bed. In the morning tell your father that you learned the answer in your dream. Let him give the horses food in three different bowls, one with corn, the other with oats, and the third with milk. The oldest horse will walk to the bowl with corn, the middle horse will prefer oats, and the youngest, the milk.”

The Czar did everything the girl told him, and so sent the pagan correct answers again.

This raised the pagan czar’s anger to a fevered pitch, and he wrote him a letter with the following message:

“If you are so wise, fire a cannon from east to west just as I am lowering my fork to my plate. And mind you, shoot so sharply as to hit my finger besides.”

This news made the Czar grief-stricken.

“Oh, now we’re in real trouble!” he said to his daughter.

She took the midday meal, and when she brought it to Herasim, he asked:

“Maria, what’s new?”

“There is big trouble: the pagan czar sent Father a letter saying he must fire a cannon from east to west just at the moment the pagan is lowering his fork to his plate. And he has to shoot so sharply as to hit the pagan’s finger besides.

“Return home and go to bed,” Herasim advised. “Then tell your father what you learned in your dream: this task can be performed only by the boy you had imprisoned.”

The Czar was truly sorry he had sealed the boy in a wall, thus leading him to his inevitable death. He ordered the masons to break down the wall carefully lest a splinter of brick fall on Herasim’s ashes.

When the masons broke down the wall, they saw no ashes but a lad so tall he could barely stand upright within his quarters of confinement. Shortly thereafter the Czar was informed of this. He had the lad’s hair cut, his beard shaved, his body washed and dressed in beautiful garb. When the lad came to the palace, the Czar put his crown on Herasim’s head, and said:

“You are to be Czar from now on.”

Then he gave the lad his daughter in marriage.

Thereupon Herasim told his childhood dream to the Czar:

“In my dream I saw myself taking a czarivna to wife and holding a czar’s head on the tip of my sword.”

Herasim made himself a wooden cannon to fire from east to west just at the moment the pagan had willed. When the proper moment came, Herasim fired the cannon and, in addition to the pagan’s fork and finger, he blew his hand off as well.

The pagan czar raged in anger and sent a letter with the following message: “Come here and be my guest. You must eat everything I serve you, or otherwise you will suffer a cruel death!”

Herasim dressed himself in royal garb, had horses hitched to a carriage, and drove off to the pagan czar with his servant. Driving along the highroad, he came across a river and a man drinking water out of it. With every gulp he took, he left a dry river bottom behind.

Herasim was very much surprised to see such a man. The man turned round, and said:

“What makes you so surprised at seeing me drink the river water? I wasn’t surprised at all when the Czar fired his cannon and blew the pagan’s hand off!”

“I was the one who did it,” Herasim said. “And who are you?”

“My name’s Drinker-Upper,” the man replied. “Where go you, Czar?”

“To pay a call on the pagan.”

“Will there be anything to drink at his place?”

“Sure there will. So come along, Drinker-Upper!”

As the three of them drove on, they saw a field being broken by twelve plows, behind which walked a man eating up all the clods. Herasim stopped again in surprise.

“How can one man eat so much?”

The plowman turned round and said:

“What makes you so surprised? I wasn’t surprised at all when the Czar fired his cannon and blew the pagan’s hand off!”

“I was the one who did it,” Herasim said. “And who are you?”

“My name’s Earth-Eater. Where go you, Czar?”

“To pay a call on the pagan.”

“Will there be anything to eat at his place? Perhaps I should join you?”

“I’m sure there will be enough, so why don’t you join us!”

Now as the four of them drove on, they saw four burning heaps of wood, between which sat a man who could not get warm enough. That was Frost shivering. He looked round at Herasim, and said:

“What makes you surprised to see a man who can’t get warm enough? I wasn’t surprised at all when the Czar fired his cannon from east to west and blew the pagan’s hand off.”

“I was the one who did it.”

“Where go you, Czar?”

“To pay a call on the pagan.”

“Shall I join you? Will there be anything to warm me there?”

“Sure there will, so come along!”

Now there were five of them. On their way they saw a man, Tumblehill, as it proved, who stalked from hill to hill. Herasim looked at the man with surprise. But he turned round, and said:

“And what makes you so surprised? I wasn’t surprised at all when the Czar fired his cannon from east to west and blew the pagan’s hand off.”

“I was the one who did it, and now I’m going to pay him a call.”

“Shall I join you, too?”

“Come along.”

As they entered the pagan’s realm, they saw heaps of raw flesh on each side of the road. Herasim’s companions were wolfishly hungry, so he allowed them to still their hunger. But however much they ate the flesh raw, roasted or cured, and however much they drank, they could not get their fill. When they came to the pagan, they said:

“Give us much, much more than you have prepared, because it’s not enough for us.”

Instead of giving them anything more, the pagan said to Herasim:

“If any of your men can bring water from the well faster than my servant girl, it will be good for you. But if you fail, your realm will be mine.”

The pagan had a servant girl who could fly. She picked up a pitcher and flew off to the well. Herasim’s companion Tumblehill just sat there, watching what would happen next. When he saw her already at the well, he extended

his hand and pinned her to the well curb, while with the other hand he took the pitcher away from her and gave it to the pagan.

Thereupon the pagan invited them into a house of iron for the night. Once they had filed in, he had the house locked from the outside. He summoned his servants and ordered straw and wood piled around the house and set afire. Shortly thereafter it became so hot inside the house that Herasim could barely breathe, and his clothes started to smolder.

“Get up, Frost!” Herasim shouted. “We’re in big trouble!”

The shout roused Frost from his sleep. He took the sheepskin coat off his shoulders and shook it. With that the fire died out and hoar frost covered the walls.

In the morning the pagan sent his girl servant for the bones of his guests. After unlocking the door, she looked inside and saw the guests sleeping. Back she hurried to the pagan czar to report:

“Your Majesty, they are alive as alive can be and sleeping soundly.”

By that time they were on their feet and made their way to the cruel czar. Herasim drew his sword and chopped the pagan’s head off at once. Then he impaled the head on the tip of his sword and returned to his realm with his companions.

Back home he lived in plenty and happiness with his wife, and ruled over his realm until he died.





THE POOR MAN AND HIS SONS

Unce there lived a poor man who had three sons, the eldest Petro, the second Havrilo, and the youngest Ivan by name.

When the boys had grown up, he summoned them, and said:

“I’ve grown old, my children, and can no longer take care of you. You’re big enough to go out into the world and fend for yourselves now. He who has earned the most in a year’s time will stay with me to the end of my days.”

The sons went out into the world in different directions, and soon each entered into service somewhere.

A year passed.

In a year the eldest son returned with lots of money. The next day the second son arrived with some gold nuggets. On the third day the youngest son showed up without anything to his name.

The father got angry with him and turned him out of the house. The lad went to wander in the big wide world wherever his feet would carry him. On and on he walked until night descended. He entered a dark forest, sat down on a stump, produced the last crust of bread he had brought from home, and began chewing it. As he chewed on the stale bread, he pondered over what he should do and where he should take himself. He was so lost in thought that he did not notice a giant appear in front of him.

“What preys on your heart, my lad?” the giant asked.

Ivan told him everything.

“If you like, you can enter my service,” the giant proposed.

Ivan agreed and followed his new master to the heart of the dense forest where he had a cottage for his home, and there Ivan settled down.

Ivan lived well at the giant’s. There was not much work to do. The giant taught him how to ride a horse and wield a sword. He also taught his servant to read, write, and count.

A year passed in this manner. Then one day the giant came home, and said:

“Ivan, get your horse ready, take your sword and ride to the south. There, beyond two mountains, you will find a black castle surrounded by a black wall. Inside the castle lives a black vampire which you must destroy.”

The lad prepared for the journey, bid farewell to the giant, and rode south.

After riding for three days he saw at last the frightful black castle surrounded by a black wall. Ivan rode inside and there he saw the vampire sitting with an iron mace in his hands.

On seeing Ivan, the vampire roared in a horrible voice:

“What do you want here? How dare you tread upon my land?”

“I’ve come to fight you!” Ivan replied.

The vampire burst into hideous laughter and hurled the iron mace at the lad. Ivan jumped aside, and the mace flew past him. Then he picked it up, took

good aim, hurled the mace at the vampire with such might that the creature dropped dead. Ivan entered the black castle and found a black horse in black harness there. He jumped on the black horse, tied his own horse to the saddle, and set off for home.

The giant was already expecting Ivan. On seeing his servant safe and sound, he praised him and took the horse to the stables.

Some time passed after that. Ivan was growing wiser and stronger all the while. One day the giant summoned him, and said:

“Ride to the north. Once you pass the impenetrable forests and impassable swamps, you’ll see a red castle. In it lives a red vampire which has done much harm to the people. You must destroy it. When the vampire dies, the swamps will dry up and the people will be able to sow wheat on them.”

Ivan did not tarry but set off for the north the very next day.

On and on he rode until he entered a dense, impenetrable forest. He could barely make his way through the thickets, so he took out his sword and began hacking himself a path. He hacked until nightfall, and was thus forced to spend the night in the forest. After hobbling his horse lest it go astray, Ivan lay down on the moss and was soon fast asleep.

But he did not sleep long. When he woke up, he saw that the trees around him had retreated. The landscape glowed with a miraculous light and the ground was carpeted with fragrant flowers. In the trees birds were singing in a way Ivan had never heard before.

Attracted by the birdsong, dryads came out of the forest and the water sprites emerged from the lakes to join together in merry dances and songs. All kinds of animals gathered around them, and none of the stronger pounced upon the weaker ones. Perched on a bough above Ivan’s head was an old owl by whose side a little turtle dove snuggled. The owl was telling her something and the turtle dove was listening very attentively.

Ivan, too, gave an ear to the owl’s story, from which he learned that the forest had been bewitched, and everything in it had died. Only after he had come there, hacking his way into its heart, had everything come back to life. That was why the birds and animals were so overjoyed.

Ivan looked with wonder at the things he saw and fell asleep again. When he rose at dawn, he looked around and saw that he was lying on the edge of the



forest, and before him spread an enormous meadow covered with fragrant flowers.

Look, the swamps have dried up, he thought. I must hurry to finish off the vampire.

Ivan mounted his horse and hied on his way. Before long he saw the red castle with the red wall. He dashed into the courtyard and at once came upon the red magician-vampire who was already waiting for him.

They started to do battle. Soon the vampire was drained of its last strength, and Ivan killed it. He entered the red castle and found a red horse in red harness there. Taking it along with him, he hurried home.

As he rode, he saw with wonder people in the fields, plowing and making hay. Ivan felt happy at heart and hurried home to tell the good news to his master.

The master was full of joy to see Ivan safe and sound. He took the horse and harness, and told him to have a good rest.

But Ivan did not rest for long, because he had to go to the east to do away with a third vampire. This time he had to ride through arid steppes and hot deserts. Huge snakes blocked his way, threatening his life. Monstrous spiders fell upon him, trying to entangle him in their webs; and visions and phantoms tried to divert him from his path. He saw lakes and rivers, but whenever he approached them to quench his thirst, they moved away no matter how hard he tried to reach them.

Ivan decided to head directly eastward, not turning from the road, and so he did. At last he came to a huge white castle enclosed by a white wall. Here Ivan fought his fiercest battle ever. But he got the better of the white vampire, took the white horse and harness he found there, and sped home.

On the way he saw that the deserts had burst into bloom. Brooks bubbled in the deep gullies; the lakes, filled with water, shimmered in the sun; and birds were singing in the trees.

Ivan came home, gave the horse and harness to the giant, and went to rest. After he had rested, he took to his studies and learned many new things.

But all the time there was one question preying on his mind: why did his master, so strong and so wise, send him to slay the vampires instead of doing it himself? So one day he asked the giant:

“Please, don’t take offense, but I wanted to ask you why you, a strong and clever man, keep sending me to kill the vampires instead of fighting them yourself?”

The giant replied with a smile:

“You see, my son, when a great deed is performed by someone who is strong and clever, it is not worth as much as when it is accomplished by one who is weak and inexperienced. Remember, great deeds are often performed not by men who know much and have great strength, but by those who are strong in will and desire.”

The master’s answer satisfied Ivan completely and set his mind at ease.

One day the giant invited Ivan to go on a trip with him. They mounted their horses and set off. On their way they rode into a city which was in mourning.

Ivan and the giant asked what evil had befallen the city, and the townsfolk replied:

“A horrible dragon has come to our city. He has eaten up half of all the cattle we have and will probably devour the rest if we don’t bring him the Czar’s daughter. She has a good heart and has agreed to surrender herself to the monster. It’s a pity, but it’s no better for us either, because we cannot live without our cattle. That is why we are in mourning. If there were a brave man who would slay the dragon, the Czar would give him his daughter in marriage and his czardom as a reward.”

“Ivan, you must free the Czar’s daughter and rescue the land from this evil dragon,” the giant said.

They returned home, and Ivan untied the black horse he had taken from the black vampire, bid farewell to the giant, and set off for the city.

Upon arrival he learned that the Czar’s daughter had gone to the dragon in the forest. Ivan overtook the dragon just as he was taking the Czar’s daughter to a huge cave.

“Wait a minute, Czarivna!” Ivan cried out. “It’s too early for you to die!”

The tears on her cheeks dried. She smiled at Ivan in greeting. He went up to the cave into which the dragon had disappeared, and shouted:

“Hey, you! Crawl out of there, I’ve come to do battle with you!”

“Wait a while, I’m not ready yet!” a thunderous voice came from inside the cave.

Shortly thereafter the dragon came flying out of the cave with a terrible scream and a thunderous roar. Ivan jumped on his horse and rushed to meet the dragon.

Fierce combat ensued. Ivan chopped one head after another off the dragon's body. But no sooner did one head fall than another appeared in its place, spitting fire at Ivan and searing him. Ivan felt his strength ebbing.

In a flash the dragon knocked him and his horse to the ground, fell upon Ivan, and started to choke him. Ivan thrust his sword into the monster's belly and ripped it open. The dragon let out a roar that shook the leaves off the trees. But the dragon was already in its death throes.

Ivan looked about him and saw the Czar's daughter standing not far away.

"What has made you so sad?" Ivan asked her. "See, the dragon is dead and you can go home to your parents."

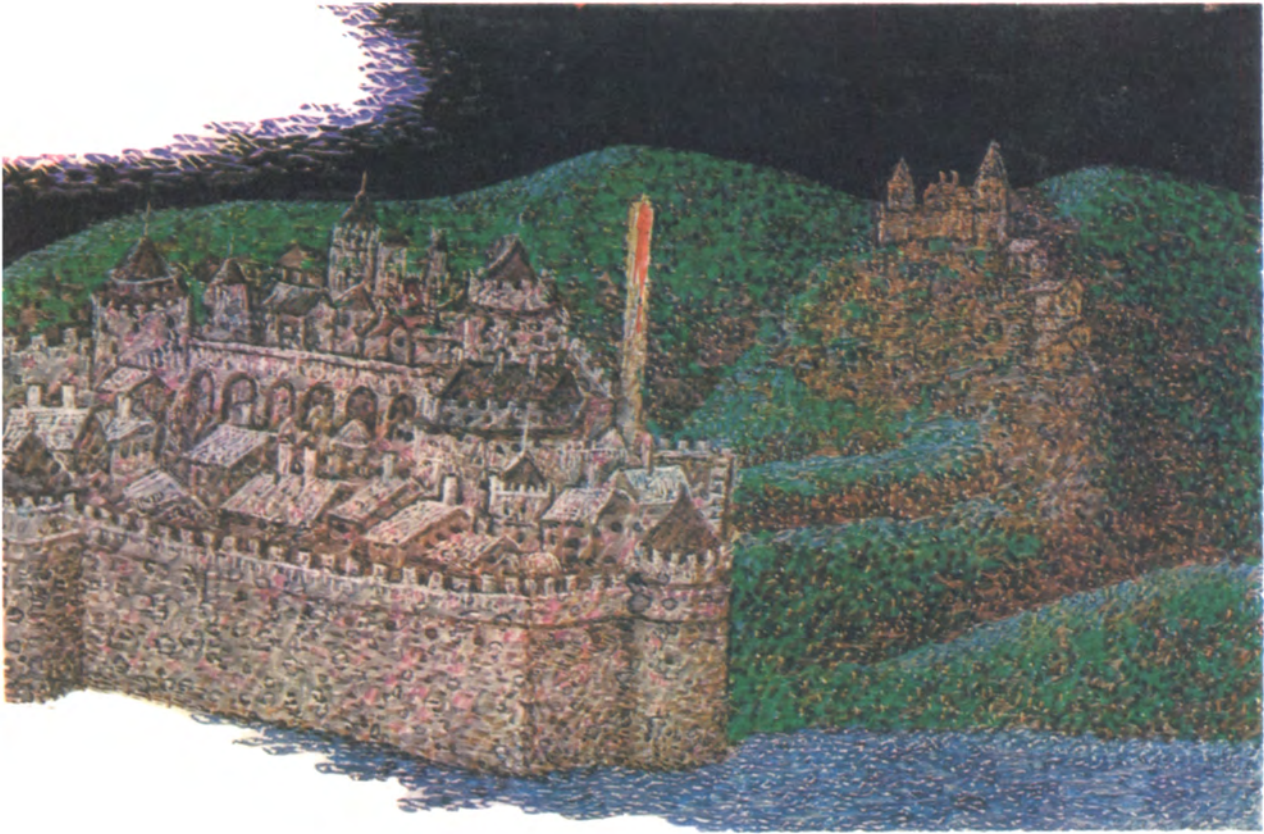
"No, I won't go home alone. I'll go only with you — for it was you who saved me and my people."

She took Ivan by the hand and they mounted his horse and rode to the city, where the people were weeping and mourning their Czarivna.

"Stop crying, I'm alive," she said. "Ivan has rescued me!"

What a jubilation there was! The people accompanied Ivan and the Czarivna to the palace. The Czar was shedding tears at the loss of his only daughter. When he saw her merry and happy, he burst into tears of joy. On learning that Ivan had saved his daughter from certain death, he gave the Czarivna to him in marriage. A wedding feast was held, the likes of which the world had never seen! Ivan invited his master, the giant, to the feast and there they were making merry and gay, and if they're still alive, they're having fun to the present day.





THE FEARLESS LAD

Believe it or not, but it all happened in the Seventy-Seventh Realm, beyond mountains of glass, beyond rivers of milk, where once there lived a woman who had a son. He was growing up a bold and brave lad. Wherever he was sent, he went fearlessly. When the boy came of age, he told his mother:

“I am going out into the wide world to learn what fear is.”

The mother tried to talk him out of it:

“Son, do not leave me all alone. How shall I manage to live without you?”

But he would not listen to her. So she packed his bag for the journey, gave him a flat loaf of stale bread, and sent him on his way, after bidding him farewell.

On and on he walked down a road that seemed to have no end. But things do not happen as fast as they are told in a tale. In a field he came across a man plowing with oxen.

“Good day to you!” the lad said and bowed on greeting.

“And good day to you! Where go you, son?”

“Into the wide world to learn what fear is.”

“Would you enter into my service perchance?”

“Why not. But only on the condition that you teach me what fear is.”

“No easier said than done! In my barn the ghosts of two hanged men raise such a hullabaloo every night it’ll turn your spine to jelly.”

So the lad entered his service.

Once when they were plowing a field, their plow broke and seemed rooted to the ground. They set about repairing their plow and drove their ax into the stump of the tree on which two men had hanged themselves. Back home in the evening, they unyoked the oxen and noticed that they had forgotten the ax.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to go to the field and fetch the ax, boy,” the master said.

The lad walked to the field where they had plowed throughout the day, came up to the stump, pulled out the ax and was about to leave, when he heard a human voice:

“Son, give me some water!”

“I have nothing in which to give you it and besides I don’t remember seeing any water round abouts.”

“Bring it to me in your cap; the water is in the bushes yonder!”

No sooner had he proffered the water to one of them he heard the voice of the other:

“Give me some water, too, son!”

“All right, here you are!”

Then the lad picked up the ax and made to leave.

“Wait a minute, we want to return your service!”

“Oh, never mind. It was just water and nothing else.”

Said the first:

“I will give you a cudgel that beats of its own accord!”

Said the second, holding out a sack:

“Here is a sack that ties and unties of its own accord.”

It was already late when the lad returned home and everybody had gone to bed. Only the master was awake. After the evening meal the master said to the lad:

“Now go and sleep in the barn if you’re not chicken-hearted.”

The lad went there, and he slept so soundly that he did not see or hear anything.

“What did you see or hear in there?” the lad was asked in the morning.

“Nothing at all!” the lad replied.

The master prepared to go to the field again, and asked:

“Are you going with me?”

“I’d like to if you can show me what fear is! Otherwise I’ll be on my way.”

The master did not say anything, and what could he say if the lad had not been frightened by the ghosts of those two hanged men?

So they parted, the master going to the field, and the lad stepping down the wide road that led to the Czar’s capital city. On his way he met an old woman.

“Good day to you!”

“And good day to you!”

“What is new in your city, granny?”

“Bad news, son. An evil spirit has visited us. Every night it carries off a soldier. Many men have disappeared in this manner, and tonight the Czar himself will vanish.”

“I’ll go in his stead.”

The old woman showed him where the Czar could be found.

At the palace the guards stopped him:

“Who are you and where go you, lad?”

“I want to meet death instead of one of the Czar’s soldiers.”

The guards liked the answer and informed the Czar that a lad was seeking his audience.

The Czar had the lad brought before him.

“What do you intend to do here?” the Czar asked.

“I want to prepare an evening meal where your soldiers die.”

The lad’s bold answer was to the liking of the Czar.

“Your wish shall be granted! What do you ask for such a service?”

“Nothing, except for a piece of bread and a hunk of fatback.”

When night descended, the lad was brought to that horrible place.

He built a fire and started to roast the fatback. At midnight a devil came skipping along.

“What are you doing here?”

“Can’t you see for yourself? I’m roasting fatback.”

“Get out of here, because the devils will gather here soon.”

“I’ll stay just to spite you.”

“Oh no, you’ll scam for sure when you see how many of us there will be.”

“Even if there are a thousand of you, I won’t go.”

The devil got angry, gave a whistle and a multitude of devils popped out of the ground. They started trying to chase the lad away and began threatening him.

“Listen, are all of you here or is anybody missing?” he asked.

The devils exchanged glances in puzzlement, and one of them said:

“The old lame devil isn’t here yet.”

“Good, when he comes I’ll have a chat with you,” the lad said.

The lame devil came at last. He jumped up to the lad and shouted:

“Get out of my sight!”

“Sack, untie yourself,” the lad said calmly.

The sack untied itself.

“Cudgel, chase all the devils into the sack!”

The cudgel chased all the fiends into the sack which tied itself up.

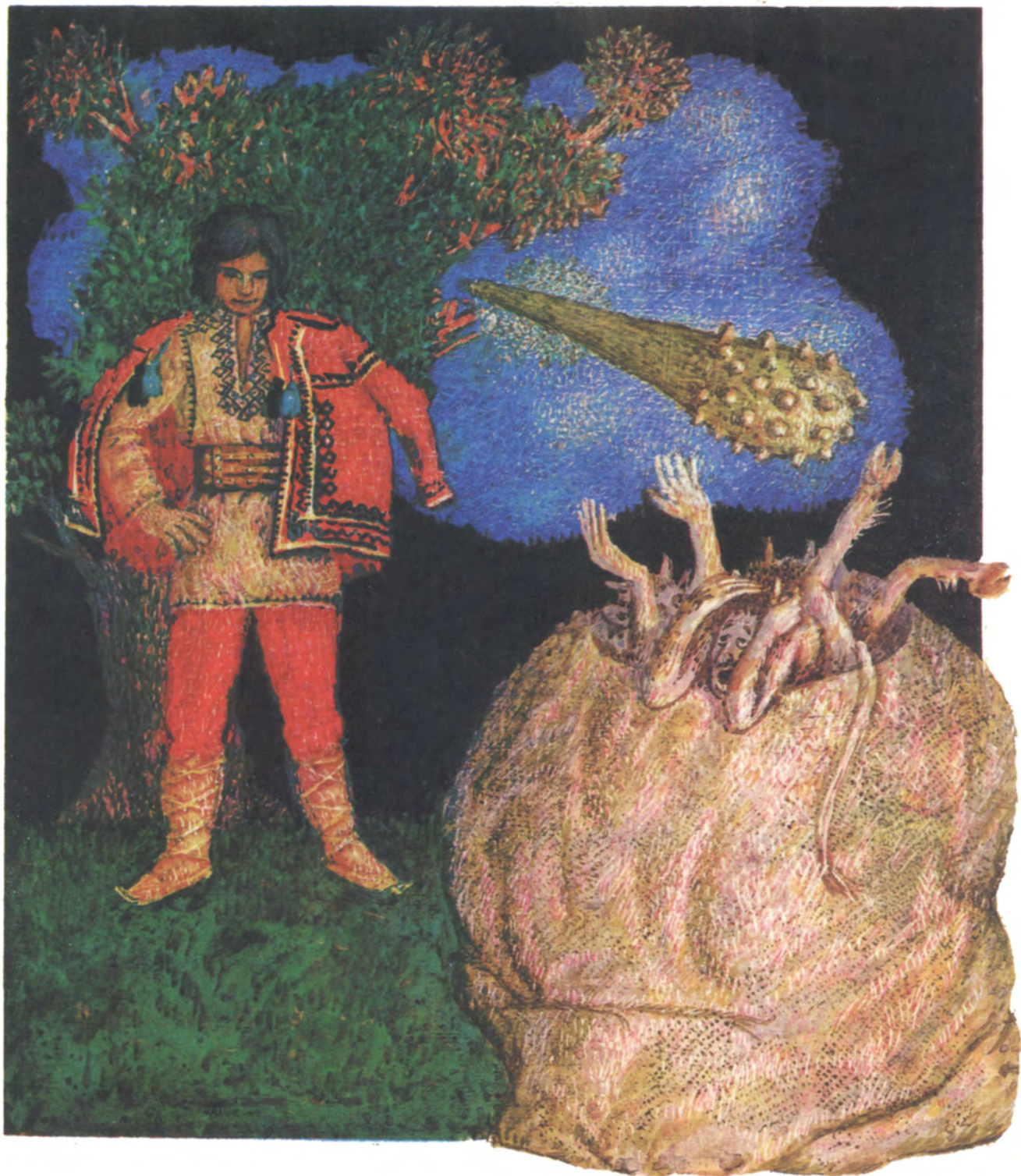
“Cudgel, now give them a good drubbing.”

The cudgel went thrashing away, while the devils shrieked and screamed, begging for mercy:

“Let us go! Whatever you wish will be yours!”

“I wish to be the proprietor in this place.”

“Good, good. Have it your way!” the devils agreed.



“Will you sign a proper document to this effect?”

“Take whatever you wish without any document.”

To which the lad countered:

“Cudgel, give it to them again!”

The cudgel resumed the thrashing. The devils shrieked with pain, and pleaded again:

“Let us go; we’ll sign anything you wish!”

“Sack, untie yourself!”

The devils poured out of the sack like so many bees out of a beehive, and the lame devil made up the contract.

“And what about the keys to the Czar’s palace?”

The devil produced so many keys no cart could haul them off.

“Now begone, all of you!” the lad shouted at the devils. “And don’t you ever dare come to this place again!”

The devils took to their heels.

Then the lad took the document to the Czar.

All the chambers in the palace lit up, and the document was read aloud. Then the lad produced the keys he had and opened all the doors of the palace with them. In the rooms they found many people, both living and dead. The living were set free, and the dead were buried.

The Czar asked the lad how he could repay his service.

“I don’t want anything, except to learn what fear is.”

Upon parting, the Czar said to the daring lad:

“Let us know in what land you died, and we will toll all the bells in my realm in your honor.”

The lad ordered a pole set up in front of the Czar’s window. It was rough-hewn on four sides.

“Now listen attentively, Your Highness! The side on which you see blood will show you in what direction to seek my corpse.”

With that the lad departed. By and by he came to a land in which the sun blazed mercilessly. There he broke a twig off a hazel bush and walked up to a hole belching steam.

What could be in that hole? he wondered. I must have a look.

A ladder stuck out of the hole. He climbed down the ladder into the hole,

and saw at the bottom three huge cauldrons of pitch in which sinners were being boiled. As he went up to a cauldron, he was apprehended by a devil:

“What are you doing here?”

“I just wanted to stick this twig into a cauldron.”

“It’s forbidden! Get out of here!”

But the lad would not leave.

“Are all of you here?” he was curious to know.

The devils exchanged glances, because the lame devil was not among them.

When the oldest devil arrived, the lad ordered:

“Sack, untie yourself! Cudgel, make your rounds across their backs!”

The sack untied itself and the cudgel chased all the devils into the sack.

“Tie yourself up, sack! Give them a good thrashing, cudgel!”

The cudgel belabored the devils so hard they screamed and shrieked and yelled for mercy:

“Let us go! We’ll let you do anything you want!”

That’s just what he was expecting to hear. He went up to the cauldron, stuck the twig into the pitch, and a multitude of ants clung to the twig. When he pulled the twig out, all the ants turned into sheep. He was joyous not to have to roam the world all by himself now.

When nothing would cling to the twig anymore, he went up to the sack, and said:

“Now untie yourself, sack!”

When the devils crawled out of the sack, the cudgel gave each a blow on parting.

The lad walked out into a field, the sheep following him. There were so many sheep that even a hundred clerks would have been unable to count them.

On and on he walked until he suddenly came to a large gate. He opened the gate, and all the sheep entered an enclosure. Presently a stranger appeared, and said:

“You cannot come in here, for you are not worthy it!”

It pained the lad to hear such words, so he left.

In the field he came upon a well, and he sat down beside it to eat something of the food and drink of the water. When he bent over the curb to scoop up the water, a frog jumped out of the well and hid under a bush. The frog scared him out of his wits, and he dropped dead.

At this point we shall leave the lad and return to the Czar.

The Czar's servants reported to him that one side of the pole in front of his window was dripping blood. The Czar ordered his troops to find the bold lad, which they did.

When he was brought to the palace, the Czar ordered all the bells rung and the lad buried with full honors.

Then the Czar ordered a detail of guards to stand watch at the grave of the brave lad so that no one would ever disturb his long sleep.

Well, that's all there is to this tale. I saw everything myself. When I tugged at an oar, it brought me to this shore. He who does not believe me can check it himself.





IVAN-OF-THE-WINDS

Once upon a time there lived a king who had a daughter. He kept close watch over her lest she disgrace herself, and in the end he decided to shut her away from the world altogether. He gave her a maidservant to tend to her needs and stationed guards around the quarters in which she was imprisoned.

One day as she stood by a wall, she noticed a hole in it through which the wind was blowing. And it came to pass that she begot a boy from that wind.

The infant grew not by the year but by the minute, and in five months he had grown into a big lad.

One of the guards informed the King that his daughter had a son.

The King had the walls pulled down and asked his daughter:

“How did you beget him?”

“I was begot of the wind,” the boy replied instead.

The priest christened the boy Ivan-of-the-Winds.

The King sent the boy to school. While the other children read from books, Ivan knew everything by heart. Once the principal got angry with him for something and slapped him. At that the boy blew like a wild wind, and his breath swept the roofs off the merchants' houses.

The King was informed that his grandson was turning the entire town upside down.

The King came to him, and said:

“What are you doing?”

“It was just a joke.”

“Stop it, and let's go home.”

Thereupon the King took Ivan back to the palace.

One day Ivan-of-the-Winds was sent to the forest for firewood.

“Have a chain of four thousand *sazhen* long made for me,” he requested.

His request was fulfilled. He threw the chain around the forest, pulled all the trees out by their roots, and hauled it all back to the palace. As he approached the town, the people saw something resembling an oncoming cloud, and then informed the King that his grandson was dragging an entire forest along.

The King rode out of town to meet his grandson halfway, and said:

“Drop that timber right away!”

The lad dropped the trees on the ground, picked up the chain, and went home.

The next time the King sent his grandson to the sea to fetch some water.

“Have two pails made out of the timber I brought,” he requested.

The two pails were made for him, after which he asked a yoke made of twenty thousand *poods* of iron. He went to the sea, scooped the water into the

two pails, and carried them back home on the yoke he shouldered. The King rode out to meet him halfway, and said:

“Drop that water right away.”

The lad dropped the pails onto the ground with such force that a pond appeared, almost drowning the King and his mount.

“Ivan-of-the-Winds, help me get out!” the King cried, for he and his steed were thrashing in the pond.

“Hold on!” Ivan said.

Ivan pulled him out of the water, and they returned home.

By now the King had become fearful lest the lad kill him one day. So he sent him down to hell for money, of which the devils were supposed to owe him six million. The lad agreed, but requested:

“Have me two money bags made of leather, for which two hundred oxen must be slaughtered.”

The money bags were made for him and also a cudgel weighing some eighty *poods*. Ivan-of-the-Winds went down to hell.

“Give me the six million you owe my grandpa,” he said to the devils.

The eldest devil refused to give him the money. So Ivan-of-the-Winds took to cudgeling the devils until they filled the two money bags up to the strings. He came home, gave the money to the King and his mother. Then he said to his mother:

“Go to the quarters where you begot me, put an empty bottle on a table, and hang a knout on the wall.”

He gave her also healing and life-giving water, a horse and a cart, and said:

“Now when the cart starts to shake, and the horse begins to neigh, and the bottle on the table fills with blood, and the knout on the wall starts to move, get onto the cart and drive off and take the healing and life-giving water along with you.”

Then he went out into the wide world, and soon entered a forest. In there he came upon a palace in which lived an immortal dragon. Upon entering the palace, he met a lovely lady.

“How did you get here, Ivan-of-the-Winds?” the lady asked him.

Ivan took a liking to her at first sight.

“Hey, Ivan,” she addressed him again. “Once the dragon comes flying here, he will devour you.”

When the immortal dragon arrived, he asked:

“Well, well, it is human flesh I smell! Who has come here?”

“It’s my brother,” the lady replied.

“All right, brother-in-law, come out wherever you are!” the dragon said.

Ivan-of-the-Winds stepped forth. After they had eaten the dragon said:

“Here is some money for you, and now go home.”

To which Ivan-of-the-Winds proposed:

“Brother-in-law, what if we go onto the copper thrashing floor and match our strength?”

The dragon extended his paw to the lad, and said:

“Here, squeeze it!”

Hard as Ivan-of-the-Winds squeezed the paw, it turned blue only a little above the talons. But when Ivan threw him to the ground, the dragon barely got back on his feet again. Then it was the dragon’s turn to squeeze the lad’s hand. When he squeezed his hand, blood spurted from Ivan’s nails. And when the lad was thrown onto the ground, his bones scattered to all sides. The dragon swept the bones under a tree.

Back at his mother’s house the horse started neighing, the bottle on the table filled with blood, and the knout on the wall started to move. His mother got onto the cart, and the horse brought her to the very place where her son’s remains were lying. She sprinkled life-giving water on him, and he came to life. Then she sprinkled healing water on him, and he became hale and hearty again.

“Go home, now, Mother,” he told her. “I am setting out into the wide world.”

He returned to the lady in the palace, and said:

“Ask the dragon to tell you where he gets his strength from.”

With that he left and hid in a forest.

One day the lady asked the dragon:

“We’ve been living together for years now, but I’ve never heard you speak the truth.”

“What truth do you want to hear?”



“Tell me, where do you get your strength from?”

“My strength is hidden in the oven.”

She was happy to have learned the truth, but he said:

“What a ninny you are. Do you really believe I keep my strength in the oven?”

So she asked again:

“Where is it then?”

“My strength is hidden in a poker.”

She was happy once more, but the dragon laughed at her, and said:

“Now just how could my strength be hidden in a poker. My strength is hidden in a field that is guarded by a company of soldiers. In the middle of the field there is a huge boulder, under which there is a chest, and in that chest there is a hare, and in that hare there is a duck, and in that duck there is an egg which contains my strength.”

The next day the dragon left to hunt, while Ivan-of-the-Winds visited the lady who told him everything.

He went there with a shotgun. On his way he saw a hound lying on the ground. He was about to shoot the hound when the animal started to plead in a human voice:

“Ivan-of-the-Winds, please do not shoot me. I might stand you in good stead one of these days.”

Presently he saw a kite flying by. He was about to shoot it when the kite pleaded:

“Do not shoot me. I might stand you in good stead.”

Then he went to the field to the soldiers, and said:

“Good day to you, boys!”

“We wish you good health, Your Excellency!”

“Lift that stone yonder!”

The soldiers had a go at it, but they failed to move the boulder an inch. So Ivan had a try and overturned the boulder, under which he found the chest. The next moment the hare bolted out of the chest and ran off. But no sooner was it off than the hound brought the hare back in his fangs. The lad tore the hare asunder, and a duck flew out with a whir. The next thing Ivan-of-the-Winds saw was the kite catching the duck on the wing. Ivan tore open the duck,

and took the egg out of her. By that time the dragon had lost almost all of his strength. Ivan-of-the-Winds went to the palace and made small talk to the lady, when the dragon showed up, and said:

“Ivan-of-the-Winds, could you wait for two hours at least?”

“Oh no, that I will not do!”

He took the egg, broke it over his head, and all the dragon’s strength seeped into his body. In that very instant the dragon dropped dead. Ivan hacked him to pieces and threw them to the dogs.

He took the lady and went home to his mother. When he got there, his wedding was held.

Once I was batman to a general. While he was sitting at the table, I was standing beyond the threshold, drinking ale; it trickled down my beard but left my throat so dry. So I leaned on a thread, girded myself with straw, and got so drunk I burrowed into the earth. They charged a cannon with that earth, and when it blazed away, it sent me flying right to the place where I’ve told you this tale.





PETRO AND THE KING'S TRUSTY SWORD

Once there lived a poor peasant who had a son, Petro by name. When Petro was small, he played and larked around with his peers, but when he grew up, he started making himself toy muskets all the time. When asked why he was doing it, Petro would reply:

“I want to be a soldier!”

His father insisted that he till and sow the land instead of dreaming of army

life, but the lad did not want to listen to him. He marched around with a musket on his shoulder, and called out:

“Left, right! Left, right! One, two, three!”

His father was worried to death when he saw the lad behaving like that.

One day the lad came upon a sage, who asked him:

“What do you want to be?”

“A soldier!”

“It’s difficult to be a soldier,” the sage said. “You’d have to carry a peck of troubles.”

“I’m not afraid of any troubles!” Petro rejoined.

So the sage said:

“If you are of such a sort, drop to the ground, turn into a stag and run in the direction of the rising sun. Have a good look at how the troops there suffer want and deprivation.”

“All right, I’ll do it.”

Petro dropped to the ground, turned into a stag, and ran in the direction of the rising sun. He had a good look at how the King’s soldiers drilled on the parade ground, how they suffered from lack of food, and how they were chased out of the barracks into the rain.

Shortly thereafter Petro returned to his village.

“Well, do you still want to be a soldier?” the sage asked.

“I do!”

The sage thought for a while, and advised then:

“Drop to the ground now, turn into a hare and run in the direction of the setting sun. Have a good look at how the soldiers there suffer want and deprivation.”

Petro dropped to the ground, turned into a hare, and hopped off in the direction of the setting sun. There the sergeants and officers were tormenting the soldiers, flogging them, and ordering them to run barefoot outside the barracks when it was freezing. The lean and exhausted men ate dry bread, slurped watery soup, and cursed their lot.

Petro returned to the sage, and said:

“Still, I want to be a soldier!”

The sage shook his head, and said:

“If that’s so, drop to the ground once again, turn into an eagle and fly to the south. Have a look at how the troops fare there.”

The lad dropped to the ground, turned into an eagle, and flew off to the south. There thousands upon thousands of soldiers pushed on like black clouds in a savage attack, as they hit left and right, killed, fired from muskets and manned booming cannon. The sky was enveloped in smoke, and rivers of blood flowed across the land. Everywhere there was such screaming, shrieking and wailing in the air it made the hair stand on end.

The lad returned to the sage, and said:

“Still, I want to be a soldier.”

The sage kept his peace, thinking for a while. In the end he said:

“I see that you are persistent, and I like persistent fellows and try to help them in whatever way I can. I’ll help you, too. Join the army then, but remember one thing: if the going gets difficult, turn into a stag. If you’ve had enough of being a stag, turn into a hare. If you don’t want to be a hare, turn into an eagle. Good luck to you, my lad!”

Petro bid farewell to his father and mother, and off he marched to the army. But he did not stay long in the barracks, because the King had declared war on another king. The host marched across fields, hills, forests, and then sailed across a sea. Suddenly the King cried out:

“Halt! I’ve forgotten my trusty sword. It’s back in my palace. He who brings it to me in three days will be given my daughter’s hand in marriage.”

The entire host froze. A young prince stepped forth, and said:

“Who else but me can bring the sword to you, Your Majesty?”

A count who did not like the prince was cut to the quick by these words. He turned red in the face, and declared:

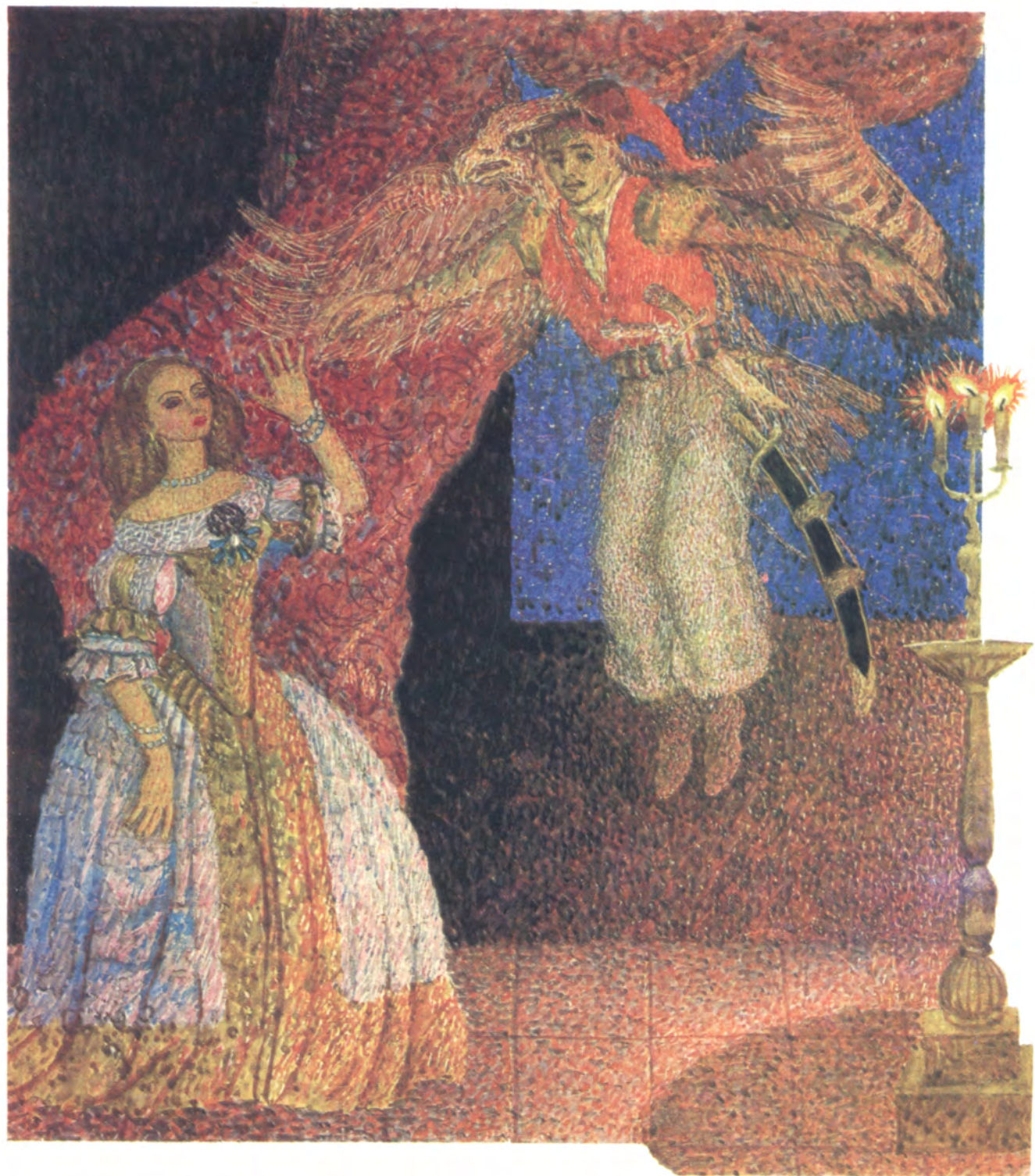
“This is a matter of state import, Your Majesty. Only I can cope with the task. Send me for the sword.”

Petro, too, stepped forth, snapped to attention, and said:

“I will bring it to you, Your Majesty!”

The King gave it all some thought, and said in answer:

“All three of you go. He who brings me my trusty sword will have the hand of my daughter.”



The Prince, the Count, and Petro set off for the King's sword, each going his own way. After he had walked some distance from the host Petro dropped to the ground and turned into a stag. He raced across fields, over mountains, and through gullies for a long time. When his legs got tired, he dropped to the ground and turned into a hare. Then he turned into an eagle. Thus he came flying to the King's capital city and began to wheel over the royal palace. When the Princess opened her window, he flew into her apartments, dropped to the floor, and turned into his old form again. Petro bowed to the princess, and said:

"Your father forgot to take his trusty sword along. He willed that you give it to me, because a sword is indispensable at war."

To which the Princess said:

"I won't give it to you until you turn into an eagle again."

"Let it be as you wish," Petro agreed.

He dropped to the floor and turned into a stag. The Princess pulled three hairs from his left ear. Then he dropped to the floor and turned into a hare. The Princess pulled three tufts of fur from his left ear. Then he dropped to the floor and turned into an eagle. She pulled three feathers from his left wing. Then he dropped to the floor once again and turned into his old form.

The Princess gave him the trusty sword, and said:

"When the war is over, come back to me."

"What for?" he asked.

"I want to be your wife."

"You are a fine girl, Princess. Perhaps I will return..."

With that he bowed in parting, and set out on his journey to the King's host. When he came to a field, he dropped to the ground and turned into a stag. He kept on running for a long time until he came to the seashore, where he dropped to the ground and turned into an eagle. He flew across the sea and saw the King's host from afar. He dropped to the ground and turned into a soldier again.

However, he was in no hurry to appear before the King, because only a day had passed since he had been sent on his mission. Since Petro was tired, he lay down under an oak tree and fell sound asleep.

The haughty Prince who had set out after the King's trusty sword lost his way in a field. By that time the Count had reached the oak tree. On seeing the sleeping Petro, the Count drew his sword and chopped Petro's head off. He took the King's trusty sword, brought it to the King, and said, bowing his head:

"I have carried out your orders, Your Majesty. Here is your trusty sword!"

"Thank you, Count. Once the war is over, we will celebrate your wedding — my daughter's hand awaits you."

The King won the war and returned to the capital with his host. The day after his arrival he had the message broadcast that his daughter would be given to the Count in marriage.

At this the Princess burst into tears:

"I won't marry the Count, because it was not he who brought the trusty sword. It was the lad..."

In the meantime the sage had not forgotten the persistent Petro. He came to the oak tree, put the lad's severed head on his trunk and sprinkled it with healing water. Petro seemed to have been roused from a deep sleep. Blinking at the sage, he said:

"Oh, did I have a good sleep!"

"You'd have slept for ever and ever if it were not for me."

"Where is the King's trusty sword?"

"The King has it."

"And where is the King?"

"In his capital city already, giving his daughter's hand in marriage to the Count who delivered the sword."

"Where was I all this time?"

"Lying here with your head chopped off. The Count beheaded you."

"So what am I to do now?" the lad asked, downcast.

"Run to the capital!"

Petro thanked the good sage profusely, dropped to the ground and turned into a stag. He streaked through the forest like a whirlwind. When his legs grew tired, he dropped to the ground, turned into a hare and hopped off through the bushes to his right. When he got short of wind and sweat had drenched him, he dropped to the ground, turned into an eagle, and darted off

like an arrow to the capital. He flew into the chambers of the Princess who was weeping bitterly.

She took the three feathers and went to the King with the eagle.

“Look,” she said, “this eagle came here asking for your trusty sword. I pulled three feathers out of his left wing then.”

The eagle dropped to the floor and turned into a hare.

“This hare also came here and asked for your trusty sword. I pulled three tufts of fur from his left ear.”

The hare dropped to the floor and turned into a stag.

“And this stag, too, came here asking for your trusty sword. I pulled three hairs from his left ear.”

The stag dropped to the floor and turned into a soldier.

Petro snapped to attention before the King, and said:

“Your Majesty, now fulfill your promise.”

“All right, lad, we will celebrate your wedding tomorrow,” the King agreed.

In the evening the sage appeared.

“Why are you always helping me as if you were my dear father?” Petro asked him.

“Because you are persistent, and I like such lads.”

The wedding feast was attended by a huge crowd of guests. During the dancing the great sage broke a painted jug, and lest he be woeful, he was given a mug to end this tale with a draft of ale.





THE LAD WHO GAVE THE SUN, THE MOON AND THE STARS BACK TO THE PEOPLE

Once upon a time there lived a lord and his wife. They were very rich, but when they became old, they grew sad, because they had no heir to whom they could leave their estate. So the lord's wife went to a sorceress to seek her advice on what to do.

"In the sea there dwells a magic fish," the sorceress told her. "The woman who eats it shall bear a child."

The lady went back home, tolld her husband everything, and said:
“Buy that fish for me.”

The lord traveled to the sea, and asked some fishermen:

“Could you catch the magic fish for my wife to eat so she can beget a child?”

“Why not? But for this you’ll have to give us a keg of *horilka* so the boy she begets will be a merry sort, a keg of honey so the girls will like him, and a keg of money so he will always live in plenty.”

“All that you shall have. When can I come for the fish? I need it as quickly as possible.”

“A tale is quickly told, but a fish takes time to catch. Come back in a week.”

In a week the lord brought the fishermen everything they asked for and received the fish.

Back at his estate he had an elderly Hutsul woman for a cook. Now when the fish was sizzling on the frying pan, it smelled so delicious it made her mouth water. It was simply a sin not to taste a little bit of the fish at least. Besides, what cook prepares food without tasting it? So she ate a little piece and took the rest to the lady.

In the end the cook bore a son, and several days later the lady bore a son as well.

As soon as the lord’s son was old enough, he started school, while the cook’s son was made to graze geese on the commons. He was not permitted even to enter the chambers where the lord’s son played.

With the years the cook’s son grew into such a handsome lad that his mother never ceased to admire him.

One day it came to such a pass that the sun did not rise in the sky, the moon disappeared somewhere at midnight, and the stars did not shine. The people walked about downcast as before doomsday. It was rumored that the sun, the moon, and the stars had been stolen by devils.

The King let it be known throughout the realm that whoever found the sun, the moon and the stars would be given his daughter, the royal princess, in marriage.

On hearing this news, the cook’s son said to his mother:

“I’ll go to the King and have a look at the Princess, because I don’t know whether it is worthwhile messing with those devils for the sake of her hand.”

Upon arriving in the capital city, he went to the palace, stepped up to the King on his throne, and said:

“I will rescue the sun, the moon, and the stars, Your Majesty, but would you please have the Princess brought here, so I have a look at her.”

The Princess was brought before him. The lad struck a spark with a steel and flint, lit a splinter of wood, had a good look at the Princess, and said:

“Well, she is a fine girl. It’s worth jumping into hell for her.”

At midnight the Hutsul lad hied on his steed to a big bridge beyond the dark forest. He tethered his steed to a willow tree, tore a plank from the bridge, and threw it into the water. Then he sat down on his haunches and waited to see what would happen next.

Presently he heard hoofbeats. Somebody stopped at the bridge and started to shout:

“Who is taking my bridge apart? Hey there, step forth, you menace!”

“It’s me who is destroying your bridge!” the lad responded from behind a tree stump.

“So shall we fight each other?”

“You fiend, stop trying to scare me with your hooves! You’d better just give the sun, the moon and the stars back to the people or else I’ll make mincemeat of you!”

“I won’t give anything back. We must do battle!”

“Listen, why should we shed blood?” the lad said. “It’d be better for you to turn into fire and me into rain. Then we’ll see who gets the better of whom.”

“Agreed!” the fiend cried out.

Suddenly a conflagration burst out, followed by a torrential downpour. The fire raged, and the rain kept dousing it. The rain gushed, and the fire scorched. The rain thudded, while the fire hissed.

By and by the fire dwindled, but the rain kept pouring—as if ten clouds had burst open at once. In the end the fire went out completely, and when the steam dispersed, only a little heap of ashes remained on the ground. The lad swept the ashes aside and saw the sun shining underneath. He tucked the sun in his bosom, jumped on his steed, and galloped off to the King.

On his way he saw a little cottage by the roadside, and decided to find out who dwelled in it. He looked into a window and saw the cottage full of witches spinning wire, pouring tin, and practicing sorcery with beans. Another witch was poring over her cards.

The lad turned into a fly, flew into the house and settled on the wall. The witch who was studying the cards mumbled under her breath:

“The cards show that a certain lad killed my husband and took the sun away. I’ll have to shorten his days by turning into a pear tree in a field. When he passes by, he’ll eat a pear and choke on it.”

The fly darted out of the house and turned into a Hutsul lad again. Then he hurried to the King’s palace, where he supped and retired.

“Don’t let anyone rouse me in the morning,” was the only thing he asked. “The sun must rouse me from my sleep.”

The next morning the people were awakened by a glorious, joyous sun. Shouts and calls resounded in the air, and the birds burst into a cheerful twitter.

At midnight the lad mounted his steed and rode to the bridge again. He tethered his mount to a willow tree, tore a second plank from the bridge, and hurled it into the river.

Shortly thereafter hoofbeats reached his ear. It was a second devil coming along. He stopped at the bridge, took a look at it, and screamed:

“Hey there, who’s stolen my plank? Reveal yourself!”

“It’s me!” the lad responded, and stepped forth from behind a tree stump.

“What makes you seek trouble with us?”

“Give the people the moon back.”

“I won’t without a fight.”

The lad thought for a while, and said then:

“Listen, why should we shed blood? It’d be better if you turn into a rock and I into a pillar. The rock will roll down the hill and strike the pillar. If it shatters the pillar to smithereens, you win; if not, you surrender the moon.”

And that’s what they did. A huge black boulder rolled down a hill and struck the pillar below so hard that nothing but a heap of sand remained of the boulder. The lad pushed the sand aside, and underneath he found the moon smiling for joy. This time the Hutsul lad did not carry the moon to the King’s palace,



but flung it back into the sky. In that instant everything around grew merry, with the nightingales trilling in the trees, the dogs barking in the courtyards, and the frogs croaking in the bog.

The lad mounted his steed and rode to the palace. At the witches' cottage he stopped and peered into the window. Inside the witches were spinning wire, pouring tin, practicing sorcery. The oldest witch sat poring over her cards. The Hutsul lad turned into a flea and hopped into the cottage, where he jumped into the hair of the witch, who was mumbling:

"Tonight some tramp destroyed another devil. I'll have to settle accounts with him. I'll ask the sun to turn wild with blistering heat, while I'll turn into a well in a field. When he drinks of my water, he'll burst into bits and pieces."

The flea hopped out of the cottage and turned into a lad again. He mounted a steed — and off he hied straight to the palace.

On the third day he was back at the bridge again. He tore the last plank from the bridge and threw it into the river.

The devil was quick in showing up, and started to shout:

"Who's been messing around with my bridge?"

"It's me," the lad replied, stepping forth from behind a tree stump.

"What makes you hang around our bridge?"

"I want you to put the stars back into the sky."

"Oh no, I'll have to fight you first."

"I'd thought you'd have sense enough not to do that," the Hutsul lad said. "I've already wrung the heads off two fiends like you. And sure as I'm standing here, I'll wring yours off, too. Give the stars back while the giving is good."

"No, we must do battle first."

"If you insist, you can bind me fast with the strongest rope you have, and you will see me snap it like cobwebs."

The devil bound him with the strongest rope and tied the ends so fast that a hundred devils would be unable to untie them.

"If you don't snap the rope, I'll throw you into the river," the devil said.

"All right, but turn away for a while."

The devil turned his back on him. The lad had a pen knife about him. He cut the rope, straightened up, and said:

"You can turn round now — I'm ready."

Seeing the lad without any rope twisted round his body, the devil almost dropped dead from fright and started to tremble as if he had an ague.

“Now you bind my hands and feet,” the devil mumbled.

The Hutsul lad tied the devil firmly as a potter would turn a pot. Then he turned away, and cried out:

“Tear the rope!”

The devil strained so hard his eyes almost popped out of his head. He huffed and puffed, dropped to the ground, rubbed the rope against the rocks, and whined with rage like a rabid dog — but all in vain.

“You’d have to eat another helping of *kulish* gruel to set yourself free,” the lad mocked. “Now give back the stars lest I make short work of you.”

“You can have them,” the devil agreed at last.

“Where are they?”

“On my horse, under the saddle.”

The lad took the stars out from under the saddle and started to count them. He counted for a long time, putting them from one pile onto another. How many he counted it is difficult to tell, but in the end he found one star missing.

“Where is it?!” he shouted angrily at the devil.

“You’ve got all of them.”

“One is missing! If you don’t tell me, I’ll send you flying into the river!”

The devil realized things were going badly for him, because the lad knew what was what. So the devil confessed:

“I gave one star to my sweetheart who is a witch.”

With that the lad did not think twice. He threw the tied-up devil across the steed’s back, jumped into the saddle and galloped off to the witches’ cottage. He peered into the window and listened to what the oldest witch was mumbling over her cards:

“There’s another peck of trouble! A third devil has disappeared somewhere. Looks like the Hutsul lad’s done him in.”

“I’m right here!” the devil shouted from outside.

“Oh, Antip, my love, do come into the house.

“I can’t, my dear, because I’m tied up. Give the star back to the lad and ask him to set me free.”

The Hutsul lad entered the house, and the witch gave him the missing star.

“Untie my lover,” she asked.

“I still need him.”

The whole night through the lad kept throwing the stars back into the sky. He wanted to see each of them in its proper place. By the time he had finished his work the sky was blushing with the first flush of dawn. Then he picked up the devil and rode to the capital city.

People thanked him for the sun, the moon and the stars. Only the tavern-keepers, the King’s ministers and villains had no words of gratitude for him, because without the moon it was much easier to swindle people in the dark.

The lad untied the devil, and said:

“Come on, Antip, get all the inn-keepers, ministers and villains together, tar and feather them, and lead them thus around the fairs and markets for three days and three nights.”

The devil ran off to fulfil the order.

The lad, though, went to the palace, stepped before the throne, and said:

“Your Majesty, I have done everything already. The sun, the moon and the stars are in place. Now I will leave to fetch my mother so she may have a look at the Princess and decide if she agrees to have her for a daughter-in-law.”

The Hutsul lad set out on his journey to the town of Kolomiya. The sun was blistering hot that day. When he saw the pear tree with the ripening fruit on it, he did not so much as swerve half a step in that direction. Thirst made him feel more dead than alive. But the witch’s vile tricks were all in vain, because when he saw a well with crystal-clear water on his way, he just walked past it.

He took his mother and returned with her to the King. The Princess was to her liking.

There followed a wedding party such as the world has never seen before or after. And that’s the truth!





THE MOUNTAIN THAT REACHED TO THE SKY

Once upon a time, somewhere or other, there lived a rich count. He owned a great deal of good land, and he owned much barren land as well, along with forests, orchards, pastures, and cattle galore.

The count was an avid hunter. For days and weeks on end he wandered throughout the forests and across fields, shooting game. But never did he venture into the Dreadful Forest, from which no one had ever returned alive.

When he grew old, he gave his estate over to the keeping of his sons, and willed:

“My sons, as I leave my estate to you, I wish that you should manage it properly and live in peace and concord. You two who are older take care of your youngest brother, because he is still lightminded and disobedient. He does not want to learn — larking about and getting into all sorts of mischief is the only thing on his mind. When you go out hunting, you may shoot game anywhere, but beware of the Dreadful Forest. I ordered signs posted to warn everyone not to enter that forest. If any dares to enter, he will never return alive.”

The old count died, and the sons were left on their own. The youngest son did not stay at home and play as he had before. He was a restless sort, never sitting in one place for a minute. He frequented the woods, orchards and fields. Although he did not attend school, he learned to read and write well enough from his elder brothers.

The count had many servants and workers in his employ. The elder sons supervised them so the youngest brother did not have to worry about anything. He would shoulder a shotgun and make for the forests and fields, roaming far and wide, but always keeping away from the Dreadful Forest, because his father’s warning was still green in his memory.

One day the sons were hunting game in the forest the whole day. Much as they tried to avoid the Dreadful Forest, they lost their bearings and entered it by accident. What they saw there was enough to boggle any hunter’s imagination: the forest had so much game that hares, wild goats, deer, and wild boar could be found under practically every bush and tree. Human beings had never entered the forest, so the game multiplied freely.

The sons stayed in the forest the whole day. By midday they came across a spring of clear water not far from a wonderful sycamore. Here they settled down to eat and have a rest. They roasted some meat, drank of the water, and then went on their way.

“We’ll roam around some more; maybe we’ll come across some unusual game, and toward evening we’ll go back home.”

There was game enough and to spare. They shot what they wanted and put it in stacks; then twilight descended.

When they were ready to leave, they looked for a footpath but could not find one. They searched everywhere — but all in vain. It seemed as if someone had bound their eyes. Back and forth they roamed until it was night, and they

came across the spring under the sycamore again. The broad tree spread its long branches, and the water in the spring was clear and cool.

“Let us build a campfire!” the brothers said. “We’ll roast some meat for supper and stay here for the night. At dawn we’ll go back home.”

The brothers still did not suspect that they were in the Dreadful Forest. As they sat round the campfire eating their evening meal, they had a friendly chat which seemed the appropriate thing to do.

Since the youngest brother went hunting more often, he knew his father’s forests much better than his brothers. That is why they listened to him attentively. When they were about to go to sleep, he said:

“All through the night we must guard the fire lest wild beasts attack us. The first to stand guard will be the eldest brother.”

The eldest brother took his shotgun and made his rounds, while his younger brothers slept.

Sometime around midnight he heard a loud noise.

What’s that din and drone there? he wondered. The wind was swaying the trees and bending them to the ground.

Then silence fell. He pricked up his ears and heard something crawling down the tree. He looked up, and by the light of the campfire spied a strange sprite hugging the trunk. The eldest brother raised his shotgun, took aim, and was about to shoot, when he heard:

“Wait a minute, don’t shoot! I’ll give you something which might come in handy some day.”

“What is it?”

“It’s a cap. When you put it on your head, you’ll become invisible.”

“All right, throw the cap down on the ground and make yourself scarce, or else I’ll shoot.”

In that instant the wind rose with a rumble and whistle, and the sprite disappeared.

In the morning the brothers awoke, sat round the campfire, had their breakfast, drank of the spring water, and set forth in search of a footpath that would lead them back home.

They roamed and stumbled through the thickets, but they could not find their way out in the end. By midday they came upon the spring under the sy-

camore. They built a campfire as they had done the day before, roasted some meat, had their meal, and went in search of the footpath. Thus they roamed through the thickets till evening when they came upon the sycamore again.

“Looks like we’ll have to stay here for another night.”

After supper the youngest brother said:

“Tonight the middle brother will stand guard.”

The middle brother picked up his shotgun and made his rounds. Around midnight a horrible din reached his ears.

What could all that noise be? he wondered.

The wind was swaying the trees and bending them to the ground. The moment the wind diminished the sprite appeared in the tree. The middle brother took aim and was about to shoot.

“Wait, don’t shoot! I’ll give you something.”

“What is it?”

“I’ll give you a whistle. Whenever you blow it, there will appear before you as many troops as there are grains of sand in the sea, leaves on the trees, and blades of grass on the ground.”

“All right, throw that whistle down on the ground and make yourself scarce!”

In that instant the wind rose and the sprite disappeared.

The middle brother hid the whistle in his bag and stood guard till dawn.

With the first flush of morning, the brothers woke up, roasted some meat, had their breakfast, drank of the cool spring water, and went in search of the footpath back home. They roamed till midday and again returned to the sycamore.

It seemed strange to them that they kept returning to the same tree every time.

“What will become of us?” they asked, downcast. Although they searched for the footpath all afternoon, they returned to the sycamore toward evening. They built a campfire, had their supper, and went to sleep.

“Well, good night to you all,” the youngest brother said. “Now it is my turn to stand guard.”

He kept watch alertly, looking warily on all sides. Sometime around midnight a horrible din reached his ears.

What could that noise be? he wondered. Didn't my brothers hear it, too?

The wind was swaying the trees so violently it made the earth rise and fall. Then silence fell, and the youngest brother spied the sprite up in the sycamore. He took aim and was about to shoot, when he heard a voice:

"Wait, don't shoot! I'll give you something which might come in handy some day."

"What is it?"

"I'll give you a purse in which there will always be money. When you take one gold coin out of it, there'll always be another one inside in place of the first."

"If that is so, throw that purse down on the ground and get out of my sight, or else I'll shoot."

The sprite threw down the purse. The youngest brother hid the purse in his bag. As the sprite was climbing down, the youngest brother came to his senses, fired his shotgun without thinking twice, and the sprite dropped to the ground.

At the break of day the brothers awoke and saw something lying under the tree — what they saw was actually not a sprite but a little devil. He reigned over the Dreadful Forest, lured people into it, and made them stumble through the thickets in search of a way out until they perished.

The brothers washed in the spring, roasted some meat, ate their fill, and set off home. They had no sooner walked two kilometers than they found the footpath which led them out into a glade. There they halted for a rest and entered into conversation with one another.

"Did you see anything during the night?" the eldest brother asked.

"We did. We saw a sprite."

"What did he give you?"

"To me he gave a cap..."

"...and to me a whistle..."

"...and to me a purse."

"All right, let us try all these things out."

The youngest brother put the cap on his head.

"Do you see me?"

“No, we don’t, but we hear your voice.”

Then the eldest brother took the whistle from the middle brother, and blew it. The next moment troops started to pour onto the glade like so many grains out of a sack. They occupied the glade from end to end. Presently a general came running up:

“What can I do for you, Your Majesty?”

“I don’t need anything. I was just trying out the whistle.”

“We are ready to serve you. We are always at your beck and call.”

Then the eldest brother checked the purse. He took one gold coin out of it, and in its place he found a second coin. No matter how many times he reached into the purse, it was never empty.

“Well, brothers, all this will stand us in good stead. Now we are the richest men in the world.”

From that time on they lived in plenty. No longer were they afraid to hunt in the Dreadful Forest. They always came home safely.

The animals and birds of the forest also became livelier, for they had been released from the curse. As long as the little devil had ruled in the forest, everything in it was as good as dead.

The youngest brother got bored of such a life without any adventure, so he told his brothers one day:

“What am I gaining by staying here? I want to see the wide world and travel about.”

He filled his pockets with gold coins and set out on his journey. His brothers did not stop him, but said on parting:

“Go and have a look at the wide world, and then tell us where you’ve been, what you’ve seen, and what is happening in foreign lands.”

He walked from village to village, from town to town, and roamed through forests and deserts.

One day he walked into a capital city where a czar lived, and stopped at a travelers’ inn. Here he made the acquaintance of some gentlemen who asked him:

“Whence come you, lad?”

“From here and there and from afar.”

“How do the people there fare? What is their way of life?”

“It’s one thing and another... and what’s new around these parts?”

“Nothing much. You might take an interest in the Czar’s daughter, the Czarivna, if you like. She is wise, astoundingly cunning, and the shrewdest card player the world has ever seen. Whoever sits down for a game of cards with her loses and gets stripped of his last copper.”

The story intrigued the lad. I’ll challenge her to a game, he decided. I don’t think she’ll beat me out of my last copper.

After some thinking he decided to return home for his magic purse.

But his brothers would not let him leave again:

“You just stay where you are! Enough of traipsing around the world.”

“But I’ve made up my mind to play cards with that cunning Czarivna who’s supposed to be the wisest person in the world.”

“Oh, poor fellow, you better not have anything to do with royalty. Don’t take the purse with you, or else you’ll get into trouble.”

But he paid them no heed. He took his magic purse, bade his brothers farewell, and went straight to the capital city where the Czar lived. He rented suitable rooms and started to pick up all the news he could get from the people he met young and old. Those who were beaten by the Czarivna out of their last copper complained bitterly about her.

He lived in the city for a month, heard all the news he wanted, and then went to the Czarivna to challenge her to a game.

The guards let him into the palace.

As he sat down at the card table opposite the Czarivna, she wondered how he intended to play, since he had no money with him. She was used of seeing her challengers arrive with wagons of money. She was winning so much she had to order a new bank built every year.

But nonetheless she met the challenge, because such was the rule — she had to play with everyone who wished. The first thing they did was to make each other’s acquaintance.

“So what can I do for you?” she asked.

“I want to play a game of cards with you.

The Czarivna sized him up from head to toe, and asked in surprise:

“What money are you putting up? You’ll lose everything you have in a few minutes and be whipped into the bargain.”

Once the game started, the lad began to lose money hopelessly. The Czarivna kept raking it in, but he produced ever new gold coins. They played on and on for a day and a night. Meals were even brought to their card table, and the servants were kept busy hauling the money to the bank.

Where does he get his money from? she wondered. I've already won a wagonful of gold from him, but he doesn't seem to grow any poorer. Then she began to fear him, thinking she'd never bring the game to an end with such an opponent. So she ordered a table laid with sumptuous meat and fiery drink. When he had had his fill of the lavish victuals, he dozed off, and then fell fast asleep. In the meantime the Czarivna ordered a purse exactly like his made and substituted it for the lad's magic purse while he was asleep.

When he awoke they resumed the game. But it did not last long. He put a coin on the table, then opened his purse to take out another — but alas! — the purse was empty.

How could that have happened? he wondered, bewildered, but the Czarivna shouted just then: "What's the matter? Out with your money!"

He had nothing with which to pay her.

The Czarivna ordered him whipped soundly, and chased him away. She had never before had anyone flogged with such delight.

More dead than alive, he dragged himself out of the palace. What could the poor lad do?

I'll go home, take my magic cap, and wreak vengeance a hundredfold for this injustice, he decided.

And he hurried back home.

"Why are you so sad and downcast?" his brothers asked him.

"Well, it so happened," he confessed, "that the Czarivna treated me to meat and drink, and then stole my magic purse."

"What do you intend to do now?"

"I'll take my magic cap and thrash her until she returns my purse."

"Don't court anymore trouble with the Czar's daughter," the brothers tried to talk him out of it. "Give it all up. We've got enough money as it is. It's time you married and settled down like everybody else."

"Oh, no!" the lad cried out angrily. "I simply must punish that cheat!"

He took the magic cap and left, going right to the Czar's palace. There he donned the cap, went through the gate past the sentry, and opened the door to the Czarivna's chambers. She did not see anything, although she heard the door squeak. Since he was invisible, he could come close enough to her to start flogging her.

The Czarivna lost her power of speech from fright. For three days in a row he belabored her thus. She thrashed around, trying to defend herself, and finally tore the cap off his head by accident. And lo! there was the culprit standing before her. She had him whipped savagely and ordered him thrown out of the palace, after hiding his cap.

"It'll come in handy one day," she said. "I suffered from that tramp, but not in vain."

The lad, his clothes in tatters from the whipping, and he himself half-famished, went back home.

"Why do you have such a sad and tortured look?" his elder brothers asked him.

"The Czarivna stole my magic cap."

"We told you not to mess with her, didn't we? But you paid us no heed." Still, the lad could not reconcile himself to his defeat.

"I must get her! I'll ravage the realm of that vile cheat with fire and sword."

The brothers tried to talk him out of it:

"Don't go anywhere. Stay at home. We've got enough of everything! Marry and you'll be happy!"

But he would not listen. He took the whistle and set off for the Czar's realm again. He stopped at the border, and announced through a messenger:

"My name is so and so, and I herewith declare war on you. If you do not bring your army to the border, I will destroy your entire czardom."

The Czar marshalled a huge army and deployed it along the border. The lad met him single-handedly.

How is he going to fight us? the army wondered.

Presently the lad took out his whistle and blew it. The next moment troops began to spring out of the ground like so many grains, covering the field from end to end. The general came rushing up to him, and asked:

“What can I do for you, Your Majesty?”

“Destroy all the officers of the hostile army, but do not touch the men, because they are not to blame for anything. Leave the Czar alive for the time being!”

“Your orders will be fulfilled, Your Majesty!”

The officers were dealt with in a minute, which deprived the troops of their commanders — there was no one to lead the host.

The Czar realized that the war was lost and returned sadly from the battlefield with the remainder of his troops.

“What happened, Father?” his daughter asked him.

“Well, it all happened this way... No sooner did the lad blow his whistle than troops appeared out of nowhere. There were as many of them as grains of sand in the sea, leaves on the trees, and blades of grass on the ground. All the officers were destroyed, and there was no one to command my army.”

But the Czarivna was much wiser than her father.

“Father, declare war on him again,” she said. “I’ll go with you to the front line. I’ll become invisible, come up to him, and snatch the magic whistle out of his hand.”

The Czar did as he was asked. He again declared war and led his troops to the border. As soon as hostilities broke out, the Czarivna put on the magic cap and became invisible. She stole up to the lad and snatched the whistle out of his hand.

“Haven’t you finished fighting yet?” she asked with a smirk.

Now she did the whistling, and troops began to pour out onto the field like so many grains of sand. The general rushed up to her:

“What can I do for you, Your Majesty?”

Not far away there rose a tall mountain that looked like an island rising out of the surrounding landscape. The sides of the mountain were as smooth as glass, and it reached right to the sky. Nobody knew what was on top of that mountain, because clouds always hid it from view. The Czarivna pointed to the mountain, and said to the general:

“Haul that wretch to the top of that mountain, lest he ever come down again. If he tries, he’ll be smashed to smithereens anyway.”



The general's men seized the lad and carried him to the top of the mountain.

More dead than alive, he lay in one place for a long time, believing he had landed in the hereafter.

By and by he came to his senses and took a look around his new surroundings. Here the sun shone much brighter than down in the valley; it was much warmer, and the air was cleaner and fresher than down below.

“So it's possible to live here, after all!” he said to himself.

On top of that mountain grew a wonderful orchard with every sort of fruit he could possibly desire. From that orchard wafted such a delicious fragrance that it alone was enough to exist on.

The lad began to eat apples, pears, cherries, plums and everything else his heart desired. The plums, pears and apples on that mountain were a hundred times better and tastier than the ones in the valley below.

He lived in that garden for quite a long time. Instead of growing weaker, he put on weight and became stronger. Once as he walked around the garden he approached the edge of the mountain, lay down on his belly, and looked down. Oh, how far away and deep the earth looked from there. He realized he could not even see it.

One day during his usual walk around the garden, he came upon a gigantic walnut tree. Its crown was so broad that an entire village could have been sheltered beneath it. By the walnut tree there was a spring. The lad drank of the fresh water, and he liked it so much that he exclaimed:

“I've never tasted such water in my life!”

Once he had drunk of the water, he began to understand the language of animals as well as birds and insects — of every living creature, as a matter of fact.

He lay down under the walnut tree for a rest. Presently a crow came flying by and lit on the tip of a branch. The branch rocked under its weight, and the crow flapped its wings lest the branch break. Then the crow gave a mighty caw, and shortly afterward another crow came flying up. It also responded with a caw, and they began to talk. The lad understood everything they said.

“Hello, Mother!”

“Hello, my daughter!”

“What’s new, Mother?”

“The news is that in three months the mountain is to sink until it is level with the ground. If the man who has become our Czar walks to the edge of the mountain, he can easily step onto the earth again. The top of the mountain will sink exactly to the level of the earth. Then it will rise again and become as tall as it is now.”

The daughter crow cawed in response and flew away.

“Farewell, Mother!”

“Farewell, my daughter!”

The mother crow took off in the opposite direction.

The lad had attentively heard out the crow’s conversation, and fell to thinking: was the mother crow really telling the truth? Would the top of this mountain really sink to the level of the earth?

He became restless, walking up and down the garden. Suddenly the wind wafted a strange fragrant aroma he had never smelled before, although the garden had a lot of wonderful fragrances. But this particular one was so pleasant it tingled his bones.

Where can it be coming from? he wondered.

He walked around the orchard in search of it, and in the end came across a wonderful apple tree bearing such fragrant apples as he had never seen in his life. Not far from it grew a pear tree. The pears, too, gave off a heady aroma.

The branches of both trees were so densely interwoven that they practically formed a single crown. They were laden with so much fruit that they bent right down to the ground.

The lad sat down in between the trees and delighted in the sight of the abundant harvest of fruit. Then he reached for a branch and picked one of the ripest apples.

No sooner had he taken a bite out of it than he became dizzy and felt horns growing out of his head. They kept growing until they reached the branches, cut through the leaves, and pushed up right to the top of the tree as they intertwined and wound round the branches and twigs. The horns pushed the lad to the ground so solidly that he could not budge an inch.

“Oh, for what sin has God punished me so cruelly?” the lad lamented. “It looks like this is really the end of me!”

As he lay there motionlessly on the ground, he still did not realize that the apple was the cause of his trouble. He lay thus for several days and nights, growing terribly hungry. Presently a pear plumped onto the ground and rolled his way.

“How good that one at least has fallen!” the lad said, overjoyed. “I’ll eat it, because I’m just dying of hunger.”

No sooner had he eaten the pear than he became dizzy again, and the horns dropped off his head. The lad jumped to his feet for joy. Then he went about picking pears and apples from the other trees to quell his hunger. When he had eaten his fill, he again sat down for a rest, because the horns had exhausted him.

Why did those horrible horns begin to grow from my head? he turned over in his mind as he rested. Could it have been because of that apple I ate? Well, let me try another one. No sooner had he taken a bite than the horns came pushing out of his head again. They toppled him to the ground with their horrible weight and he could not budge an inch. But after he had eaten a pear the horns fell off.

That is how he learned the mystery of the magic apples and pears. He stuffed a sack full of apples and pears and went to the edge of the mountain, waiting impatiently for it to sink.

He waited for a long time, or so it seemed, because he was dying to be back on earth. Suddenly the mountain began to sink — and so rapidly that he remained suspended in mid-air and moments later found himself entangled in the branches of a tree. He took hold of a branch and held on fast, his feet flying up as the mountain took him headlong toward the earth.

It did not last long, because the mountain was level with the earth shortly thereafter. The lad quickly ran to the edge of a cliff. He had put just one foot on the earth, with the other still on the cliff, when the mountain began to rise so quickly that the earth swayed before his eyes. He got so frightened that he forgot what happened next. When he came to his senses and looked around, he saw that the mountain had risen to the sky, its peak shrouded once again by clouds.

He rested on the grass for a long, long time, and then set out on his journey.

He decided to return to his brothers for some money, and then to punish the vile Czarivna as she so richly deserved.

He met many a hardship before he reached home. After he had rested and regained his strength, he took some money, and went to the capital city where lived the Czarivna who had cheated him. He donned the tatters of a beggar and went to the market.

After paying the tax for the right to sell his fruit, he put out a pair of apples. Moments later the entire market was filled with a heady fragrance that made people turn around in surprise. They rushed to his stall and asked in amazement:

“How much for the apples?”

“Oh, they’re expensive! You can’t buy them, because you don’t have enough money.”

The lad asked such a high price the common people could not afford to pay, of course. Shortly thereafter the Czar’s servants appeared at the market, and the fragrance of the apples reached their noses as well. On learning of the high price, they returned to the palace, and informed the Czarivna:

“There are wondrous apples on sale at the market. Their fragrance has filled the entire area. But their price is formidable.”

“Never mind the price — we have enough money,” the Czarivna said. “I’ll go and buy the apples myself.”

She took a wicker basket and set off for the market. The moment the lad saw her he pushed his cap down over his eyes lest she recognize him.

“How much for the apples?” she asked.

He named a high price, adding: “But I’ll lower it a bit, because nobody’s buying my apples, and I’ve been sitting here too long just wasting my time. I’ve sold a couple of them, but I have three left — the very best. Take them; I’m tired of sitting here.”

The Czarivna bought the apples and took them to her palace. Just then the royal family was sitting down for their midday meal. She gave her parents an apple apiece.

“Eat this after dinner, Father,” she said to the Czar.

The second apple she gave to her mother, saying:
“Eat this after dinner, Mother.”

The third apple she kept for herself.

The Czar, Czarina and their daughter went to their apartments, each taking an apple along. But no sooner had they taken a bite than horns began to grow from their heads, and they kept pushing out so rapidly that some minutes later they had reached the ceiling, twisting and turning in every direction. They would have kept on growing if there had been enough space for them. The horns pressed the Czar’s family to the floor so firmly that they could not budge an inch.

Scared out of their wits, the Czar, Czarina and their daughter raised a horrible cry and lament, which made the servants come running. But at the sight of this horror, the servants took to their heels.

The news spread like wildfire throughout the city and the realm — the Czar, Czarivna and their daughter had horns growing out of their heads. The news reached the press and hit the front pages of newspapers. The entire world knew of the woe that had befallen the royal family.

The newspapers were bought eagerly, for everyone wanted to read about those horrible horns. Some pitied the Czar, and others had a rib-aching laughter at his predicament. Of course, there was more of the latter than of the former, as always.

“They had it coming for a long time!” the people said.

Physicians began to arrive from all over the realm and from all over the world. No matter what they did — applying ointments, rubbing the horns with concoctions, or trying to cut them off — their efforts were in vain. The patients were dying of pain from the treatment. No sooner would a piece of horn be cut off than another, even bigger piece grew in its place.

After he had sold the apples, the lad returned to his homeland. Let them bear the torment for a while, he reasoned. He spent quite a long time at home, preparing himself for the role as a doctor. He ate and ate until he had a big belly (All doctors had a big belly.) He bought himself all sorts of medicines and a physician’s gown, a leather bag for the medicines, a britzka and a pair of fine horses. To make his appearance the more imposing, he hired a coachman.

As he rode in his britzka, the people were awed: “What a fine physician he must be!”

“What a fine coachman he has, too!”

Indeed, the coachman sat up front with a proud mien, holding the reins, and at the back of his cap a red feather fluttered in the breeze.

The physician drove into the capital city in his elegant britzka. He took expensive rooms at the local hotel and informed the proprietor that he had come from a distant realm. His appearance gave the local lords the impression that he was a renowned man in his profession.

Not only the physician but his coachman as well were accorded the highest respect and treatment.

The physician ordered himself an expensive meal, and as he ate it, he reached out for the newspapers that were lying around on the tables. Then he asked to be served an expensive drink, emptied the goblet, lit up a cigarette, and as he was puffing on it, he read the newspapers.

He tapped his plate with his fork, and the next moment the waiter was at his side.

“What can I do for you, sir?”

“Bring me such and such a wine!” he said, ordering the most expensive wine the house could offer — a drink fit only for kings.

After the waiter had brought him the wine, the physician asked:

“What’s happened to His Majesty? I read in the newspapers that he...”

“Oh, most honorable sir, so great a woe has visited our Czar that it is simply horrible to tell. Doctors from all over the world have come here, but they can do nothing to cure his ailment.”

“Well, I’m on my way to another realm... to treat a sick prince. Perhaps I could have helped your Czar, but, unfortunately, I have no time. I must hurry to the prince...”

Moments later the chief minister was informed by telephone:

“There is a renowned foreign physician here who could heal our Czar. But he is hurrying to a sick prince in another realm. Come quickly! Maybe you can talk him into saving our Czar!”

The minister mounted a spirited horse and whipped it viciously so as to get to that famous physician as fast as he could. He introduced himself:

“I am the chief minister here.”

“And I am such and such a physician.”

“Sir, our royal family has a terrible affliction. Would you please help them? They have been suffering too long as it is.”

“I would be willing to come to their aid, but, unfortunately, I am hurrying to get to the neighboring realm where a rich prince awaits my assistance.”

“But, sir, since you are passing through our city, could you please examine our unfortunate Czar at least. He will shower you with gold.”

The minister pleaded and implored until the physician agreed:

“All right, I will examine him. But if the treatment for the disease will take too much time, I will administer it only on my way back from the prince.”

The physician, formally dressed, thickset and red in the face, and heavily made up lest anyone recognize him, was then taken to the Czar’s chambers. He opened his bag, took out the instruments he needed, and began to tap the patient’s horns.

The Czar burst into tears from the pain.

“This is not an easy case,” the doctor said. “The disease can be cured, but it will take much time. Unfortunatley, I am in a hurry now.”

Then there was imploring and pleading again. The Czar, Czarina, their daughter, and the minister as well cried for help:

“Honored physician, please remedy our misfotune. You will be rewarded with gold by the trainloads...”

The lad took his time. At long last he agreed to treat the royal family:

“I agree on one condition — only the patients may remain in the royal apartments, while all the courtiers, servants, and cooks must leave the palace for the duration of the treatment. There must not be anyone around during my operation.”

“I suppose I have no other choice,” the Czar agreed. “Whatever torments there will be, I will bear them. If I die, at least it will be without any horns.”

The Czar ordered all the courtiers, ministers and servants to leave the royal apartments.

When there was only the royal family left, the physician commenced the operation.

“Your Majesty, I must let your blood to cure you. To this end, I must beat you. You may eat only sparingly throughout the treatment, and I will beat you every day for a fortnight. Then the horns will fall off. Of that I guarantee you.”

The Czar agreed to everything. So the doctor got down to work. He had a whip of ox tendons with which he began to scourge the naked Czar so hard it made him roar with pain. But all that did not proceed as fast as it is told. For a fortnight the lad laced the Czar and rubbed ointments into his horns. He had lambasted His Highness to such a degree that the poor man was barely breathing. In the end the lad produced a pear, cut it into pieces, threw them into a glass, mixed the pieces with water, and gave it to the patient to drink. No sooner had the Czar downed the medicine than the horns dropped off.

Then the physician ordered a britzka over the telephone to have the Czar delivered to the hospital, since he had no horns. When the Czar was brought to the hospital, the doctors had a look at him and wondered why he had been beaten so black and blue. For all that they were happy not to find a single trace of the horns and heaped praise upon the foreign physician:

“He must be a really wise man since he has cured the Czar of such a terrible disease.”

Then it was the Czarina’s turn to be treated, and the physician did with her the same as he had done with His Majesty. To tell the truth, he did not lash her as viciously, because she was of a weaker sort. Throughout the whipping she squeaked in a high voice like a goat’s. In a fortnight he gave her a pear to eat, and the horns dropped off.

She, too, was delivered to the hospital. The newspapers carried joyous reports on the royal family having been saved from the horrible disease. And everyone praised the foreign physician to the skies.

Then came the Czarivna’s turn to be treated. The physician examined her, tapped her horns, and said:

“Oh, my poor dear, this will be the most difficult operation, because your blood is young, and that means you must be beaten the hardest.”

The Czarivna was a soft, plump girl, and the color of her skin was so white no goose feathers could match it. When the physician began lashing her, she screamed so loudly it almost split his ear drums. But the physician laid on the

blows without any pity. He lashed her just short of death and tortured her so that she was prepared to bear the horns if only he would stop flogging her.

No sooner would the physician open the door to her chamber than she would start to scream at the top of her lungs before he had even started the treatment. Thus the lad treated the Czarivna for a fortnight. Then he left her chamber and came back the next morning, saying:

“Promise that you will do whatever I tell you. Otherwise you will meet your death today.”

“I promise, I promise.”

“Do you recognize me?”

She looked closely at him, and said:

“No, I don’t recognize you.”

He took off his cap.

“Do you recognize me now? I am the one you played cards with and cheated out of his purse, his magic cap, and his whistle. I am the one you ordered dumped on top of the mountain.”

The Czarivna recognized him then.

“So what do you prefer — dying or returning my possessions to me?” the lad asked.

The Czarivna was so scared she could not utter a word. Yet she was loath to surrender the magic purse, the cap and the whistle.

So the physician resumed his “treatment,” and began beating her flesh so viciously she moaned for mercy:

“Oh, I will give everything to you!”

“Where are my things then?”

“There’s a hole under the stove; the hole is covered with clay so you won’t see a trace! Look there and you will find the purse.”

He searched for a long, long time until he found the purse. After checking its magic power he put it in his pocket.

“And where is the magic cap?” the asked, returning to the Czarivna.

“There is a hole under the wardrobe. Search there and you will find it.”

He found the magic cap as well, checked its magic power, and put it into his bag.

“Where is the whistle?”

“Tear up the floor under the table, and there you will find the whistle.”

He found the whistle, too, checked its magic power and put it in his bag.

Stepping up to the Czarivna, he said then:

“On parting I will administer to you a ‘medicine’ which you will remember for a long time.”

And again he basted her white flesh so badly he almost flogged her to kingdom come.

Once he was through with the “treatment” and had administered the last bit of “medicine,” the lad produced a pear. She ate it, and her horns dropped off. Then he made a phone call to have her delivered to the hospital, and told her by way of parting:

“Now mind you, if you ever breathe a word about me, you will die on the spot.”

So she did not tell anyone how he had treated her, the Czar and the Czarina.

The lad got into his britzka and left for an unknown city. There he rested for a month, during which the local doctors treated the royal family after his beatings. When he received word that they had recovered, he declared war on them.

The Czar’s army was deployed in battle order. The lad produced his whistle, blew it, and in that instant troops appeared. There were so many of them as grains of sand in the sea, leaves on the trees, and blades of grass on the ground. Presently the general came running up:

“What can I do for you, Your Majesty?”

“Have the Czar, Czarina, and Czarivna destroyed! Destroy also the ministers, senior officers, and all the treacherous lords! After all of them have been dealt with, ask the junior officers and men, ‘Do you submit or do you choose death?’”

And that’s exactly how it happened. The Czar, Czarina, Czarivna, ministers, senior officers, and all the lords who had fleeced the innocent people were visited with death. Then the junior officers and men were asked:

“Do you submit or do you choose death?”

“We do not want to spill our blood for the sake of our enemies!” the troops responded.

The war ceased, and hostilities were broken off. Everyone applauded and shouted:

“Long live the young Czar!”

The young Czar ascended the throne of the realm. He took for his wife a beautiful and honest girl from a simple and industrious family of commoners. After the engagement they celebrated their wedding, to which he invited his brothers. No czars, kings, counts or great lords were invited to the wedding, because he respected and loved the poor working people. Each of his guests he showered with valuable presents, and declared at the wedding that the poor were exempt from large taxes.

Great was the joy of the common people, because power had passed into the hands of a man who loved the workers and peasants. Such a man could rule the realm justly.

The young Czar and his wife lived happily in love. Perhaps they are still living if they have not died.

And this brings us to the end of our tale.





CZAREVICH IVAN AND THE BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN

Once upon a time there was a czar and czarina who had three sons. The Czarina never left the palace even for a walk. When the sons started attending school, the children teased them that their mother never went out of the palace. Back at home the sons complained to her about it. So one day she left the palace for a walk. Suddenly the Black Raven from the Black Realm swooped out of nowhere, snatched her up, and carried her away. For some days thereafter the Czar and his sons grieved, and then the sons said:

“Father, give us your blessing and we will leave in quest of our mother.”

The Czar made all the preparations for their journey and let them go.

On and on the sons walked until they came to a little cottage wherein dwelled an old woman.

“Do you know, granny, the way to the Black Raven from the Black Realm?” the sons asked.

“No, I don’t,” she replied. “Maybe my servants do.”

Thereupon she gave a mighty shout and whistle, and lo! wolves and lions and all sorts of animals came running up.

“Do you know the way to the Black Raven from the Black Realm?” the sons asked.

“No, we don’t,” the animals replied.

The sons continued on their quest. On and on they walked until they came to another cottage wherein dwelled an old woman as well.

“Do you know, granny, the way to the Black Raven from the Black Realm?” they asked.

“No, I don’t,” she replied. “Maybe my servants do.”

Thereupon she gave a mighty shout and whistle, and lo! lizards, snakes and all sorts of reptiles came crawling up.

“Do you know the way to the Black Raven from the Black Realm?” the sons asked.

“No, we don’t,” the reptiles replied.

The sons continued their quest until they came to a third cottage wherein dwelled an old woman, too.

“Do you know, granny, the way to the Black Raven from the Black Realm?” the sons asked.

“No, I don’t,” she replied. “Maybe my servants do.”

Thereupon she gave a mighty shout and whistle, and lo! eagles, kites, crows, sparrows and all sorts of birds came flying.

“Do you know the way to the Black Raven from the Black Realm?” the sons asked.

“No, we don’t,” the birds replied. “But maybe the one-winged bird knows.”

The old woman had in her service a sorry looking worn-out bird with one wing.

“Have her brought here!” she ordered.

That same instant the birds darted off to fulfill her command.

“Do you know the way to the Black Raven from the Black Realm?” the old woman asked the one-winged bird when it was brought before her.

“Yes, I do,” the bird replied.

“Good. Take these people there, and mind you, direct them to the beautiful maiden, or else I’ll cut your other wing off.”

The sons thanked the old woman and then followed the bird which, skipping and flapping her wing as best she could, led them to a place where a red-hot fiery shield blocked their path.

“Fare thee well,” the bird said. “Walk boldly forward.”

The elder brothers froze in their tracks, but Czarevich Ivan walked on, and said:

“Wait for me here. One of us, either Mother or I, will return.”

As he walked into the fiery shield, it parted and he walked through.

On and on he walked until he came to a palace at the gate of which stood six lions, their tongues lolling from thirst. He scooped up some water, drank of it himself, then gave some to the lions to drink; they bowed to him in gratitude and let him pass. Then he entered the palace and came upon a sleeping maiden as dazzlingly beautiful as a bright star. Since he was tired after the journey, he sat down at a table, propped his head up with one hand and fell fast asleep. Some time later the maiden woke up, and at the sight of him she drew her sword and rushed up to him with the intent of killing him. But then she thought to herself: He did not want to kill me, so why should I want to kill him? So she roused him, and asked why he had come here.

“The Black Raven from the Black Realm carried my mother away, so I came here for her.”

“The Black Raven is my father,” the maiden said. “Go to my second sister now. She will show you the way.”

He thanked her and left.

On his way he came to a second palace, at the gate of which stood twelve lions, their jaws drooping and their tongues lolling from thirst. He scooped up some water, drank of it himself, then gave some to the lions; they bowed to him in gratitude and let him pass. Then he entered the second palace and saw

there a maiden more dazzlingly beautiful than the first. He admired her for some time, then propped his head on one hand at the table and fell fast asleep. When she awoke she reached for her sword, but then thought to herself: Why should I kill him when he didn't kill me while I was asleep. So she roused him and asked why he had come.

He told her everything.

"So it happens that you are our brother," she said. "This calls for a celebration."

After she had treated him to meat and drink, she said:

"Go to my third sister now. She will show you the way."

Then they took leave of each other.

The next palace he came to had at the gate twenty-four lions, their jaws drooping and their tongues lolling from thirst. He scooped up some water, drank of it himself, then gave some to the lions, and they let him pass. When he entered the palace, he saw a maiden much more beautiful than the first two. He admired her for some time, and then fell fast asleep as before. She also wanted to kill him, but thought better of it, roused him from his slumber instead, and after learning the reason for his appearance, gave him an apple.

"Take this apple," she said. "Wherever it rolls, follow it, and you will reach your destination."

He thanked her and left. Indeed, the apple rolled right to the palace of the Black Raven, where he found his mother.

"Good day to you, Mother."

"Good day to you, my son!"

She asked him how he had found her, and then gave him an awl and a mace.

"Go and stand behind that pillar yonder," she said. "When the raven comes flying and lights on the pillar to rest, he won't notice you at first."

He did as he was advised. Presently the Black Raven came flying up, lit upon the pillar, looked about to see whether there was anything for him to feed on, and then spied the lad below.

"Oh wonderful, you'll make a good snack," the Black Raven said.



“You’ll choke first before it happens, you carrion hound,” the lad countered. The Black Raven swooped down from his perch to attack, but the lad jumped aside and straddled the raven, driving the awl into his back and hitting him with the mace. The raven shot up into the sky, carrying the lad to the clouds and above them. But the lad kept beating him again and again until the carrion-eater dropped to the ground and burst to pieces. Then the lad went to his mother.

“Dress yourself suitably, Mother,” he said. “We are leaving for home.”

After his mother had dressed herself suitably, they had a fiery carriage harnessed, took the three beautiful maidens along, and drove away. When they drove up to the fiery shield, Czarevich Ivan boasted that he could get through the shield without sitting in the carriage. The mother and the maidens rode through, but he failed to pass through on foot in the end. He roamed aimlessly for quite a few days thereafter, and then decided to return to the old palace in hope of finding something to eat. When he got there, he did not find a single scrap of food except for the apple the third maiden had given him. So he sat down and burst into tears. Presently Closecropped Ivan popped up.

“Why are you weeping?” he asked.

“I have nothing to eat but this apple.”

“What more could you wish? Give it to me.”

He rolled the apple on the ground and lo! there appeared meat and drink and three musicians to entertain them gaily during their repast.

After they had eaten heartily, Closecropped Ivan said:

“Let us go for the horses and ride to your home.”

They descended into the cellar, broke down twelve doors, broke twelve chains asunder, and led out two horses that were as hot as fire. When they mounted the horses and galloped off, they did not even notice how they raced past the fiery shield.

When the mother and the three maidens came to the Czar’s palace, the two brothers concluded that Ivan would not show up till doomsday, so they forced their mother and the maidens to tell everyone it was they who had rescued them. Shortly thereafter the two brothers made preparations to celebrate their weddings. Just then Czarevich Ivan and Closecropped Ivan appeared in the realm. They rented a room at the home of a soldier and listened intently to

the talk of the town. Soon they learned that the Czarevich's brothers were preparing for their wedding. The beautiful maidens, however, were against this, and said to the brothers:

"We do not have the proper apparel for the wedding. If you make us dresses like the ones we had at our father's, but without taking our measurements, and exactly of the same cut, piece by piece, stitch by stitch, just like what we had, then we will marry you."

The brothers had all the tailors summoned, but none of them would agree to take up the job. So Closecropped Ivan said to the soldier:

"Go and offer your services."

The soldier refused.

"You just go there and ask a measure of gold for the job, and I'll take care of all the rest."

While the soldier went to the palace to offer his services, Closecropped Ivan jumped on his horse and galloped off to the Black Realm where he picked up the dresses and returned by dawn.

"Here, take them to the maidens," he said to the soldier in the morning.

At the sight of the dresses the maidens did not utter a word but only exchanged winks. When they had put on the dresses, they said:

"Now it would be fine if we had our boots to match these dresses."

The brothers rushed to the shoemakers, but none of them would agree to take the job. So they turned to the soldier. He, too, said no, but Closecropped Ivan insisted:

"You just go there and ask two measures of gold for the job, and I'll take care of all the rest."

While the soldier went to offer his services, Closecropped Ivan galloped off to the Black Realm and brought the maiden's boots. At the sight of them the maidens were filled all the more so with joy.

"He must be somewhere near here," they said. Then, turning to the two brothers, they demanded:

"We'd like to have our kerchiefs as well."

This time the brothers did not turn to anyone, but went straight to the soldier:

“Get those kerchiefs for us, you so and so!”

As soon as Closecropped Ivan learned of this, he galloped off and brought the kerchiefs back by dawn.

The beautiful maidens went after the soldier, trying to find out who had brought him all these things. In the end he confessed. So the maidens went to the Czar and told him it was Czarevich Ivan and not his villainous brothers who had saved them.

The Czar had Czarevich Ivan brought before him and questioned. Then he had the two brothers tied to a pair of unbroken horses which tore the villains asunder. Czarevich Ivan chose the youngest maiden for wife, and they lived happily ever after.

Over there three lanterns glimmered, past them walked three gentlemen, and they spied three apples — one apple is for me, the other for Lazarus, and the third is for the one who told this tale.



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