

LEO TOLSTOY

TOLSTOI FOR THE
YOUNG. SELECT TALES
FROM TOLSTOI

Лев Толстой

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Select tales from Tolstoi**

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Leo Tolstoy

Tolstoi for the young / Select tales from Tolstoi

IVAN THE FOOL

THE STORY OF IVAN THE FOOL AND HIS TWO BROTHERS SIMON THE WARRIOR AND TARAS THE POT-BELLIED, AND OF HIS DEAF AND DUMB SISTER, AND THE OLD DEVIL AND THREE LITTLE DEVILKINS.

Once upon a time there lived a rich peasant, who had three sons – Simon the Warrior, Taras the Pot-bellied, and Ivan the Fool, and a deaf and dumb daughter, Malania, an old maid.

Simon the Warrior went off to the wars to serve the King; Taras the Pot-bellied went to a merchant's to trade in the town, and Ivan the Fool and the old maid stayed at home to do the work of the house and the farm. Simon the Warrior earned a high rank for himself and an estate and married a nobleman's daughter. He had a large income and a large estate, but he could never make both ends meet, for, what he managed to gather in, his wife managed to squander; thus it was that he never had any money.

And Simon the Warrior went to his estate one day to collect his income, and his steward said to him, "There is nothing to squeeze money out of; we have neither cattle, nor implements, nor horses, nor cows, nor ploughs, nor harrows; we must get all these things first, then there will be an income."

Then Simon the Warrior went to his father and said, "You are rich, father; and have given me nothing, let me have a third of your possessions and I will set up my estate."

And the old man replied, "Why should I? You have brought nothing to the home. It would be unfair to Ivan and the girl."

And Simon said, "Ivan is a fool and Malania is deaf and dumb; they do not need much, surely."

"Ivan shall decide," the old man said.

And Ivan said, "I don't mind; let him take what he wants."

Simon took a portion of his father's goods and moved them to his estate, and once more he set out to serve the King.

Taras the Pot-bellied made a great deal of money and married a merchant's widow, but still, it seemed to him that he had not enough, so he too went to his father and said, "Give me my portion, father." And the old man was loath to give Taras his portion, and he said, "You have brought us nothing; everything in the home has been earned by Ivan; it would be unfair to him and the girl."

And Taras said, "Ivan is a fool, what does he need? He cannot marry, for no one would have him, and the girl is deaf and dumb and does not need much either." And turning to Ivan, he said, "Let me have half the corn, Ivan. I will not take any implements, and as for the cattle, I only want the grey cob; he is of no use to you for the plough."

Ivan laughed.

"Very well," he said, "you shall have what you want."

And Taras was given his portion, and he carted the corn off to the town and took away the grey cob, and Ivan was left with only the old mare to work the farm and support his father and mother.

II

The old Devil was annoyed that the three brothers had not quarrelled over the matter and had parted in peace. He summoned three little Devilkins.

“There are three brothers,” he said, “Simon the Warrior, Taras the Pot-bellied, and Ivan the Fool. I want them all to quarrel and they live in peace and goodwill. It is the Fool’s fault. Go to these three brothers, the three of you, and confound them so that they will scratch out each others’ eyes. Do you think you can do it?”

“We can,” they said.

“How will you do it?”

“We will ruin them first,” they said, “so that they have nothing to eat, then we will put them all together and they will begin to fight.”

“I see you know your work,” the old Devil said. “Go then, and do not return to me until you have confounded the whole three, or else I will skin you alive.”

And the Devilkins set out to a bog to confer on the matter, and they argued and argued, for each wanted the easiest work, and they decided to cast lots and each to take the brother that fell to him, and whichever finished his work first was to help the others. And the Devilkins cast lots and fixed a day when they should meet again in the bog, in order to find out who had finished his work and who was in need of help.

The day arrived and the Devilkins gathered together in the bog. They began to discuss their work. The first to give his account was the one who had undertaken Simon the Warrior. “My work is progressing well,” he said. “To-morrow Simon will return to his father.”

“How did you manage it?” the others asked him.

“First of all,” he said, “I gave Simon so much courage that he promised the King to conquer the whole world. And the King made him the head of his army and sent him to make war on the King of India. That same night I damped the powder of Simon’s troops and I went to the King of India and made him numberless soldiers out of straw. And when Simon saw himself surrounded by the straw soldiers, a fear came upon him and he ordered the guns to fire, but the guns and cannon would not go off. And Simon’s troops were terrified and ran away like sheep, and the King of India defeated them. Simon was disgraced. He was deprived of his rank and estate and to-morrow he is to be executed. I have only one day left in which to get him out of the dungeon and help him to escape home. To-morrow I shall have finished with him, so I want you to tell me which of you two is in need of help.”

Then the second Devilkin began to tell of his work with Taras. “I do not want help,” he said; “my work is also going well. Taras will not live in the town another week. The first thing I did was to make his belly grow bigger and fill him with greed. He is now so greedy for other people’s goods that whatever he sees he must buy. He has bought up everything he could lay his eyes on, and spent all his money, and is still buying with borrowed money. He has taken so much upon himself, and become so entangled that he will never pull himself out. In a week he will have to repay the borrowed money, and I will turn his wares into manure so that he cannot repay, then he will go to his father.”

“And how is your work getting on?” they asked the third Devilkin about Ivan.

“My work is going badly,” he said. “The first thing I did was to spit into Ivan’s jug of kvas to give him a stomach-ache and then I went into his fields and made the soil as hard as stones so that he could not move it. I thought he would not plough it, but the fool came with his plough and began to pull. His stomach-ache made him groan, yet still he went on ploughing. I broke one plough for him and he went home and repaired another, and again persisted in his work. I crawled beneath the ground and clutched hold of his ploughshares, but I could not hold them – he pressed upon the plough so hard, and the shares were sharp and cut my hands. He has finished it all but one strip. You must come and help me, mates, for singly we shall never get the better of him, and all our labour

will be wasted. If the fool keeps on tilling his land, the other two brothers will never know what need means, for he will feed them.”

The first Devilkin offered to come and help to-morrow when he had disposed of Simon the Warrior, and with that the three Devilkins parted.

III

Ivan had ploughed all the fallow but one strip, and he went to finish that. His stomach ached, yet he had to plough. He undid the harness ropes, turned over the plough and set out to the fields. He drove one furrow, but coming back, the ploughshares caught on something that seemed like a root.

“What a strange thing!” Ivan thought. “There were no roots here, yet here’s a root!”

He put his hand into the furrow and clutched hold of something soft. He pulled it out. It was a thing as black as a root and it moved. He looked closely and saw that it was a live Devilkin.

“You horrid little wretch, you!”

Ivan raised his hand to dash its head against the plough, but the Devilkin squealed, “Don’t kill me, and I’ll do whatever you want me to.”

“What can you do?”

“Tell me what you want.”

Ivan scratched his head.

“My stomach aches,” he said; “can you make it well?”

“I can.”

“Do it, then.”

The Devilkin bent down, rummaged about with his nails in the furrow and pulled out three little roots, grown together.

“There,” he said; “if any one swallows a single one of these roots all pain will pass away from him.”

Ivan took the three roots, separated them and swallowed one. His stomach-ache instantly left him.

“Let me go now,” the Devilkin begged once more. “I will dive through the earth and never bother you again.”

“Very well,” Ivan said; “go, in God’s name.”

At the mention of God the Devilkin plunged into the ground like a stone thrown into water, and there was nothing but the hole left. Ivan thrust the two remaining little roots into his cap and went on with his ploughing. He finished the strip, turned over his plough and set off home. He unharnessed and went into the house, and there was his brother, Simon the Warrior, sitting at table with his wife, having supper. His estate had been taken from him; he had escaped from prison and come back to live with his father.

As soon as Simon the Warrior saw Ivan, he said to him, “I have come with my wife to live with you; will you keep us both until I find another place?”

“Very well,” Ivan said, “you can live here.”

When Ivan sat down by the table, the smell of him was displeasing to the lady and she said to her husband, “I cannot sup together with a stinking peasant.”

And Simon the Warrior said, “My lady says you do not smell sweet; you had better eat in the passage.”

“Very well,” Ivan said. “It is time for bed anyway, and I must feed the mare.”

Ivan took some bread and his coat and went out for the night.

IV

That night, having freed himself of Simon the Warrior, the first little Devilkin set out to seek Ivan's Devilkin, to help him plague the Fool as they had agreed. He came to the fields, looked all round for his mate, but he was nowhere to be seen; he only found a hole. "I see some misfortune has happened to my mate; I must take his place. The ploughing is all finished; I must upset the Fool at the mowing."

And the Devilkin went to the meadow and flooded it and trampled the hay in the mud.

Ivan awoke at daybreak, put his scythe in order and set out to the meadow to mow the hay. Ivan swung the scythe once, he swung it twice, but the scythe grew blunt and would not cut; he had to sharpen it. Ivan struggled and struggled and struggled.

"This won't do," he said; "I must go home and bring a whetstone and a hunk of bread. If it takes me a week I'll not give up until I've mowed it every bit."

And the Devilkin grew pensive when he heard these words.

"The Fool has a temper," he said; "I can't catch him this way; I must think of something else."

Ivan returned, sharpened his scythe and began to mow. The Devilkin crept into the grass, caught hold of the scythe by the heel and pushed the point into the ground. It was hard for Ivan, but he mowed all the grass, except a little piece in the swamp.

The Devilkin crept into the swamp, thinking, "Even if I have to cut my hands I won't let him mow that!"

Ivan came to the swamp. The grass was not thick, but the scythe could not cut through it. Ivan grew angry and began to mow with all his might. The Devilkin began to lose hold, seeing that he was in a bad plight, but he had no time to get away and took refuge in a bush. Ivan swung the scythe near the bush and cut off half the Devilkin's tail. He finished mowing the grass, told the old maid to rake it up and went away to mow the rye.

He came to the field with his sickle, but the Devilkin with the clipped tail was there before him. He had entangled the rye, so that the sickle could not take it. Ivan went back for his reaping-hook and reaped the whole field of rye. "Now," he said, "I must tackle the oats."

At these words the Devilkin with the clipped tail thought, "I did not trip him up with the rye, but I'll do so with the oats. If only the morrow would come!"

In the morning the Devilkin hurried off to the field of oats, but the oats were all harvested. Ivan had reaped them overnight so that less of the grain should be wasted. The Devilkin lost his temper at that.

"He has mutilated and exhausted me, the fool! I've never had such trouble on the battlefield even. The wretch doesn't sleep and you can't get ahead of him. I'll creep into the stacks of sheaves and rot the grain."

And the Devilkin crept into a stack of sheaves, and began to rot them. He heated them, grew warm himself and fell asleep.

Ivan harnessed the mare and set out with his sister to gather in the sheaves. He stopped by the stack and began to throw the sheaves into the cart. He had thrown up two sheaves and was going to take up a third, when the fork dug into the Devilkin's back. He looked at the prongs and saw a live Devilkin with his tail clipped, wriggling and writhing and trying to get away.

"You horrid little wretch! You here again!"

"I'm not the same one," the Devilkin pleaded. "The other was my brother. I belong to your brother Simon."

"Whoever you are you shall share the same fate."

Ivan was about to dash it against the cart, when the Devilkin cried out, "Spare me! I'll not worry you again, and I'll do whatever you want me to."

“What can you do?”

“I can make soldiers out of anything you choose.”

“What good are they?”

“You can make them do anything you like. Soldiers can do everything.”

“Can they play songs?”

“They can.”

“Very well; make some, then.”

And the Devilkin said, “Take a sheaf of rye and bump it upright on the ground, saying, —

My slave bids you be a sheaf no more.
Every straw contained in you,
Must turn into a soldier true.”

Ivan took the sheaf and banged it on the ground and repeated the Devilkin’s words. And the sheaf burst asunder and every straw turned into a soldier and at their head the drummer and bugler were playing. Ivan laughed aloud.

“That was clever of you,” he said. “It will amuse Malania.”

“Let me go now,” the Devilkin begged.

“Not yet,” Ivan said. “I shall want to make the soldiers out of chaff so as not to waste the grain. Show me first how to turn the soldiers into a sheaf again, so that I can thrash it.”

And the Devilkin said, “Repeat the words —

My slave bids every soldier be a straw
And turn into a sheaf once more.”

Ivan repeated the Devilkin’s words, and the soldiers turned into a sheaf again.

And again the Devilkin pleaded, “Let me go.”

“Very well,” Ivan said, taking him off the prongs. “Go, in God’s name.”

At the mention of God the Devilkin plunged into the ground like a stone thrown into water, and there was nothing but the hole left.

When Ivan reached home, his other brother, Taras, and his wife were sitting at table and having supper. Taras could not pay his debts; he fled from his creditors and came home to his father. As soon as he saw Ivan he said, “Until I can make some more money, will you keep me and my wife?”

“Very well,” Ivan said. “You can live here.”

Ivan took off his coat and sat down to table.

And Taras’ wife said, “I cannot sup with a fool; he smells of sweat.”

Taras the Pot-bellied said, “You do not smell sweet, Ivan; go and eat in the passage.”

“Very well,” Ivan said; “it’s time for bed, anyhow, and I must feed the mare.”

He took his coat and a piece of bread, and went out.

V

That night, having disposed of Taras, the third little Devilkin came to help his mates plague Ivan, as they had agreed. He came to the ploughed field and looked and looked, but could see no one; he only found the hole. Then he went to the meadow and found a piece of tail in the swamp, and in the rye-stubble field he found another hole.

“I see some misfortune has happened to my mates. I must take their places and tackle the Fool.”

The Devilkin set out to find Ivan.

Ivan had finished his work in the fields and had gone into the copse to cut wood.

The brothers found it too crowded to live together in their father’s house and they ordered Ivan to fell timber to build themselves new houses.

The Devilkin rushed into the wood and crept into the knots of the trees to prevent Ivan from felling them.

Ivan had cut a tree in the right way so that it should fall on to a clear space, but the tree seemed to be possessed, and fell over where it was not wanted, and got entangled among the branches. Ivan lopped them off with his bill-hook and at last, with great difficulty, brought down the tree. He began to fell another and the same thing was repeated. He struggled and struggled and succeeded only after great exertion. He began on a third and the same thing happened. Ivan had intended to fell fifty trees at least, and he had not managed more than ten, and night was coming on. Ivan was exhausted, and the steam rose from him and floated through the wood like a mist; yet still he would not give up. He felled another tree and his back began to ache so that he could not go on. He stuck his axe into the trunk of a tree and sat down to rest.

When the Devilkin realized that Ivan had ceased to work, he rejoiced. “He is worn out at last,” he thought; “now I can rest too.” And he sat himself astride on a branch, exulting.

Ivan rose, took out his axe, flourished it aloft, and brought it down so heavily that the tree came down with a crash. The Devilkin had no time to disentangle his legs; the branch broke and pinned down his paw.

Ivan began to clear the tree and behold! there was a live Devilkin. Ivan was amazed.

“You horrid little wretch! You here again!”

“I am not the same one,” the Devilkin said. “I belong to your brother Taras.”

“Whoever you may be, you shall share the same fate.” And Ivan raised the axe to bring it down on its head, but the Devilkin began to plead.

“Don’t kill me,” he said, “and I’ll do whatever you want me to.”

“What can you do?”

“I can make as much money as you like.”

“Very well,” Ivan said; “make it, then.”

And the Devilkin taught him what to do.

“Take some leaves from this oak and rub them in your hands and gold will fall to the ground.”

Ivan took the leaves and rubbed them in his hand and gold rained down.

“This is well,” he said; “on holidays it will amuse the children.”

“Let me go,” the Devilkin begged.

“I don’t mind,” Ivan said, and taking up his axe, he freed the Devilkin of the branch. “Go, in God’s name.”

At the mention of God the Devilkin plunged into the ground like a stone thrown into water and there was nothing but the hole left.

VI

The brothers built themselves houses and began to live apart. Ivan finished his work in the fields, brewed some beer and invited his brothers to a feast. The brothers did not accept his invitation.

“We do not go to feast with peasants,” they said.

Ivan treated the peasants and the peasant-women and drank himself until he got tipsy, and he went into the street and joined the dancers and singers. He approached the women, and bade them sing his praises.

“I will give you something you have never seen in your lives,” he said.

The women laughed and began to sing his praises, and when they had finished, they said, “Well, give us what you promised.”

“I will bring it in a moment,” Ivan said, and he took his seed-basket and ran into the wood.

The women laughed. “What a fool!” they said, and forgot all about him, when behold! Ivan returned, his basket full of something.

“Shall I share it out?”

“Do.”

Ivan took up a handful of gold and threw it to the women. Heavens! The women rushed to pick it up, the peasants after them, snatching it out of each others’ hands. One old woman was nearly killed in the fray.

Ivan laughed.

“You fools!” he said. “Why did you hurt Granny? If you are not so rough I’ll give you some more.”

He scattered more gold. The whole village came up. Ivan emptied his basket. The people asked for more, but he said, “Not now; another time I’ll give you more. Now let us dance. You play some songs.”

The women began to play.

“I don’t like your songs,” Ivan said.

“Do you know any better ones?”

“You shall see in a moment.”

Ivan went into a barn, took up a sheaf, thrashed it, stood it up, and banged it on the floor, and said —

My slave bids you be a sheaf no more.

Every straw contained in you

Must turn into a soldier true.

And the sheaf burst asunder and turned into soldiers, and the drummers and buglers played at their head. Ivan asked the soldiers to play some songs, and led them into the street. The people were amazed.

When the soldiers had played their songs Ivan took them back into the barn, forbidding any one to follow. He turned the soldiers into a sheaf again and threw it on a pile of straw, then he went home and lay down to sleep in the stables.

VII

Simon the Warrior heard of these things next morning, and went to his brother.

“Tell me,” he said, “where did you get the soldiers from, and where did you take them to?”

“What does it matter to you?”

“Matter, indeed! With soldiers one can do anything. One can conquer a kingdom.”

Ivan wondered.

“Really! Then why didn’t you tell me before?” he said. “I will make you as many soldiers as you like. It is well Malania and I have threshed so much straw.”

Ivan took his brother to the barn and said, “Look here, if I make the soldiers you must take them away at once, for if we have to feed them they will eat up the whole village in a day.”

Simon the Warrior promised to take the soldiers away, and Ivan began to make them. He banged a sheaf on the threshing-floor and a company appeared. He banged another sheaf and a second company appeared. He made so many soldiers that they filled the whole field.

“Are there enough now?” he asked.

Simon was overjoyed and said, “That will do, Ivan, thank you.”

“Very well. If you want more, come back and I’ll make them for you. There is plenty of straw this year.”

Simon the Warrior soon put his troops in order, and went away to make war.

He had no sooner gone than Taras the Pot-bellied came along. He, too, had heard of yesterday’s affair and he said to his brother, “Tell me where you get gold money from. If only I could get hold of some I could make it bring in money from the whole world.”

Ivan wondered.

“Really? Then why didn’t you tell me before? I’ll make you as much as you like.”

Taras was overjoyed.

“I shall be satisfied with three baskets full,” he said.

“Very well; come into the wood,” Ivan said; “but I had better harness the mare, for you won’t be able to carry it away.”

They rode into the wood. Ivan began to rub the oak leaves, and made a heap of gold.

“Is it enough?” he asked.

Taras was overjoyed.

“It will do for the present, thank you, Ivan,” he said.

“Very well,” Ivan said; “if you want more, come back and I’ll make it for you. There are plenty of leaves left.”

Taras the Pot-bellied gathered up a whole cartload of money, and went off to trade.

Both brothers had gone – Simon to make war and Taras to trade. And Simon the Warrior conquered a kingdom, and Taras the Pot-bellied made much money in trade.

When the two brothers met they told each other how they had come by their soldiers and money.

Simon the Warrior said to his brother, “I have conquered a kingdom for myself and live well, only I have not enough money to feed my soldiers.”

And Taras the Pot-bellied said, “I have made a heap of money, only unfortunately I have no one to guard it.”

And Simon the Warrior said, “Let us go to our brother Ivan. I will ask him to make more soldiers and give them to you to guard your money, and you must ask him to make more money and give it to me to feed my soldiers.”

And they came to Ivan.

And Simon said, “I haven’t enough soldiers, brother. Will you make another couple of sheaves for me?”

Ivan shook his head.

“No,” he said; “I won’t make you any more soldiers.”

“But you promised you would.”

“I know I promised, but I won’t make any more.”

“Why not, you fool?”

“Because your soldiers killed a man. I will not let you have any more.”

And he was obstinate, and would not make any more soldiers.

Then Taras the Pot-bellied asked Ivan the Fool to make him more golden money.

Ivan shook his head.

“No,” he said; “I won’t make any more money.”

“But you promised.”

“I know I promised, but I won’t make any more.”

“Why not, you fool?”

“Because your money took a cow away from a woman in the village.”

“But how can that be?”

“The woman had a cow. The children used to drink the milk, but the other day they came to beg a little milk of me. ‘But where’s your cow?’ I asked them, and they said, ‘Taras’ bailiff came and gave mother three golden coins and she gave him the cow; now we have no milk to drink.’ I thought you only wanted to play with the golden coins, but you’ve taken away the cow from the children; I won’t give you any more.”

And the Fool was obstinate and kept to his word.

And the brothers went away and deliberated over their difficult situation in order to find a way out.

Simon said, “This is what we must do. You give me some of your money to feed my soldiers, and I’ll give you half my kingdom and soldiers to guard your money.”

Taras agreed. The brothers divided their possessions, and both became kings and both were rich.

VIII

And Ivan lived at home, supporting his father and mother and working in the fields with his deaf and dumb sister.

One day Ivan's yard-dog fell sick. He grew mangy, and was near dying. Ivan pitied it. He took a piece of bread from his sister, put it in his cap, carried it out and threw it to the dog. The creases in his cap parted and out rolled one of the little roots with the bread. The dog ate it up. As soon as it had swallowed the root it began to jump about and bark and play and wag its tail. It was quite well again.

The father and mother were amazed.

"How did you cure the dog?" they asked.

And Ivan said, "I had two little roots that could cure any pain, and the dog swallowed one."

It happened at the time that the King's daughter fell ill, and the King proclaimed to every town and village that he would reward any man who could cure her, and that if he were an unmarried man he should have her for his wife. The news came to Ivan's village.

And the father and mother summoned Ivan and said to him, "Have you heard of the King's promise? You told us you had a little root that could cure any sickness; go, cure the King's daughter, you will then be happy for life."

"Very well," Ivan said, "I will go."

And Ivan prepared himself for the journey, and they dressed him in his best clothes. When he came out on the doorstep he saw a beggar-woman with a crippled hand.

"I heard that you can cure the sick," she said. "Cure my hand, for I cannot even put on my own shoes."

"Very well," Ivan said. And he took the little root out of his cap, gave it to the beggar-woman and told her to swallow it. As soon as she swallowed it, she recovered, and began to wave her hand.

The father and mother came out to bid good-bye to Ivan, and they heard that he had given away his last root and had nothing left with which to cure the King's daughter, and they began to scold him.

"You pity a beggar-woman, yet have no pity for the King's daughter," they reproached him.

But Ivan was sorry for the King's daughter. He harnessed the mare, threw some straw into the cart and got in.

"Where are you going to, you fool?"

"To cure the King's daughter."

"But you have nothing to cure her with now."

"It doesn't matter," he said, and drove away.

He came to the King's palace, and as soon as he stepped over the threshold the King's daughter got well.

The King was overjoyed. He ordered Ivan to be brought to him, and dressed him in fine clothes.

"You must be my son-in-law," he said.

"Very well," Ivan said.

And Ivan married the princess. Her father died soon after, and Ivan became King.

All three brothers were now kings.

IX

The three brothers lived and reigned.

The elder brother Simon the Warrior lived well. With his straw soldiers he gathered together real soldiers. Throughout the whole of his kingdom he ordered a levy of one soldier for every ten houses, and each soldier had to be tall and whole of body and clean of face. In this way he gathered many soldiers and trained them. If any one opposed him he sent his soldiers off at once and imposed his will, and people began to fear him. His life was a very goodly one. Whatever he saw and wanted was his. He sent his soldiers and they brought him all he wanted.

Taras the Pot-bellied also lived well. He did not lose the money Ivan had given him, but increased it a hundredfold. He introduced law and order into his kingdom. He stowed his money away in coffers and levied taxes on the people. There was a poll-tax, and tolls for walking and driving, and a tax on shoes and stockings and frills. He got whatever he wanted. For money people brought him everything, and even worked for him, for every one wanted money.

Ivan the Fool, too, did not live badly. As soon as his father-in-law was dead he took off his royal robes and gave them to his wife to stow away in a chest. And he put on his coarse linen shirt and breeches and peasant shoes and began to work once more.

“It’s so dull for me,” he said. “I’ve got fat, lost my appetite and can’t sleep.”

He brought his father and mother and sister to live with him, and began to work as of old.

“But you are a king,” people remonstrated.

“Even a king must eat,” he said.

One of his ministers came to him and said, “We have no money to pay salaries.”

“Don’t pay them, then,” he said.

“But no one will serve us.”

“What does it matter? They needn’t. They’ll have more time for work. There’s the manure to cart; heaps of it lying about.”

When people came to Ivan for justice and said, “That man stole my money,” Ivan said, “Never mind; he must have wanted it.”

And all realized that Ivan was a fool. And his wife said to him, “People say you are a fool.”

“What does it matter?” Ivan said.

His wife reflected awhile, but she was also a fool.

“Why should I go against my husband?” she said. “Where the needle goes, the thread follows.”

So she took off her royal robes, put them away in a chest and went to Malania to learn to work. When she knew how, she began to help her husband.

All the wise left Ivan’s kingdom, and only the fools remained.

Nobody had money. They lived and worked, fed themselves and others.

X

The old Devil waited and waited for news of the Devilkins. He was expecting to hear that they had ruined the three brothers, but no news came. He set out himself to find them. He searched and searched, and found nothing but three holes.

“They’ve not been able to manage it, evidently,” he thought. “I must tackle the job myself.”

He went to look for the brothers, but they were no longer in their old places. He found them in their different kingdoms. All three lived and reigned. The old Devil was annoyed.

“Now we’ll see what I can do!” he said.

First of all he went to King Simon.

He did not go in his own shape, but disguised himself as a general. In that guise he appeared before King Simon.

“I have heard that you are a great warrior, King Simon,” he said. “I am well versed in these things and want to serve you.”

And King Simon began to ask him all manner of questions, and seeing that he was a clever man, he took him into his service.

The new commander instructed King Simon how to collect a large army.

“First of all,” he said, “we must get more soldiers. There are many idle people in your kingdom. We must conscript all the young men without exception, then you will have an army five times as large as the one you have now. Secondly, we must get new guns and cannons. I will get guns that will fire a hundred bullets at one shot; they will rain out like peas. And I will get cannons that will consume with fire either man or horse or wall; they will burn everything.”

King Simon listened to the new commander, and enrolled all the young men as soldiers and built new factories where he manufactured new guns and cannons, then he made war on a neighbouring king. As soon as he was faced by the opposing army, King Simon ordered his soldiers to rain bullets against it and shoot fire from their cannons, in this way wiping out half the hostile troops. The neighbouring king was alarmed; he surrendered and gave up his kingdom. King Simon rejoiced.

“Now,” he said, “I will make war on the King of India.”

And the King of India heard of King Simon’s doings. He adopted all his methods, and invented some improvements of his own. He not only enrolled all the young men as soldiers, but the unmarried women as well, and in consequence had a larger army than King Simon. And he made guns and cannons like King Simon’s, and invented machines to fly in the air and drop explosive bombs from above.

And King Simon set out to make war on the King of India, thinking he would beat him as easily as he had beaten the other king, but the scythe that had cut so well had lost its edge. The King of India did not give Simon time to open fire, for he sent his women to fly in the air and drop explosive bombs on Simon’s troops. And the women rained down bombs from above like borax upon cockroaches and Simon’s troops scattered and fled, and Simon was left alone.

The King of India took possession of Simon’s kingdom, and Simon the Warrior escaped as best he could.

Having disposed of this brother, the old Devil went to King Taras.

He changed himself into a merchant and settled in Taras’ kingdom, where he opened establishments and began to circulate money freely. He paid high prices for everything, and the people flocked to him for the sake of the extra profit. And the people came to have so much money that they were able to settle all their arrears and to pay their taxes at the proper time. King Taras rejoiced.

“Thanks to the merchant,” he thought, “I have more money than ever, and I’ll be able to live better than I used to.”

And he began making all sorts of new plans, and decided to have a new palace built for himself. He proclaimed to the people that he wanted timber and stone and labour, for which he was prepared to pay a high price. King Taras thought that for his money people would flock to work for him as of old. But lo! all the timber and stone was taken to the merchant, and all the labourers flocked to work for him. King Taras raised his price, and the merchant raised his. King Taras had much money, but the merchant had more and beat the King. The King's palace could not be built.

King Taras had arranged to make a new garden. When the autumn came he proclaimed that he wanted men to come and plant his garden, but no one came, for the people were all digging for the merchant.

Winter came. King Taras wanted to buy some sable skins for a new coat. He sent a messenger to buy it, but the messenger returned empty-handed, and said that there were no sable skins, for the merchant had bought them all at a higher price, and made himself a sable carpet.

King Taras wanted to buy some stallions. He sent a messenger, but the messenger returned and said that the merchant had all the good stallions; they were carting water for him to make a pond.

And the King's plans fell to pieces, for no one would work for him. All worked for the merchant, and only brought him the merchant's money to pay the taxes.

And the King came to have so much money that he did not know where to put it all, but he lived badly. The King gave up making plans; he would have been contented to live quietly somehow, but even that was difficult. He was hampered on all sides. His cook and coachman and servants left him to go to the merchant's. He even went short of food. When he sent to the market to buy some provisions there were none left, for the merchant had bought up everything, and the people only brought the King money for their taxes.

King Taras lost patience and banished the merchant from his kingdom. The merchant settled on the very border, and did exactly the same as before, and for his money the people dragged everything away from the King and brought it to the merchant. Life became very hard for the King. For whole days he did not eat, and to make matters worse a rumour went abroad that the merchant had boasted that he would buy the King himself. King Taras lost courage, and did not know what to do.

Simon the Warrior came to him and said, "Will you support me? I have been beaten by the King of India."

King Taras himself was in a sad plight.

"I haven't eaten anything myself for two days," he said.

XI

Having disposed of the two brothers, the old Devil went to Ivan. He changed himself into a general and came to Ivan, and began to persuade him to set up a large army.

“A king should not live without an army,” he said. “Give me the power, and I’ll collect soldiers from among your people and organize an army.”

Ivan listened to all he had to say.

“Very well,” he said, “organize one, then; only teach the soldiers to sing nice songs, for I like singing.”

And the old Devil went through Ivan’s kingdom to collect a voluntary army. To each recruit who should offer himself he promised a bottle of vodka and a red cap.

The fools laughed at him.

“We have plenty of drink,” they said; “we brew it ourselves, and as for caps, our women can make us any kind we like – embroidered ones and even ones with fringes.”

And no one offered himself.

The old Devil went back to Ivan and said, “Your fools won’t enlist of their own accord; we’ll have to force them.”

“Very well; force them, then.”

And the old Devil proclaimed throughout the kingdom that every man must enlist as a soldier, and if he fails to do so Ivan will have him put to death.

The fools came to the Devil and said, “You tell us that if we won’t enlist as soldiers the King will have us put to death, but you don’t say what will happen to us when we become soldiers. People say that soldiers are killed.”

“You can’t get over that.”

When the fools heard this they kept to their decision.

“We won’t go,” they said. “We’d sooner die at home since we have to die in either case.”

“What fools you are!” the old Devil said. “A soldier may or may not be killed, but if you don’t go King Ivan will have you put to death for certain.”

The fools reflected over this; then went to Ivan the Fool and said, “A general has appeared among us who orders us all to enlist as soldiers. ‘If you go as a soldier,’ he says, ‘you may or you may not be killed, but if you don’t go, King Ivan will have you put to death for certain.’ Is it true?”

Ivan laughed.

“How can I alone have you all put to death? Had I not been a fool I would have explained it to you, but I don’t understand it myself.”

“Then we won’t go,” the fools said.

“Very well, don’t.”

The fools went to the general and refused to enlist as soldiers.

The old Devil saw that his plan would not work, so he went to the King of Tarakan and wormed himself into his favour.

“Come,” he said, “let us go and make war on King Ivan. He has no money, but grain and cattle and all manner of good things he has in abundance.”

The King of Tarakan prepared to make war. He gathered together a large army, repaired his guns and cannons and marched across the border on his way to Ivan’s kingdom.

People came to Ivan and said, “The King of Tarakan is marching on us with his army.”

“Very well; let him,” Ivan said.

When the King of Tarakan crossed the border he sent his vanguard to find Ivan’s troops. They searched and searched, but no troops were to be found anywhere. Should they wait and see if they showed themselves? But there was no sign of any troops and no one to fight with. The King of Tarakan

sent men to seize the villages. The soldiers came to one village and the fools – men and women alike – rushed out and stood gaping at them in wonder. The soldiers began to take away their corn and cattle and the fools let them have what they wanted, making no resistance. The soldiers went to another village and the same thing was repeated. And they marched one day and another, and still the same thing happened. Everything was given up without any resistance and the fools even invited the soldiers to stay with them. “If you find it hard to live in your parts, good fellows, come and settle with us altogether.” And the soldiers marched from village to village and no troops were to be found anywhere; the people lived, fed themselves and others; no one offered any resistance and every one invited them to settle there.

And the soldiers grew weary of the job and they went back to their King of Tarakan.

“We can’t fight here,” they said; “take us to another place. This is not war; this is child’s-play. We can’t fight here.”

The King of Tarakan grew angry. He ordered his soldiers to go over the whole kingdom and lay waste the villages and burn the corn and kill the cattle.

“If you won’t do what I tell you,” he said, “I will punish you all.”

The soldiers were frightened and began to carry out the King’s commands. They burnt the houses and corn and killed the cattle. The fools made no resistance, they only wept. The old men wept and the old women and the little children.

“Why do you treat us like this?” they said. “Why do you waste the good things? If you want them, why not take them?”

And the soldiers grew to loathe their work. They refused to go further and the troops dispersed.

XII

And the old Devil went away, having failed to bring Ivan to reason by means of the soldiers.

The old Devil changed himself into a clean gentleman and came to live in Ivan's kingdom, hoping to ruin Ivan by money, as he had done Taras.

"I want to do you good and teach you common sense," he said. "I will build myself a house in your midst and open an establishment."

"Very well," the people said; "you can live here."

The clean gentleman spent the night and in the morning he went out to the square with a bag of gold and a bundle of papers and said, "You all live like swine. I want to teach you how you ought to live. Build me a house according to this plan. You will work for me and I will teach you and pay you in golden money." And he showed them the gold.

The fools marvelled. They had no money in circulation, but exchanged thing for thing, or paid by labour. And they began to exchange things with the gentleman and to work for his golden coins. And the old Devil, as in Taras' kingdom, began to circulate gold, and people brought him things and worked for him.

The old Devil rejoiced.

"At last my plan is beginning to work!" he thought. "I will ruin him as I ruined Taras, and will get him completely in my power."

The fools collected the golden coins and gave them to the women to make themselves necklaces and to the girls to plait into their hair; the children even played with the coins in the street. After a while every one had enough and refused to take more. And the clean gentleman's house was not half finished, and the corn and cattle had not yet been stored up for the year. And the gentleman invited people to come and work for him to bring him corn and rear his cattle, offering to pay many golden coins for everything brought and every piece of work done.

But no one would come and work, and no one would bring him anything, unless a chance boy or girl brought him an egg in exchange for a golden coin; and no one else came and he was left without any food. And the clean gentleman was hungry and went through the village to buy himself something for dinner. He went into one house and offered a golden coin for a chicken, but the mistress would not take it.

"I have many such coins," she said.

He went into another place to buy a salt herring, offering a golden piece. "I don't want it, my good man," the mistress said. "I have no children to play with them, and have three of these pieces already as curiosities."

He went into a peasant's for some bread. The peasant too would not take the money.

"I don't want it," he said. "But if you want the bread in Christ's name, then wait, and I'll tell my old woman to cut you some."

The old Devil spat on the ground and fled from the peasant. To hear the word Christ was worse than a knife to him, let alone to take anything in His name.

And so he got no bread. All had gold; wherever the old Devil went no one would give him anything for money, and every one said, "Bring us something else instead, or come and work, or take it in Christ's name." And the Devil had nothing to offer but money and had no liking for work, and he could not take anything in Christ's name. He lost his temper.

"What more do you want when I offer you money?" he said. "You can buy anything you like for gold and employ any kind of labour."

But the fools did not heed him.

"We don't need money," they said. "We exchange everything in kind and have no taxes to pay; what good would it be to us?"

The old Devil went supperless to bed.

The story reached Ivan the Fool. People came to him and said, “What shall we do? A clean gentleman has appeared in our midst who likes to eat and drink well, and dress in fine clothes, but he won’t work and won’t take anything in Christ’s name; he only offers us golden coins. People gave him what he wanted until they had enough of these coins, and now no one gives him anything. What are we to do with him? He may die of hunger.”

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