

Tsarevich Ivan and Grey Wolf

Once upon a time there was a Tsar named Berendei, and he had three sons, the youngest of whom was called Ivan.

Now the Tsar had a beautiful garden with an apple-tree in it that bore golden apples.

One day the Tsar found that somebody was visiting his garden and stealing his golden apples. The Tsar was very unhappy about this. He sent watchmen into the garden, but they were unable to catch the thief.

The Tsar was so grieved that he would not touch food or drink. His sons tried to cheer him.

"Do not grieve, Father dear," they said, "we shall keep watch over the garden ourselves."

Said the eldest son: "Today it is my turn to keep watch." And he went into the garden. He walked about for a long time but saw no one, so he flung himself down on the soft grass and went to sleep.

In the morning the Tsar said to him:

"Come, now, have you brought me good news? Have you discovered who the thief is?"

"No, Father dear. That the thief was not there I am ready to swear. I did not close my eyes all night, but I saw no one."

On the following night the middle son went out to keep watch, and he, too, went to sleep and in the morning said he had seen no one.

It was now the youngest son's turn to go and keep watch. Tsarevich Ivan went to watch his father's garden and he did not dare so much as to sit down, let alone lie down. If he felt that he was getting sleepy, he would wash his face in dew and become wide awake again.

Half the night passed by, and all of a sudden what should he see but a light shining in the garden. Brighter and brighter it grew, and it lit up everything around. Tsarevich Ivan looked, and there in the apple-tree he saw the Fire-Bird pecking at the golden apples.

Tsarevich Ivan crept up to the tree and caught the bird by the tail. But the Fire-Bird broke free of his grasp and flew away, leaving a feather from its tail in his hand.

In the morning Tsarevich Ivan went to his father.

"Well, my son, have you caught the thief?" asked the Tsar.

"No, Father," said Tsarevich Ivan, "I have not caught him, but I have discovered who he is. See, he sends you this feather as a keepsake. The Fire-Bird is the thief, Father."

The Tsar took the feather, and from that time he became cheerful again and began to eat and drink. But one fine day he fell to thinking about the Fire-Bird and, calling his sons to his side, said:

"My dear sons, I would have you saddle your trusty steeds and set out to see the wide world. If you search in all its far corners, perhaps you will come upon the Fire-Bird."

The sons bowed to their father, saddled their trusty steeds and set out. The eldest son took one road, the middle son another, and Tsarevich Ivan a third.

Whether Tsarevich Ivan was long on the way or not, no one can say, but one day, it being summer and very warm, he felt so tired that he got off his horse and, binding its feet so that it could not go very far, lay down to rest.

Whether he slept for a long time or a little time nobody knows, but when he woke up he found that his horse was gone. He went to look for it, he walked and he walked, and at last he found its remains: nothing but bones, picked clean. Tsarevich Ivan was greatly grieved. How could he continue on his journey without a horse?

"Ah, well," he thought, "it cannot be helped, and I must make the best of it."

And he went on on foot. He walked and walked till he was so tired that he was ready to drop. He sat down on the soft grass, and he was very sad and woebegone. Suddenly, lo and behold! who should come running up to him but Grey Wolf.

"Why are you sitting here so sad and sorrowful, Tsarevich Ivan?" asked Grey Wolf.

"How can I help being sad, Grey Wolf! I have lost my trusty steed."

"It was I who ate up your horse, Tsarevich Ivan. But I am sorry for you. Come, tell me, what are you doing so far from home and where are you going?"

"My father has sent me out into the wide world to seek the Fire-Bird."

"Has he now? Well, you could not have reached the Fire-Bird on that horse in three years. I alone know where it lives. So be it—since I have eaten up your horse, I shall be your true and faithful servant. Get on my back and hold fast."

Tsarevich Ivan got on his back and Grey Wolf was off in a flash. Blue lakes skimmed past ever so fast, green forests swept by in the wink of an eye, and at last they came to a castle with a high wall round it.

"Listen carefully, Tsarevich Ivan," said Grey Wolf, "and remember what I say. Climb over that wall. You have nothing to fear—we have come at a lucky hour, all the guards are sleeping. In a chamber within the tower you will see a window, in that window hangs a golden cage, and in that cage is the Fire-Bird. Take the bird and hide it in your bosom, but mind you do not touch the cage!"

Tsarevich Ivan climbed over the wall and saw the tower with the golden cage in the window and the Fire-Bird in the cage. He took the bird out and hid it in his bosom, but he could not tear his eyes away from the cage.

"Ah, what a handsome golden cage it is!" he thought longingly. "How can I leave it here!"

And he forgot all about the Wolf's warning. But the moment he touched the cage, a hue and cry arose within the castle—trumpets began to blow, drums began to beat, and the guards woke up, seized Tsarevich Ivan and marched him off to Tsar Afron.

"Who are you and whence do you hail?" Tsar Afron demanded angrily.

"I am Tsarevich Ivan, son of Tsar Berendei."

"Fie, shame on you! To think of the son of a tsar being a thief!"

"Well, you should not have let your bird steal apples from our garden."

"If you had come and told me about it in an honest way, I would have made you a present of the Bird out of respect for your father, Tsar Berendei. But now I shall spread the ill fame of your family far and wide. Or no—perhaps I will not, after all. If you do what I tell you, I shall forgive you. In a certain tsardom there is a Tsar named Kusman and he has a Horse with a Golden Mane. Bring me that Horse and I will make you a gift of the Fire-Bird and the cage besides."

Tsarevich Ivan felt very sad and crestfallen, and he went back to Grey Wolf.

"I told you not to touch the cage," said the Wolf. "Why did you not heed my warning?"

"I am sorry, Grey Wolf, please forgive me."

"You are sorry, are you? Oh, well, get on my back again. I gave my word, and I must not go back on it. A truth that all good folk accept is that a promise must be kept."

And off went Grey Wolf with Tsarevich Ivan on his back. Whether they travelled for a long or a little time nobody knows, but at last they came to the castle where the Horse with the Golden Mane was kept.

"Climb over the wall, Tsarevich Ivan, the guards are asleep," said Grey Wolf. "Go to the stable and take the Horse, but mind you do not touch the bridle."

Tsarevich Ivan climbed over the castle wall and, all the guards being asleep, he went to the stable and caught Golden Mane. But he could not help picking up the bridle—it was made of gold and set with precious stones—a fitting bridle for such a horse.

No sooner had Tsarevich Ivan touched the bridle than a hue and cry was raised within the castle. Trumpets began to blow, drums began to beat, and the guards woke up, seized Tsarevich Ivan and marched him off to Tsar Kusman.

"Who are you and whence do you hail?" the Tsar demanded.

"I am Tsarevich Ivan."

"A tsar's son stealing horses! What a foolish thing to do! A common peasant would not stoop to it. But I shall forgive you, Tsarevich Ivan, if you do what I tell you. Tsar Dalmat has a daughter named Yelena the Fair. Steal her and bring her to me, and I shall make you a present of my Horse with the Golden Mane and of the bridle besides."

Tsarevich Ivan felt more sad and crestfallen than ever, and he went back to Grey Wolf.

"I told you not to touch the bridle, Tsarevich Ivan!" said the Wolf. "Why did you not heed my warning?"

"I am sorry, Grey Wolf, please forgive me."

"Being sorry won't do much good. Oh, well, get on my back again."

And off went Grey Wolf with Tsarevich Ivan. By and by they came to the tsardom of Tsar Dalmat, and in the garden of his castle Yelena the Fair was strolling with her women and maids.

"This time I shall do everything myself," said Grey Wolf. "You go back the way we came and I will soon catch up with you."

So Tsarevich Ivan went back the way he had come, and Grey Wolf jumped over the wall into the garden. He crouched behind a bush and peeped out, and there was Yelena the Fair strolling about with all her women and maids. After a time she fell behind them, and Grey Wolf at once seized her, tossed her across his back, jumped over the wall and took to his heels.

Tsarevich Ivan was walking back the way he had come, when all of a sudden his heart leapt with joy, for there was Grey Wolf with Yelena the Fair on his back! "You get on my back too, and be quick about it, or they may catch us," said Grey Wolf.

Grey Wolf sped down the path with Tsarevich Ivan and Yelena the Fair on his back. Blue lakes skimmed past ever so fast, green forests swept by in the wink of an eye. Whether they were long on the way or not nobody knows, but by and by they came to Tsar Kusman's tsardom.

"Why are you so silent and sad, Tsarevich Ivan?" asked Grey Wolf.

"How can I help being sad, Grey Wolf! It breaks my heart to part with such loveliness. To think that I must exchange Yelena the Fair for a horse!"

"You need not part with such loveliness, we shall hide her somewhere. I will turn myself into Yelena the Fair and you shall take me to the Tsar instead."

So they hid Yelena the Fair in a hut in the forest, and Grey Wolf turned a somersault, and was at once changed into Yelena the Fair. Tsarevich Ivan took him to Tsar Kusman, and the Tsar was delighted and thanked him over and over again.

"Thank you for bringing me a bride, Tsarevich Ivan," said he. "Now the Horse with the Golden Mane is yours, and the bridle too."

Tsarevich Ivan mounted the horse and went back for Yelena the Fair. He put her on the horse's back and away they rode!

Tsar Kusman held a wedding and feast to celebrate it and he feasted the whole day long, and when bedtime came he led his bride into the bedroom. But when he got into bed with her what should he see but the muzzle of a wolf instead of the face of his young wife! So frightened was the Tsar that he tumbled out of bed, and Grey Wolf sprang up and ran away.

He caught up with Tsarevich Ivan and said:

"Why are you sad, Tsarevich Ivan?"

"How can I help being sad! I cannot bear to think of exchanging the Horse with the Golden Mane for the Fire-Bird."

"Cheer up, I will help you," said the Wolf.

Soon they came to the tsardom of Tsar Afron.

"Hide the horse and Yelena the Fair," said the Wolf. "I will turn myself into Golden Mane and you shall take me to Tsar Afron."

So they hid Yelena the Fair and Golden Mane in the woods, and Grey Wolf turned a somersault and was changed into Golden Mane.

Tsarevich Ivan led him off to Tsar Afron, and the Tsar was delighted and gave him the Fire-Bird and the golden cage too. -

Tsarevich Ivan went back to the woods, put Yelena the Fair on Golden Mane's back and, taking the golden cage with the Fire-Bird in it, set off homewards.

Meanwhile Tsar Afron had the gift horse brought to him, and he was just about to get on its back when it turned into a grey wolf. So frightened was the Tsar that he fell down where he stood, and Grey Wolf ran away and soon caught up with Tsarevich Ivan.

"And now I must say good-bye," said he, "for I can go no farther."

Tsarevich Ivan got off the horse, bowed low three times, and thanked Grey Wolf humbly.

"Do not say good-bye for good, for you may still have need of me," said Grey Wolf.

"Why should I need him again?" thought Tsarevich Ivan. "All my wishes have been fulfilled."

He got on Golden Mane's back and rode on with Yelena the Fair and the Fire-Bird. By and by they reached his own native land, and Tsarevich Ivan decided to stop for a bite to eat. He had a little bread with him, so they ate the bread and drank fresh water from the spring, and then lay down to rest.

No sooner had Tsarevich Ivan fallen asleep than his brothers came riding up. They had been to other lands in search of the Fire-Bird, and were now coming home empty-handed.

When they saw that Tsarevich Ivan had got everything, they said:

"Let us kill our brother Ivan, for then all his spoils will be ours."

And with that they killed Tsarevich Ivan. Then they got on Golden Mane's back, took the Fire-Bird, seated Yelena the Fair on a horse and said:

"See that you say not a word about this at home!"

So there lay Tsarevich Ivan on the ground, with the ravens circling over his head. All of a sudden who should come running but Grey Wolf. He ran up and he seized a raven and her fledgling.

"Fly and fetch me dead and living water, Raven," said the Wolf. "If you do, I shall let your nestling go."

The Raven flew off—what else could she do?—while the Wolf held her fledgling. Whether a long time passed by or a little time nobody knows, but at last she came back with the dead and living water. Grey Wolf sprinkled the dead water on Tsarevich Ivan's wounds, and the wounds healed. Then he sprinkled him with the living water, and Tsarevich Ivan came back to life.

"Oh, how soundly I slept!" said he.

"Aye," said Grey Wolf, "and but for me you would never have wakened. Your own brothers killed you and took away all your treasures. Get on my back, quick."

They went off in hot pursuit, and they soon caught up the two brothers, and Grey Wolf tore them to bits and scattered the bits over the field.

Tsarevich Ivan bowed to Grey Wolf and took leave of him for good.

He rode home on the Horse with the Golden Mane, and he brought his father the Fire-Bird and himself a bride—Yelena the Fair.

Tsar Berendei was overjoyed and asked his son all about everything. Tsarevich Ivan told him how Grey Wolf had helped him, and how his brothers had killed him while he slept and Grey Wolf had torn them to bits.

At first Tsar Berendei was sorely grieved, but he soon got over it. And Tsarevich Ivan married Yelena the Fair and they lived together in health and cheer for many a long and prosperous year.