



Story of Bulat the Brave

Companion

The Russian Garland

Russian

Advanced
14 min read

There was once upon a time a Tsar named Chodor, who had an only son, Ivan Tsarevich. Chodor gave him in his youth various masters to teach him the different knightly exercises; and when Ivan was grown up, he begged leave of his father to travel in other countries, in order to see the world. Tsar Chodor consented, and bade him show his skill and valour in foreign lands, and bring renown on his father.

Then Ivan Tsarevich went into the royal stables to choose a good steed; and he thought that if he could find one on whose back he could lay his hand, without the horse's going on his knees, it would be just the one to suit him. So he looked in all the stalls, but found no horse to his mind, and he went his way with a heavy heart. Then he took his crossbow and arrows and roved about in the open fields to drive away his sadness. As he was walking thus along, he saw high in the air a swan, and he drew his bow and shot; but he missed the swan, and his arrow vanished from his sight. Then Ivan was sad at losing a favourite arrow, and with tears in his eyes he sought for it the whole field over. At last he came to a little hill, and heard a man's voice calling to him: "Come hither, Ivan Tsarevich!" Ivan wondered to himself not a little at hearing a voice and seeing no one. But the voice called again; and Ivan went toward the spot whence it came, and remarked in the hill a little window, with an iron lattice; and at the window he saw a man, who beckoned to him with the hand. Ivan came up, and the man said to him: "Why are you so sad, my good lad, Ivan Tsarevich?"

"How can I help grieving?" replied Ivan; "I have lost my favourite arrow, and can find it nowhere, and my sorrow is the greater because I can not discover a steed to please me."

"That is no great matter to grieve for," said the man; "I will get you a good horse, and give you back your arrow since it flew down to me here; but what will you give me for it?"

"Anything you ask," replied Ivan, "if you will give me what you promise."

"Nay," said the man, "I want nothing more than that you will free me from this place."

"And how and by whom were you caged up thus?"

"Your father imprisoned me here," replied the man. "I was a famous robber, and was called Bulat the Brave Companion. He was enraged against me, and ordered me to be taken and imprisoned; and here I have been confined for three-and-thirty years."

"Hark ye, Bulat, brave Companion," said Ivan, "I cannot set you free without my father's consent; were he to hear of it he would be wroth."

"Fear not," replied Bulat; "your father will hear nothing; for as soon as you set me at liberty I shall go into other lands and not live here."

"Well then," said Ivan Tsarevich, "I consent, only on condition that you give me back my arrow and tell me

where I can find a trusty steed.”

“Go into the open fields,” said Bulat the Brave Companion, “and there you will see three green oaks; and, on the ground under these oaks, an iron door, with a copper ring. Under the door is a stable, in which stands a good steed, shut in by twelve iron doors with twelve steel locks. Heave up this door, strike off the twelve steel locks, and open the twelve doors; there you will find a horse; mount him and come to me; I will give you back your arrow, and then you will let me out of this prison.”

When Ivan Tsarevich heard this he went into the open fields, saw the three green oaks, and found the iron door with the copper ring. So he hove up the door, knocked off the twelve locks, and opened the twelve doors, and entered a stable, where he beheld a knightly steed and a suit of armour. Then Ivan Tsarevich laid his hand upon the horse, and the horse fell not upon his knees, but merely bent himself a little. And as soon as the horse saw a knight standing before him, he neighed loudly, and let Ivan saddle and bridle him. Ivan Tsarevich took the steed, the battle-axe, and sword, led the horse out of the stable, leaped into the Tcherkess saddle, and took the silken bridle in his white hand. Then Ivan wished to try his steed, and struck him on the flank: the horse chafed his bit, and rose from the ground, and away he went over the tall forests and under the flying clouds, left hill and dale beneath his feet, covered small streams with his tail, bounded over wide rivers and marshes; and so at last Ivan came to Bulat the Brave Companion, and said with a loud voice: “Now give me back my arrow, Bulat my brave fellow, and I will let you out of your cage.” So Bulat instantly gave him back his arrow, and Ivan set him free.

“I thank you, Ivan Tsarevich,” said Bulat, “for giving me freedom. I will, in return, render you good service; whenever you are in any difficulty, and want me, only say: ‘Where is my Bulat, the Brave Companion?’ and I will instantly come to you and serve you faithfully in your need.”

So saying, Bulat cried with a loud voice:

“Sivka Burka! he!

Fox of Spring! Appear!

Like a grass blade, here

Stand before me!”

Instantly a steed stood before Bulat the Brave, who crept into his ear, ate and drank his fill, and then crept out at the other ear; and he became such a handsome youth as no one can imagine, no pen can describe, nor story

tell. Then Bulat mounted his horse and galloped off, exclaiming: "Farewell, then, for the present, Ivan Tsarevich!"

Ivan now mounted his good steed and rode to his father, and with tears in his eyes, took leave of him; then, taking with him his squire, he rode forth into foreign lands. And after they had ridden for some time they came to a wood; the day was bright and hot, and Ivan Tsarevich grew thirsty. So they wandered all about the wood, seeking water, but could find none. At length they found a deep well, in which there was some water; and Ivan said to his squire: "Go down the well and fetch me up some water; I will hold you by a rope to prevent you being drowned."

"Nay, Ivan Tsarevich," said the squire, "I am heavier than you, and you cannot hold me up; you had better descend, for I can support you."

So Ivan followed his squire's advice, and let himself down into the well. And when Ivan had drunk enough, he told the squire to draw him up; but the squire answered: "Nay, I will not draw you out until you give me your word in writing that you are my servant and I am your master, and that my name is Ivan Tsarevich; if you refuse this I will drown you in the well."

"My dear squire," cried Ivan, "do not drown me, but draw me up, and I will do all you desire." "No, I don't believe you," said the squire; "swear me an oath." So Ivan swore that he would be true.

Thereupon the squire drew him out, and Ivan Tsarevich took a piece of paper, wrote the writing, and gave it to the squire. Then he took off his own cloak, and exchanged it for the squire's, and they went on their way. After some days they came to the kingdom of the Tsar Panthui. And when the Tsar heard of the arrival of Ivan Tsarevich he went out to meet him; and, greeting the false Tsarevich, he took him by the white hands, conducted him into his marble halls, seated him at his oaken table, and they feasted and made merry. Then Tsar Panthui asked the false Tsarevich what had brought him to his kingdom, and he answered: "My gracious lord, I am come to sue for the hand of your daughter, the fair Princess Tseria."

"Gladly will I give you my daughter to wife," replied Panthui.

In the course of their talk the false Ivan said to the Tsar Panthui: “Let my servant, I pray, do the lowest work in the kitchen, for he has greatly annoyed me on my journey.” So the Tsar immediately commanded Ivan to be set to do the most menial work, whilst his squire feasted and made merry with the Tsar.

A few days after this an army was seen marching against the kingdom of Panthui, threatening to lay it waste and take the Tsar prisoner. Thereupon Panthui called the false Ivan and said: “My dear future son-in-law, a hostile army has come to attack my dominions: drive the enemy back and I will give you my daughter, but only on this condition.” And the squire answered; “Well and good, I will do as you desire; but only by night—in the day I have no luck in fight.”

As soon as night drew on and everyone in the castle had gone to rest, the false Ivan went out into the open court, called to him the true Tsarevich, and said: “Ivan Tsarevich, be not angry with me for taking your place; forget it all, do me one service, and drive the enemy from this kingdom.” And Ivan answered: “Go and lie down to sleep—all shall be accomplished.” Then the squire went and lay down to sleep, and Ivan cried with a loud voice: “Where is my Bulat, the Brave Companion?” In an instant Bulat stood before him, and asked: “What service do you require now? What is your need? Tell me forthwith.” Then Ivan Tsarevich told him his need, and Bulat desired him to saddle his horse and put on his armour; and then cried with a loud voice:

“Sivka Burka! he!
Fox of Spring! Appear!
Like a grass blade, here
Stand before me!”

The horse bounded till the ground shook; from his ears rose a column of steam, and from his nostrils issued flames; but when he came up to Bulat he stood still. Then Bulat the Brave Companion mounted the horse, and Ivan Tsarevich seated himself upon his steed, and so they rode forth from the courtyard. Meanwhile the Princess Tseria, who was not yet asleep, was sitting at the window, and overheard all that Ivan Tsarevich had spoken with the squire and Bulat the Brave Companion.

As soon as they reached the hostile army, Bulat said to Ivan: “Fall thou upon the enemy on the right, I will attack them on the left.” And so they began to mow down this mighty army with the sword, and to trample them down with their horses’ hoofs; and in an hour’s time they had stretched on the earth a hundred thousand men. Then the hostile King fled with the small remains of his army back into his own kingdom, and Ivan

Tsarevich returned with Bulat the Brave Companion to the castle of the Tsar Panthui, unsaddled his steed, led him into the stable, and gave him white wheat to eat. After that he took leave of Bulat the Brave Companion, went back into the kitchen, and lay down to sleep.

Early the next morning the Tsar went out on to his balcony, and looked forth over the country where the hostile army lay; and when he saw that it was all cut down and destroyed, he called to him the false Ivan, and thanked him for having saved his kingdom; he rewarded him with a rich present and promised soon to give him his daughter to wife.

After a fortnight the same Tsar marched again with a fresh army and besieged the city. And the Tsar Panthui in terror called again upon the false Ivan and said: "My dear friend, Ivan Tsarevich, save me once more from the enemy, and drive them from my kingdom, and I will immediately give you my daughter to wife." And so it all fell out again exactly as before, and the enemy were quite driven away by Ivan and Bulat the Brave.

The hostile King, however, soon returned to attack Tsar Panthui a third time, and over and over again he was driven back, until at last he was himself killed. Then Ivan and Bulat the Brave Companion went back, unsaddled their steeds, and put them into the stable. Thereupon Bulat took leave of Ivan Tsarevich, and said: "You will never see me more." With this he mounted his horse and rode forth; and Ivan went into the kitchen and lay down to sleep.

Early the next morning the Tsar went again on to his balcony, and looked forth over the country where the hostile army had been; and when he saw that it was all destroyed, he sent for his future son-in-law and said: "Now I will give you my daughter to wife." Then all the preparations were made for the wedding; and a few days after, the squire married the fair Princess Tseria; and when they had returned from church, and were sitting at table, Ivan Tsarevich begged the head cook to let him go into the banquet-hall and see his master and his bride seated at the table. So the cook consented, and gave him a change of dress. When Ivan entered the royal hall he stationed himself behind the other guests and gazed at his squire and the fair Tseria. But the Princess espied Ivan, and recognised him instantly; then she jumped up from the table, took him by the hand, led him to the Tsar, and said: "This is the true bridegroom and the saviour of your kingdom, and not yon man who was betrothed to me."

Then the Tsar Panthui asked his daughter what it all meant, and begged her to explain the mystery. And when the Princess Tseria had related to him all that had passed, Ivan Tsarevich was placed at the table beside her, and his squire was shot at the gate for his treacherous conduct. Ivan married the Princess, and returned with

her to his father's kingdom. Tsar Chodor placed the crown upon his head, and Ivan mounted the throne, and ruled over the kingdom.

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