

Ivan Popyalof

By Unknown

Once upon a time there was an old couple, and they had three sons. Two of these had their wits about them, but the third was a simpleton, Ivan by name, surnamed Popyalof.

For twelve whole years Ivan lay among the ashes from the stove; but then he arose, and shook himself, so that six poods of ashes fell off from him.

Now in the land in which Ivan lived there was never any day, but always night. That was a Snake's doing. Well, Ivan undertook to kill that Snake, so he said to his father, 'Father, make me a mace five poods in weight.' And when he had got the mace, he went out into the fields, and flung it straight up in the air, and then he went home. The next day he went out into the fields to the spot from which he had flung the mace on high, and stood there with his head thrown back. So when the mace fell down again it hit him on the forehead. And the mace broke in two.

Ivan went home and said to his father, 'Father, make me another mace, a ten pood one.' And when he had got it he went out into the fields, and flung it aloft. And the mace went flying through the air for three days and three nights. On the fourth day Ivan went out to the same spot, and when the mace came tumbling down, he put his knee in the way, and the mace broke over it into three pieces.

Ivan went home and told his father to make him a third mace, one of fifteen poods weight. And when he had got it, he went out into the fields and flung it aloft. And the mace was up in the air six days. On the seventh Ivan went to the same spot as before. Down fell the mace, and when it struck Ivan's forehead, the forehead bowed under it. Thereupon he said, 'This mace will do for the Snake!'

So when he had got everything ready, he went forth with his brothers to fight the Snake. He rode and rode, and presently there stood before him a hut on fowl's legs,' and in that hut lived the Snake. There all the party came to a standstill. Then Ivan hung up his gloves, and said to his brothers, 'Should blood drop from my gloves, make haste to help me.' When he had said this he went into the hut and sat down under the boarding.

Presently there rode up a Snake with three heads. His steed stumbled, his hound howled, his falcon clamoured.' Then cried the Snake:

'Wherefore hast thou stumbled, O Steed! hast thou howled, O Hound I hast thou clamoured, O Falcon?'

'How can I but stumble,' replied the Steed, 'when under the boarding sits Ivan Popyalof?'

Then said the Snake, 'Come forth, Ivanushka! Let us try our strength together.' Ivan came forth, and they began to fight. And Ivan killed the Snake, and then sat down again beneath the boarding.

Presently there came another Snake, a six-headed one, and him too Ivan killed. And then there came a third, which had twelve heads. Well, Ivan began to fight with him, and lopped off nine of his heads. The Snake had no strength left in him. Just then a raven came flying by, and it croaked:

'Krof? Krof!'

Then the Snake cried to the Raven, 'Fly, and tell my wife to come and devour Ivan Popyalof.'

But Ivan cried: 'Fly, and tell my brothers to come, and then we will kill this Snake, and give his flesh to thee.'

And the Raven gave ear to what Ivan said, and flew to his brothers and began to croak above their heads. The brothers awoke, and when they heard the cry of the Raven, they hastened to their brother's aid. And they killed the Snake, and then, having taken his heads, they went into his hut and destroyed them. And immediately there was bright light throughout the whole land.

After killing the Snake, Ivan Popyalof and his brothers set off on their way home. But he had forgotten to take away his gloves, so he went back to fetch them, telling his brothers to wait for him meanwhile. Now when he had reached the hut and was going to take away his gloves, he heard the voices of the Snake's wife and daughters, who were talking with each other. So he turned himself into a cat, and began to mew outside the door. They let him in, and he listened to everything they said. Then he got his gloves and hastened away.

As soon as he came to where his brothers were, he mounted his horse, and they all started afresh. They rode and rode; presently they saw before them a green meadow, and on that meadow lay silken cushions. Then the elder brothers said, 'Let's turn out our horses to graze here, while we rest ourselves a little.'

But Ivan said, 'Wait a minute, brothers!' and he seized his mace, and struck the cushions with it. And out of those cushions there streamed blood.

So they all went on further. They rode and rode; presently there stood before them an apple-tree, and upon it were gold and silver apples. Then the elder brothers said, 'Let's eat an apple apiece.' But Ivan said, 'Wait a minute, brothers; I'll try them first,' and he took his mace, and struck the apple-tree with it. And out of the tree streamed blood.

So they went on further. They rode and rode, and by and by they saw a spring in front of them. And the elder brothers cried, 'Let's have a drink of water.' But Ivan Popyalof cried: 'Stop, brothers!' and he raised his mace and struck the spring, and its waters became blood.

For the meadow, the silken cushions, the apple-tree, and the spring, were all of them daughters of the Snake.

After killing the Snake's daughters, Ivan and his brothers went on homewards. Presently came the Snake's Wife flying after them, and she opened her jaws from the sky to the earth, and tried to swallow up Ivan. But Ivan and his brothers threw three poods of salt into her mouth. She swallowed the salt, thinking it was Ivan Popyalof, but afterwards—when she had tasted the salt, and found out it was not Ivan—she flew after him again.

Then he perceived that danger was at hand, and so he let his horse go free, and hid himself behind twelve doors in the forge of Kuzma and Demian. The Snake's Wife came flying up, and said to Kuzma and Demian, 'Give me up Ivan Popyalof.' But they replied

'Send your tongue through the twelve doors and take him.' So the Snake's Wife began licking the doors. But meanwhile they all heated iron pincers, and as soon as she had sent her tongue through into the smithy, they caught tight hold of her by the tongue, and began thumping her with hammers. And when the Snake's Wife was dead they consumed her

with fire, and scattered her ashes to the winds. And then they went home, and there they lived and enjoyed themselves, feasting and revelling, and drinking mead and wine.

I was there too, and had liquor to drink; it didn't go into my mouth, but only ran down my beard.