



THE APPLES OF YOUTH AND THE WATER OF LIFE: A RUSSIAN FAIRY TALE

Adapted by Aleksey Tolstoy
Translated from Russian by Amelia Parkes



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About Aleksey Tolstoy

Aleksey Tolstoy (1883-1945)¹ was a Russian writer known for his adaptations of folktales.² Throughout the 1920s, the Bolsheviks had taken an unclear stance on the promotion of folktales; in 1934, however, it was decided that they were acceptable literature.³ By 1936 Aleksey Tolstoy had written a Russian version of Pinocchio, *The Adventures of Buratino*.¹ Shortly thereafter, by 1938, he began collaborating with renowned Russian folklorists, including G. A. Gukovskiy and A. N. Nechaev, on a project for the compilation of Russian folktales, a project for which Molotov, Chairman at that time of the Council of People's Commissars,⁴ himself advocated.⁵ Aleksey Tolstoy was involved with the aspect of the project which had the goal of combining the various variants into single standard versions of the stories and publishing them in one volume which would be available to a wide audience.² He not only read the numerous published and archived versions of the tales but also met with storytellers to hear the oral versions and accustom himself with the folktale sounds.⁵ In 1940 he compiled "A Tale about the Apples of Youth and Water of Life,"⁵ which has forty variants in Russian alone,⁶ and published it as part of his collection of wonder tales in 1944.⁵

Here is Aleksey Tolstoy's description of his own approach: "I choose the most interesting and fundamental of the many variants of folktales, and I enrich it with colorful language and phrases and plot details from the other variants. Of course, in this compilation of a tale, or 'restoration' of it, from individual parts, I have to add some, alter some, and supplement what is missing, but I do it in the same [folktale] style." ²

Introduction

Three years ago, I started studying Russian without any clue as to where it would take me. Almost immediately, I was intrigued by the language and country that opened up before me. The more Russian I learned, the more I grew in appreciation of the rhythmic beauty of the language which allows poems such as those by Pushkin to be so lyrical. As my pursuit of Russian intensified, I could not help but expand my studies to encompass the literature, history, and culture of Russia. In translating Aleksey Tolstoy's adaptation of "A Tale about the Apples of Youth and Water of Life," I have sought to make some of the Russia that I have discovered available to Americans.

While I wanted to preserve the Russian as much as possible, I did not take a solely literal approach in my translation. My goal was not simply to translate the words of the tale but rather to translate it in such a way that it would be brought to life in English with the rhythm and flow that shadows the Russian while attempting to keep wording that would sound natural to readers. I decided to translate the tale in the past tense as most Americans are accustomed to with fairy tales. Some wording I altered in the English so as to be more readily understood or provide a more rhythmic sentence. For example, "за трёхдевять земель, в тридесятom царстве" (*behind the three-nine land,*

in the three-tenth tsardom) does not carry the fairytale connotations in English that it does in Russian, so in my translation I instead chose to use “in a faraway land at the other end of the world” which is more familiar to an American audience. I especially endeavored to maintain a sense of rhythm and rhyme in the most critical encounters in the tale, such as those between the Baba-Yagas and Tsarevich Ivan, hence leading to sentences such as “The little hut stood on a chicken leg with chicken toes and had only one window” when there is no mention of “chicken toes” in the original Russian.

Furthermore, I had no desire to lose the Russianness of the tale, so certain words and names that are specific to Russian culture have simply been transliterated and are explained in the “Pronunciations and Explanations Table” below.

For me, studying Russian has been a gift, a discovering of treasure, and I hope that in sharing this story I can show a glimpse of it.

Pronunciations and Explanations

Tsarevich (tsar-YE-vich) = Tsar’s son—**Fyodor** (FYO-dor); **Vasily** (va-SEE-ly); **Ivan** (ee-VON)

Baba-Yaga (BAH-ba ya-GAH) = Baba-Yaga is a prominent figure in many Russian fairy tales; her roles, however, differ from tale to tale. Often times, as in this tale, the tales have more than one Baba-Yaga. Baba-Yaga appears as a sort of woman on the border of the real world and the fairytale world. She is always elderly and unattractive and has a strong sense of smell.

Seenyglazka (SEE-nee-GLAZ-ka) = This name actually means “blue eyes.”

Bogatyr (bog-a-TEER) and **Bogatyрка** (bog-a-TEER-ka) = They are male and female, respectively, characters in Russian fairy tales and epic poems. They are not quite the same as giants but are large mortal characters who possess extreme strength.

Nagai (Na-GUY) = It is a large magical bird who carries characters between the fairytale world and the real world.

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The Apples of Youth and the Water of Life: A Russian Fairy Tale

Adapted by Aleksey Tolstoy; Translated by Amelia Parkes

In a certain tsardom, in a certain kingdom, there lived a Tsar who had three sons: the eldest was called Fyodor; the second, Vasily; and the youngest, Ivan.

The Tsar had become very old, and his vision had become poor. But he heard that in a faraway land at the other end of the world there was a garden with the apples of youth and a well with the water of life. If an old man ate such an apple, he would become young, and if a blind man rinsed his eyes with such water, he would see.

The Tsar gathered together the feast of feasts, summoned there the princes and nobles, and said to them:

“My children! Who will come forth from among the chosen and among the hunters and go to a faraway land at the other end of the world to bring to me the apples of youth and a twelve-spouted jug filled with the water of life? I will give half the tsardom to such a horseman.”

At that, the highest ranking nobles hid behind the middle and the middle hid behind the least, and from the least came no reply.

Then, Tsarevich Fyodor, the Tsar’s son, came out and said:

“I do not want us to give the tsardom to other people. I will make the journey and bring to you, Tsar-father, the apples of youth and the twelve-spouted jug filled with the water of life.”

Tsarevich Fyodor went to the stables, chose for himself a horse that had never been ridden, bridled it with a bridle that had never been bridled, and took a whip that had never been whipped. Then, he saddled the horse with twelve saddle girths—not for beauty, but for strength.

So, Tsarevich Fyodor started on his way. The people saw him mount but did not see in which direction he rode away.

He went here, there, and everywhere. He took the high road. He took the low road. He rode from day to evening—from dawn to dusk. He came to a crossroads with three different paths to choose from. At the crossroads lay a stone slab on which was written this writing:

“If you go to the right, you will save yourself but lose your horse. If you go to the left, you will save your horse but lose yourself. If you go straight, you will get married.”

Tsarevich Fyodor pondered, “Well, now. I will go where I will get married.”

So he turned to the path where he would get married. He rode and rode until he rode up to a house with a golden roof. Then, out ran a beautiful maiden who said to him:

“Tsarevich, I will help you dismount from your saddle. Come with me, be welcomed with salt and bread, and sleep and rest your head.”

“No, maiden, I do not want bread and salt, and sleep will not shorten my journey. I must continue forward.”

“Oh, Tsarevich, do not hurry to leave, but instead hurry to fulfill your dearest desire.”

At that, the beautiful maiden helped him dismount and took him into the house. She gave him food, gave him drink, and gave him a bed to sleep on.

As soon as Tsarevich Fyodor lay against the wall, the maiden quickly overturned the bed, and he fell under the floor into a deep hole...

After sometime, long or short, the Tsar again gathered together a feast, summoned the princes and nobles and said to them:

“My children! Who will come forth from among the hunters to bring to me the apples of youth and the twelve-spouted jug with the water of life? I will give half the tsardom to such a rider.”

Again, the highest ranking nobles hid behind the middle and the middle hid behind the least, and from the least came no reply.

Then, came out the Tsar’s second son, Tsarevich Vasily, and said:

“My dear Father, I do not want to give the tsardom to strangers. I will make the journey, bring these things, and give them to you.”

Tsarevich Vasily went to the stables and chose a horse that never been ridden, bridled it with a bridle that had never been bridled, and took a whip that had never been whipped. Then, he saddled it with a saddle with twelve saddle girths.

Tsarevich Vasily left. The people saw him mount but did not see in which direction he rode away.... Later, he came to the crossroads where lay the stone slab and read:

“If you go to the right, you will save yourself but lose your horse. If you go to the left, you will save your horse but lose yourself. If you go straight, you will get married.”

Tsarevich Vasily thought and thought, and then he went down the road where he would get married. He rode up to the house with the golden roof. Out ran the fair maiden to him and invited him to be welcomed with salt and bread and then to sleep and rest his head.

“Oh Tsarevich, do not hurry to leave, but instead hurry to fulfill your dearest desire.”

At that, she helped him dismount and took him into the house. She gave him food, gave him drink, and gave him a bed to sleep on.

As soon as Tsarevich Vasily lay against the wall, she again overturned the bed, and he flew under the floor.

And a voice asked, “Who is flying down?”

“Tsarevich Vasily. And who is sitting down there?”

“Tsarevich Fyodor.”

“So, dear brother, we have been trapped!”

After some time, long or short, the Tsar again gathered a third feast and summoned the princes and nobles.

“Who will come forth from among the hunters to bring to me the apples of youth and the twelve-spouted jug with the water of life? I will give half of the tsardom to such a rider.”

Once again, the highest ranking nobles hid behind the middle and the middle hid behind the least, and from the least came no reply.

Out came Tsarevich Ivan and said:

“Dear father, give me your blessing, from my mighty head to fast feet, to go to the faraway land at the other end of the world to search for the apples of youth and the water of life for you and also to search for my brothers.”

The Tsar gave him his blessing. Then, Tsarevich Ivan went to the stables to choose for himself a horse that matched his wit. As soon as he looked at a horse, it trembled. As soon as he put his hand on it, it fell down....

Tsarevich Ivan could not find a horse that matched his wit. He started walking, his mighty head drooping. He met an old granny who lived on the Tsar’s grounds.

“Hello, my child, Tsarevich Ivan! What has brought you such sorrow and woe?”

“How can I not be sorrowful? I cannot find a horse that matches my wit.”

“You should have asked me sooner. The right horse is standing chained in a chain of iron in the cellar. You may take it—that horse will be a match for your wit.”

Tsarevich Ivan approached the cellar, kicked the iron plating, and uncovered the cellar’s entrance. He jumped toward the noble steed, and it put its forelegs on his shoulders. Tsarevich Ivan stood unshaken—he did not move. The horse broke out of the iron chain, leaped out of the cellar, and took Tsarevich Ivan out with him. At that point, Tsarevich Ivan bridled him with a bridle that never been bridled and saddled him with a saddle that had never been saddled. Then, he put on twelve saddle girths—not for beauty, but for his noble glory.

Tsarevich Ivan set off on the path. The people saw him mount, but did not see in which direction he rode away.... He came to the crossroads and stopped to think:

“If I go to the right, I will lose my horse. Where can I go without my horse? If I go straight, I will get married. I did not set out on this way for that. If I go to the left, I will save my horse. That is the best way for me.”

So, he turned toward the path where he would save his horse and lose himself. He went here, there, and everywhere. He took the high road along rocky mountains. He took the low road along green meadows. From day to evening he rode—from dawn to dusk—until he came to a little hut.

The little hut stood on a chicken leg with chicken toes and had only one window.

“O little hut, little hut, turn from your back to your front. Face not the trees but me, so that as I enter you, I may also pass right through.”

The little hut turned its back to the woodland and its front to Tsarevich Ivan. He entered it, and there sat a Baba-Yaga of old age. She was spinning silken flax and throwing the thread over a clothing line.

“Phew, phew, Russian fume,” she said, “Unheard of, never seen, yet now the Russian man himself has come to me.”

Tsarevich Ivan said to her, “Oh you, Baba-Yaga, the bony leg, you did not catch the bird, yet you pluck out its feathers. You do not know me, yet you nag me. Now, shouldn’t you get up and come to me, a fair youth, a traveler, and give me food and drink and a bed for the night? Then, I would lie down; you would sit at the head of the bed and start asking questions; and only then would I begin telling who I am and from where I have come.”

Then, the Baba-Yaga did as he said; she gave Tsarevich Ivan food and drink and a bed. She sat at the head of the bed and started asking him:

“Who are you, traveler, fair youth, and from where have you come? To which land do you belong? Who are your father and mother?”

“Dear grandmother, I am from a certain tsardom in a certain kingdom and am the Tsar’s son Tsarevich Ivan. I am going to a faraway land at the other end of the world for the apples of youth and the water of life.”

“Well, my sweet child, you have a long way to go. The water of life and apples of youth belong to a strong bogatyrka, the maiden Seenyglazka, Blue Eyes. She is my niece. I do not know if you will receive what you want.”

“And you in your turn, grandmother, put your head on these mighty shoulders of mine, and direct me with your wisdom of mind.”

“Many youths here have passed through, but not many spoke as politely as you. Dear child, take my steed. He will be more powerful than yours. He will take you to my middle sister. She will advise you what to do.”

In the morning, Tsarevich Ivan rose early and bathed thoroughly. He thanked the Baba-Yaga for letting him stay the night and left on her steed.

Suddenly, he said to the horse:

“Stop! I dropped my glove.”

But the horse answered:

“In the time it took you to speak, I have already flown 150 miles”

Tsarevich Ivan went near and far. The day shortened into night. He saw before him a little hut that stood on a chicken leg with chicken toes and had only one window.

“Oh little hut, little hut, turn from your back to your front. Face not trees but me, so that as I enter you, I may also pass right through.”

The little hut turned its back to the woodland and its front to him. Suddenly, he heard the sound of a horse neighing, and the horse he was riding neighed in response.

These horses were from the same herd. So, the Baba-Yaga here, even older than the first, heard this and said:

“It seems my dear sister has come to visit me.”

She went out onto the porch:

“Phew, phew, the Russian fume,” she said, “Unheard of, never seen, yet now the Russian man himself has come to me.”

And Tsarevich Ivan said to her:

“Oh, you, Baba-Yaga, the boney leg, clothes do not make the man, and we should not judge by first impression. Shouldn’t you care for my horse and give me, a fair youth and traveler, food and drink and a place to sleep?”

The Baba-Yaga did as he said. She cared for his horse, gave him food and drink and a bed, and then she started asking him who he was, from where he had come, and where he was going.

“Grandmother, I am from a certain tsardom in a certain kingdom and am the Tsar’s son, Tsarevich Ivan. I am going to a strong bogatyrka, the maiden Seenyglazka, Blue Eyes, for the water of life and the apples of youth.”

“Well, sweet child, I do not know if you will receive what you want. It is not easy to reach the maiden Seenyglazka.”

“Oh, but grandmother, put your head on these mighty shoulders of mine, and direct me with your wisdom of mind.”

“Many youths here have passed through, but not many spoke as politely as you. Dear child, take my horse and go to my eldest sister. She will advise you what to do better than I.”

There Tsarevich Ivan spent the night at the old woman’s house, in the morning arose early, and bathed thoroughly. He thanked the Baba-Yaga for the night, and left on her horse. And this horse was more powerful than the other.

Suddenly, he said to the horse:

“Stop! I dropped my glove.”

But the horse answered:

“In the time it took you to speak, I have already flown 200 miles.”

The doings of life pass ever slowly by, but in this tale time will simply fly. Tsarevich Ivan rode from day to evening, from dawn to dusk. He came to a little hut that stood on a chicken leg with chicken toes and had only one window.

“Oh little hut, little hut, turn from your back to your front. Face not trees but me. I cannot spend forever here, and I have only one night to spare.”

Suddenly a horse neighed and the horse Tsarevich Ivan was riding neighed in response. An elderly Baba-Yaga, even older than the last, came out onto the porch. She saw her sister’s horse and its rider from a faraway land, the fair youth...

Then, Tsarevich Ivan politely bowed to her and asked to stay the night. What else could she do? No one carries a place to sleep with them, but everyone needs to sleep—both travelers and horses, both rich and poor.

The Baba-Yaga did all the proper things: she cared for the horse, gave Tsarevich Ivan food and drink, and then asked him from where he had come and where he was going.

“Grandmother, I am from a certain tsardom in a certain kingdom and am the Tsar’s son, Tsarevich Ivan. I visited your youngest sister. She sent me to your middle sister. And your middle sister sent me to you. Put your head on these mighty shoulders of mine, and direct me with your wisdom of mind, so that I may find the maiden Seenyglazka’s apples of youth and water of life.”

“Let it be so. I will help you, Tsarevich Ivan. The maiden Seenyglazka, my niece, is a strong and mighty bogatyrka. Around her tsardom is a wall seven feet wide and twenty feet tall. By the gate stand guards, 30 men, all bogatyr. They will not let you pass through the gate. You need to go in the middle of the night, and you must ride on my noble steed. When you get to the wall, beat the sides of the horse with the whip that has never been whipped. The horse will jump over the wall. Tie the horse and go into the garden. You will see the apple tree with the apples of youth and under the apple tree, a well. Pick three apples, but do not take any more. With the twelve-spouted jug draw water from the well. The maiden Seenyglazka will be sleeping. Do not enter the house to see her; instead, mount the horse and whip its steep sides. He will take you over the wall.”

Tsarevich Ivan did not stay the night at this old woman’s home, rather he mounted her gallant steed and rode at night time. This horse galloped, leaped over mossy bogs, and swept rivers and lakes with its tail.

For some time, long or short, he rode here, there, and everywhere. He took the high road. He took the low road. He came to the tall wall in the middle of the night. By the gate the guards, all thirty bogatyr, were sleeping. He grasped his fine steed and whipped it with the whip that had never been whipped.

The horse got angry and leaped over the wall. Tsarevich Ivan dismounted from the horse, entered the garden, and saw that there stood the apple tree with golden apples and silver leaves and beneath the tree was the well. So Tsarevich Ivan picked three apples but took no more than that, and with the twelve spouted jug he drew the water of life out from the well. However, a desire to see the strong, mighty bogatyrka, the maiden Seenyglazka, overcame him.

Tsarevich Ivan entered the house. There slept six bogatyrka maidens on one side and six on the other, and in the middle slept the maiden Seenyglazka tossing and turning as noisily as mighty river rapids.

Tsarevich Ivan could not restrain himself. He touched her, kissed her, and left.... He mounted his fine steed, and the horse spoke to him with the voice of a man:

“You did not listen, Tsarevich Ivan. You went into the house, to the maiden Seenyglazka. Now I will not jump over the wall.”

But Tsarevich Ivan whipped him with the whip that had never been whipped.

“Ugh, you horse, food for the wolves, bag of grass, if we stay here overnight, we will lose our heads!”

The horse got even angrier than before and leaped over the wall, but with one hoof it touched the wall and strings started singing and bells started ringing.

The maiden Seenyglazka woke up and discovered the theft:

“Get up! We have had a great theft!”

She ordered to have her horse prepared, and she rushed with her twelve strong bogatyrka maidens in pursuit of Tsarevich Ivan.

Tsarevich Ivan rode his horse at full gallop, and the maiden Seenyglazka galloped after him. He rode to the eldest Baba-Yaga, and she had already brought the horse out of the stables and had it ready. He changed horses and rushed forward again.... After Tsarevich Ivan went out, Seenyglazka came in and asked the Baba-Yaga:

“Grandmother, has an animal raced by here?”

“No, dear child.”

“Grandmother, has a fair youth come through here?”

“No, sweet child. But you have just come from the road; you should drink some milk.”

“I would drink some, grandmother, but it takes a long time to milk a cow.”

“Not at all, dear child. I will do it quickly.”

The Baba-Yaga went to milk the cow. She milked it, but she did not hurry. Seenyglazka drank the milk and once again galloped after Tsarevich Ivan.

Tsarevich Ivan rode to the middle Baba-Yaga, changed his horse and again galloped off. After Tsarevich Ivan went out, Seenyglazka came in.

“Grandmother, has an animal raced by or a fair youth passed through?”

“No sweet child. But you have just come from the road; you should eat some pancakes.”

“But you will take too long to cook them.”

“Not at all, dear child. I will do it quickly.”

Baba-Yaga baked the pancakes. She baked, but she did not hurry. Seenyglazka ate and once again galloped after Tsarevich Ivan.

He rode to the youngest Baba-Yaga, dismounted her horse, mounted his own steed fit for a bagatyr, and again galloped off. Once again, after Tsarevich Ivan went out, Seenyglazka came in and asked the Baba-Yaga if a fair youth had passed through.

“No sweet child. But you have just come from the road; you should steam in the bath house.”

“But you will take too long to heat it up.”

“Not at all, dear child. I will do it quickly.”

She heated the bath house and prepared everything. The maiden Seenyglazka steamed and rinsed in the bath house and again galloped forward on her chase. Her horse leaped from hill to hill; his tail swept over rivers and lakes. She started to get closer to Tsarevich Ivan.

He saw chasing behind him the twelve bogatyrkas with a thirteenth—the maiden Seenyglazka—gaining on him to take his head from his shoulders. He started to slow down his horse, and the maiden Seenyglazka leaped up to him and yelled:

“You, thief, drank from my well without asking, and you did not close the well.”

But he replied to her:

“Let us stand apart the length of three horse leaps, and then let us test our strength.”

At that, Tsarevich Ivan and the maiden Seenyglazka galloped apart the length of three horse leaps and took up fighting clubs, long spears, and sharp sabers. They rushed forward three times, broke their clubs and beat their spears and sabers, but they could not knock each other off of their horses. There was no need for them to ride on their fine steeds. They jumped from their horses and fought with their bare hands.

They fought from morning to night—from dawn to dusk. Tsarevich Ivan’s leg twisted, and he fell down to sweet Mother Earth. The maiden Seenyglazka put one knee on his fair chest and pulled out a damask dagger to cut his fair chest. Tsarevich Ivan said to her:

“Do not kill me, maiden Seenyglazka. It would be better for you to take me by my fair hands, pull me up from this sweet Earth, and kiss my sweet mouth.”

Then, the maiden Seenyglazka lifted Tsarevich Ivan from the sweet Earth and kissed him on his sweet mouth. They pitched tent in a clear field, in a wide open space, in a green meadow. Then, they feasted for three days and three nights. Here they got engaged and exchanged rings.

The maiden Seenyglazka said to him:

“I am going to go home. You should go home, too, but see to it that you do not stray from the path anywhere. In three years, wait for me in your own land.”

They mounted their horses and parted ways....

The doings of life pass ever slowly by, but in this tale time will simply fly. After a time, long or short, Tsarevich Ivan came to the crossroads with three different paths, where the stone slab lay, and he thought:

“This is not right! I am going home, but my brothers have disappeared without a trace.”

So, he did not listen to the maiden Seenyglazka. He turned aside toward the path that led to marriage. He reached the house with the golden roof. Then, the horse Tsarevich Ivan was riding began to neigh, and his brothers’ horses neighed in response. Those horses were from the same herd....

Tsarevich Ivan went up the porch and knocked with the door knocker. The onion shaped roof shifted, and the window frame twisted. Out ran the beautiful maiden.

“Oh, Tsarevich Ivan, I have been waiting a long time for you! Come with me and be welcomed with salt and bread and sleep and rest your head.”

She took him into the house and fed him. Tsarevich Ivan did not eat so much as threw the food under the table. He did not drink so much as he poured the drink under the table. The beautiful maiden took him into the bedroom:

“Lie down, Tsarevich Ivan, and sleep and rest.”

But Tsarevich Ivan pushed her onto the bed and quickly turned the bed over. The beautiful maiden flew under the floor into the deep hole.

Tsarevich Ivan bent above the hole and cried:

“Who is alive down there?”

And from the hole voices replied:

“Tsarevich Fyodor and Tsarevich Vasily.”

He pulled them out of the hole. Their faces were black; soil had already started to build up. Tsarevich Ivan washed his brothers with the water of life, and they were themselves again as before.

They mounted their horses and departed. After some time, long or short, they rode up to the crossroads. Tsarevich Ivan said to his brothers:

“Guard my horse while I lie down to rest.”

He lay down on the silken grass and fell asleep as bogatyrs do. But Tsarevich Fyodor said to Tsarevich Vasily:

“If we return without the water of life and without the apples of youth, that will bring little honor to us. Our father will send us to care for the geese.”

Tsarevich Vasily replied:

“Let’s throw him into the abyss, and then we will take the apples of youth and the water of life and give them to our father.”

Then, they took the apples of youth and the jug with the water of life from under his shirt, and took and threw him into the abyss. There Tsarevich Ivan flew down three days and three nights.

Tsarevich Ivan fell down to the very seashore. He came to himself and saw that under an old oak tree baby birds were chirping, the weather beating them.

Tsarevich Ivan took off his coat and wrapped up the baby birds. He himself took cover under the oak tree.

The weather got better, and the great bird Nagai flew in. She flew down and perched under the oak tree and asked the baby birds:

“My dear children, did the bad weather harm you?”

“Do not worry, mother, a kind Russian man wrapped us in his own coat and saved us.”

The bird Nagai asked Tsarevich Ivan:

“Why did you come all the way here, my dear man?”

“My own brothers threw me into the abyss for the apples of youth and the water of life.”

“You saved my children. Ask me for whatever you want: gold, silver, or precious stones.”

“Bird Nagai, I need nothing of the sort. No gold, silver, nor precious stones. But could you get me to my homeland on the other side of the world?”

The bird Nagai answered:

“Get me two barrels with 400 pounds of meat.”

So, Tsarevich Ivan shot the geese and swans along the seashore and put them in two barrels. He put one barrel on her right shoulder, the other on her left. He himself sat on her back. He began to feed the bird Nagai, and she rose and flew up high.

She flew, and he gave her more and more... After some time, long or short, Tsarevich Ivan fed her both barrels of meat, and nothing was left. But again the bird Nagai turned to him. He took out a knife and cut off a piece from his leg and gave it to the bird Nagai. She flew and flew and again turned to him. He cut off a piece of meat from his other leg and gave it to her. There was not very far left to go. Again the bird Nagai turned to him. He cut a piece of meat from his chest and gave it to her.

Then, the bird Nagai brought Tsarevich Ivan to his homeland.

“You fed me well the whole way, but the last piece was the sweetest I have ever eaten.”

Tsarevich Ivan showed her his wounds. She spat out the three pieces.

“Put them back in place.”

Tsarevich Ivan put the meat back, and it grew to the bones.

“Now, get off me, Tsarevich Ivan. I am going to go home.”

She rose up high, while Tsarevich Ivan went on his way to his homeland.

He went to the capital and discovered that Tsarevich Fyodor and Tsarevich Vasily had taken the apples of youth and water of life to their father, and the Tsar was healed. His health and his eyes were as good as ever.

Tsarevich Ivan did not go to his father and mother, but he gathered together the beggars from the pub and led them from tavern to tavern and lived instead with the paupers.

At that time in the faraway land at the other end of the world, the strong bogatyrka Seenyglazka gave birth to two sons. They grew not by the day but by the hour.

The doings of life pass ever slowly by, but in this tale time will simply fly—three years passed.

Seenyglazka took her sons, gathered her army, and went to search for Tsarevich Ivan.

She came to his tsardom and in a clear field, in a wide open space, in a green meadow, she pitched her white linen tent. She covered the path out of the tent with colorful cloth. Then, she sent word to the Tsar at the capital:

“Tsar, give me your son. If you do not, I will trample over all your tsardom and set it on fire; I will take you into captivity.”

The Tsar was frightened and sent the eldest son, Fyodor. Tsarevich Fyodor walked on the colorful cloth and approached the white linen tent. Out ran two boys:

“Mother, dear mother, is this our father who has come?”

“No, children, this is your uncle.”

“And what would you like us to do with him?”

“You, dear children, treat him as he deserves.”

At that, the two boys took sticks and beat Tsarevich Fyodor below the spine. They beat and beat him, and he barely escaped with his life.

Again Seenyglazka sent word to the Tsar:

“Give me your son...”

The Tsar was even more afraid and sent the middle son, Vasily. He came to the tent. Out ran two boys:

“Mother, dear mother, is this our father who has come?”

“No, dear children, this is your uncle. Treat him as he deserves.”

Again the pair of boys thrashed their uncle with sticks. They beat and beat, and Tsarevich Vasily barely escaped with his life.

Then, Seenyglazka sent word to the Tsar for the third time:

“Go and search for your third son, Tsarevich Ivan. If you do not find him, I will trample and burn all your tsardom.”

The Tsar was even more afraid still, sent for Tsarevich Fyodor and Tsarevich Vasily, and ordered them to find their brother, Tsarevich Ivan. At that the brothers fell on their knees and confessed to their father everything—how they took the apples of youth and the water of life from Tsarevich Ivan while he was sleeping, and how they threw him into the abyss.

The Tsar heard this and burst into tears.... At that time Tsarevich Ivan himself went to Seenyglazka, and the beggars went with him. They tore the cloths under their feet and threw them to the sides.

He came to the white linen tent. Out ran the two boys:

“Mother, dear mother, someone has come to us with the beggars from the tavern!”

But Seenyglazka responded to them:

“Take him by his fair hands and lead him into the tent. This is your father. He has suffered guiltlessly for three years.”

At that they took Tsarevich Ivan by his fair hands and led him into the tent. Seenyglazka washed and scrubbed him, brushed his hair, changed his clothes, and put him to sleep. She gave the beggars some drink, and they returned home.

The next day Seenyglazka and Tsarevich Ivan went to the palace. Then began a feast of feasts in celebration of their wedding. Tsarevich Fyodor and Tsarevich Vasily were stripped of all honor. They were banished from the palace with nowhere to spend that night, or the second, or the third...

Tsarevich Ivan did not stay there but left with Seenyglazka to her own maiden tsardom.

Thus ends our fairy tale.