Ivan Romanov

A father lived with his children, and he did not go to pray in church, but went to the threshing floor and prayed in the rye. His children began to persuade him: "Why is it, father, that you do not go to church, that you pray in the rye? People laugh at you, and we are ashamed." The father says: "All right, my children, if you want, I will go to church." The time came, and he went to church (it was beyond the lake), approached the water and walked across the lake as if on dry land. He prayed in church, and on his way home he sank into the water up to his knees. He came home and said to his children: "You see, when I prayed in the rye, I pleased God; when I began to pray in church, I did not please God." So the old man began to persuade his children: "Let us build a bridge across the lake — let us do a good deed: everyone will have a short, convenient road. I have money, I do not need it, I only want to fold my hands on my chest and die in peace." The children obeyed and built the bridge.

People began to walk and ride across this bridge. Everyone praises and thanks the old man. A rich, renowned merchant lived there too, and it galled him that the poor old man had such fame as he did not have. He sent his clerk to stand on the bridge and find out whether it was true that so much was said about the old man. The clerk went, stands and listens. An old man approaches him and asks why he is standing there. He told him. The old man said to him: "Let your merchant not be proud of his wealth. In such-and-such a village a son will be born to such-and-such a peasant, and he is destined to possess all the wealth of your master." The clerk came and told the merchant everything the old man had said to him. The merchant began to think how to destroy this child. When the woman gave birth, the merchant promised the midwife a pile of gold if she destroyed the child. The old woman took the newborn, gave it to a man sent by the merchant, and smeared the mouth of the mother, who was lying unconscious, with blood and explained to the people that she had eaten the child. The man sent by the merchant received orders to take the child, kill it in the ravine, and bring him the child's heart on a knife. He finds at the place where he came a little hare, kills it and brings the merchant the hare's heart on a knife. He stuffs the child into a sleeve torn from the merchant's sheepskin coat. He is picked up and raised by kind people. After three years he is already an adult and intelligent young man. Meanwhile his mother is sitting in prison and awaiting trial. The son learns his origin, guesses about his mother and intercedes in her case. He rides to the city where his mother will be tried.

On the way he comes to an old woman and orders that his horse be given embers instead of oats. She refuses, but he insists. His wish is fulfilled, but the horse, of course, turned away from the coals in fear. They tell this to the boy. One cannot believe that a horse would eat hot coals. "And how do you believe that a mother ate her own child!" In the city the mother has already been sentenced to the gallows. She is being taken to the execution. The son arrives at the time when she has been brought to the place of execution and hanged. The son spurs the horse, it knocks down the gallows — the mother is saved from death. He is seized and interrogated: "How did you dare to do this?" He says: "I came on horseback, so give my horse embers!" They answer him: "Will a horse eat embers!" He answers them: "Will a mother eat her own child." He struck with his whip (var.: lash) crosswise.

Suddenly there stands near him this very merchant. "Look," he says, "in his sheepskin coat there is no sleeve — only from below." They looked, there is no sleeve. Rightly! "In this sleeve was my cut-short life. They cut short not my life, but a hare's. This is my mother." He took his mother, pressed her close to his heart, and they rode home. And the merchant was executed on this gallows.