Folk Tale No. 239

Once there was an old man; he had three sons, the third of whom was Ivan the Fool. There was a certain tsar at that time — that was long ago; he had a daughter. She says to her father: "Allow me, father, to guess riddles; if I guess someone's riddles, let his head be cut off, and if I do not guess, I will marry him." Immediately a proclamation was made; many came forward, all were executed: the tsarevna guessed the riddles. Ivan the Fool says to his father: "Bless me, father! I will go to the tsar to pose riddles!" — "Where are you going, fool! They will execute even those better than you!" — "If you bless me I will go, and if you do not bless me I will go!" The father blessed him. Ivan the Fool set off, he sees: on the road there is bread, in the bread a horse; he drove her out with a whip so she would not trample it, and says: "Here is a riddle!" He rides further, sees a snake, took it and stabbed it with a spear and thinks: "Here is another riddle!"

He arrives at the tsar's; he is received and told to pose riddles. He says: "I was riding to you, I see on the road a good, in the good is good, I took the good and with good drove it out of the good; the good fled from the good and out of the good." The tsarevna grabbed the book, looks: this riddle is not there; she does not know how to solve it and says to her father: "Father! My head aches today, my thoughts are muddled; I will solve it tomorrow." They postponed until tomorrow. A room was assigned to Ivan the Fool. In the evening he sits, smoking his pipe; and the tsarevna chose a faithful maid, sends her to Ivan the Fool: "Go," she says, "ask him what this riddle is; promise him gold and silver, whatever he wants."

The maid comes, knocks; Ivan the Fool opened the door, she entered and asks the riddle, promises mountains of gold and silver. Ivan the Fool says: "What do I need money for! I have plenty of my own. Let the tsarevna stand all night without sleeping in my chamber, then I will tell the riddle." The tsarevna heard this, agreed, stood all night — did not sleep. In the morning Ivan the Fool told the riddle, that he drove the horse out of the bread. And the tsarevna solved it.

Ivan the Fool began to pose another: "I was riding to you, on the road I see an evil, I took it and struck it with evil, the evil died from the evil." The tsarevna again grabbed the book, cannot solve the riddle and asked for delay until morning. In the evening she sends the maid to find out the riddle from Ivan the Fool: "Promise," she says, "him money!" — "What do I need money for! I have plenty of my own," answers Ivan the Fool, "let the tsarevna stand the night without sleeping, then I will tell the riddle." The tsarevna agreed, did not sleep the night and solved the riddle.

The third riddle Ivan the Fool did not pose like that, but ordered all the senators to be gathered and posed how the tsarevna could not solve those riddles and sent the maid to him to bribe with money. The tsarevna could not guess this riddle either; again to ask him — she promised silver and gold as much as he wanted and wanted to send her home on a post chaise. But that was not to be! Again she stood the night without sleeping; when he told her what the riddle was about — she cannot solve it; about her, they will find out how she ferreted out those riddles from Ivan the Fool. And the tsarevna answered: "I do not know." And so, with great rejoicing, they had the wedding: Ivan the Fool married her; they began to live and be, and they live to this day.