Folk Tale No. 285

King Dodon had three daughters. Ivan Tsarevich came to woo them: his legs were silver up to the knees, his arms gold up to the elbows, a red sun shone in his forehead, and a bright moon on the back of his head. He began to woo King Dodon's daughters: "I," he says, "will take the one who in three pregnancies bears seven gallants — just like myself, with legs silver to the knees, arms gold to the elbows, a red sun in the forehead, a bright moon on the back of the head." The youngest daughter, Marya Dodonovna, jumped out and said: "I will bear seven gallants in three pregnancies, even better than you!" Ivan Tsarevich liked this speech, and took Marya Tsarevna as his wife. Some time passed, she became pregnant, and Ivan Tsarevich was preparing to go away on service. "How can you leave me alone?" — "I will send for your sister." They brought the sister; and he left.

Not long after, Marya Tsarevna gave birth to three gallants: legs silver to the knees, arms gold to the elbows, a red sun in the forehead, a bright moon on the back of the head. To her misfortune, the bitch whelped at that same time. The sister took Marya Dodonovna's sons and cast them onto an island, and when Ivan Tsarevich arrived, she brought him three puppies and said: "See, your boaster has brought three puppies!" Ivan Tsarevich answered: "Well, let it wait until the next pregnancy!" Another time Marya Dodonovna became pregnant; again Ivan Tsarevich went away on service. The wife gave birth to three more gallants without him; to her misfortune, the bitch whelped again. The sister took the children, did not show them to the mother, and cast them onto the same island. Ivan Tsarevich came home, and she said to him: "See, your boaster has again brought three puppies!" — "Let it wait until the third pregnancy," said the tsarevich.

The third time Marya Dodonovna became pregnant; again Ivan Tsarevich went away on service. She gave birth to one boy; to her misfortune, the bitch whelped again. Marya Dodonovna did not show this child to anyone, hid him in her bosom; the sister pressed her: "If you do not show this child, I will strangle you!" No, she did not show him. Ivan Tsarevich arrived, the sister dragged a puppy to him and said: "See, your boaster has again brought a puppy!" Ivan Tsarevich chained his wife into a barrel and set it upon the blue sea. She floated and floated on the sea, and the little child grew bigger and bigger, and began to speak. "Mother! Let me stretch." — "No, my dear! The barrel is not yet rattling; the depth beneath it, perhaps, we will sink!" The barrel went farther and farther, closer and closer to the shore, and began to rattle from the bottom. "Well, mother! Now we have run

aground on a sandbank, may I stretch?" — "Now stretch!" He stretched — all the hoops burst.

They came out of the barrel onto an island; they walk around the island and look for a road, where to go. They walked and walked, found a path; they set off along this path, walked and walked, found a house. They enter the house, look here and there — on the chairs lie worn, unwashed little shirts. Marya Dodonovna took these little shirts, rewashed, rerinsed, redried, rerolled them and laid them in the front corner. And the dishes on the table stand unwashed; as soon as eaten — not cleared away. She also rewashed the dishes, rewiped them, swept the floor; everywhere became clean. Then she said to her son: "Someone is coming here; let us go hide behind the stove." They hid behind the stove, stood a little while and saw that six people entered the room, entered and rejoiced that everything in the house was washed and tidied. "Who is it that washed and tidied for us? Show yourself! — said the gallants. — If you are a fair maiden — you will be our own sister, and if you are a woman of fifty — you will be our own mother!"

Marya Dodonovna came out from behind the stove; the six gallants rushed to her neck and spoke these words: "Be our own mother to us!" They all began to live together, began to question her: "From where did you appear to us, own mother?" She answered: "I was married to Ivan Tsarevich, in the first pregnancy I bore three boys — legs silver to the knees, arms gold to the elbows, a red sun in the forehead, a bright moon on the back of the head. The sister seized them, sent them off somewhere, and told her husband: 'See, your boaster has brought three puppies!' Ivan Tsarevich did not touch me until the second pregnancy; again I bore three boys, again the sister sent them off, and showed her husband three puppies. Ivan Tsarevich did not touch me until the third pregnancy. The third time I bore one boy and hid him in my bosom; the sister ran to her husband. 'Your,' she says, 'boaster has again brought a puppy!' He chained me with my son into a barrel and set it upon the blue sea. Long we floated; my little son grew, stretched — the barrel burst; we came out onto this island and got into your house. And you, my little children, where were you born and raised?" — "Where we were born, we ourselves do not know; but we grew up on this island, a lioness suckled us with her milk."

Then the gallants took off their caps, Marya Dodonovna looks, and on all of them there is a red sun in the forehead, a bright moon on the back of the head. "Ah, my dear little children! It seems you are my own born!" — said Marya Tsarevna and fell dead from joy. They took her, lifted her, rubbed her — and she came to life. "Mother! Bless us on our journey to seek our father." — "God bless you!" All seven of them went, reached the kingdom where Ivan Tsarevich lived, and asked for him. They were at once admitted to the palace; the gallants pulled their caps down over

their foreheads, went in to Ivan Tsarevich and said: "Would you care to hear a little story?" — "Very well, tell it; I love little stories." And they told how their wicked aunt cast them onto the island, how they grew up and found their mother; then they took off their caps. Ivan Tsarevich saw that their legs were silver to the knees, arms gold to the elbows, a red sun in the forehead, a bright moon on the back of the head, recognized them as his children; without delay, sent messengers for his wife; and the spiteful aunt he tied by the tail to a stallion and struck that stallion with a whip: it flew like an arrow into the open field and tore her apart among the bushes and ravines. Marya Dodonovna returned to her husband, and they began to live and thrive and gather wealth.