

# Ivan the Fool

by

Leo Tolstoy

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## Chapter I

In a certain kingdom there lived a rich peasant, who had three sons—Simeon (a soldier), Tarras-Briukhan (fat man), and Ivan (a fool)—and one daughter, Milania, born dumb. Simeon went to war, to serve the Czar; Tarras went to a city and became a merchant; and Ivan, with his sister, remained at home to work on the farm.

For his valiant service in the army, Simeon received an estate with high rank, and married a noble's daughter. Besides his large pay, he was in receipt of a handsome income from his estate; yet he was unable to make ends meet. What the husband saved, the wife wasted in extravagance. One day Simeon went to the estate to collect his income, when the steward informed him that there was no income, saying:

“We have neither horses, cows, fishing nets, nor implements; it is necessary first to buy everything, and then to look for income.”

Simeon thereupon went to his father and said:

“You are rich, batiushka [little father], but you have given nothing to me. Give me one-third of what you possess as my share, and I will transfer it to my estate.”

The old man replied: “You did not help to bring prosperity to our household. For what reason, then, should you now demand the third part of everything? It would be unjust to Ivan and his sister.”

“Yes,” said Simeon; “but he is a fool, and she was born dumb. What need have they of anything?”

“See what Ivan will say.”

Ivan’s reply was: “Well, let him take his share.”

Simeon took the portion allotted to him, and went again to serve in the army.

Tarras also met with success. He became rich and married a merchant’s daughter, but even this failed to satisfy his desires, and he also went to his father and said, “Give me my share.”

The old man, however, refused to comply with his request, saying: “You had no hand in the accumulation of our property, and what our household contains is the result of Ivan’s hard work. It would be unjust,” he repeated, “to Ivan and his sister.”

Tarras replied: “But he does not need it. He is a fool, and cannot marry, for no one will have him; and sister does not require anything, for she was born dumb.” Turning then to Ivan he continued: “Give me half the grain you have, and I will not touch the implements or fishing-nets; and from the cattle I will take only the dark mare, as she is not fit to plow.”

Ivan laughed and said: “Well, I will go and arrange matters so that Tarras may have his share,” whereupon Tarras took the brown mare with the grain to town, leaving Ivan with one old horse to work on as before and support his father, mother, and sister.

## Chapter II

**I**t was disappointing to the Stary Tchern (Old Devil) that the brothers did not quarrel over the division of the property, and that they separated peacefully; and he cried out, calling his three small devils (Tchernionki).

“See here,” said he, “there are living three brothers—Simeon the soldier, Tarras-Briukhan, and Ivan the Fool. It is necessary that they should quarrel. Now they live peacefully, and enjoy each other’s hospitality. The Fool spoiled all my plans. Now you three go and work with them in such a manner that they will be ready to tear each other’s eyes out. Can you do this?”

“We can,” they replied.

“How will you accomplish it?”

“In this way: We will first ruin them to such an extent that they will have nothing to eat, and we will then gather them together in one place where we are sure that they will fight.”

“Very well; I see you understand your business. Go, and do not return to me until you have created a feud between the three brothers—or I will skin you alive.”

The three small devils went to a swamp to consult as to the best means of accomplishing their mission. They disputed for a long time—each one wanting the easiest part of the work—and not being able to agree, concluded to draw lots; by which it was decided that the one who was first finished had to come and help the others. This agreement being entered into, they

appointed a time when they were again to meet in the swamp—to find out who was through and who needed assistance.

The time having arrived, the young devils met in the swamp as agreed, when each related his experience. The first, who went to Simeon, said: “I have succeeded in my undertaking, and to-morrow Simeon returns to his father.”

His comrades, eager for particulars, inquired how he had done it.

“Well,” he began, “the first thing I did was to blow some courage into his veins, and, on the strength of it, Simeon went to the Czar and offered to conquer the whole world for him. The Emperor made him commander-in-chief of the forces, and sent him with an army to fight the Viceroy of India. Having started on their mission of conquest, they were unaware that I, following in their wake, had wet all their powder. I also went to the Indian ruler and showed him how I could create numberless soldiers from straw.

Simeon’s army, seeing that they were surrounded by such a vast number of Indian warriors of my creation, became frightened, and Simeon commanded to fire from cannons and rifles, which of course they were unable to do. The soldiers, discouraged, retreated in great disorder. Thus Simeon brought upon himself the terrible disgrace of defeat. His estate was confiscated, and to-morrow he is to be executed. All that remains for me to do, therefore,” concluded the young devil, “is to release him to-morrow morning. Now, then, who wants my assistance?”

The second small devil (from Tarras) then related his story.

“I do not need any help,” he began. “My business is also all right. My work with Tarras will be finished in one week. In the first place I made him grow thin. He afterward became so covetous that he wanted to possess everything he saw, and he

spent all the money he had in the purchase of immense quantities of goods. When his capital was gone he still continued to buy with borrowed money, and has become involved in such difficulties that he cannot free himself. At the end of one week the date for the payment of his notes will have expired, and, his goods being seized upon, he will become a bankrupt; and he also will return to his father.”

At the conclusion of this narrative they inquired of the third devil how things had fared between him and Ivan.

“Well,” said he, “my report is not so encouraging. The first thing I did was to spit into his jug of quass [a sour drink made from rye], which made him sick at his stomach. He afterward went to plow his summer-fallow, but I made the soil so hard that the plow could scarcely penetrate it. I thought the Fool would not succeed, but he started to work nevertheless. Moaning with pain, he still continued to labor. I broke one plow, but he replaced it with another, fixing it securely, and resumed work. Going beneath the surface of the ground I took hold of the plowshares, but did not succeed in stopping Ivan. He pressed so hard, and the colter was so sharp, that my hands were cut; and despite my utmost efforts, he went over all but a small portion of the field.”

He concluded with: “Come, brothers, and help me, for if we do not conquer him our whole enterprise will be a failure. If the Fool is permitted successfully to conduct his farming, they will have no need, for he will support his brothers.”

## Chapter III

Ivan having succeeded in plowing all but a small portion of his land, he returned the next day to finish it. The pain in his stomach continued, but he felt that he must go on with his work. He tried to start his plow, but it would not move; it seemed to have struck a hard root. It was the small devil in the ground who had wound his feet around the plowshares and held them.

“This is strange,” thought Ivan. “There were never any roots here before, and this is surely one.”

Ivan put his hand in the ground, and, feeling something soft, grasped and pulled it out. It was like a root in appearance, but seemed to possess life. Holding it up he saw that it was a little devil. Disgusted, he exclaimed, “See the nasty thing,” and he proceeded to strike it a blow, intending to kill it, when the young devil cried out:

“Do not kill me, and I will grant your every wish.”

“What can you do for me?”

“Tell me what it is you most wish for,” the little devil replied.

Ivan, peasant-fashion, scratched the back of his head as he thought, and finally he said:

“I am dreadfully sick at my stomach. Can you cure me?”

“I can,” the little devil said.

“Then do so.”

The little devil bent toward the earth and began searching for roots, and when he found them he gave them to Ivan, saying: “If you will swallow some of these you will be immediately cured of whatsoever disease you are afflicted with.”

Ivan did as directed, and obtained instant relief.

“I beg of you to let me go now,” the little devil pleaded; “I will pass into the earth, never to return.”

“Very well; you may go, and God bless you;” and as Ivan pronounced the name of God, the small devil disappeared into the earth like a flash, and only a slight opening in the ground remained.

Ivan placed in his hat what roots he had left, and proceeded to plow. Soon finishing his work, he turned his plow over and returned home.

When he reached the house he found his brother Simeon and his wife seated at the supper-table. His estate had been confiscated, and he himself had barely escaped execution by making his way out of prison, and having nothing to live upon had come back to his father for support.

Turning to Ivan he said: “I came to ask you to care for us until I can find something to do.”

“Very well,” Ivan replied; “you may remain with us.”

Just as Ivan was about to sit down to the table Simeon’s wife made a wry face, indicating that she did not like the smell of Ivan’s sheep-skin coat; and turning to her husband she said, “I shall not sit at the table with a moujik [peasant] who smells like that.”

Simeon the soldier turned to his brother and said: “My lady objects to the smell of your clothes. You may eat in the porch.”



Ivan said: “Very well, it is all the same to me. I will soon have to go and feed my horse any way.”

Ivan took some bread in one hand, and his kaftan (coat) in the other, and left the room.

## Chapter IV

The small devil finished with Simeon that night, and according to agreement went to the assistance of his comrade who had charge of Ivan, that he might help to conquer the Fool. He went to the field and searched everywhere, but could find nothing but the hole through which the small devil had disappeared.

“Well, this is strange,” he said; “something must have happened to my companion, and I will have to take his place and continue the work he began. The Fool is through with his plowing, so I must look about me for some other means of compassing his destruction. I must overflow his meadow and prevent him from cutting the grass.”

The little devil accordingly overflowed the meadow with muddy water, and, when Ivan went at dawn next morning with his scythe set and sharpened and tried to mow the grass, he found that it resisted all his efforts and would not yield to the implement as usual.

Many times Ivan tried to cut the grass, but always without success. At last, becoming weary of the effort, he decided to return home and have his scythe again sharpened, and also to procure a quantity of bread, saying: “I will come back here and will not leave until I have mown all the meadow, even if it should take a whole week.”

Hearing this, the little devil became thoughtful, saying: "That Ivan is a koolak [hard case], and I must think of some other way of conquering him."

Ivan soon returned with his sharpened scythe and started to mow.

The small devil hid himself in the grass, and as the point of the scythe came down he buried it in the earth and made it almost impossible for Ivan to move the implement. He, however, succeeded in mowing all but one small spot in the swamp, where again the small devil hid himself, saying: "Even if he should cut my hands I will prevent him from accomplishing his work."

When Ivan came to the swamp he found that the grass was not very thick. Still, the scythe would not work, which made him so angry that he worked with all his might, and one blow more powerful than the others cut off a portion of the small devil's tail, who had hidden himself there.

Despite the little devil's efforts he succeeded in finishing his work, when he returned home and ordered his sister to gather up the grass while he went to another field to cut rye. But the devil preceded him there, and fixed the rye in such a manner that it was almost impossible for Ivan to cut it; however, after continuous hard labor he succeeded, and when he was through with the rye he said to himself: "Now I will start to mow oats."

On hearing this, the little devil thought to himself: "I could not prevent him from mowing the rye, but I will surely stop him from mowing the oats when the morning comes."

Early next day, when the devil came to the field, he found that the oats had been already mowed. Ivan did it during the night, so as to avoid the loss that might have resulted from the grain being too ripe and dry. Seeing that Ivan again had escaped him, the little devil became greatly enraged, saying:

“He cut me all over and made me tired, that fool. I did not meet such misfortune even on the battle-field. He does not even sleep;” and the devil began to swear. “I cannot follow him,” he continued. “I will go now to the heaps and make everything rotten.”

Accordingly he went to a heap of the new-mown grain and began his fiendish work. After wetting it he built a fire and warmed himself, and soon was fast asleep.

Ivan harnessed his horse, and, with his sister, went to bring the rye home from the field.

After lifting a couple of sheaves from the first heap his pitchfork came into contact with the little devil’s back, which caused the latter to howl with pain and to jump around in every direction. Ivan exclaimed:

“See here! What nastiness! You again here?”

“I am another one!” said the little devil. “That was my brother. I am the one who was sent to your brother Simeon.”

“Well,” said Ivan, “it matters not who you are. I will fix you all the same.”

As Ivan was about to strike the first blow the devil pleaded: “Let me go and I will do you no more harm. I will do whatever you wish.”

“What can you do for me?” asked Ivan.

“I can make soldiers from almost anything.”

“And what will they be good for?”

“Oh, they will do everything for you!”

“Can they sing?”

“They can.”

“Well, make them.”

“Take a bunch of straw and scatter it on the ground, and see if each straw will not turn into a soldier.”

Ivan shook the straws on the ground, and, as he expected, each straw turned into a soldier, and they began marching with a band at their head.

“Ishty [look you], that was well done! How it will delight the village maidens!” he exclaimed.

The small devil now said: “Let me go; you do not need me any longer.”

But Ivan said: “No, I will not let you go just yet. You have converted the straw into soldiers, and now I want you to turn them again into straw, as I cannot afford to lose it, but I want it with the grain on.”

The devil replied: “Say: ‘So many soldiers, so much straw.’”

Ivan did as directed, and got back his rye with the straw.

The small devil again begged for his release.

Ivan, taking him from the pitchfork, said: “With God’s blessing you may depart”; and, as before at the mention of God’s name, the little devil was hurled into the earth like a flash, and nothing was left but the hole to show where he had gone.

Soon afterward Ivan returned home, to find his brother Tarras and his wife there. Tarras-Briukhan could not pay his debts, and was forced to flee from his creditors and seek refuge under his father’s roof. Seeing Ivan, he said: “Well, Ivan, may we remain here until I start in some new business?”

Ivan replied as he had before to Simeon: “Yes, you are perfectly welcome to remain here as long as it suits you.”

With that announcement he removed his coat and seated himself at the supper-table with the others. But Tarras-Briukhan's wife objected to the smell of his clothes, saying: "I cannot eat with a fool; neither can I stand the smell."

Then Tarras-Briukhan said: "Ivan, from your clothes there comes a bad smell; go and eat by yourself in the porch."

"Very well," said Ivan; and he took some bread and went out as ordered, saying, "It is time for me to feed my mare."

## Chapter V

The small devil who had charge of Tarras finished with him that night, and according to agreement proceeded to the assistance of the other two to help them conquer Ivan. Arriving at the plowed field he looked around for his comrades, but found only the hole through which one had disappeared; and on going to the meadow he discovered the severed tail of the other, and in the rye-field he found yet another hole.

“Well,” he thought, “it is quite clear that my comrades have met with some great misfortune, and that I will have to take their places and arrange the feud between the brothers.”

The small devil then went in search of Ivan. But he, having finished with the field, was nowhere to be found. He had gone to the forest to cut logs to build homes for his brothers, as they found it inconvenient for so many to live under the same roof.

The small devil at last discovered his whereabouts, and going to the forest climbed into the branches of the trees and began to interfere with Ivan’s work. Ivan cut down a tree, which failed, however, to fall to the ground, becoming entangled in the branches of other trees; yet he succeeded in getting it down after a hard struggle. In chopping down the next tree he met with the same difficulties, and also with the third. Ivan had supposed he could cut down fifty trees in a day, but he succeeded in chopping but ten before darkness put an end to his labors for a time. He was now exhausted, and, perspiring profusely, he sat down alone in the woods to rest. He soon after

resumed his work, cutting down one more tree; but the effort gave him a pain in his back, and he was obliged to rest again. Seeing this, the small devil was full of joy.

“Well,” he thought, “now he is exhausted and will stop work, and I will rest also.” He then seated himself on some branches and rejoiced.

Ivan again arose, however, and, taking his axe, gave the tree a terrific blow from the opposite side, which felled it instantly to the ground, carrying the little devil with it; and Ivan, proceeding to cut the branches, found the devil alive. Very much astonished, Ivan exclaimed:

“Look you! Such nastiness! Are you again here?”

“I am another one,” replied the devil. “I was with your brother Tarras.”

“Well,” said Ivan, “that makes no difference; I will fix you.” And he was about to strike him a blow with the axe when the devil pleaded:

“Do not kill me, and whatever you wish you shall have.”

Ivan asked, “What can you do?”

“I can make for you all the money you wish.”

Ivan then told the devil he might proceed, whereupon the latter began to explain to him how he might become rich.

“Take,” said he to Ivan, “the leaves of this oak tree and rub them in your hands, and the gold will fall to the ground.”

Ivan did as he was directed, and immediately the gold began to drop about his feet; and he remarked:

“This will be a fine trick to amuse the village boys with.”



“Can I now take my departure?” asked the devil, to which Ivan replied, “With God’s blessing you may go.”

At the mention of the name of God, the devil disappeared into the earth.

## Chapter VI

The brothers, having finished their houses, moved into them and lived apart from their father and brother. Ivan, when he had completed his plowing, made a great feast, to which he invited his brothers, telling them that he had plenty of beer for them to drink. The brothers, however, declined Ivan's hospitality, saying, "We have seen the beer moujiks drink, and want none of it."

Ivan then gathered around him all the peasants in the village and with them drank beer until he became intoxicated, when he joined the Khorovody (a street gathering of the village boys and girls, who sing songs), and told them they must sing his praises, saying that in return he would show them such sights as they had never before seen in their lives. The little girls laughed and began to sing songs praising Ivan, and when they had finished they said: "Very well; now give us what you said you would."

Ivan replied, "I will soon show you," and, taking an empty bag in his hand, he started for the woods. The little girls laughed as they said, "What a fool he is!" and resuming their play they forgot all about him.

Some time after Ivan suddenly appeared among them carrying in his hand the bag, which was now filled.

"Shall I divide this with you?" he said.

"Yes; divide!" they sang in chorus.

So Ivan put his hand into the bag and drew it out full of gold coins, which he scattered among them.

“Batiushka,” they cried as they ran to gather up the precious pieces.

The moujiks then appeared on the scene and began to fight among themselves for the possession of the yellow objects. In the melee one old woman was nearly crushed to death.

Ivan laughed and was greatly amused at the sight of so many persons quarrelling over a few pieces of gold.

“Oh! you duratchki” (little fools), he said, “why did you almost crush the life out of the old grandmother? Be more gentle. I have plenty more, and I will give them to you;” whereupon he began throwing about more of the coins.

The people gathered around him, and Ivan continued throwing until he emptied his bag. They clamored for more, but Ivan replied: “The gold is all gone. Another time I will give you more. Now we will r,sume, our singing and dancing.”

The little children sang, but Ivan said to them, “Your songs are no good.”

The children said, “Then show us how to sing better.”

To this Ivan replied, “I will show you people who can sing better than you.” With that remark Ivan went to the barn and, securing a bundle of straw, did as the little devil had directed him; and presently a regiment of soldiers appeared in the village street, and he ordered them to sing and dance.

The people were astonished and could not understand how Ivan had produced the strangers.

The soldiers sang for some time, to the great delight of the villagers; and when Ivan commanded them to stop they instantly ceased.

Ivan then ordered them off to the barn, telling the astonished and mystified moujiks that they must not follow him. Reaching the barn, he turned the soldiers again into straw and went home to sleep off the effects of his debauch.

## Chapter VII

The next morning Ivan's exploits were the talk of the village, and news of the wonderful things he had done reached the ears of his brother Simeon, who immediately went to Ivan to learn all about it.

"Explain to me," he said; "from whence did you bring the soldiers, and where did you take them?"

"And what do you wish to know for?" asked Ivan.

"Why, with soldiers we can do almost anything we wish—whole kingdoms can be conquered," replied Simeon.

This information greatly surprised Ivan, who said: "Well, why did you not tell me about this before? I can make as many as you want."

Ivan then took his brother to the barn, but he said: "While I am willing to create the soldiers, you must take them away from here; for if it should become necessary to feed them, all the food in the village would last them only one day."

Simeon promised to do as Ivan wished, whereupon Ivan proceeded to convert the straw into soldiers. Out of one bundle of straw he made an entire regiment; in fact, so many soldiers appeared as if by magic that there was not a vacant spot in the field.

Turning to Simeon Ivan said, "Well, is there a sufficient number?"

Beaming with joy, Simeon replied: “Enough! enough! Thank you, Ivan!”

“Glad you are satisfied,” said Ivan, “and if you wish more I will make them for you. I have plenty of straw now.”

Simeon divided his soldiers into battalions and regiments, and after having drilled them he went forth to fight and to conquer.

Simeon had just gotten safely out of the village with his soldiers when Tarras, the other brother, appeared before Ivan—he also having heard of the previous day’s performance and wanting to learn the secret of his power. He sought Ivan, saying: “Tell me the secret of your supply of gold, for if I had plenty of money I could with its assistance gather in all the wealth in the world.”

Ivan was greatly surprised on hearing this statement, and said: “You might have told me this before, for I can obtain for you as much money as you wish.”

Tarras was delighted, and he said, “You might get me about three bushels.”

“Well,” said Ivan, “we will go to the woods, or, better still, we will harness the horse, as we could not possibly carry so much money ourselves.”

The brothers went to the woods and Ivan proceeded to gather the oak leaves, which he rubbed between his hands, the dust falling to the ground and turning into gold pieces as quickly as it fell.

When quite a pile had accumulated Ivan turned to Tarras and asked if he had rubbed enough leaves into money, whereupon Tarras replied: “Thank you, Ivan; that will be sufficient for this time.”

Ivan then said: “If you wish more, come to me and I will rub as much as you want, for there are plenty of leaves.”

Tarras, with his tarantas (wagon) filled with gold, rode away to the city to engage in trade and increase his wealth; and thus both brothers went their way, Simeon to fight and Tarras to trade.

Simeon's soldiers conquered a kingdom for him and Tarras-Briukhan made plenty of money.

Some time afterward the two brothers met and confessed to each other the source from whence sprang their prosperity, but they were not yet satisfied.

Simeon said: "I have conquered a kingdom and enjoy a very pleasant life, but I have not sufficient money to procure food for my soldiers;" while Tarras confessed that he was the possessor of enormous wealth, but the care of it caused him much uneasiness.

"Let us go again to our brother," said Simeon; "I will order him to make more soldiers and will give them to you, and you may then tell him that he must make more money so that we can buy food for them."

They went again to Ivan, and Simeon said: "I have not sufficient soldiers; I want you to make me at least two divisions more." But Ivan shook his head as he said: "I will not create soldiers for nothing; you must pay me for doing it."

"Well, but you promised," said Simeon.

"I know I did," replied Ivan; "but I have changed my mind since that time."

"But, fool, why will you not do as you promised?"

"For the reason that your soldiers kill men, and I will not make any more for such a cruel purpose." With this reply Ivan remained stubborn and would not create any more soldiers.

Tarras-Briukhan next approached Ivan and ordered him to make more money; but, as in the case of Tarras, Ivan only shook his head, as he said: "I will not make you any money unless you pay me for doing it. I cannot work without pay."

Tarras then reminded him of his promise.

"I know I promised," replied Ivan; "but still I must refuse to do as you wish."

"But why, fool, will you not fulfill your promise?" asked Tarras.

"For the reason that your gold was the means of depriving Mikhailovna of her cow."

"But how did that happen?" inquired Tarras.

"It happened in this way," said Ivan. "Mikhailovna always kept a cow, and her children had plenty of milk to drink; but some time ago one of her boys came to me to beg for some milk, and I asked, 'Where is your cow?' when he replied, 'A clerk of Tarras-Briukhan came to our home and offered three gold pieces for her. Our mother could not resist the temptation, and now we have no milk to drink. I gave you the gold pieces for your pleasure, and you put them to such poor use that I will not give you any more.'"

The brothers, on hearing this, took their departure to discuss as to the best plan to pursue in regard to a settlement of their troubles.

Simeon said: "Let us arrange it in this way: I will give you the half of my kingdom, and soldiers to keep guard over your wealth; and you give me money to feed the soldiers in my half of the kingdom."

To this arrangement Tarras agreed, and both the brothers became rulers and very happy.



## Chapter VIII

Ivan remained on the farm and worked to support his father, mother, and dumb sister. Once it happened that the old dog, which had grown up on the farm, was taken sick, when Ivan thought he was dying, and, taking pity on the animal, placed some bread in his hat and carried it to him. It happened that when he turned out the bread the root which the little devil had given him fell out also. The old dog swallowed it with the bread and was almost instantly cured, when he jumped up and began to wag his tail as an expression of joy. Ivan's father and mother, seeing the dog cured so quickly, asked by what means he had performed such a miracle.

Ivan replied: "I had some roots which would cure any disease, and the dog swallowed one of them."

It happened about that time that the Czar's daughter became ill, and her father had it announced in every city, town, and village that whosoever would cure her would be richly rewarded; and if the lucky person should prove to be a single man he would give her in marriage to him.

This announcement, of course, appeared in Ivan's village.

Ivan's father and mother called him and said: "If you have any of those wonderful roots, go and cure the Czar's daughter. You will be much happier for having performed such a kind act—indeed, you will be made happy for all your after life."

“Very well,” said Ivan; and he immediately made ready for the journey. As he reached the porch on his way out he saw a poor woman standing directly in his path and holding a broken arm. The woman accosted him, saying:

“I was told that you could cure me, and will you not please do so, as I am powerless to do anything for myself?”

Ivan replied: “Very well, my poor woman; I will relieve you if I can.”

He produced a root which he handed to the poor woman and told her to swallow it.

She did as Ivan told her and was instantly cured, and went away rejoicing that she had recovered the use of her arm.

Ivan’s father and mother came out to wish him good luck on his journey, and to them he told the story of the poor woman, saying that he had given her his last root. On hearing this his parents were much distressed, as they now believed him to be without the means of curing the Czar’s daughter, and began to scold him.

“You had pity for a beggar and gave no thought to the Czar’s daughter,” they said.

“I have pity for the Czar’s daughter also,” replied Ivan, after which he harnessed his horse to his wagon and took his seat ready for his departure; whereupon his parents said: “Where are you going, you fool—to cure the Czar’s daughter, and without anything to do it with?”

“Very well,” replied Ivan, as he drove away.

In due time he arrived at the palace, and the moment he appeared on the balcony the Czar’s daughter was cured. The Czar was overjoyed and ordered Ivan to be brought into his presence. He dressed him in the richest robes and addressed him as his son-in-law. Ivan was married to the Czarevna, and, the Czar dying soon after, Ivan became ruler. Thus the three brothers became rulers in different kingdoms.

## Chapter IX

**T**he brothers lived and reigned. Simeon, the eldest brother, with his straw soldiers took captive the genuine soldiers and trained all alike. He was feared by every one.

Tarras-Briukhan, the other brother, did not squander the gold he obtained from Ivan, but instead greatly increased his wealth, and at the same time lived well. He kept his money in large trunks, and, while having more than he knew what to do with, still continued to collect money from his subjects. The people had to work for the money to pay the taxes which Tarras levied on them, and life was made burdensome to them.

Ivan the Fool did not enjoy his wealth and power to the same extent as did his brothers. As soon as his father-in-law, the late Czar, was buried, he discarded the Imperial robes which had fallen to him and told his wife to put them away, as he had no further use for them. Having cast aside the insignia of his rank, he once more donned his peasant garb and started to work as of old.

“I felt lonesome,” he said, “and began to grow enormously stout, and yet I had no appetite, and neither could I sleep.”

Ivan sent for his father, mother, and dumb sister, and brought them to live with him, and they worked with him at whatever he chose to do.

The people soon learned that Ivan was a fool. His wife one day said to him, “The people say you are a fool, Ivan.”

“Well, let them think so if they wish,” he replied.

His wife pondered this reply for some time, and at last decided that if Ivan was a fool she also was one, and that it would be useless to go contrary to her husband, thinking affectionately of the old proverb that “where the needle goes there goes the thread also.” She therefore cast aside her magnificent robes, and, putting them into the trunk with Ivan’s, dressed herself in cheap clothing and joined her dumb sister-in-law, with the intention of learning to work. She succeeded so well that she soon became a great help to Ivan.

Seeing that Ivan was a fool, all the wise men left the kingdom and only the fools remained. They had no money, their wealth consisting only of the products of their labor. But they lived peacefully together, supported themselves in comfort, and had plenty to spare for the needy and afflicted.

## Chapter X

The old devil grew tired of waiting for the good news which he expected the little devils to bring him. He waited in vain to hear of the ruin of the brothers, so he went in search of the emissaries which he had sent to perform that work for him. After looking around for some time, and seeing nothing but the three holes in the ground, he decided that they had not succeeded in their work and that he would have to do it himself.

The old devil next went in search of the brothers, but he could learn nothing of their whereabouts. After some time he found them in their different kingdoms, contented and happy. This greatly incensed the old devil, and he said, "I will now have to accomplish their mission myself."

He first visited Simeon the soldier, and appeared before him as a voyevoda (general), saying: "You, Simeon, are a great warrior, and I also have had considerable experience in warfare, and am desirous of serving you."

Simeon questioned the disguised devil, and seeing that he was an intelligent man took him into his service.

The new General taught Simeon how to strengthen his army until it became very powerful. New implements of warfare were introduced.

Cannons capable of throwing one hundred balls a minute were also constructed, and these, it was expected, would be of deadly effect in battle.

Simeon, on the advice of his new General, ordered all young men above a certain age to report for drill. On the same advice Simeon established gun-shops, where immense numbers of cannons and rifles were made.

The next move of the new General was to have Simeon declare war against the neighboring kingdom. This he did, and with his immense army marched into the adjoining territory, which he pillaged and burned, destroying more than half the enemy's soldiers. This so frightened the ruler of that country that he willingly gave up half of his kingdom to save the other half.

Simeon, overjoyed at his success, declared his intention of marching into Indian territory and subduing the Viceroy of that country.

But Simeon's intentions reached the ears of the Indian ruler, who prepared to do battle with him. In addition to having secured all the latest implements of warfare, he added still others of his own invention. He ordered all boys over fourteen and all single women to be drafted into the army, until its proportions became much larger than Simeon's. His cannons and rifles were of the same pattern as Simeon's, and he invented a flying-machine from which bombs could be thrown into the enemy's camp.

Simeon went forth to conquer the Viceroy with full confidence in his own powers to succeed. This time luck forsook him, and instead of being the conqueror he was himself conquered.

The Indian ruler had so arranged his army that Simeon could not even get within shooting distance, while the bombs from the flying-machine carried destruction and terror in their path, completely routing his army, so that Simeon was left alone.

The Viceroy took possession of his kingdom and Simeon had to fly for his life.

Having finished with Simeon, the old devil next approached Tarras. He appeared before him disguised as one of the

merchants of his kingdom, and established factories and began to make money. The “merchant” paid the highest price for everything he purchased, and the people ran after him to sell their goods. Through this “merchant” they were enabled to make plenty of money, paying up all their arrears of taxes as well as the others when they came due.

Tarras was overjoyed at this condition of affairs and said: “Thanks to this merchant, now I will have more money than before, and life will be much pleasanter for me.”

He wished to erect new buildings, and advertised for workmen, offering the highest prices for all kinds of labor. Tarras thought the people would be as anxious to work as formerly, but instead he was much surprised to learn that they were working for the “merchant.” Thinking to induce them to leave the “merchant,” he increased his offers, but the former, equal to the emergency, also raised the wages of his workmen. Tarras, having plenty of money, increased the offers still more; but the “merchant” raised them still higher and got the better of him. Thus, defeated at every point, Tarras was compelled to abandon the idea of building.

Tarras next announced that he intended laying out gardens and erecting fountains, and the work was to be commenced in the fall, but no one came to offer his services, and again he was obliged to forego his intentions. Winter set in, and Tarras wanted some sable fur with which to line his great-coat, and he sent his man to procure it for him; but the servant returned without it, saying: “There are no sables to be had. The ‘merchant’ has bought them all, paying a very high price for them.”

Tarras needed horses and sent a messenger to purchase them, but he returned with the same story as on former occasions—that none were to be found, the “merchant” having bought them all to carry water for an artificial pond he was constructing. Tarras was at last compelled to suspend business, as he could not find any one willing to work for him.

They had all gone over to the “merchant’s” side. The only dealings the people had with Tarras were when they went to pay their taxes. His money accumulated so fast that he could not find a place to put it, and his life became miserable. He abandoned all idea of entering upon the new venture, and only thought of how to exist peaceably. This he found it difficult to do, for, turn which way he would, fresh obstacles confronted him. Even his cooks, coachmen, and all his other servants forsook him and joined the “merchant.” With all his wealth he had nothing to eat, and when he went to market he found the “merchant” had been there before him and had bought up all the provisions. Still, the people continued to bring him money.

Tarras at last became so indignant that he ordered the “merchant” out of his kingdom. He left, but settled just outside the boundary line, and continued his business with the same result as before, and Tarras was frequently forced to go without food for days. It was rumored that the “merchant” wanted to buy even Tarras himself. On hearing this the latter became very much alarmed and could not decide as to the best course to pursue.

About this time his brother Simeon arrived in the kingdom, and said: “Help me, for I have been defeated and ruined by the Indian Viceroy.”

Tarras replied: “How can I help you, when I have had no food myself for two days?”



## Chapter XI

The old devil, having finished with the second brother, went to Ivan the Fool. This time he disguised himself as a General, the same as in the case of Simeon, and, appearing before Ivan, said: “Get an army together. It is disgraceful for the ruler of a kingdom to be without an army. You call your people to assemble, and I will form them into a fine large army.”

Ivan took the supposed General’s advice, and said: “Well, you may form my people into an army, but you must also teach them to sing the songs I like.”

The old devil then went through Ivan’s kingdom to secure recruits for the army, saying: “Come, shave your heads [the heads of recruits are always shaved in Russia] and I will give each of you a red hat and plenty of vodki” (whiskey).

At this the fools only laughed, and said: “We can have all the vodki we want, for we distill it ourselves; and of hats, our little girls make all we want, of any color we please, and with handsome fringes.”

Thus was the devil foiled in securing recruits for his army; so he returned to Ivan and said: “Your fools will not volunteer to be soldiers. It will therefore be necessary to force them.”

“Very well,” replied Ivan, “you may use force if you want to.”

The old devil then announced that all the fools must become soldiers, and those who refused, Ivan would punish with death.

The fools went to the General; and said: “You tell us that Ivan will punish with death all those who refuse to become soldiers, but you have omitted to state what will be done with us soldiers.

We have been told that we are only to be killed.”

“Yes, that is true,” was the reply.

The fools on hearing this became stubborn and refused to go.

“Better kill us now if we cannot avoid death, but we will not become soldiers,” they declared.

“Oh! you fools,” said the old devil, “soldiers may and may not be killed; but if you disobey Ivan’s orders you will find certain death at his hands.”

The fools remained absorbed in thought for some time and finally went to Ivan to question him in regard to the matter.

On arriving at his house they said: “A General came to us with an order from you that we were all to become soldiers, and if we refused you were to punish us with death. Is it true?”

Ivan began to laugh heartily on hearing this, and said: “Well, how I alone can punish you with death is something I cannot understand. If I was not a fool myself I would be able to explain it to you, but as it is I cannot.”

“Well, then, we will not go,” they said.

“Very well,” replied Ivan, “you need not become soldiers unless you wish to.”

The old devil, seeing his schemes about to prove failures, went to the ruler of Tarakania and became his friend, saying: “Let us go and conquer Ivan’s kingdom. He has no money, but he has plenty of cattle, provisions, and various other things that would be useful to us.”

The Tarakanian ruler gathered his large army together, and equipping it with cannons and rifles, crossed the boundary line into Ivan's kingdom. The people went to Ivan and said: "The ruler of Tarakania is here with a large army to fight us."

"Let them come," replied Ivan.

The Tarakanian ruler, after crossing the line into Ivan's kingdom, looked in vain for soldiers to fight against; and waiting some time and none appearing, he sent his own warriors to attack the villages.

They soon reached the first village, which they began to plunder.

The fools of both sexes looked calmly on, offering not the least resistance when their cattle and provisions were being taken from them. On the contrary, they invited the soldiers to come and live with them, saying: "If you, dear friends, find it is difficult to earn a living in your own land, come and live with us, where everything is plentiful."

The soldiers decided to remain, finding the people happy and prosperous, with enough surplus food to supply many of their neighbors. They were surprised at the cordial greetings which they everywhere received, and, returning to the ruler of Tarakania, they said: "We cannot fight with these people—take us to another place. We would much prefer the dangers of actual warfare to this unsoldierly method of subduing the village."

The Tarakanian ruler, becoming enraged, ordered the soldiers to destroy the whole kingdom, plunder the villages, burn the houses and provisions, and slaughter the cattle.

"Should you disobey my orders," said he, "I will have every one of you executed."

The soldiers, becoming frightened, started to do as they were ordered, but the fools wept bitterly, offering no resistance,

men, women, and children all joining in the general lamentation.

“Why do you treat us so cruelly?” they cried to the invading soldiers. “Why do you wish to destroy everything we have? If you have more need of these things than we have, why not take them with you and leave us in peace?”

The soldiers, becoming saddened with remorse, refused further to pursue their path of destruction—the entire army scattering in many directions.

## Chapter XII

The old devil, failing to ruin Ivan's kingdom with soldiers, transformed himself into a nobleman, dressed exquisitely, and became one of Ivan's subjects, with the intention of compassing the downfall of his kingdom—as he had done with that of Tarras.

The “nobleman” said to Ivan: “I desire to teach you wisdom and to render you other service. I will build you a palace and factories.”

“Very well,” said Ivan; “you may live with us.”

The next day the “nobleman” appeared on the Square with a sack of gold in his hand and a plan for building a house, saying to the people: “You are living like pigs, and I am going to teach you how to live decently. You are to build a house for me according to this plan. I will superintend the work myself, and will pay you for your services in gold,” showing them at the same time the contents of his sack.

The fools were amused. They had never before seen any money. Their business was conducted entirely by exchange of farm products or by hiring themselves out to work by the day in return for whatever they most needed. They therefore glanced at the gold pieces with amazement, and said, “What nice toys they would be to play with!” In return for the gold they gave their services and brought the “nobleman” the produce of their farms.

The old devil was overjoyed as he thought, “Now my enterprise is on a fair road and I will be able to ruin the Fool—as I did his brothers.”

The fools obtained sufficient gold to distribute among the entire community, the women and young girls of the village wearing much of it as ornaments, while to the children they gave some pieces to play with on the streets.

When they had secured all they wanted they stopped working and the “noblemen” did not get his house more than half finished. He had neither provisions nor cattle for the year, and ordered the people to bring him both. He directed them also to go on with the building of the palace and factories. He promised to pay them liberally in gold for everything they did. No one responded to his call—only once in awhile a little boy or girl would call to exchange eggs for his gold.

Thus was the “nobleman” deserted, and, having nothing to eat, he went to the village to procure some provisions for his dinner. He went to one house and offered gold in return for a chicken, but was refused, the owner saying: “We have enough of that already and do not want any more.”

He next went to a fish-woman to buy some herring, when she, too, refused to accept his gold in return for fish, saying: “I do not wish it, my dear man; I have no children to whom I can give it to play with. I have three pieces which I keep as curiosities only.”

He then went to a peasant to buy bread, but he also refused to accept the gold. “I have no use for it,” said he, “unless you wish to give it for Christ’s sake; then it will be a different matter, and I will tell my baba [old woman] to cut a piece of bread for you.”

The old devil was so angry that he ran away from the peasant, spitting and cursing as he went.

Not only did the offer to accept in the name of Christ anger him, but the very mention of the name was like the thrust of a knife in his throat.

The old devil did not succeed in getting any bread, and in his efforts to secure other articles of food he met with the same failure. The people had all the gold they wanted and what pieces they had they regarded as curiosities. They said to the old devil: "If you bring us something else in exchange for food, or come to ask for Christ's sake, we will give you all you want."

But the old devil had nothing but gold, and was too lazy to work; and being unable to accept anything for Christ's sake, he was greatly enraged.

"What else do you want?" he said. "I will give you gold with which you can buy everything you want, and you need labor no longer."

But the fools would not accept his gold, nor listen to him. Thus the old devil was obliged to go to sleep hungry.

Tidings of this condition of affairs soon reached the ears of Ivan. The people went to him and said: "What shall we do? This nobleman appeared among us; he is well dressed; he wishes to eat and drink of the best, but is unwilling to work, and does not beg for food for Christ's sake. He only offers every one gold pieces. At first we gave him everything he wanted, taking the gold pieces in exchange just as curiosities; but now we have enough of them and refuse to accept any more from him. What shall we do with him? he may die of hunger!"

Ivan heard all they had to say, and told them to employ him as a shepherd, taking turns in doing so.

The old devil saw no other way out of the difficulty and was obliged to submit.

It soon came the old devil's turn to go to Ivan's house. He went there to dinner and found Ivan's dumb sister preparing the

meal. She was often cheated by the lazy people, who while they did not work, yet ate up all the gruel. But she learned to know the lazy people from the condition of their hands. Those with great welts on their hands she invited first to the table, and those having smooth white hands had to take what was left.

The old devil took a seat at the table, but the dumb girl, taking his hands, looked at them, and seeing them white and clean, and with long nails, swore at him and put him from the table.

Ivan's wife said to the old devil: "You must excuse my sister-in-law; she will not allow any one to sit at the table whose hands have not been hardened by toil, so you will have to wait until the dinner is over and then you can have what is left.

With it you must be satisfied."

The old devil was very much offended that he was made to eat with "pigs," as he expressed it, and complained to Ivan, saying: "The foolish law you have in your kingdom, that all persons must work, is surely the invention of fools. People who work for a living are not always forced to labor with their hands. Do you think wise men labor so?"

Ivan replied: "Well, what do fools know about it? We all work with our hands."

"And for that reason you are fools," replied the devil. "I can teach you how to use your brains, and you will find such labor more beneficial."

Ivan was surprised at hearing this, and said:

"Well, it is perhaps not without good reason that we are called fools."

"It is not so easy to work with the brain," the old devil said. "You will not give me anything to eat because my hands have not the appearance of being toil-hardened, but you must understand that it is much harder to do brain-work, and



sometimes the head feels like bursting with the effort it is forced to make.”

“Then why do you not select some light work that you can perform with your hands?” Ivan asked.

The devil said: “I torment myself with brain-work because I have pity for you fools, for, if I did not torture myself, people like you would remain fools for all eternity. I have exercised my brain a great deal during my life, and now I am able to teach you.”

Ivan was greatly surprised and said: “Very well; teach us, so that when our hands are tired we can use our heads to replace them.”

The devil promised to instruct the people, and Ivan announced the fact throughout his kingdom.

The devil was willing to teach all those who came to him how to use the head instead of the hands, so as to produce more with the former than with the latter.

In Ivan’s kingdom there was a high tower, which was reached by a long, narrow ladder leading up to the balcony, and Ivan told the old devil that from the top of the tower every one could see him.

So the old devil went up to the balcony and addressed the people.

The fools came in great crowds to hear what the old devil had to say, thinking that he really meant to tell them how to work with the head. But the old devil only told them in words what to do, and did not give them any practical instruction. He said that men working only with their hands could not make a living. The fools did not understand what he said to them and looked at him in amazement, and then departed for their daily work.

The old devil addressed them for two days from the balcony, and at the end of that time, feeling hungry, he asked the people to bring him some bread. But they only laughed at him and told him if he could work better with his head than with his hands he could also find bread for himself. He addressed the people for yet another day, and they went to hear him from curiosity, but soon left him to return to their work.

Ivan asked, “Well, did the nobleman work with his head?”

“Not yet,” they said; “so far he has only talked.”

One day, while the old devil was standing on the balcony, he became weak, and, falling down, hurt his head against a pole.

Seeing this, one of the fools ran to Ivan’s wife and said, “The gentleman has at last commenced to work with his head.”

She ran to the field to tell Ivan, who was much surprised, and said, “Let us go and see him.”

He turned his horses’ heads in the direction of the tower, where the old devil remained weak from hunger and was still suspended from the pole, with his body swaying back and forth and his head striking the lower part of the pole each time it came in contact with it. While Ivan was looking, the old devil started down the steps head-first—as they supposed, to count them.

“Well,” said Ivan, “he told the truth after all—that sometimes from this kind of work the head bursts. This is far worse than welts on the hands.”

The old devil fell to the ground head-foremost. Ivan approached him, but at that instant the ground opened and the devil disappeared, leaving only a hole to show where he had gone.

Ivan scratched his head and said: “See here; such nastiness! This is yet another devil. He looks like the father of the little ones.”

Ivan still lives, and people flock to his kingdom. His brothers come to him and he feeds them.

To every one who comes to him and says, “Give us food,” he replies: “Very well; you are welcome. We have plenty of everything.”

There is only one unchangeable custom observed in Ivan’s kingdom: The man with toil-hardened hands is always given a seat at the table, while the possessor of soft white hands must be contented with what is left.

***Ivan the Fool*** E-book is made possible by Hawk Stories, [www.hawkstories.com](http://www.hawkstories.com). Go to **Hawk Stories** to read more about the work of Leo Tolstoy, and to read the short story that was inspired by *Ivan the Fool*, called by TJ Hawk ***A Tale of the Foolish Farmer***.

TJ Hawk’s adaptation and retelling differs in many respects, and is shorter, yet he wrote the story in tribute to Leo Tolstoy, hoping the spirit and wit of Tolstoy becomes evident.