

**THE WONDROUS STORY OF IVAN GOLIK
AND THE SERPENTS**
from: **Cossack Fairy Tales and Folk Tales**
by **Anonymous**, translated by **R. Nisbet Bain**

The prince returned to his own people and fell a-weeping. Ivan Golik perceived it, and said to him, "Wherefore dost thou weep?"

"For such and such a reason," said he; "dost thou not see that I am ruined?"

Then said Ivan Golik, "The serpent lies. He himself it was who took his daughter's ring and flew over the sea early this morning, and dropped it in the water. But lie down and sleep! I myself will go to the sea to-morrow, haply I may find the ring."

So, very early next morning, Ivan Golik went down to the sea. He shouted with an heroic voice, and whistled with an heroic whistle, till the whole sea was troubled by a storm. Then the two pike he had thrown back into the sea came swimming to the shore. "Why dost thou call us, O Ivan Golik?" said they.

"Why should I not call you? The serpent flew over the sea early yesterday morning and dropped in it his daughter's ring. Search for it everywhere. If you find it, I shall remain alive, but if you find it not, know that the serpent will remove me from the face of the earth!"

Then they swam off and searched, nor was there a single corner of the sea where they searched not. Yet they found nothing. At last they swam off to their mother, and told her what a great woe was about to befall. Their mother said to them, "The ring is with me. I am sorry for him, and still more sorry for you, so you may have it." And with that she drew off the ring, and they swam with it to Ivan Golik, and said, "Now we have requited thy service. We have found it, but 'twas a hard task."

Then Ivan Golik thanked the two pike and went on his way. He found the prince weeping, for the serpent had already sent for him twice, and there was no ring. The moment he saw Ivan Golik he sprang to his feet, and said, "Hast thou the ring?"

"Yes, here it is! But look! the serpent himself is coming!"

"Let him come!"

The serpent was already on the threshold as the prince was going out. They ran against each other with their foreheads, and the serpent was very angry.

"Where's the ring?" cried he.

"There it is! But I will not give it to thee, but to her from whom thou didst take it."

The serpent laughed. "Very good!" said he, "but now let us go to dinner, for my guests are many, and we have been waiting for thee this long time."

So they went. The prince arrived at the house, where eleven serpents were sitting down to dinner. He saluted them, and then went on to the daughters, and said, as he drew off the ring, "To which of you does this belong?"

Then the youngest daughter blushed and said, "To me!"

"If it be thine, take it, for I sounded all the depths of the sea in searching for it."

All the others laughed, but the youngest daughter thanked him.

Then they all went to dine. After dinner the serpent said to him, in the presence of all the guests, "Well, prince, now that thou hast dined and rested, to thy tasks again! I have a bow of one hundred poods^[30] weight. If thou canst bend this bow in the presence of these my guests, thou shalt have my daughter!"

[30] A pood = forty pounds.

When dinner was over they all lay down to rest, but the prince hastened off as quickly as he could to Ivan Golik, and said, "Now indeed it is all over with us, for he has given me such and such a task."

"Simpleton!" cried Ivan Golik, "when they bring forth this bow, look at it, and say to the serpent, 'I should be ashamed to bend a bow that the least of my servants can bend!' Then call me, and I'll bend the bow so that none other will be able to bend it again."

With that the prince went straight off to the serpent again, and the serpent commanded and they brought the bow, together with an arrow weighing fifty poods. When the prince saw it, he was like to have died of fright; but they put the bow down in the middle of the courtyard, and all the guests came out to look at it. The prince walked all round the bow and looked at it. "Why," said he, "I

would not deign to touch a bow like that. I'll call one of my servants, for any one of them can bend such a bow as that!"

Then the serpent looked at the prince's servants one after the other, and said, "Well, let them try!"

"Come forward thou, Ivan Golik!" cried the prince.

And the prince said to him, "Take me up that bow and bend it!"

Ivan Golik took up the bow, placed the arrow across it, and drew the bow so that the arrow split into twelve pieces and the bow burst. Then the prince said, "Did I not tell you? and was I to put myself to shame by touching a bow that one of my servants can draw?"

After that Ivan Golik returned to his fellow-servants, and put the pieces of the broken bow behind his shin-bone; but the prince returned with the serpents into the guest-chamber, and they all rejoiced because he had done his appointed task. But the serpent whispered something in the ear of his youngest daughter, and she went out, and he after her. They remained outside a long time, and then the serpent came in again, and said to the prince, "There is no time for anything more to-day, but we'll begin again early to-morrow morning. I have a horse behind twelve doors; if thou canst mount it, thou shalt have my daughter."