# Seven Simeons

In an empire, in a country beyond many seas and islands, beyond high mountains, beyond large rivers, upon a level expanse, as if spread upon a table, there stood a large town, and in that town there lived a Tsar called Archidei, the son of Aggei; therefore he was called Aggeivitch.A famous Tsar he was, and a clever one. His wealth could not be counted; his warriors were innumerable. There were forty times forty towns in his kingdom, and in each one of these towns there were ten palaces with silver doors and golden ceilings and magnificent crystal windows.For his council twelve wise men were selected, each one of them having a beard half a yard long and a head full of wisdom. These advisers offered nothing but truth to their father sovereign; none ever dared advance a lie.How could such a Tsar be anything but happy? But it is true, indeed, that neither wealth nor wisdom give happiness when the heart is not at ease, and even in golden palaces the poor heart often aches.So it was with the Tsar Archidei; he was rich and clever, besides being a handsome fellow; but he could not find a bride to his taste, a bride with wit and beauty equal to his own. And this was the cause of the Tsar Archidei's sorrow and distress.One day he was sitting in his golden armchair looking out of the window lost in thought. He had gazed for quite a while before he noticed foreign sailors landing opposite the imperial palace. The sailors ran their ship up to the wharf, reefed their white sails, threw the heavy anchor into the sea and prepared the plank ready to go ashore. Before them all walked an old merchant; white was his beard and he had about him the air of a wise man. An idea suddenly occurred to the Tsar: "Sea merchants generally are well informed on many subjects. If I ask them, perchance I shall find that they have met somewhere a princess, beautiful and clever, suitable for me, the Tsar Archidei."Without delay the order was given to call the sea merchants into the halls of the palace.The merchant guests appeared, prayed to the holy icons hanging in the corner, bowed to the Tsar, bowed to the wise advisers. The Tsar ordered his servants to serve them with tumblers of strong green wine. The guests drank the strong green wine and wiped their beards with embroidered towels. Then the Tsar Archidei addressed them:"We are aware that you gallant sea merchants cross all the big waters and see many wonderful things. My desire is to ask you about something, and you must give a straightforward answer without any deceit or evasion.""So be it, mighty Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch," answered the merchant guests, bowing."Well, then, can you tell me if somewhere in an empire or kingdom, or among great princes, there is a maiden as beautiful and wise as I myself, Tsar Archidei; an illustrious maiden who would be a proper wife for me, a suitable Tsaritza for my country?"The merchant guests seemed to be puzzled, and after a long silence the eldest among them thus replied:"Indeed, I once heard that yonder beyond the great sea, on an island called Buzan, there is a great country; and the sovereign of that land has a daughter named Helena, a princess very beautiful, not less so, I dare say, than thyself. And wise she is, too; a wise man once tried for three years to guess a riddle that she gave, and did not succeed.""How far is that island, pray tell, and where are the roads that lead to it?""The island is not near," answered the old merchant. "If one chooses the wide sea he must journey ten years. Besides, the way to it is not known to us. Moreover, even suppose we did know the way, it seems that the Princess Helena is not a bride for thee."The Tsar Archidei shouted with anger:"How dost thou dare to speak such words, thou, a long-bearded buck?""Thy will be done, but think for thyself. Suppose thou shouldst send an envoy to the island of Buzan. He would require ten long years to go there, ten years equally long to come back, and so his journey would require fully twenty years. By that time a most beautiful princess would grow old—a girl's beauty is like the swallow, a bird of passage; it lasts not long."The Tsar Archidei became thoughtful."Well," he said to the merchant guests, "you have my thanks, guests of passage, respectable men of trade. Go in God's name, transact business in my tsarstvo without any taxes whatever. What to do about the beautiful Princess Helena I will try to think out by myself."The merchants bowed low and left the Tsar's rich palace.The Tsar Archidei sat still, wrapped in thought, but he could find neither beginning nor end to the problem. "Let me ride into the wide fields," he said; "let me forget my sorrow amid the excitement of the noble hunt, hoping that the future may bring advice."The falconers appeared, cheerful notes from the golden trumpets resounded, and falcons and hawks were soon slumbering under their velvet caps as they sat quietly on the fingers of the hunters.The Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch came with his men to a wide, wide field. All of his men were watching the moment to loose their falcons in order to let the birds pursue a long-legged heron or a white-breasted swan.Now, you, my listeners, must understand that the fairy tale is quick, but life is not. The Tsar Archidei was on horseback for a long while, and finally came to a green valley. Looking around he saw a well cultivated field where the golden ears of the grain were already ripe, and oh, how beautiful! The Tsar stopped in admiration."I presume," he exclaimed, "that good workers are owners of this place, honest plowmen and diligent sowers. If only all fields in my tsarstvo were equally cultivated, my people need never know what hunger means, and there would even be plenty to send beyond the sea to be exchanged for silver and gold."Then the Tsar Archidei gave orders to inquire who the owners of the field were, and what were their names. Hunters, grooms, and servants rushed in all directions, and discovered seven brave fellows, all of them fair, red-cheeked, and very handsome. They were dining according to the peasant fashion, which means that they were eating rye bread with onions, and drinking clear water. Their blouses were red, with a golden galloon around the neck, and they were so much alike that one could hardly be recognized from another.The royal messengers approached."Whose field is this?" they asked; "this field with golden wheat?"The seven brave peasants answered cheerfully:"This is our field; we plowed it, and we also have sown the golden wheat.""And what kind of people are you?""We are the Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch's peasants, farmers, and we are brothers, sons of one father and mother. The name for all of us is Simeon, so you understand we are seven Simeons."This answer was faithfully delivered to the Tsar Archidei by the envoys, and the Tsar at once desired to see the brave peasants, and ordered them to be called before him. The seven Simeons presently appeared and bowed. The Tsar looked at them with his bright eyes and asked them:"What kind of people are you whose field is so well cultivated?"One of the seven brothers, the eldest of them, answered:"We are all thy peasants, simpletons, without any wisdom, born of peasant parents, all of us children of the same father and the same mother, and all having the same name, Simeon. Our old father taught us to pray to God, to obey thee, to pay taxes faithfully, and besides to work and toil without rest. He also taught to each of us a trade, for the old saying is, 'A trade is no burden, but a profit.' The old father wished us to keep our trades for a cloudy day, but never to forsake our own fields, and always to be contented, and plow and harrow diligently."He also used to say, 'If one does not neglect the mother earth, but thoroughly harrows and sows in due season, then she, our mother, will reward generously, and will give plenty of bread, besides preparing a soft place for the everlasting rest when one is old and tired of life.'"The Tsar Archidei liked the simple answer of the peasant, and said:"Take my praise, brave good fellows, my peasants, tillers of the soil, sowers of wheat, gatherers of gold. And now tell me, what trades did your father teach you, and what do you know?"The first Simeon answered:"My trade is not a very wise one. If thou wouldst let me have materials and working men, then I could build a post, a white stone column, reaching beyond the clouds, almost to the sky.""Good enough!" exclaimed the Tsar Archidei. "And thou, the second Simeon, what is thy trade?"The second Simeon was quick to give answer:"My trade is a simple one. If my brother will build a white stone column, I can climb upon that column high up in the sky, and I shall see from above all the empires and all the kingdoms under the sun, and everything which is going on in those foreign countries.""Thy trade is not so bad either," and the Tsar smiled and looked at the third brother. "And thou, third Simeon, what trade is thine?"The third Simeon also had his answer ready:"My trade is simple, too; that is to say, a peasant's trade. If thou art in need of ships, thy learned men of foreign birth build them for thee as well as their wisdom teaches them. But if thou wilt order, I will build them simply—one, two! and the ship is ready. My ships will be the result of the quick headwork of a peasant simpleton. But where a foreign ship sails a year, mine will sail an hour, and where others take ten years, mine will take not longer than a week.""Well, well!" laughed the Tsar. "And thy trade, the fourth Simeon?" he asked.The fourth brother bowed."My trade needs no wisdom either. If my brother will build thee a ship, I then will sail that ship; and if an enemy gives chase or a tempest rises, I'll seize the ship by the black prow and plunge her into the deep waters where there is eternal quiet; and after the storm is over or the enemy far, I'll again guide her to the surface of the wide sea.""Good!" approved the Tsar. "And thou, fifth Simeon, what dost thou know? Hast thou also a trade?""My trade, Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch, is not a fair one, for I am a blacksmith. If thou wouldst order a shop built for me, I at once would forge a self-shooting gun, and no eagle far above in the sky or wild beast in the wood would be safe from that gun.""Not bad either," answered the Tsar Archidei, well pleased. "Thy turn now, sixth Simeon.""My trade is no trade," answered the sixth Simeon, rather humbly. "If my brother shoots a bird or a beast, never mind what or where, I can catch it before it falls down, catch it even better than a hunting dog. If the prey should fall into the blue sea, I'll find it at the sea's bottom; should it fall into the depth of the dark woods, I'll find it there in the midst of night; should it get caught in a cloud, I'll find it even there."The Tsar Archidei evidently liked the trade of the sixth Simeon very well also. These were all simple trades, you see, without any wisdom whatever, but rather entertaining. The Tsar also liked the peasants' speech, and he said to them:"Thanks, my peasants, tillers of the soil, my faithful workers. Your father's words are true ones: 'A trade is not a burden, but a profit.' Now come to my capital for a trial; people like you are welcome. And when the season for harvest arrives, the time to reap, to bind in bundles the golden grain, to thresh and carry the wheat to the market, I will let you go home with my royal grace."Then all the seven Simeons bowed very low. "Thine is the will," said they, "and we are thy obedient subjects."Here the Tsar Archidei looked at the youngest Simeon and remembered that he had not asked him about his trade. So he said:"And thou, seventh Simeon, what is thy trade?""I have none, Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch. I learned many, but not a single one did me any good, and though I know something very well, I am not sure your majesty would like it.""Let us know thy secret," ordered the Tsar Archidei."No, Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch! Give me, first of all, thy royal word not to kill me for my inborn talent, but to have mercy upon me. Then only will I be willing to disclose my secret.""Thy wish is granted. I give thee my royal word, true and not to be broken, that whatever thou shalt disclose to me, I will have mercy upon thee."Hearing these kind words, the seventh Simeon smiled, looked around, shook his curls and began:"My trade is one for which there is no mercy in thy tsarstvo, and it is the one thing I am able to do. My trade is to steal and to hide the trace of how and when. There is no treasure, no fortunate possession, not even a bewitched one, nor a secret place that could be forbidden me if it be my wish to steal."As soon as these bold words of the seventh Simeon reached the Tsar's ears he became very angry."No!" he exclaimed, "I certainly shall not pardon thee, thief and burglar! I will give orders for thy cruel death! I will have thee chained and thrown into my subterranean prison with nothing but bread and water for food until thou forget thy trade!""Great and merciful Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch, postpone thy orders. Listen to my peasant talk," prayed the seventh Simeon. "Our old Russian saying is: 'He is no thief who is not caught, and neither is he who steals, but the one who instigates the theft.' If my wish had been to steal, I should have done it long ago. I should have stolen thy treasures and thy judges would not have objected to take a small share of them, and I could have built a white-walled stone palace and have been rich. But, mark this: I am a stupid peasant of low origin. I know well enough how to steal, but will not. If thy wish were to learn my trade, how could I keep it from thee? And if thou, for this sincere acknowledgment, wilt have me put to death, then what is the value of thy royal word?"The Tsar thought a moment. "For this time," he said, "I will not let thee die, for it pleases me to grant thee my grace. But from this very day, this very hour, thou never shalt see God's light nor the bright sunshine nor the silvery moon. Thou shalt never walk at liberty through the wide fields, but thou, my dear guest, shalt dwell in a palace where no sunny ray ever penetrates. You, my servants, take him, chain his hands and his feet and lead him to my chief jailor. And you six Simeons follow me. You have my grace and reward. To-morrow every one of you will begin to work for me according to his gifts and capacities."The six Simeons followed the Tsar Archidei, and the seventh brother, the youngest, the beloved one, was fallen upon by the servants, taken away to the dark prison and heavily chained.The Tsar Archidei ordered carpenters to be sent to the first Simeon, as well as masons and blacksmiths and all sorts of workingmen. He also ordered a supply of bricks, stones, iron, clay, and cement. Without any delay, Simeon, the first brother, began to build a column, and according to his simple peasant's habits his work progressed rapidly, and not a moment was wasted in clever combinations. In a short time the white column was ready, and lo, how high it went! as high as the great planets. The smaller stars were beneath it, and from above the people seemed to be like bugs.The second Simeon climbed the column, looked around, listened to all sounds, and came down. The Tsar Archidei, anxious to know about everything under the sun, ordered him to report, and Simeon did so. He told the Tsar Archidei all the wonderful doings all over the world. He told how one king was fighting another, where there was war and where there was peace, and with other things the second Simeon even mentioned deep secrets, quite surprising secrets, which made the Tsar Archidei smile; and the courtiers, encouraged by the royal smile, roared with laughter.Meantime the third Simeon was accomplishing something in his line. After crossing himself three times the fellow rolled up his sleeves to the elbow, took a hatchet and—one, two—without any haste built a vessel. What a curious vessel it was! The Tsar Archidei watched the wonderful structure from the shore and as soon as the orders were given for sailing, the new vessel sailed away like a white-winged hawk. The cannon were shooting and upon the masts, instead of rigging, were drawn strings upon which musicians were playing the national tunes.As soon as the wonderful vessel sailed into deep water, the fourth Simeon snatched the prow and no trace of it remained on the surface; the whole vessel went to the depths like a heavy stone. In an hour or so Simeon, with his left hand, led the ship to the blue surface of the sea again, and with his right he presented to the Tsar a most magnificent sturgeon for his "kulibiaka," the famous Russian fish pie.While the Tsar Archidei enjoyed himself with looking at the marvelous vessel, the fifth Simeon built a blacksmith shop in the court back of the palace. There he blew the bellows and heated the iron. The noise from his hammers was great and the result of his peasant work was a self-shooting gun. The Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch went to the wild fields and perceived high above him, very high under the sky, an eagle flying."Now!" exclaimed the Tsar, "there is an eagle forgetting himself with watching the sun; shoot it. Perchance thou shalt have the good luck to hit it. Then I will honor thee."Simeon shook his locks, smiled, put into his gun a silver bullet, aimed, shot, and the eagle fell swiftly to the earth. The sixth Simeon did not even allow the eagle to fall to the ground, but, quick as a flash, he ran under it with a plate, caught it on that big plate and presented his prey to the Tsar Archidei."Thanks, thanks, my brave fellows, faithful peasants, tillers of the soil!" exclaimed the Tsar Archidei gayly. "I see now plainly that all of you are men of trade and I wish to reward you. But now go to your dinner and rest awhile." The six Simeons bowed to the Tsar very low, prayed to the holy icons and went. They were already seated, had time to swallow each one a tumbler of the strong, green wine, took up the round wooden spoons in order to attack the "stchi," the Russian cabbage soup, when lo! the Tsar's fool came running and shaking his striped cap with the round bells and shouted:"You ignorant simpletons, unlearned peasants, moujiks! Is it a suitable moment for dinner when the Tsar wants you? Go in haste!"All the six started running toward the palace, thinking within themselves: "What can have happened?" In front of the palace stood the guards with their iron staves; in the halls all the wise and learned people were gathered together, and the Tsar himself was sitting on his high throne looking very grim and thoughtful."Listen to me," he said when the peasants approached, "you, my brave fellows, my clever brothers Simeon. I like your trades and I think, as do my wise advisers, that if thou, the second Simeon, art able to see everything going on under the sun, thou shouldst climb quickly on yonder column and glance around to see if there is, as they say, beyond the great sea an island, Buzan by name. And see if on that island, as men assert, there is a mighty kingdom, and in that kingdom a mighty king, and if that king, as the story goes, has a daughter, the most beautiful princess Helena."The second Simeon bowed and ran quickly, even forgetting to put on his cap. He went straight to the column, climbed it, looked around, came down, and this was his report:"Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch, I have accomplished thy sovereign wish. I looked far beyond the sea and have seen the island Buzan. Mighty is the king there, and he is proud and merciless. He sits within his palace and his speech is always the same:'I am a great king and I have a most beautiful daughter, the princess Helena. There is no one in the universe more beautiful and more wise than she; there is no bridegroom worthy of her in any place under the bright sun, no tsar, no king, no tsarevitch, no korolevitch. To no one will I ever give my daughter, the princess Helena, and whoever shall dare to court her, on such an one will I declare war, ruin his country, and capture himself.'""And how great is the army of that king?" asked the Tsar Archidei; "and also how far is his kingdom from my tsarstvo?""Well, according to the measure of my eyes," answered Simeon, "I fancy it would take a ship ten years less two days; or, if it happened to be stormy, I am afraid even a little longer than ten years. And that king has not a small army. I have seen altogether a hundred thousand spearmen, a hundred thousand armed men, and a hundred thousand or more could be gathered from the Tsar's court, from his servants and all kinds of underlings. Besides, there is no small armament of guards held in reserve for a special occasion, fed and petted by the king."The Tsar Archidei remained for a long time in thoughtful silence and finally addressed his court people:"My warriors and advisers: I have but one wish; I want the princess Helena for my wife. But tell me, how can I reach her?"The wise advisers remained silent, hiding themselves behind each other. The third Simeon looked around, bowed to the Tsar, and said:"Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch, forgive my simple words. How to reach the island of Buzan there is no need to worry about. Sit down on my ship; she is simply built, and equipped without any wise tricks. Where others require a year she takes but a day, and where other ships take ten years mine will take, let us say, a week. Only order thine advisers to decide whether we ought to fight for or peacefully court the beautiful princess.""Now, my warriors brave, my advisers sage," spoke the Tsar Archidei to his men, "How will you decide upon this matter? Who among you will go to fight for the princess, or who will be shrewd enough to bring her peacefully here? I will pour gold and silver over that one. I will give to him the first rank among the very first."And again the brave warriors and the sage advisers remained silent. The Tsar grew angry; he seemed to be ready for a terrible word. Then, as if somebody had asked the fool, out he jumped from behind the wise people with his foolish talk, shook his striped fool's cap, rang his many bells, and shouted:"Why so silent, wise men? why so deep in thought? You have big heads and long beards; it would seem that there is plenty of wisdom, so why not show it? To go to the island of Buzan to obtain the bride does not mean to lose gold or army. Have you already forgotten the seventh Simeon? Why, it will be simple enough for him to steal the princess Helena. Afterwards let the king of Buzan come here to fight us, and we will welcome him as an honored guest. But do not forget that he must take ten years' time to reach us, and in ten years—ah me! I have heard that some wise man somewhere undertook to teach a horse to talk in ten years!""Good! Good!" exclaimed the Tsar Archidei, forgetting even his anger. "I thank thee, striped fool. I certainly shall reward thee. Thou must have a new cap with noisy bells, and each one of thy children a ginger pancake. You, faithful servants, run quickly and bring here the seventh Simeon."According to the Tsar's bidding the heavy iron gates of the dark prison were thrown open, the heavy chains were taken off and the seventh Simeon appeared before the eager eyes of the Tsar Archidei, who thus addressed him:"Listen to me attentively, thou seventh Simeon, for I had almost decided to grant thee a high honor; to keep thee thy life long in my prison. But if thou shouldst prove useful to me, then will I give thee freedom; and besides, thou shalt have a share out of my treasures. Art thou able to steal the beautiful princess Helena from her father, the mighty king of the island of Buzan?""And why not?" cheerfully laughed the seventh Simeon. "There is nothing difficult about it. She is not a pearl, and I presume she is not under too many locks. Only order the ship which my brother had built for thee to be loaded with velvets and brocades, with Persian rugs, beautiful pearls and precious stones, and bid my four brothers come along with me. But the two eldest keep thou as hostages."Once said, quickly done. The Tsar Archidei gave orders while all were running hither and thither, and everything was finished so promptly that a short-haired girl would scarcely have had time to plait her hair. The ship, laden with velvets, brocades, with Persian rugs and pearls, and costly precious stones, was ready; the five brothers, the brave Simeons, were ready; they bowed to the Tsar, spread sail, and disappeared.The ship floated swiftly over the blue waters; she flew like a hawk in comparison with the slow merchant vessels, and in a week after the five Simeons had left their native land they sighted the island of Buzan.The island appeared to be surrounded with cannon as thick as peas; the gigantic guards walked up and down the shores tugging fiercely at their big mustaches. As soon as the ship became visible from a tower somebody shouted through a Dutch trumpet:"Stop! Answer! What kind of people are ye? Why come ye here?"The seventh Simeon answered from the ship: "We are a peaceful people, not enemies but friends, merchants everywhere welcomed as guests. We bring foreign merchandise. We want to sell, to buy, and to exchange. We also have gifts for your king and for the korolevna."The five brothers, our brave Simeons, lowered the boat, loaded it with choice Venetian velvets, brocades, pearls, and precious stones, and covered all with Persian rugs. They rowed to the wharf, and landing near the king's palace, at once carried their gifts to the king.The beautiful korolevna Helena was sitting in her terem. She was a fair maiden with eyes like stars and eyebrows like precious sable. When she looked at one it was like receiving a gift, and when she walked it was like the graceful swimming of a swan. The korolevna was quick to notice the brave, handsome brothers and at once called her nurses and maidens."Hasten, my dear nurses, and you, swift maidens, find out what kind of strangers are these coming to our royal palace."All of the nurses, all of the maidens, ran out with questions ready. The seventh Simeon answered them thus:"We are merchant guests, peaceful people. Our native land is the country of the Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch, a great Tsar indeed. We came to sell, to buy, to exchange; moreover, we have gifts for the king and his princess. We do hope the king will favor us and will accept these trifles; if not for himself, at least for the adornment of his court's lovely maidens."When Helena heard these words she at once let the merchants in. And the merchants appeared, bowed low to the beautiful korolevna, unfolded the showy velvets and golden brocades, strewed around the pearls and precious stones, such stones and pearls as had never been seen before in Buzan. The nurses and the maidens opened their mouths in amazement, and the korolevna herself seemed to be greatly pleased. The seventh Simeon, quick to understand, smiled and said:"We all know thee to be as wise as beautiful, but now thou art evidently joking about us or mocking us. These simple wares are altogether too plain for thine own use. Accept them for thy nurses and maidens for their everyday attire, and these stones send away to the kitchen boys to play with. But if thou wilt listen to me, let me say that on our ship we have very different velvets and brocades; we have also precious stones, far more precious than any one has ever seen; yet we dared not bring them at once lest we might not suit thy temper and thy hearty wish. If thou shouldst decide to come in person and choose anything from among our possessions, they all are thine and we bow to thee gratefully for the bright glance of thy beautiful eyes."The royal maid liked well enough these polite words of the handsome Simeon, and to her father she went:"Father and king, there have come to visit us some foreign merchants and they have brought some goods never before seen in Buzan. Give me thy permission to go on board their wonderful ship to choose what things I like. They also have rich gifts for thee."The king hesitated before answering her, frowning and scratching behind his ear."Well," he said at last, "be it according to thy wish, my daughter, my beautiful korolevna. And you, my counselors, order my royal vessel to be ready, the cannons loaded, and a hundred of my bravest warriors detailed to escort the vessel. Send besides a thousand heavy armed warriors to guard the korolevna on her way to the merchants' vessel."Then the king's vessel started from the island of Buzan. Numbers of cannon and warriors protected the princess, and the royal father remained quiet at home.When they reached the merchants' ship the korolevna Helena came down, and at once the crystal bridge was placed and the korolevna with all her nurses and maidens went on board the foreign ship, such a ship as they had never seen before, never even dreamed of. Meanwhile the guards kept watch.The seventh Simeon showed the lovely guests everywhere. He was talking smoothly while leisurely unfolding his precious goods. The korolevna listened attentively, looked around curiously, and seemed well pleased.At the same moment the fourth Simeon, watching the proper moment, snapped the prow and down to mysterious depths went the ship where no one could see her. The people on the king's vessel screamed in terror, the warriors looked like drunken fools, and the guards only opened their eyes wider than before. What should they do? They directed the vessel back to the island and appeared before the king with their terrible tale."Oh, my daughter, my darling princess Helena! It is God who punishes me for my pride. I never wanted thee to marry. No king, no prince, would I consider worthy of thee; and now—oh! now I know that thou art wedded to the deep sea! As for me, I am left alone for the rest of my sorrowful days."Then all at once he looked around and shouted to his men:"You fools! what were you thinking about? You shall all lose your heads! Guards, throw them into dungeons! The most cruel death shall be theirs, such a death that the children of their great-grandchildren shall shiver to hear the tale!"Now, while the king of Buzan raved and grieved, the ship of the brothers Simeon, like a golden fish, swam under the blue waters, and when the island was lost from sight the fourth Simeon brought her to the surface and she rose upon the waters like a white-winged gull. By this time the princess was becoming anxious about the long time they were away from home, and she exclaimed:"Nurses and maidens, we are leisurely looking around, but I fancy my father the king finds the time sadly long." She hastily walked to the deck of the ship, and behold!—only the wide sea was around her like a mirror! Where was her native island, where the royal vessel? There was nothing visible but the blue sea. The princess screamed, struck her white bosom with both hands, transformed herself into a white swan and flew high into the sky. But the fifth Simeon, watching closely, lost no time, snapped his lucky gun and the white swan was shot. His brother, the sixth Simeon, caught the white swan, but lo! instead of the white swan there was a silvery fish, which slipped away from him. Simeon caught the fish, but the pretty, silvery fish turned into a small mouse running around the ship. Simeon did not let it reach a hole, but swifter than a cat caught the mouse,—and the princess Helena, as beautiful and natural as before, appeared before them, fair-faced, bright-eyed.On a lovely morning a week later the Tsar Archidei was sitting by the window of his palace lost in thought. His eyes were turned toward the sea, the wide, blue sea. He was sad at heart and could not eat; feasts had no interest for him, the costly dishes had no taste, the honey drink seemed weak. All his thoughts and longings were for the princess Helena, the beautiful one, the only one.What is that far away upon the waters? Is it a white gull? Or are those white wings not wings, but sails? No, it is not a gull, but the ship of the brothers Simeon, and she approaches as rapidly as the wind which blows her sails. The cannon boom, native melodies are played on the cords of the masts. Soon the ship is anchored, the crystal bridge prepared, and the korolevna Helena, the beautiful princess, appears like a never-setting sun, her eyes like bright stars, and oh! how happy is the Tsar Archidei!"Run quick, my faithful servants, you brave officers of state, and you, too, my bodyguard, and all you useful and ornamental fellows of my palace, run and prepare, shoot off rockets and ring the bells in order to give a joyful welcome to korolevna Helena, the beautiful."All hastened to their tasks, to shoot, to ring the bells, to open the gates, to honorably receive the korolevna. The Tsar himself came out to meet the beautiful princess, took her white hands and helped her into the palace."Welcome! welcome!" said the Tsar Archidei. "Thy fame, korolevna Helena, reached me, but never could I imagine such beauty as is thine. Yet, though I admire thee, I do not want to separate thee from thy father. Say the word and my faithful servants will take thee back to him. If thou choosest, however, to remain in my tzarstvo, be the tsaritza over my country and rule over me, the Tzar Archidei, also."At these words of the Tsar the korolevna Helena threw such a glance at the Tsar that it seemed to him the sun was laughing, the moon singing, and the stars dancing all around.Well, what more is there to be said? You certainly can imagine the rest. The courtship was not long and the wedding feast was soon ready, for you know kings always have everything at their command. The brothers Simeon were at once dispatched to the king of Buzan with a message from the korolevna, his daughter, and this is what she wrote:"Dear father, mighty king and sovereign: I have found a husband according to my heart's wish and I am asking thy fatherly blessing. My bridegroom, the Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch, sends his counselors to thee, begging thee to come to our wedding."At the very moment when the merchant ship was to land at the island of Buzan, crowds of people had gathered to witness the execution of the unfortunate guards and brave warriors whose ill-luck it was to have allowed the princess to disappear."Stop!" Simeon the seventh shouted aloud from the deck. "We bring a missive from the korolevna Helena. Holla!"Very glad indeed was the king of the island of Buzan, and glad were all his subjects. The missive was read and the condemned were pardoned."Evidently," the king said, "it is fated that the handsome and witty Tsar Archidei and my beautiful daughter are to become husband and wife."Then the king treated the envoys and the brothers Simeon very well and sent his blessings with them, as he himself did not wish to go, being very old. The ship soon returned and the Tsar Archidei rejoiced over it with his beautiful bride, and at once summoned the seven Simeons, the seven brave peasants.He said to them: "Thanks! thanks! my peasants, my brave tillers of the soil. Take as much gold as you wish. Take silver also and ask for whatever is your heart's desire. Everything shall be given you with my mighty hand. Would you like to become boyars, you shall be the greatest among the very great. Do you choose to become governors, each one shall have a town."The first Simeon bowed to the Tsar and cheerfully answered:"Thanks also to thee, Tsar Archidei Aggeivitch. We are but simple people and simple are our ways. It would not do for us to become boyars or governors. We do not care for thy treasures either. We have our own father's field, which shall always give us bread for hunger and money for need. Let us go home, taking with us thy gracious word as our reward. If thou choosest to be so kind, give us thine order which shall save us from the judges and tax-gatherers; and if we should be guilty of some offense, let thyself alone be our judge. And do, we pray thee, pardon the seventh Simeon, our youngest brother. His trade is surely bad, but he is not the first and not the last one to have such a gift.""Let it be as you wish," said the Tsar; and every desire was granted to the seven Simeons, and each one of them received a big tumbler of strong green wine out of the hands of the Tsar himself. Soon after this the wedding was celebrated.Now, honorable dames and gentlemen, do not judge this story of mine too severely. If you like it, praise it; if not, let it be forgotten. The story is told and a word is like a sparrow—once out it is out for good.

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