# The Iron Wolf

There was once upon a time a parson who had a servant, and when this servant had served him faithfully for twelve years and upward, he came to the parson and said, “Let us now settle our accounts, master, and pay me what thou owest me. I have now served long enough, and would fain have a little place in the wide world all to myself.”––“Good!” said the parson. “I’ll tell thee now what wage I’ll give thee for thy faithful service. I’ll give thee this egg. Take it home, and when thou gettest there, make to thyself a cattle-pen, and make it strong; then break the egg in the middle of thy cattle-pen, and thou shalt see something. But whatever thou doest, don’t break it on thy way home, or all thy luck will leave thee.”So the servant departed on his homeward way. He went on and on, and at last he thought to himself, “Come now, I’ll see what is inside this egg of mine!” So he broke it, and out of it came all sorts of cattle in such numbers that the open steppe became like a fair. The servant stood there in amazement, and he thought to himself, “However in God’s world shall I be able to drive all these cattle back again?” He had scarcely uttered the words when the Iron Wolf came running up, and said to him, “I’ll collect and drive back all these cattle into the egg again, and I’ll patch the egg up so that it will become quite whole. But in return for that,” continued the Iron Wolf, “whenever thou dost sit down on the bridal bench, I’ll come and eat thee.”––“Well,” thought the servant to himself, “a lot of things may happen before I sit down on the bridal bench and he comes to eat me, and in the meantime I shall get all these cattle. Agreed, then,” said he. So the Iron Wolf immediately collected all the cattle, and drove them back into the egg, and patched up the egg and made it whole just as it was before.The servant went home to the village where he lived, made him a cattle-pen stronger than strong, went inside it and broke the egg, and immediately that cattle-pen was as full of cattle as it could hold. Then he took to farming and cattle-breeding, and he became so rich that in the whole wide world there was none richer than he. He kept to himself, and his goods increased and multiplied exceedingly; the only thing wanting to his happiness was a wife, but a wife he was afraid to take. Now near to where he lived was a General who had a lovely daughter, and this daughter fell in love with the rich man. So the General went and said to him, “Come, why don’t you marry? I’ll give you my daughter and lots of money with her.”––“How is it possible for me to marry?” replied the man; “as soon as ever I sit down on the bridal bench, the Iron Wolf will come and eat me up.” And he told the General all that had happened.––“Oh, nonsense!” said the General, “don’t be afraid. I have a mighty host, and when the time comes for you to sit down on the bridal bench, we’ll surround your house with three strong rows of soldiers, and they won’t let the Iron Wolf get at you, I can tell you.” So they talked the matter over till he let himself be persuaded, and then they began to make great preparations for the bridal banquet. Everything went off excellently well, and they made merry till the time came when bride and bridegroom were to sit down together on the bridal bench. Then the General placed his men in three strong rows all round the house so as not to let the Iron Wolf get in; and no sooner had the young people sat down upon the bridal bench, than, sure enough, the Iron Wolf came running up. He saw the host standing round the house in three strong rows, but through all three rows he leaped and made straight for the house. But the man, as soon as he saw the Iron Wolf, leaped out of the window, mounted his horse, and galloped off with the wolf after him.Away and away he galloped, and after him came the wolf, but try as it would, it could not catch him up anyhow. At last, toward evening, the man stopped and looked about him, and saw that he was in a lone forest, and before him stood a hut. He went up to this hut, and saw an old man and an old woman sitting in front of it, and said to them, “Would you let me rest a little while with you, good people?”––“By all means!” said they.––“There is one thing, however, good people!” said he, “don’t let the Iron Wolf catch me while I am resting with you.”––“Have no fear of that!” replied the old couple. “We have a dog called Chutko, who can hear a wolf coming a mile off, and he’ll be sure to let us know.” So he laid him down to sleep, and was just dropping off when Chutko began to bark. Then the old people awoke him, and said, “Be off! be off! for the Iron Wolf is coming.” And they gave him the dog, and a wheaten hearth-cake as provision by the way.So he went on and on, and the dog followed after him till it began to grow dark, and then he perceived another hut in another forest. He went up to that hut, and in front of it were sitting an old man and an old woman. He asked them for a night’s lodging. “Only,” said he, “take care that the Iron Wolf doesn’t catch me!”––“Have no fear of that,” said they. “We have a dog here called Vazhko, who can hear a wolf nine miles off.” So he laid him down and slept. Just before dawn Vazhko began to bark. Immediately they awoke him. “Run!” cried they, “the Iron Wolf is coming!” And they gave him the dog, and a barley hearth-cake as provision by the way. So he took the hearth-cake, sat him on his horse, and off he went, and his two dogs followed after him.He went on and on. On and on he went till evening, when again he stopped and looked about him, and he saw that he was in another forest, and another little hut stood before him. He went into the hut, and there were sitting an old man and an old woman. “Will you let me pass the night here, good people?” said he; “only take care that the Iron Wolf does not get hold of me!”––“Have no fear!” said they, “we have a dog called Bary, who can hear a wolf coming twelve miles off. He’ll let us know.” So he lay down to sleep, and early in the morning Bary let them know that the Iron Wolf was drawing nigh. Immediately they awoke him. “’Tis high time for you to be off!” said they. Then they gave him the dog, and a buckwheat hearth-cake as provision by the way. He took the hearth-cake, sat him on his horse, and off he went. So now he had three dogs, and they all three followed him.He went on and on, and toward evening he found himself in front of another hut. He went into it, and there was nobody there. He went and lay down, and his dogs lay down also, Chutko on the threshold of the room door, Vazhko at the threshold of the house door, and Bary at the threshold of the outer gate. Presently the Iron Wolf came trotting up. Immediately Chutko gave the alarm, Vazhko nailed him to the earth, and Bary tore him to pieces.Then the man gathered his faithful dogs around him, mounted his horse, and went back to his own home.

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