

Examples and Questions

River of the Princess

by Micha F. Lindemans

A long time ago, the land of Romania was devastated by a disastrous drought. Men crept about like ghosts with their bones starting through their skins and their lips drawn back so that their teeth lay bare. They wore nothing but a few rags upon their bodies. The beautiful princess Irina felt her heart breaking for pity, and wringing her hands, prayed thus, "Oh good God, hast Thou, then, quite forsaken me? Wilt Thou bring our poor land to destruction? Have we sinned yet more that we must endure such searchings-out of Thy wrath?" Then a soft, cool breath stole in, bearing a perfume as from the most beautiful of gardens, and a silvery voice spoke, "Help shall arise for thee out of a river. Only seek." Then, through the burning summer heat, the princess began a weary pilgrimage toward the rivers. Occasionally, she would stumble upon a starved little horse that would carry her for a short distance, and then fall down dead, even beneath her own light weight. Most of the time, however, Irina walked the barren land herself. She went up the Olt river, the Gin, the Buzau, the Siret, all the rivers both great and small. They flowed but meagerly over their stony beds, and those once mighty waters scarcely whispered as they went, they that of old were wont to rush and roar.

"Merciful God!", prayed the princess, "Let but a little cloud appear when I have found the river that is to help us!" But no cloud appeared, and she was forced to seek further and further. She was wandering for a second time up the banks of the Argesch, and was just about to turn sadly back, when she caught sight of the mouth of a little stream that she had not noticed before. Too tired to investigate, she lay herself to sleep beside the river.

When she awoke the next morning, the river was no longer brown, but clear and blue as the air, and at the bottom of the water something shone and glittered as the sunbeams themselves. She girt up her garments and waded in to find out what it was that shone with so wondrous a gleam. And lo! it was pure gold. She fell on her knees, right there in the stream, and gave God thanks, aloud and earnestly. She had found gold and now she could finally help. The princess went carefully on through the water and gathered up the golden grains and little fragments, filling her mantle with them until the burden was almost too heavy to bear. Then, she hurried home with her treasure and poured it out before her husband. Her children were yet alive, though weak and sorely exhausted. They scarcely knew her again, so emaciated and sunburnt she was. With the treasure, they sent forth messengers into distant lands to buy corn, maize and hay, seeds and cattle; and the river never grew weary of giving gold until the famine was at an end, and laughing, green, and sleek cattle covered the Romanian meadows once more.

The Dun Horse

by Ilil Arbel

Long ago there was an old man who had three sons. The older sons looked after the farm, but the youngest, Ivan the Fool, just sat all day on the great kitchen stove. One day the father knew he was dying. He called his sons and said: "When I am dead, bring bread to my grave for three nights, as is the custom of our fathers."

The first night after the father's death was the eldest son's turn to bring the bread to the grave, but the night was dark, the wind was howling, and he was afraid to go. So he said: "you go, Ivan. Nothing ever happens to fools." Ivan went fearlessly and laid the bread on his father's grave. The father's ghost came out, thanked him kindly, ate the bread and disappeared. The next night was the second's brother's turn, but the night was dark, the wind was howling, and he was afraid to go. Again Ivan went, and the father's ghost graciously accepted the gift.

The third night was dark, the wind was howling, and it was Ivan's own turn. The ghost ate the bread and said: "Ivan, do not come back to my grave, as I am now going to heaven. You were the only son who kept the faith, so I shall reward you. Go to the field and call: 'Dun horse, magic horse, come when I call you!' And when he comes, mount him. God bless you, my son."

The next day, the Tsar issued a proclamation. All the young unmarried men were to come to the Tsar's courtyard. In the window of the tallest tower the Tsar's only daughter would be sitting. The young men would jump their horses right up to her. If one could reach her and kiss her lips, he would be her husband and the next Tsar. The two older brothers immediately put on their finest clothes and mounted the best horses, completely forgetting Ivan. So Ivan went to the field and called: "Dun horse, magic horse, come when I call you!"



Thundering hooves, flying tail and flame streaming from his nostrils, the dun horse came. Ivan mounted him and immediately turned into a handsome young man, dressed in the finest clothes! He rode to the Tsar's courtyard, and watched as the young men were defeated, one by one, in their efforts to reach the princess. Then he rode to the window and looked at her, so high above, the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. The princess smiled at him. She liked the handsome young man on the fabulous dun horse very much! Without word, Ivan turned the horse.

A hush fell over the crowd as he circled the courtyard, urged the horse on and took the jump at full gallop. Like an arrow he shot to the window and kissed the princess on her lips!

The Tsar gave the greatest wedding banquet ever seen in Russia. He thought he was blessed to have such a magician for a son-in-law! Ivan's brothers certainly did not think he was a fool anymore, and were proud of him. Ivan and his princess lived happily ever after, and ruled Russia better than anyone before or after.

The Chief Who Was No Fool

by Phillip Martin

"Help me," the old man begged. "My neighbor has stolen from me."

The paramount chief gladly listened. It pleased him that others recognized his wisdom. "What exactly is the problem?" questioned the chief.

"My neighbor stole my goats. I'm a poor man, too poor to replace them."

"And what do you have to say?" the chief asked the man's neighbor.

"I don't know what he is talking about," answered the neighbor. "I have many goats but none of them belong to this man."

This would not be an easy problem to settle. The paramount chief would have to rely on his wisdom. It was the kind of problem he enjoyed the most.

"I have a test for you," announced the chief. "Whoever passes the test will own the goats. Go home until you can answer this for me. I want to know what is the fastest thing in the world. Do not return until you have my answer."

The two men left shaking their heads. Who could answer that question?

The old man repeated the question to his daughter, Ziah. She was as beautiful as she was wise. Right away, she whispered the answer that would please the chief. The old man returned to the chief the following morning.

The chief was surprised. "You already have an answer for my question?"

"Yes," replied the old man, "it was not difficult."

"And what is the fastest thing in the world?"

"Time," answered the old man. "We never have enough of it. It always goes too fast. There is never enough time to do all that we want to do."

The answer amazed the paramount chief. He wasn't sure if he himself could have answered the question as well.

"Who helped you? Who gave you these words?" demanded the chief.

"They are my own words, my own thoughts," lied the old man. "There is no one else who helped me."

"If you are not telling the truth, I will punish you," warned the chief.

The old man was too afraid to continue the lie. "It was my daughter, Ziah, who gave me the words," he confessed. "She is a very wise woman."

"She must be!" thought the chief. "I would like to meet this woman."

Not long after that the old man presented his daughter Ziah to the paramount chief. If the chief was amazed with her wisdom, he was captivated by her beauty. "You are indeed a wise and lovely woman. I would be honored to have you as my wife. Will you marry me?"

"The honor is mine," smiled Ziah.



Although the chief was pleased, he was also concerned about having such a wise wife. He did not want her to interfere with the problems brought before him. He didn't want to share this honor with anyone, not even his wife.

"Everything in my house is yours," declared the chief. "I only have one rule for you. You must never involve yourself with the problems brought before me. This is your only warning. If you break this rule, I will send you from my house."

The chief's new wife only smiled at his command.

Things went well for quite some time. The paramount chief continued to hear people's problems while Ziah kept herself busy without becoming involved. Usually she agreed with his decisions.

One day, however, the chief gave one of his puzzles to two boys who argued over a sheep. Ziah knew she shouldn't help the boy who really owned the sheep, but he was so upset. She finally asked him to explain his problem.

"The chief asked for the impossible," he sighed. "He gave us an egg and said that whoever could hatch the egg by tomorrow would own the sheep."

Ziah knew she shouldn't help but the solution was so obvious. "Take some rice to the chief," she instructed. "Tell him to plant it today so that in the morning you will have rice to feed your chicken. He will know that it is just as impossible to grow rice in one day as it is to hatch an egg that quickly."

The boy ran to the chief with the rice. He said exactly the words he was told. The chief was not impressed; he was angry! "Who told you this? Who gave you the rice?" he ordered. "These words are too wise for one so young."

"They are my own words, my own thoughts," said the boy too afraid to speak the truth. "There is no one else who helped me."

"If you are not speaking the truth, I will punish you," warned the chief.

"It was Ziah!" cried the boy. "She knew you'd understand the wisdom."

The chief, furious his wife had broken his only rule for her, called her before him and scolded, "Didn't you know all that I have is yours? You have broken the only rule I had for you. Now, go back to your father's home."

"Before I go, may I fix you one final meal?" asked the woman. "Then, I will take what is mine and go."

"Yes," answered the chief. "Make whatever you want. Take whatever you want. Just be sure that you do not remain here tonight!"

Ziah prepared the chief's favorite meal. She served it with a generous amount of palm wine. Before the meal was finished, the chief became very drunk and quietly fell asleep. Ziah's plans worked exactly as she had hoped.

With her family's help, she carried the paramount chief to her father's home. They placed him on a bed and he slept soundly through the night. In the morning the chief's voice boomed throughout the house. "Where am I? What am I doing here?" he demanded.

Ziah entered the room and grinned. "You said I could take whatever I wanted from your house. I wanted you and so I took you."

"You are certainly a wise woman," smiled the chief. "Come return with me to our home. Only a fool would send away such a woman."

"And you, my chief, are no fool," whispered the clever wife.

Questions

1. What was the main idea or moral of the tale (1 mark)
2. What kind of problems did the chief enjoy most? (1 mark)
3. Why do you think he enjoyed them the most? (1 mark)
4. Why did the chief want to marry Ziah? (1 mark)
5. Was his a wise decision? Why or why not? (2 marks)
6. What concern did the chief have once he was married? (1 mark)
7. What rule did Ziah break? Why do you think she did this? (3 marks)
8. What would you have done if you were Ziah? Why? (3 marks)
9. What did the chief do when he found out Ziah helped the boy? (1 mark)
10. What would you do if you were the paramount chief? (2 marks)
11. What action did Ziah take? Why did she do this? Did it work? (3 marks)
12. What is another good title for this folktale? (1 mark)