



## Cemetery Path by Leonard Q. Ross

Ivan was a timid little man – so timid that the villagers called him “Pigeon,” or mocked him with the title “Ivan the Terrible.” Every night Ivan stopped at the tavern which was on the edge of the village cemetery. Ivan never crossed the cemetery to get to his lonely shack on the other side. The path through the cemetery would save him many minutes, but he had never taken it – not even in the full light of the moon.

Late one winter’s night, when bitter wind and snow beat against the tavern, the customers took up their familiar mockery.

Ivan’s sickly protest only fed their taunts, and they jeered cruelly when the young Cossack lieutenant flung his horrid challenge at their quarry.

“You are a pigeon, Ivan. You’ll walk all around the cemetery in this cold – but you dare not cross the cemetery.”

Ivan murmured, “The cemetery is nothing to cross, Lieutenant. It is nothing but earth, like all the other earth.”

The lieutenant cried, “A challenge, then! Cross the cemetery tonight, Ivan, and I’ll give you five rubles – five gold rubles!”

Perhaps it was the vodka. Perhaps it was the temptation of the five gold rubles. No one ever knew why Ivan, moistening his lips, said suddenly: Yes, Lieutenant. I’ll cross the cemetery!”

The tavern echoed with their disbelief. The lieutenant winked to the men and unbuckled his saber. “Here, Ivan. When you get to the center of the cemetery, in front of the biggest tomb, stick the saber into the ground. In the morning we shall go there. And if the saber is in the ground – five gold rubles to you!”

Ivan took the saber. The men drank a toast: “To Ivan the Terrible!” They roared with laughter.

The wind howled around Ivan as he closed the door of the tavern behind him. The cold was knife-sharp. He buttoned his long coat and crossed the dirt road. He could hear the lieutenant’s voice, louder than the rest, yelling after him, “Five rubles, pigeon! If you live!”

Ivan pushed the cemetery gate open. He walked fast. “Earth, just earth...like any other earth.” But the darkness was a massive dread. “Five gold rubles...” The wind was cruel and the saber was like ice in his hands. Ivan shivered under the long, thick coat and broke into a limping run.

He recognized the large tomb. He must have sobbed – that was drowned in the wind. And he knelt, cold and terrified, and drove the saber into the hard ground. With his fist, he beat it down to the hilt. It was done. The cemetery...the challenge...five gold rubles.

Ivan started to rise from his knees. But he could not move. Something held him. Something gripped him in an unyielding and implacable hold. Ivan tugged and lurched and pulled – gasping in his panic, shaken by a monstrous fear. But something held Ivan. He cried out in terror, then made senseless gurgling noises.

They found Ivan, next morning, on the ground in front of the tomb that was in the center of the cemetery. His face was not that of a frozen man’s, but of a man killed by some nameless horror. And the lieutenant’s saber was in the ground where Ivan had pounded it – through the dragging folds of his long coat.

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**Telling About The Story:** Complete each of the following statements by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. Each statement tells something about the story.

1. The young lieutenant challenged Ivan to –  
 fight a duel with him.    walk to the center of the cemetery    walk home alone.
2. Ivan hoped to win  
 fifty rubles    five rubles    twenty pieces of gold    a bottle of vodka
3. At the end of the story, Ivan could not move because  
 someone was holding him    his legs were frozen stiff    he was pinned to the ground
4. To win the challenge, Ivan was required to  
 leave a message near the tomb    stick a saber into the ground    report back the next evening

**Watching For New Vocabulary Words:** Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct response.

1. The customers jeered Ivan cruelly. What is the meaning of the word *jeered*?  
 questioned    cheered    made fun of    fought with
2. The lieutenant and the villagers made Ivan their quarry. What is the meaning of the word *quarry*, as used in this sentence?  
 a place where stone is mined and cut    prey    friend    boss
3. With his fist, Ivan beat the sword down to the hilt. Define the word *hilt*.  
 handle    tip    strength    top
4. Something gripped Ivan in an unyielding and implacable hold. What is the meaning of the word *implacable*?  
 weak    unmoving    thoughtful    invisible

**Cemetery Path** gives you clues to the country-location of the story through the use of specific vocabulary words.

In what country do you think this story takes place \_\_\_\_\_?

List at least five words or phrases that give you specific hints to the location of the story:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Identifying Story Elements.** Each of the following questions tests your understanding of story elements. Put an *x* in the box next to each correct answer.

1. What happened first in the *plot* of the story?  Ivan pushed the cemetery gate open.  
 The lieutenant gave Ivan a saber.  Ivan could not move and cried out in terror.
2. Select the expression which best *characterizes* Ivan.  unusually brave  very fearful  
 tall and powerful  slow and steady
3. The *mood* of ***Cemetery Path*** is:  humorous and amusing  serious and suspenseful  
 happy and joyous  relaxing and introspective
4. ***Cemetery Path*** is *set* on:  an afternoon in the fall  a bright summer day  
 a cold winter night  a rainy summer afternoon

**Thinking About The Story.** Each of the following questions requires you to *think critically* about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

1. We might infer that Ivan was killed by:  a ghost  two villagers  terror  
 the men from the tavern
2. Probably, the lieutenant “winked to the men” to show that he was:  afraid of losing the bet  
 confident of winning the bet  sorry for Ivan  ready to trick Ivan
3. When the lieutenant discovered how Ivan died, he was probably:  pleased  shocked  
 not surprised  remorseful

- The author notes that Ivan wore a long, thick coat. Why is this description important to the story?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Suppose that Ivan had not been wearing a long coat. How do you think the story would have ended? Explain your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Explain why the weather played an important part in ***Cemetery Path***.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Before the conclusion of the story, did you think that Ivan was going to win or lose the bet? Explain your response.