

## The Frog Princess

Once upon a time in a faraway land, there was a tsar who had three three unmarried sons. The tsar wanted them all to marry and carry on their line. He told them, "Each of you must go out to the field beyond the palace grounds and shoot an arrow into the air as far as you can. You must marry whoever lives at the place where your arrow lands."

The three sons did as their father had asked. The arrow of the eldest son landed in the courtyard of a boyar (nobleman) and the boyar's daughter picked it up. The arrow of the middle son fell into a merchant's yard, where the merchant's daughter found it. The youngest son, Prince Ivan, shot his arrow into a swamp. When he went into the swamp to find it, he found a frog holding the arrow in its mouth. Being a dutiful son, he did what his father had asked, and all three sons married their brides.



Of course, the first two sons never tired in the days that followed of laughing at their younger brother and his frog-wife. Prince Ivan was very sad, but he kept his bargain and treated the frog as if she were a princess. At least she was a frog who was able to speak.

One day the tsar called his three sons to him and said, "I want each of your wives to sew me the best possible shirt she can by tomorrow morning."

The first two sons went off to tell the tsar's command to their wives, while Prince Ivan went home looking very sad. When the frog asked him what was wrong, he said, "My father wants you to sew him a beautiful shirt by tomorrow." "Oh, don't worry, Prince Ivan," the frog replied, "just go to bed. Morning is wiser than evening."

That night when everyone was asleep, the frog turned into a beautiful princess named Vasilisa the Wise. She clapped her hands together and said, "Come, my maids and servants, sew me a shirt like the one I saw at my dear father's!" In the morning Ivan woke to find a beautiful shirt lying on a chair and ran happily with it to the palace. The tsar did not like the shirts of his other daughters-in-

law, but loved the one Ivan had brought.

A few days later, the tsar said to his sons, "I want your wives to bake the finest bread for me by tomorrow." Of course, the same thing happened; the frog made the bread that pleased the tsar best. Then the tsar told his sons, "Dear sons, tomorrow I will hold a feast at the palace. I want you to bring your wives dressed in their finest clothes." Prince Ivan went home and told the frog about the feast. She told him, "Don't worry, Prince Ivan, go to the feast by yourself. I will come later."

Next day Ivan went to the feast alone, and his brothers and their wives started to laugh at him, saying, "Where is your frog-wife?" All of a sudden everybody heard a thunderous sound approaching the palace. A golden carriage drove up to the entrance, the door opened, and Vasilisa the Wise descended from the carriage. To everyone's astonishment, she took the hand of Prince Ivan and walked in with him to the feast.

At the dinner table Vasilisa, after eating the main course of baked swan, put some of the bones up her sleeve, drank some wine, and poured the rest from the glass up her other sleeve. Her sisters-in-law saw her and repeated what she had done. When everyone got up to dance, Vasilisa, dancing with Ivan, waved with one sleeve and a lake appeared, then waved with another sleeve and several white swans appeared on the lake. Her sisters-in-law also waved with their sleeves, but they only splashed the guests with wine and threw bones all over the dance floor.

Prince Ivan was so overjoyed to have such a wonderful wife that he ran home while everyone was still at the feast and burned his wife's discarded frog skin so that she would remain beautiful. When Vasilisa returned home and could not find her frog skin, she became sad and said, "Ah, Prince Ivan, you have no idea what you did. If you had waited three more days, I would have been your real wife forever. But now I must go live as the prisoner of Koshchei the Deathless." Then she disappeared.

Ivan wept sorrowfully and went to search for his wife. On the way he met an old man and told him what happened. The old man said, "Vasilisa's father turned her into a frog for three years, because she was wiser than he. If you wish to find her, Ivan, take this ball and follow it as it rolls along the ground."

Ivan followed the ball into the forest where he met a bear. Being very hungry, he was about to shoot the bear with an arrow but the bear begged him, "Don't kill me, prince. I will help you in the future."

Journeying further into the forest, Ivan saw a drake and wanted to kill it with his

arrow. But the drake begged him, "Don't kill me, Prince Ivan. I could be helpful to you."

So Ivan kept walking onward, getting hungrier and hungrier. Later he came across a rabbit and also could not kill it, because the rabbit begged him not to. The same thing happened when he came to the seashore and encountered a pike.

Soon Ivan came to a little hut on chicken legs where a Baba Yaga (Grandmother Spirit) lived. She told him, "Vasilisa is at Koshchei's house. It's hard to win a victory over him. His death is at a needle's end, the needle is in an egg, the egg is in a duck, the duck is in a rabbit, the rabbit is in a stone chest, the chest is at the top of a tall oak-tree." Ivan thanked her.

He continued onward until he found the oak-tree, but it was too tall to climb and too strong to cut down. All of a sudden the bear Ivan had spared appeared and tore the tree up by its roots. The chest fell out of the tree and broke. The rabbit jumped out and wanted to run away. But the rabbit Ivan had spared overtook the first one and killed it. The duck flew out from the rabbit, but the drake Ivan had spared caught it. The egg fell out of the duck into the sea. The pike Ivan had spared found the egg and brought it to Ivan. He opened the egg, broke off the point of the needle and Koschei instantly died in his palace. Vasilisa was now free. Prince Ivan and Vasilisa returned home and lived happily together for the rest of their lives.