



The Frog Princess

Long, long ago there lived a Tsar who had three sons. When all three had come of age, the Tsar called them to him and said:

"My dear children, before I grow old, I should like to see you married and to enjoy your children, my grandchildren."

The sons replied:

"Well then, father, give us your blessing. Tell us who our brides are to be."

"Do as I say, my sons. Each of you take an arrow, go out into the open countryside and shoot it. Wherever the arrow lands, there your destiny lies."

The sons left their father; each took an arrow and went out into the open countryside. They drew their bows and shot.

The eldest son's arrow fell into a boyar's courtyard and was picked up by that nobleman's daughter. The second son's arrow fell in the courtyard of a great merchant's house and was picked up by the merchant's daughter.

The youngest son, Ivan-Tsarevich, shot his arrow. It rose into the air and flew so far that he could not see where it landed. He walked and walked and at last he came to a marsh. Sitting there was a frog holding his arrow. Ivan-Tsarevich called:

"Frog, hey frog, give me back my arrow!"

But the frog replied:

"Take me as your wife!"

"What are you saying? How can I take a frog as my wife?"

"Take me — for that is your destiny."

Ivan-Tsarevich was greatly upset, but there was nothing for it. He picked up the frog and took her home. The Tsar arranged a triple wedding: his eldest son married the boyar's daughter; his second son married the merchant's daughter; and the unfortunate Ivan married the frog. Soon the Tsar called his sons to him:

"I want to see which of your wives is the best needlewoman. Have each of them sew me a shirt by tomorrow."

The sons bowed and went to their wives.

Ivan-Tsarevich came home, sat down and hung his head. The frog jumped up and asked him:

"Why are you hanging your head, Ivan-Tsarevich? Has something bad happened?"

"My father has commanded that you sew him a shirt by tomorrow."

The frog replied:

"Don't worry, Ivan-Tsarevich. You go off to bed. In the morning everything will be as it should be."

Ivan-Tsarevich went to bed, while the frog hopped out onto the porch, shed her frog's skin and turned into Vasilisa the Wise, a maiden more beautiful than can be described even in a fairy-tale. Vasilisa the Wise clapped her hands and shouted out:

"Nurses and nannies, hear me and come, for there's work to be done! Make me by morning a shirt like my own father has."

When Ivan-Tsarevich woke in the morning, the frog was already hopping around the floor. The shirt lay on the table wrapped in a towel. Ivan-Tsarevich was delighted



and took the shirt to his father. His elder brothers were just showing their wives' efforts to the Tsar. The eldest son unwrapped his shirt:

"That's a shirt fit for a lowly peasant hut."

The second son unwrapped his shirt. The Tsar said:

"That's only good for wearing to the bathhouse."

Ivan-Tsarevich unwrapped his shirt. It was embroidered with gold and silver in elaborate patterns. As soon as the Tsar saw it, he exclaimed:

"Now that is a shirt fit for a feast-day."

As Ivan's two brothers went back to their homes, they said to each other:

"You know, we were wrong to laugh at Ivan's wife. She is obviously not a frog, but some cunning creature..."

Soon the Tsar called his sons to him again:

"Have each of your wives bake me a loaf by tomorrow. I want to see which of them is the best cook."

Ivan-Tsarevich returned home with a heavy head. The frog asked him:

"Why so sad?"

He answered:

"You must bake a loaf of bread for the Tsar by tomorrow."

"Don't worry, Ivan-Tsarevich. You go off to bed. In the morning everything will be as it should be."

The other two wives, who had laughed at the frog at first, sent an old serving-woman to watch how Ivan's bride would bake bread. The frog could not be so easily caught, though. She made dough, then broke a hole right in the top of the stove and tipped all the dough straight in. The serving-woman ran to the other brides and told them what she had seen. They began to do exactly the same. Meanwhile the frog hopped out onto the porch, turned into Vasilisa the Wise and clapped her hands:

"Nurses and nannies, hear me and come, for there's work to be done! Bake me by morning a loaf of soft white bread like I used to eat in my father's house."

When Ivan-Tsarevich woke in the morning, the loaf lay on the table. It was highly decorated with patterns pressed into the sides and a model city with gates on the top. Ivan-Tsarevich was delighted, wrapped the loaf in a cloth and took it to his father. His elder brothers were just showing their wives' efforts to the Tsar. They had tipped the dough straight into the stove as the old serving-woman had told them, and of course it came out a burnt mess. The Tsar took the loaf from his eldest son, looked at it and sent it to the servants' hall. He took the loaf from his second son and promptly did the same. When Ivan-Tsarevich showed him his loaf, though, the Tsar exclaimed:

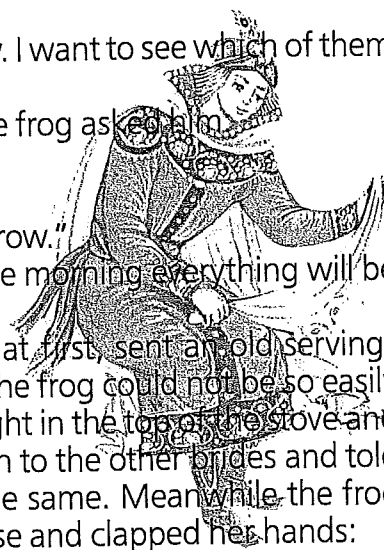
"This is a loaf that should be eaten only on a feast-day."

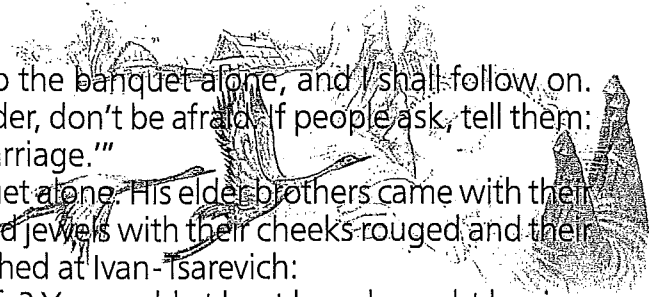
Without further ado, the Tsar commanded his three sons to appear the next evening with their wives at a banquet. Again Ivan-Tsarevich went home with a heavy heart, his head hanging low. The frog jumped up and asked him:

"Croak, croak. Why so sad, Ivan-Tsarevich? Has your father said something to upset you?"

"Frog, o frog, I cannot but be sad for my father has ordered me to bring you to the banquet tomorrow, and how can I show you to people?"

The frog replied:





"Don't worry, Ivan-Tsarevich. You go to the banquet alone, and I shall follow on. When you hear a noise like a clap of thunder, don't be afraid. If people ask, tell them: 'That's my little frog arriving in her little carriage.'"

So Ivan-Tsarevich went off to the banquet alone. His elder brothers came with their wives who were dressed in fine clothes and jewels with their cheeks rouged and their eyebrows darkened. They stood and laughed at Ivan-Tsarevich:

"Why have you not come with your wife? You could at least have brought her in a handkerchief. Where did you find such a beauty? You must have scoured the whole marsh!"

The Tsar, his sons, the two brides, and the invited guests sat down to dine at oak tables covered with finely-patterned table-cloths. Suddenly there was a noise like a clap of thunder. The guests took fright and sprang from their chairs, but Ivan-Tsarevich called out:

"Do not be alarmed, dear guests: It's my little frog arriving in her little carriage."

A golden carriage drawn by six white horses sped up to the Tsar's porch and out got Vasilisa the Wise. Wearing a sky-blue dress spangled with stars and a glittering tiara in her hair, she was more beautiful than can be imagined or described. She took Ivan-Tsarevich by the hand and allowed herself to be led to the oak tables with their finely-patterned table-cloths.

The guests began to eat, drink and enjoy themselves. Vasilisa the Wise drank from a glass and poured the last drops into her left sleeve. She ate some roast swan and tucked the bones into her right sleeve.

The other royal brides saw what she was doing and decided to copy her.

After the feasting was over, the time came to dance. Vasilisa the Wise took Ivan-Tsarevich and led him onto the floor. She tripped and turned, turned and tripped in such a way that everyone was astonished. Then she swung her left arm and a lake appeared; she swung her right and there were white swans swimming on the lake. The Tsar and his guests were amazed.

The other brides then got up to dance. They swung their left arms and only splashed the guests; they swung their right arms and scattered bones everywhere. One of the bones struck the Tsar in the eye and he was so furious he sent them both from the hall.

Meanwhile Ivan-Tsarevich had himself crept from the hall. He ran home and there he found the frog's skin. He threw it into the stove and watched as it burnt up.

When Vasilisa the Wise came home she was horrified not to find her frog's skin. She sat down on a bench, shaking her head in despair, and said to her husband:

"Oh, Ivan-Tsarevich, what have you done! You had only to wait three more days and I would have been yours for ever. Now I have to bid you farewell. You must seek me at the other end of the world, where I shall be in the power of Kashchéi the Immortal."

With that Vasilisa the Wise turned into a grey cuckoo and flew out of the window. Ivan-Tsarevich wept and wept, then he took his leave and set off he knew not where to seek his wife. He walked and walked until his boots were worn through, his caftan was threadbare and the rain had ruined his hat.

Then an old, old man crossed his path:

"Greetings, young sir! What are you seeking? Whither are you bound?"

Ivan-Tsarevich told him about his misfortune and the old, old man told him:

"Oh, Ivan-Tsarevich, why did you burn the frog's skin? You did not put it on her and it was not for you to take it off. Vasilisa the Wise was born cleverer than her father. He grew angry with her for that reason and ordered her to spend three years as a frog. Well, there's nothing more to be done. Here, take this ball of yarn. Follow it boldly wherever it rolls."

Ivan-Tsarevich thanked the old, old man and set off after the ball of yarn. The ball kept rolling and he followed it.

Once in the open countryside he came across a bear. Ivan-Tsarevich took aim and was about to kill the bear when it spoke to him in a human voice:

"Don't kill me, Ivan-Tsarevich. I shall be of use to you."

Ivan-Tsarevich dropped his bow and spared the bear.

He walked on and, glancing up, saw a drake flying past. He took aim, but the drake spoke to him in a human voice:

"Don't kill me, Ivan-Tsarevich. I shall be of use to you."

Ivan-Tsarevich spared the drake and walked on.

A hare ran across his path. Again Ivan-Tsarevich snatched up his bow and was about to shoot when the hare spoke to him in a human voice:

"Don't kill me, Ivan-Tsarevich. I shall be of use to you."

He spared the hare and walked on. He came to the deep blue sea and there on the sand he saw a pike. It was barely breathing and gasped out:

"Ivan-Tsarevich, spare me! Throw me back into the deep blue sea!"

He tossed the pike back into the sea and walked on along the shore.

After a time, the ball of yarn brought him to a forest. There he found a hut on chicken's legs, turning around. Ivan-Tsarevich called out:

"Hut, o hut, stand as your mother placed you of old: your back to the trees, your front to me!"

The hut turned so that its back was to the trees and its front to Ivan-Tsarevich. He climbed inside and there on the stove, on the ninth brick, he saw Bába-Yagá with her leg of bone. Her teeth were on the shelf and her nose had grown into the ceiling.

"Why have you come calling, my fine young man?" Baba-Yaga asked him. "Are you seeking an adventure, or seeking to avoid one?"

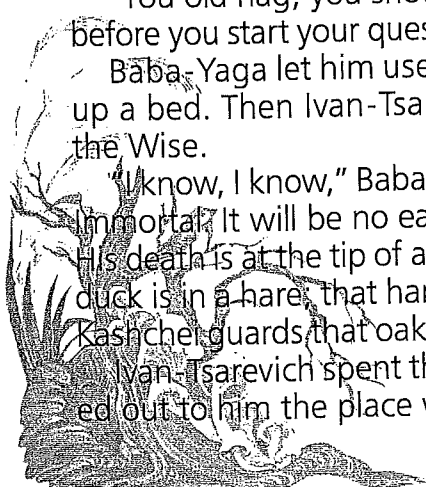
But Ivan-Tsarevich replied:

"You old hag, you should give me food and drink and let me use the bathhouse before you start your questioning."

Baba-Yaga let him use the bathhouse, gave him food and drink and made him up a bed. Then Ivan-Tsarevich told her that he was looking for his wife, Vasilisa the Wise.

"I know, I know," Baba-Yaga said. "Your wife is now in the power of Kashchei the Immortal. It will be no easy matter to recover her, as Kashchei is hard to deal with. His death is at the tip of a needle; that needle is in an egg; that egg is in a duck; that duck is in a hare; that hare sits in a stone box; that stone box rests in a tall oak; and Kashchei guards that oak with all his might."

Ivan-Tsarevich spent the night in Baba-Yaga's hut and in the morning she pointed out to him the place where the tall oak grew. He set off walking and at last he



came to the oak. He looked up and sure enough there in its branches was a stone box, way out of reach.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, a bear ran up and tore the oak out by the roots. The stone box fell down and broke open. Out sprang a hare and ran off as fast as its legs could carry it. But another hare went chasing after it, caught it and tore it to pieces. Out flew a duck and climbed way up into the sky. But a drake dived onto the duck and struck it so hard that it dropped the egg. The egg fell into the deep blue sea...

At that moment Ivan-Tsarevich burst into tears — how could he hope to find the egg in the sea? Suddenly the pike swam in to shore with the egg in its mouth. Ivan-Tsarevich took the egg, broke it, pulled out the needle and began with all his strength to snap off the tip. He strained and strained, and Kashchei the Immortal writhed and dashed about. For all Kashchei's struggling, Ivan-Tsarevich managed to break the tip of the needle and Kashchei had to die.

Ivan-Tsarevich went into Kashchei's palace of white stone and Vasilisa the Wise came running out to meet him. She kissed him on his sweet lips. Ivan-Tsarevich and Vasilisa the Wise returned home where both they lived happily to a ripe old age.

