

Vasilisa the Wise



illustrated by:
Teodora Bandeva



Vasilisa
the
Wise



In days gone by there was a King who had three sons. When his sons came of age the King called them to him and said, "My dear lads, I want you to get married so that I may see your little ones, my grand-children, before I die." And his sons replied, "Very well, Father, give us your blessing. Who do you want us to marry?" "Each of you must take an arrow, go out into the green meadow and shoot it. Where the arrows fall, there shall your destiny be."

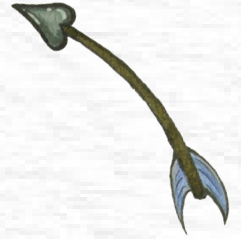




So the sons bowed to their father, and each of them took an arrow and went out into the green meadow, where they drew their bows and let fly their arrows.

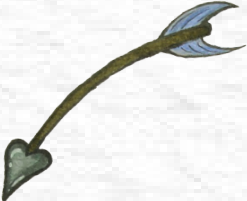


The arrow of the eldest son fell in the courtyard of a nobleman, and the nobleman's daughter picked it up.



The arrow of the middle son fell in the yard of a merchant, and the merchant's daughter picked it up.





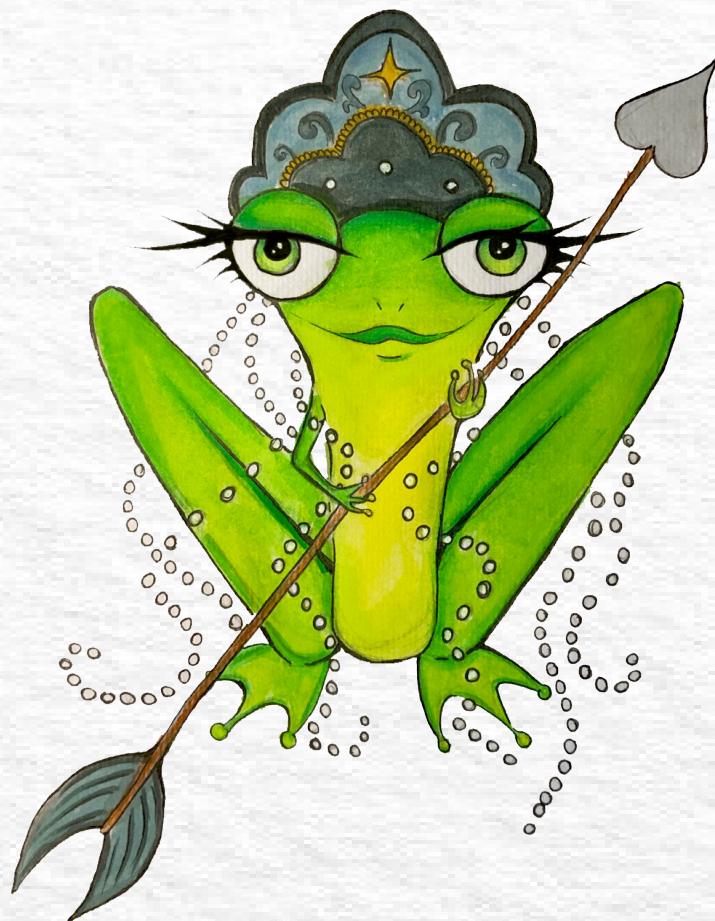
But the arrow of the youngest son, Prince Ivan, flew up and away he knew not where. He walked on and on in search of it, and at last he came to a marsh, where what should he see but a frog sitting on a leaf with the arrow in its mouth. Prince Ivan said to it, "Frog, frog, give me back my arrow."

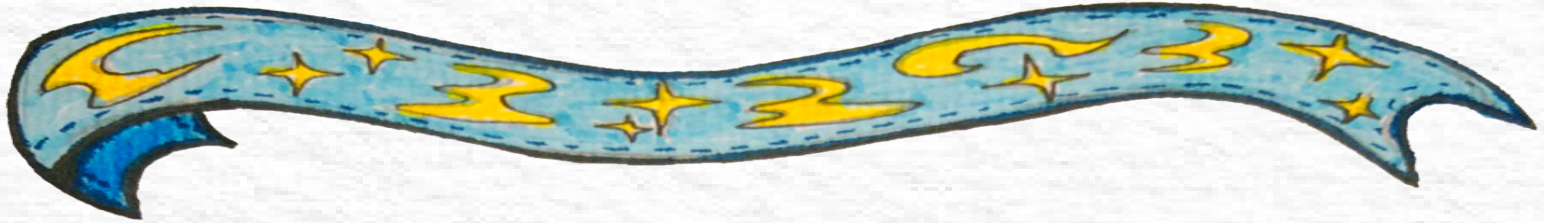
And the frog replied, "Marry me!"

"How can I marry a frog?"

"Marry me, for it is your destiny."

Prince Ivan was sadly disappointed, but what could he do? He picked up the frog and brought it home. The King celebrated three weddings: his eldest son was married to the nobleman's daughter, his middle son to the merchant's daughter, and poor Prince Ivan to the frog.





One day the King called his sons and said, "I want to see which of your wives is most skilled with her needle. Let them each sew me a shirt by tomorrow morning."

The sons bowed to their father and went out. Prince Ivan went home and sat in a corner, looking very sad. The frog hopped about on the floor and said to him, "Why are you so sad, Prince Ivan? Are you in trouble?"

"My father wants you to sew him a shirt by tomorrow morning."

Said the frog, "Don't be downhearted, Prince Ivan. Go to bed; night is the mother of counsel." So Prince Ivan went to bed, and the frog hopped out on to the doorstep, cast off her frog skin, and turned into Vasilisa the Wise, a maiden fair beyond compare. She clapped her hands and cried, "Maids and nurses, get ready, work steady! By tomorrow morning sew me a shirt like the one my own father used to wear!"





When Prince Ivan awoke the next morning, the frog was hopping about on the floor again, and on the table, wrapped up in a linen towel, the shirt lay. Prince Ivan was delighted. He picked up the shirt and took it to his father. He found the King receiving gifts from his other sons. When the eldest laid out his shirt, the King said, "This shirt will do for one of my servants." When the middle son laid out his shirt, the King said, "This one is good only for the bath-house." Prince Ivan laid out his shirt, handsomely embroidered in gold and silver. The King took one look at it and said, "Now this is a shirt indeed! I shall wear it on the best occasions."





The two elder brothers went home and said to each other, "It looks as though we had laughed at Prince Ivan's wife for nothing -- it seems she is not a frog, but a sorceress."

Again the King called his sons. "Let your wives bake me bread by tomorrow morning," he said. I want to know which one cooks the best."

Prince Ivan came home looking very sad again. The frog said to him, "Why are you so sad, Prince?"

"The King wants you to bake bread for him by tomorrow morning," replied her husband.

"Don't be downhearted, Prince Ivan. Go to bed; night is the mother of counsel." Now those other daughters-in-law had made fun of the frog at first, but this time they sent an old hen wife to see how the frog baked her bread. But the frog was cunning and guessed what they were about. She kneaded the dough, broke the top of the stove and emptied the dough-trough straight down the hole. The old hen wife ran back to the other wives and told them what she had seen, and they did as the frog had done.



Then the frog hopped out onto the doorstep, turned into Vasilisa the Wise, and clapped her hands and cried, "Maids and nurses, get ready, work steady! By tomorrow morning bake me a soft white loaf like the ones I ate when I lived at home."



Prince Ivan woke up in the morning, and there on the table he saw a loaf of bread with all kinds of pretty designs on it. On the sides were quaint figures -- royal cities with walls and gates. Prince Ivan was ever so pleased. He wrapped the loaf up in a linen towel and took it to his father. Just then the King was receiving the loaves from his elder sons. Their wives had dropped the dough into the fire as the old hen wife had told them, and it came out just a lump of charred dough. The King took the loaf from his eldest son, looked at it and sent it to the servants' hall. He took the loaf from his middle son and did the same with that. But when Prince Ivan handed him his loaf the King said, "Now that is what I call bread! It is fit to be eaten only on holidays."



And the King bade his sons come to his feast the next day and bring their wives with them. Prince Ivan came home grieving again. The frog hopped up and said, "Why are you so said, Prince Ivan? Has your father said anything unkind to you?" "Froggy, my frog, how can I help being sad? Father wants me to bring you to his feast, but how can you appear before people as my wife?"

"Don't be downhearted, Prince Ivan," said the frog. "Go to the feast alone and I will come later. When you hear a knocking and a banging, do not be afraid. If you are asked, say it is only your Froggy riding in her box."

So Prince Ivan went by himself. His elder brothers drove up with their wives, rouged and powdered and dressed in fine clothes. They stood there and mocked Prince Ivan: "Why did you not bring your wife? You could have brought her in a handkerchief . Where, indeed, did you find such a beauty? You must have searched all the marshes for her!"

The King and his sons and daughters-in-law and all the guests sat down to feast at the oaken tables covered with handsome cloths. All at once there was a knocking and a banging that made the whole palace shake. The guests jumped up in fright, but Prince Ivan said, "Do not be afraid, good people, it is only my Froggy riding in her box."

Just then a gilded carriage drawn by six white horses dashed up to the palace door and out of it stepped Vasilisa the Wise in a dress of sky-blue silk strewn with stars and a shining moon upon her head -- a maiden as fair as the sky at dawn, the fairest maiden ever born. She took Prince Ivan by the hand and led him to the oaken tables with the handsome cloths on them.





The guests began to eat, drink and make merry. Vasilisa the Wise drank from her glass and emptied the dregs into her left sleeve. Then she ate some swan meat and put the bones in her right sleeve. The wives of the elder princes saw her do this and they did the same. When the eating and drinking were over, the time came for dancing. Vasilisa the Wise took Prince Ivan and tripped off with him. She whirled and danced, and everybody watched and marveled. She waved her left sleeve, and a lake appeared! She waved her right sleeve, and white swans began to swim on the lake. The King and his guests were struck with wonder.

Then the other daughters-in-law went to dance. They waved one sleeve, but only splashed wine over the guests; they waved the other, but only scattered bones, and one bone hit the King right in the forehead. The King flew into a rage and drove both daughters-in-law away.



Meanwhile, Prince Ivan slipped out and ran home. There he found the frog skin and threw it into the fire. When Vasilisa the Wise came home, she looked for the frog skin but could not find it. She sat down on a bench, sorely grieved, and said to Prince Ivan, "Ah, Prince Ivan, what have you done? Had you but waited three more days I would have been yours forever. But now, farewell. Seek me beyond the Thrice-Nine Lands, in the Thrice-Ten Kingdom, where Koshchei the Deathless dwells."

So saying, Vasilisa the Wise turned herself into a gray cuckoo and flew out of the window. Prince Ivan wept long and hard, then bowed in all four directions and went forth he knew not where to seek his wife, Vasilisa the Wise. How long he walked is hard to say, but his boots wore down at the heels, his tunic wore out at the elbows, and his cap became battered by the rain.



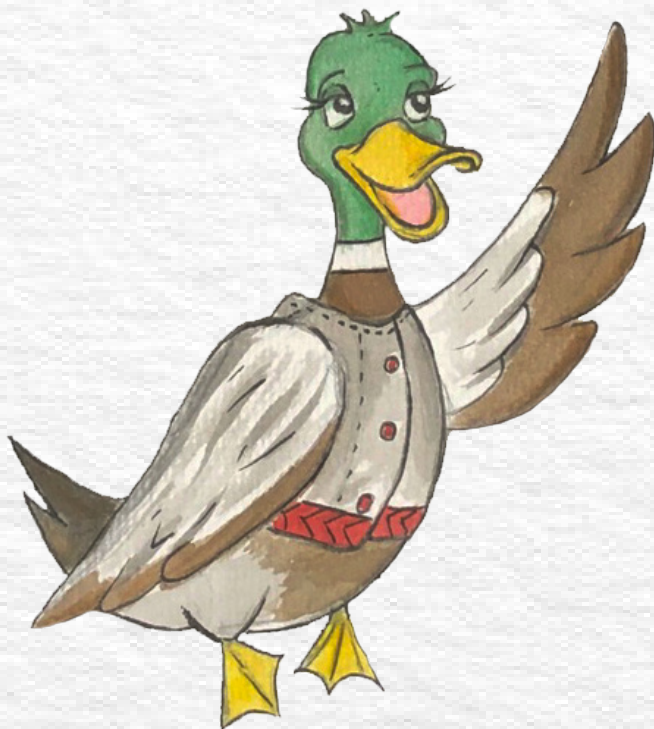


By and by he met a little man, as old as old
can be.

"Good day, my lad," said the little old man.
"Where are you going and what is your
errand?"

Prince Ivan told him about his trouble.
"Ah, why did you burn the frog skin,
Prince Ivan?" said the little old man. "It
was not yours to keep or do away with.
Vasilisa the Wise was born wiser than
her father, and that made him so angry
that he turned her into a frog for three
years. Ah, well, it cannot be helped now.
Take this ball of yarn and follow it with-
out fear wherever it rolls."

Prince Ivan thanked the little old man and followed the ball of yarn. It rolled on and he came after. In an open field he met a bear. Prince Ivan took aim and was about to kill it, but the bear spoke in a human voice: "Do not kill me, Prince Ivan, for you may have need of me someday." Prince Ivan spared the bear's life and went on farther.



Suddenly he saw a drake flying overhead. He took aim with his bow, but the drake said in a human voice, "Do not kill me, Prince Ivan, for you may have need of me someday."

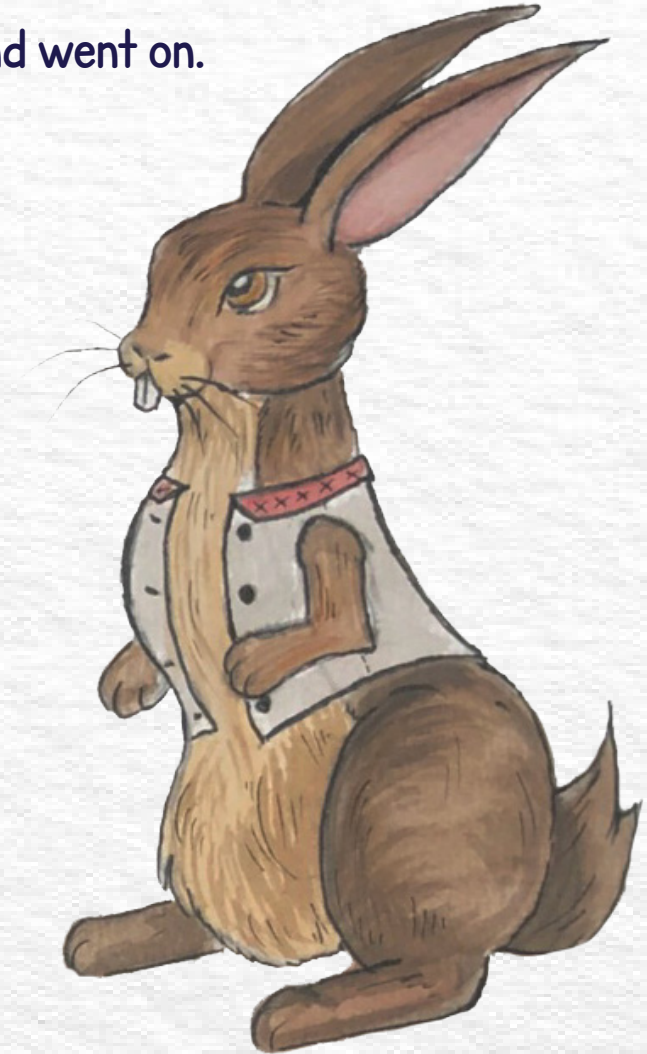
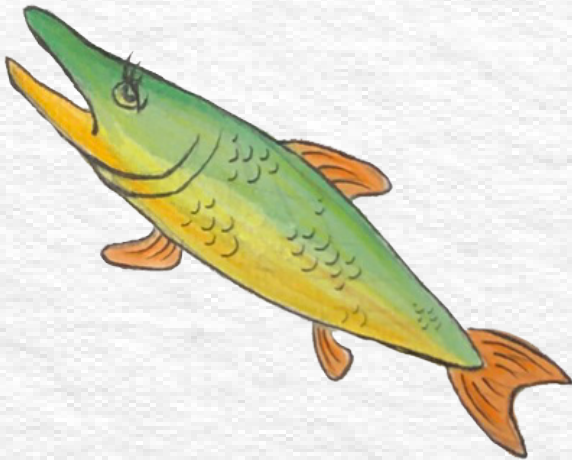
He spared the drake and went on.

A hare came running by. Again Prince Ivan snatched his bow to shoot it, but the hare said in a human voice, "Do not kill me, Prince Ivan, for you may have need of me someday."

So he spared the hare and went on.

He came to the blue sea and saw a pike lying on the sandy beach gasping for breath. "Ah, Prince Ivan," said the pike, "take pity on me and throw me back into the blue sea."

So he threw the pike into the sea and walked on along the shore



By and by the ball of yarn rolled into a forest, and there stood a little hut on hen's feet, turning round and round. "Little hut, little hut, turn your back to the trees and your face to me, please."

The hut turned its face to him and its back to the trees. Prince Ivan walked in, and there, sitting in the corner, was Baba-Yaga, the witch with a broom and a switch, a bony hag with a nose like a snag. When she saw him she said, "Ugh, ugh, Russian blood, never met by me before, now I smell it at my door. Who comes here? Where from? Where to?" "You might give me meat and drink and a steam bath before asking questions," retorted Prince Ivan. So Baba-Yaga gave him a steam bath, gave him meat and drink, and put him to bed. Then Prince Ivan told her he was seeking his wife, Vasilisa the Wise.



"I know, I know," said Baba Yaga. "Your wife is now in the power of Koshchei the Deathless. It will be hard for you to get him back. Koshchei is more than a match for you. His death is at the point of a needle. The needle is in an egg; the egg is in a duck; the duck is in a hare; the hare is in a stone casket; the casket is at the top of a tall oak tree that Koshchei the Deathless guards as the apple of his eye."



Prince Ivan spent the night at Baba-Yaga's, and in the morning she showed him the way to the tall oak. How long he walked it is hard to say, but by and by he came to the tall oak tree with the stone casket at the top of it. But it was hard to reach.



Suddenly, up came the bear whose life he had spared, and pulled the tree out, roots and all. Down fell the casket and broke open. Out of the casket sprang a hare and scampered off as fast as it could. The other hare, whose life Prince Ivan had spared, gave chase, caught it and tore it to bits. Out of the dead hare flew a duck, and shot high into the sky. But in a twinkling, the drake, whose life Prince Ivan had spared, was at it. The duck dropped the egg, and down it fell into the blue sea. At this Prince Ivan wept bitter tears. How could he find the egg in the sea? But all at once the pike, whose life Prince Ivan had spared, swam up with the egg in its mouth. Prince Ivan broke the egg, took the needle out, and set about breaking the point off. The more he bent it, the more Koshchei the Deathless writhed and screamed, but all in vain. Prince Ivan broke off the point of the needle and Koshchei fell down dead.

Prince Ivan went to Koshchei's white stone palace. Vasilisa the Wise came running out to meet him and kissed him deeply. And Prince Ivan and Vasilisa the Wise went back to their own home and lived in peace and happiness to a ripe old age.





The



End





"Vasilisa the Wise" is an old Russian folk tale that tells the story of a clever and resourceful woman named Vasilisa. With her wisdom and bravery, she outsmarts those who try to deceive her, proving that intelligence and kindness can overcome adversity. At its heart, the tale also celebrates true love, showing that love and virtue triumph above all.

