



The Firebird



Prince Ivan and his sister Katooshka lived with their father, the Tsar, in a castle in Russia. Of the two children, the Tsar preferred the daughter as she seemed to be more hard working than the son, but really it was the other way around, only Katooshka was very sneaky.

The children had to care for the Tsar's greatest treasure, a tree with apples made out of gold. But one day it was discovered that a golden apple was missing from the tree. The next night another one was stolen. The next night the Tsar told Ivan and Katooshka to stay awake in the garden and find out who was stealing the golden apples.

Katooshka didn't even try and stay awake, she just left it up to Ivan to do everything again. After a while Ivan saw the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. It was the Firebird. He ran after the Firebird, but got there just too late, although he did catch the Firebird's tail, and one of the beautiful feathers came out in his hand.

In the morning, Katooshka shouted at Ivan for letting the robber get away. When the Tsar came to speak to them, she also said that Ivan has been very lazy and hadn't done anything, so it was his fault that the Firebird had got away! The Tsar was very angry but he was amazed at the beauty of the feather. He sent his son away to catch the Firebird. He was not to return until he had caught the splendid bird. A long journey began.

First Ivan reached a creepy forest where he had to decide whether to go forward and be eaten by a wolf or go back and be a failure. Ivan was determined to find the Firebird and prove to his father that he wasn't useless. So he entered the forest and there he encountered a toothless wolf. But how could a wolf be dangerous if he did not have any teeth? A pedlar had given Ivan a wolf's tooth in his father's city. The tooth was useful for polishing the golden apples to make them extra clean and shiny. Ivan took pity in the wolf and gave him the tooth. The wolf was very grateful and decided to accompany Ivan to the castle of Koschei the Deathless. (This was where they knew the Firebird was imprisoned)

But the evil wizard, Koschei the Deathless had another prisoner: Princess Vasilisa, princess of incomparable beauty. The wolf knew some facts about the princess and he issued Ivan with this warning.

"Do not look at her! She has been bewitched by Koschei the Deathless. He has turned her heart into wood, and hidden it so she could have no feelings. You will fall hopelessly in love with her, and she will never be able to return the feelings."

The wolf was not the bravest of animals; he left Ivan to go into the castle on his own. Without the wolf there to remind him, Ivan forgot all the warnings and fell deeply in love with Vasilisa.

Now the prince had to master two difficult tasks: he had to rescue the Firebird and his princess. Before he had the chance to take the princess away, Koschei the Deathless appeared. He said that Baba Yaga, a terrible witch, had stolen the Firebird. Koschei the Deathless told Ivan that if he got the Firebird back from Baba Yaga, he would give Ivan the opportunity to choose between the princess and the Firebird. The wizard told Ivan how to find Baba Yaga, and how the Firebird was tied with a golden cord to Baba Yaga's crow, Vanka.

Ivan set off to find the Firebird, riding on the wolf's back. When they found the witch's house, they saw that both Baba Yaga and the crow were fast asleep. Once again the wolf issued a warning to prince Ivan.

"Before you go, a word of warning. The Firebird will be fastened by a golden cord. Bring the Firebird, but leave the cord."

Of course Ivan forgot this warning, he went to get the Firebird, he was about to leave with the Firebird with the golden cord still tied to the it, when Vanka the crow wakes up and squawks and squawks. Baba Yaga also wakes up and now Ivan was captured.

The wolf heard all this and went and fetched princess Vasilisa. Vasilisa pretended to be a pedlar woman and tricked Baba Yaga in to letting her into the house. When Baba Yaga and the crow were once again asleep, Ivan, the Firebird and princess Vasilisa ran away.

They all went back to Koschei's castle. Ivan was then stuck. He had to choose between the Firebird and the princess. He would not be allowed back in his father's house if he didn't bring back the bird, but how could he leave his beloved princess behind. Koschei (as he was truly evil) then tried to turn Ivan's heart into wood. Vasilisa saw this and suddenly burst into tears.

"Stop!..... Stop that I tell you! Stop your crying!" shouted Koschei the Deathless.

In an instance, Vasilisa realised where he had hidden her heart in her tears. Koschei the Deathless died and Vasilisa's heart was no longer wooden. Ivan then told the Firebird that he was free, but the Firebird chose to come to the Tsar's castle with him.

When they arrived, Ivan's horrible sister – princess Katooshka tried to prevent them showing the Firebird to the Tsar. She gave Ivan and Vasilisa two apples from the golden tree (she had poisoned them to try and catch the thief). Ivan and Vasilisa both died!

Now only the Firebird, who had promised to return a favour to Ivan, knew a solution. She flew to the fountain of life and therefore could return and revive the children with the magic water.

The Tsar now noticed how he had mistreated Ivan and that Katooshka should be punished forever. He banished her to lead a pedlar's life. However, Ivan and Vasilisa also took pleasure in the thought of being free and jolly pedlars. Finally they all decided to become pedlars and lived happily ever after!