

In a kingdom either a long or short time ago, there lived a merchant. This merchant had only one daughter and her name was Natashka. When Natashka was a little girl, her mother died. Before her mother died, Natashka was called into the room and her mother gave her a locket necklace which had a picture of her inside of it. As she gave it to Natashka she said, "Keep this locket on your neck always, and if you are ever in trouble or great need, simply open the locket up and tell it whatever you need and it shall create it before your very eyes. It will only be able to service you in three times of need, so use it wisely my beloved daughter." Her mother then died.

Once his wife died, the merchant realized that Natashka should have a mother, and he was ready to remarry. He found a woman who, too, had lost her husband in death and had two daughters that were around Natashka's age. Since she was a mother herself, the merchant assumed that she would make an excellent mother for Natashka. They were married shortly after meeting, and the merchant had no idea that the woman he married was actually a terrible wife filled with jealousy who cared only for her daughters' well-being.

Natashka was the sweetest girl that you can imagine. And beauty, well she was fairer than the fairest maiden that you can imagine laying your eyes upon! This enraged the new stepmother since her daughters were large, ugly oaf-looking girls who were evil and schemed only for their own good. Shortly after their marriage, the merchant died. Natashka was forced to stay and live with the evil stepmother and stepsisters.

Each day that passed Natashka became more and more beautiful. The stepmother and the two stepsisters were completely consumed with jealousy; they despised the mere thought of Natashka and her growing beauty. The stepmother made poor little Natashka sleep in a small, cold corner of the basement in the house. Every day the stepmother and sisters would order Natashka to do their impossible and endless amount of chores for the day. They told her that if the chores weren't completed that they would drag her to Baba Yaga's chicken hut and feed Natashka to her. Natashka grew to despise the stepmother and sisters for always holding this threat over her head. She led a bitter life completing the endless chores, but finally reached the age of marriage and knew that she would soon get away from the abuse.

Natashka was the most beautiful maiden that the town had ever seen, and every suitor in the land came to the house to ask for her hand in marriage. This infuriated the stepmother even more because no one would even take a second look at her oafish daughters. She angrily turned the suitors away and ordered more and more chores for Natashka to complete. Every day the stepmother would think up new tasks that would send Natashka further and further into the dark forest in hopes that she would not be able to return.

One day, Natashka was out in the deep forest picking berries for the stepmother when she saw a frog who had gotten his leg caught in the root of a tree. He called out for help and Natashka, being the most wonderful and beautiful girl ever, ran to him immediately. She tried and tried and tried for a long time or a short

time to release the poor frog's leg, but alas she could not! The frog had been caught for a while and would soon die if he did not eat. It was clearly a life or death situation for the poor frog. Natashka realized that she must use one of her three locket wishes. Natashka opened the locket, its brilliant light shone on the frog, and Natashka asked for the frog's leg to be freed. No sooner did she finish the sentence than the frog sprung out of the tree root with ease! He thanked Natashka immensely and hopped away.

The very next day, when Natashka was out in the woods again, she spied another poor animal in need of her help. It was a little blue bird that had fallen from its nest and hurt its wing. The poor little bird could not move about to hunt for food. It was again abundantly clear that the bird would not be able to live on its own if Natashka didn't heal its wing with a locket wish. Natashka, without selfish hesitation, opened the locket and helped the little blue bird. Immediately the bird thanked Natashka and flew away.

The next day Natashka was out in the forest completing some more tasks for her stepmother when she came upon another tragedy. This time it wasn't an animal that needed Natashka's help. It was Baba Yaga herself! Baba Yaga had noticed that Natashka had been in the forest several times, and she knew that Natashka only had one locket wish left. Baba Yaga created a big pit of quicksand in the forest and hopped in. She let only her head and arms stand out, and she waved and cried out to Natashka to help her. Now, Baba Yaga could have easily used her own magical powers, but she wanted to pretend to be in trouble to test

Natashka. Natashka knew that Baba Yaga was testing her, so she knew that she had to use her last locket wish and help. Natashka, one last time, opened up her locket and asked the locket to help the old granny. Baba Yaga told Natashka that she was a dear little girl and that she would be rewarded for being so unselfish. Baba Yaga told Natashka to journey to the thrice ninth kingdom in one year. Baba Yaga gave her two letters that she should give to her two sisters along the way, and they would help her. She told her to go to the tsar of the thrice ninth kingdom and there she would find the handsome man that she would take as her husband.

A year passed. Natashka was set to start out on her journey. Before she could start her journey, her stepmother and stepsisters who were more jealous than ever, knew that Natashka had this plan to go and find a handsome prince to marry, so they locked Natashka up in a little room of the house that had only two little windows. The little frog and the blue bird that Natashka had helped a year before knew that she was in trouble and showed up at one of the tiny windows in the room. They said, "Since you were so unselfish with your locket wishes and helped us, we now will help you. We are going to pick the lock on the door of this room, let you out, lure your stepmother and stepsisters in, and then you can lock the door from the outside while we leave through the window." Natashka, the frog, and the blue bird did just that! Natashka thanked the animals repeatedly and then they left. With her stepmother and stepsisters locked up, Natashka was free to travel to the thrice ninth kingdom to find her prince.

Natashka set off. She traveled for three days until her hunger and thirst

overtook her. Natashka came upon Baba Yaga's sister's house and did as Baba Yaga had instructed. She stopped at Baba Yaga's first sister's house and gave her the first letter. By the letter, Baba Yaga's sister knew not to attack or eat Natashka, so she welcomed her. Natashka rested there for three days and two nights. When she ate and drank her fill, she started out on her journey again. After a few days of travel she was again parched and hungry.

She came to Baba Yaga's second sister's house, and gave the second letter to her. She, too, welcomed Natashka and gave her food and shelter for three days. Then, Natashka made her way to the thirteenth kingdom. She went right to the tsar who fell immediately in love with her. He could not get enough of her beauty, and he demanded that a wedding be planned at once. Natashka finally was able to escape the miserable life with her stepfamily and lived happily ever after with her handsome tsar husband.

I was at their wedding. I drank ale, but it never reached my mouth. It rolled down my chin and onto my blue dress.