

“Ivan and the Talented Maiden”

Dara Davis

Russian Fairytales, Russian 0090

04/13/03

“Ivan and the Talented Maiden”

*L*ong ago, in a certain land, in a certain kingdom in a certain providence deep in Russia, there lived a King and his three sons: Prince Alex, Prince Vladimir, and little Prince Ivan.

The King was saddened because none of his three sons were married. He decided, “Each of you, my three sons, will take off on your horses in different directions. You will ride for thrice months, thrice weeks, and thrice days. When you reach that time. You will each ask the first maiden that you see to direct you home. The first prince to arrive home with his new maiden bride will inherit the kingdom and all its riches”.

The King sent his eldest son, Prince Alex, to the North. His middle son, Prince Vladimir he sent to the East, and his youngest son, Prince Ivan to the West. He worried about Prince Ivan, because he was the youngest and often a bit slow.

Prince Alex road this long trek and came upon a maiden, he asked her to direct him home to his castle, and she accepted his request. They began to ride home.

Prince Vladimir also met a maiden as soon as he reached the end of his long voyage destination and also requested that she direct him home. She politely accepted and they began on their journey back to his kingdom.

After traveling for only a short period of time, both princes realized that their newly found maidens had no idea how to return back to their kingdom.

Meanwhile, Prince Ivan had not even encountered a maiden yet. He had road for thrice months, thrice weeks, and thrice days, and no maiden to be found. He continued to ride around, not wanted to wander too much farther than he already had gone.

In his wandering, he came upon a hut on chicken legs. Ivan demounted his horse, and approached the hut. As he walked toward he noticed that the door to the hut was facing the other direction, and he began to walk around it to get to the door. As he circled the hut, it began to turn away from him.

Finally, Ivan stopped and demanded it to turn and face him. The hut obeyed and the door swung open. In the doorway stood a thin, old woman. She was angered by this disturbance and threatened to eat Prince Ivan if he did not explain himself immediately.

The Prince explained that he was unable to have a maiden direct him back, because there were no maidens to be found. Baba Yaga decided not to harm the young Prince, instead sent him thrice miles down the road where he could find a maiden. Prince Ivan thanked Baba Yaga, and rode his horse in the direction she instructed. After riding down the road he encountered a maiden and informed her of his challenge. She accepted his offer, and began the long journey back to his kingdom.

Unlike his brother's maidens, Ivan's was very intelligent and knew her way through the woods and forests, and seemed to be on the right path home to Ivan's Kingdom. This pleased Ivan, but he knew that his brothers must have found maidens before him and been journeying back for quite some time now.

The journey back to Ivan's kingdom took much less time than expected. The maiden knew short cuts through the woods and forest. Instead of taking thrice months, thrice weeks, and thrice days, it took only thrice weeks.

Prince Ivan took the maiden he found to his father. The King was very impressed with the wise maiden's directional skills. The King gave Prince Ivan his blessing and gave him the kingdom.

Just as Ivan was to wed the maiden, Princess Melanie, his brother finally came riding through the gates of the kingdom to protest his gaining of the kingdom. The brothers insisted that they and Ivan be challenged again for the ownership of the kingdom.

The King was hesitant to renege on his initial challenge that promised the kingdom to the brother who returned first with a directionally gifted maiden. But after much consideration the king offered another challenge to the wives to be of his sons. He first instructed each of the wives to a separate room in the palace. And then ordered them to clean each room, and it would be inspected by the King himself for approval. Whoever cleaned the room the best, her husband and herself would inherit the kingdom.

Each wife worked all day and all night for three days straight. When they emerged, they were confident that they each had the cleanest room. The king was brought to each room to inspect. He scoured over the room that Princess Melanie cleaned, and could not find one spec of dirt. The King then went on to inspect Prince Vladimir and Prince Alex's wives rooms, those rooms were not as immaculate.

The two eldest Prince's pleaded with the king for a third test of the maiden's skills. The King accepted, but said that it was the last test, and she who won this test would take the kingdom with her husband. The two wives were very jealous of Prince Melanie's cleaning and directional abilities, they were determined to beat her at the next challenge that the King presented.

The King's final challenge was in the kitchen. He believed that they way to a man's heart was through his stomach, so she who could bake the best pie would win the kingdom. Princess Melanie began to bake her pie, but was lured away for a couple

minutes. During her absence the two other princesses snuck in and added yeast to her bowl of batter. When Melanie returned, she noticed something was wrong, and decided to start from the beginning. She finished her pie, and left it to be tasted by the King.

Both other princess baked their pies, all the time thinking that Princess Melanie's was ruined.

When the King went to taste all three pies, everyone gathered in the dining room to witness his choice. He tasted all three pies, stood up, and announced that Melanie had won the final challenge and therefore inherited the kingdom with her husband.

The two other princesses were visibly upset and confused. The king took this opportunity to inform them of his knowledge of their dishonest endeavors. Apparently a loyal servant to the King witnessed their actions against Princess Melanie and alerted the King.

There was a large celebration to honor Prince Ivan and Princess Melanie's new ownership of the kingdom. The people of the town rejoiced with the royal family. I was there, at the celebration feast, drank wine and mead; it ran down my chin but did not go into my mouth.