

“The Fish Maiden”

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In a land, not that far away, and during a time not that long ago, there lived a great and wonderful king. This king had three young sons, but before he knew it they were all of marrying age. Having not a single suitable girl in the kingdom, the king said to his sons: "I will blindfold each of you and send you out. After wandering for 3 days, you may lower your blindfold and marry the girl in front of you. For if, you find no one you shall never marry." So off the brothers went the eldest to the North, the middle to the South, and the youngest to the West. Soon the time was up and each brother lowered his blindfold. The eldest was standing in front of the palace with a beautiful princess staring out of a window at him, so he took her home as his bride. The middle son was standing in front of a mansion with a lovely merchant's daughter staring out of a window at him, so he took her home as his bride. However, the youngest son was not so lucky, he found himself standing at the edge of lake with a little goldfish staring back at him. Since he had no other choice, he scooped the goldfish out and made her his bride. The three brothers and the three brides were married in an elaborate ceremony attended by all.

The three couples lived without any troubles from a short time. Then the king came to his sons and to ask them each the same question. The king asked: "Do you think you have the best wife?" The eldest and middle brothers both replied that they have the best wife, while the youngest son just shrugged his shoulders. To fairly decide the question, the king organized a competition between the wives. The first chore the wife has to complete was to make the king a pot of stew. The first two wives went about cooking, while Prince Ivan's goldfish just sat in her bowl. Prince Ivan began to whine for his wife could not do anything. When everyone was finally asleep, the goldfish jumped

out her bowl and turned into a lovely maiden. The maiden called: “Sister, sister come to me and help me make stew. When the stew was cooking, the maiden quickly turned back into a goldfish when her finger touched the water of the bowl. When Prince Ivan awoke the next morning, he found a pot of stew simmering over his fire. He immediately took it to his father for testing. The elder brothers were already there. The king examined each pot and exclaimed: “My eldest son, your stew is only fit for field workers. My middle son, your stew is only fit for eating while I’m on a hunt. Prince Ivan, your stew is only fit for serving during festivals.” The elder brothers’ wives were appalled that a goldfish could out do them.

A short time passed before the king was ready to assign the next task to his daughters-in-laws, so he called his sons together. The king spoke: “I want each of your wives to make me a shirt.” Prince Ivan immediately began to whine because how could his wife ever make a shirt. When everyone was fast asleep, the goldfish jumped out of her bowl and turned into a maiden. She quickly called: “Sister, sister come to me and help me make a shirt.” As soon as the shirt was completed, she quickly got back into her bowl before anyone noticed that she transformed herself. When Prince Ivan awoke the next morning he found a shirt sitting next to him. He immediately took it to the king. The elder brothers were also there and presenting the shirts their wives wove. After examining each shirt, the king exclaimed: “My eldest son, this shirt can only be worn for bathing. My middle son, this shirt can only be worn by a servant. Prince Ivan, this shirt can only be worn for holidays.” The elder brothers’ wives still could not figure out how

this little goldfish was completing all these wonders. However, Prince Ivan's heart was growing fonder of his little goldfish of a wife.

A little more time passed then the king called his sons together so he could assign the third task for his daughters-in-laws to complete. The king announced: "I want each of your wives to grind a pile of wheat for me by dawn." Now these piles were not of any ordinary amounts, but three times the size of a pile that women could grind in one day. The elder brothers were overconfident that each of their wives would complete the task, but little Prince Ivan feared that his wife would not be able to complete it. The elder brothers' wives took to immediately took to grinding the wheat, however they quickly fell asleep upon their piles of wheat. Meanwhile, the goldfish swam in her bowl until she knew they were fast asleep, and then she jumped out and turned into a maiden once more. She called to her third sister to come grind her wheat, and at once she was there and the wheat was ground. The next day the king and his sons came to inspect how well the wives did on grounding the wheat. The king said: "My eldest son, your wife has only ground one third of the wheat. My middle son, your wife has only ground one half of the wheat. Prince Ivan, your wife is truly the best wife because she has ground all of the wheat and completed her out tasks the best also. I will hold a ball in her honor."

Prince Ivan did not know how he would take a goldfish to the ball and he worried he would disappoint his father. The goldfish told him not to worry, but to go ahead to the ball and she would meet him there. As soon as Prince Ivan was out of sight, the goldfish jumped out of her bowl and turned into a maiden once more. She called to all three of

her fairy godmothers to come and help her dress for the ball. With a blink of an eye, the maiden was dressed and staying at the entrance to the ball. No one in the entire room could take their eyes off the maiden, for she was the most beautiful thing they had ever seen. Prince Ivan knew that this was his bride. He went to meet her and led her to the dance floor. Time quickly passed, Prince Ivan excused himself from his wife shortly before the ball was over. He dashed home and dumped out the water from the goldfish bowl. His wife appeared before him and spoke: "My dear husband, you were too impatient and now you must pay the price. I will be beyond the thrice ninth kingdom, but you will only find me after you wear through such in such pairs of iron shoes." And with her last word spoken, she disappeared.

For three days and three nights, Prince Ivan paced through the palace hallways not knowing where to start. Then, he decided that he would leave to find his wife. He received the king's blessing to find his wife. He walked and walked in his iron shoes, and when he wore out three pairs he found himself in back of a little hut that was propped up on chicken legs. He said: "Little hut, little hut turn yourself to face me." The hut turned around and Prince Ivan walked into it. He found an old women sitting there and she said: "Hmmm, I smell Russian blood in my house. What do you want from me, Prince Ivan?" "Oh grandmother, I'm searching near and far for my wife we disappeared before me own eyes." She said there quiet for awhile, and then she said: "Poor Prince Ivan, she is quickly forgetting about you. Continue on your travels until you come upon my middle sister, she can help you more than I."

Prince Ivan traveled until he wore out 3 pairs of iron shoes, then there was a little hut once more. He spoke: "Little hut, little hut turn yourself to face me. The hut turned around and he walked into it. There sat an old woman. She said: "Hmm, I smell Russian blood. It must be Prince Ivan for I was warned about this visit." "Oh dear grandmother, please help me find my wife. Your sister said you could help me." She spoke: "Prince Ivan your time is almost up. Go on until you find my eldest sister, she can help you.

Prince Ivan walked and ruined 3 pairs of iron shoes. Just then he found a little house. He said: "Little hut, little hut turn yourself to face me." The hut turned around and he went into it. There was an old woman sitting there, who said: "Hmm, I smell Russian blood. It must be Prince Ivan for I was warned about this visit." "Please grandmother, tell me where I can find my wife." She said: "She has all but forgotten you. She's marrying a prince in the next kingdom. But take this mirror and give it to her, when she looks in it she will remember her old life." Prince Ivan immediately ran out with the mirror to stop the wedding.

He arrived at the next kingdom's palace and was welcomed right in for they heard of his family. He drank and enjoyed the wedding feast. After awhile, he decided it was time to give the princess her mirror. Prince Ivan went up to the princess and said: "Here is a little gift for you in honor of your wedding." She took the mirror and looked into it, and she suddenly remembered that she was married to Prince Ivan. The princess also knew how to use the mirror to transport them to wherever they wanted to go. Just as her new bridegroom was coming to get her, the princess and Prince Ivan looked into the

mirror and were transported back to Prince Ivan's palace. Everyone rejoiced at the return of the couple and feast was thrown in their honor. It was a great time, for I was there and I drank their beer, and it ran down my moustache and never went in my mouth.