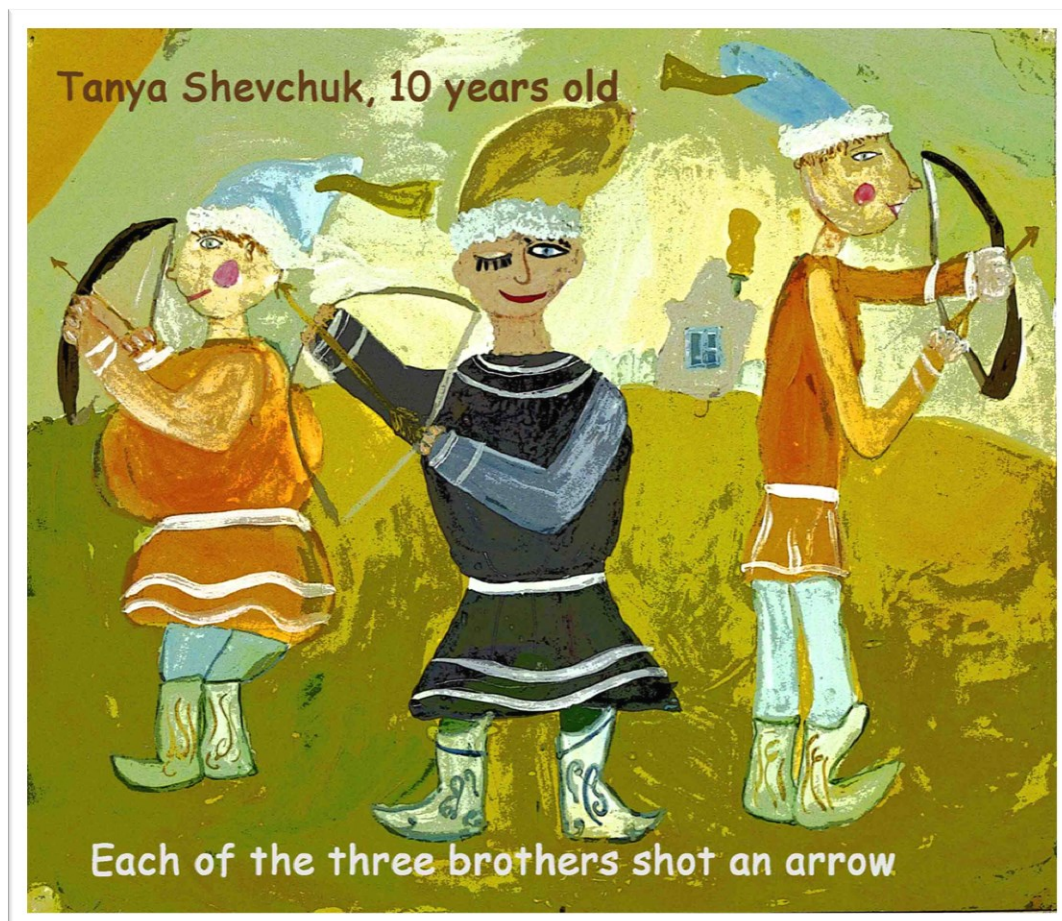


The Frog Princess

In a far-away kingdom in a distant empire lived a Tsar and his Tsaritsa, and they had three sons. All three sons were young, unwed and valiant, the like of which no tale can tell, and no quill write.



The Tsar called his three sons to him and said, “ My dear children, take each of you an arrow, stretch taut the cords of your bows, and shoot in different directions. Wherever your arrows fall, that is where you will find your destined brides.”

The elder brother shot his arrow, and it fell in the courtyard of a *boyar*, a mighty lord, right in front of the lord’s daughter’s chamber. The middle brother shot his arrow, and it flew into a

courtyard, falling in front of a magnificent balcony, where there stood a lovely young maiden, the daughter of a merchant. The youngest brother, Ivan *Tsarévich*, or Prince Ivan, shot his arrow, and it fell into a muddy marsh, where a quacking-frog caught hold of it in its mouth.

Prince Ivan said to his father, the Tsar: “How can I take this



quacking-frog for my wife? A quacker is not my equal.”

“Take her and marry her,” said the Tsar. “You are destined to have her!”

So all the young princes were married, the eldest to the *boyar’s* daughter, the middle one to the merchant’s daughter, and Prince Ivan to the quacking-frog.

The Tsar summoned his sons and said, “Your wives shall each bake soft white bread for my breakfast.”

Prince Ivan became distressed on hearing this, and returned to his chambers with his head hung low. “Qua, qua, Prince Ivan, why are you so sad?” asked the frog. “Is it because your father, the Tsar, has spoken some unpleasant words to you?”

“How can I not be sad? His majesty, my father, has ordered you to bake soft white bread for his breakfast tomorrow.”

“Don’t be sad Prince Ivan, the morning is wiser than the evening, so go to sleep and get some rest.” The frog made the young prince lie down and rest, and casting off her frog-skin turned into the fair maiden, Vasilisa the Wise. She walked out on to her beautiful balcony and cried: “Nurses and maids! Set to work and make me some soft white bread, such as I used to eat and taste in my dear father’s house!” In the morning when Prince Ivan awoke, the bread was baked and ready. The bread was so wonderful that the like of it cannot be imagined, but only told of in tales. The bread was decorated with ingenious ornaments, showing the Tsar’s cities and their fortresses. When the Tsar was given the bread, he praised Prince Ivan greatly.

The Tsar issued a new command to his three sons, “Let each of your wives weave me a silk carpet in a single night.”

Once again Prince Ivan returned home unhappy and with his head hung low. “Qua, qua, Prince Ivan,” said the frog, “why are you so sad? Has your father, the Tsar, spoken some cruel and sad words to you?”

“How can I not be sad? His majesty, my father, has ordered that you should weave a silk carpet in a single night.”

The frog said, “Don’t worry, the morning is much wiser than the evening, so go to bed and take some rest!” She made him lie down to rest, and casting off her frog’s skin she turned into the fair maiden, Vasilisa the Wise. She went out onto her beautiful balcony and cried: “Nurses and maids! Set to work and weave me a silken carpet, such as the one I used to sit on in my father’s house.” No sooner was it said than done. Next morning when Prince Ivan awoke, the carpet was woven and ready. It was so wonderful that the like of it cannot be imagined, but only told of in tales. It was adorned with gold and silver, and beautifully embroidered. The Tsar praised Prince Ivan highly for the carpet.

After that, the Tsar commanded that a ball was to be held, and that all three princes should attend with their wives, so that he could see them with his own eyes.

Once more Prince Ivan returned home unhappy with his head hung low. “Qua, qua,” said the Frog, “Why are you so sad? Has your father, the Tsar, said unpleasant words to you?”

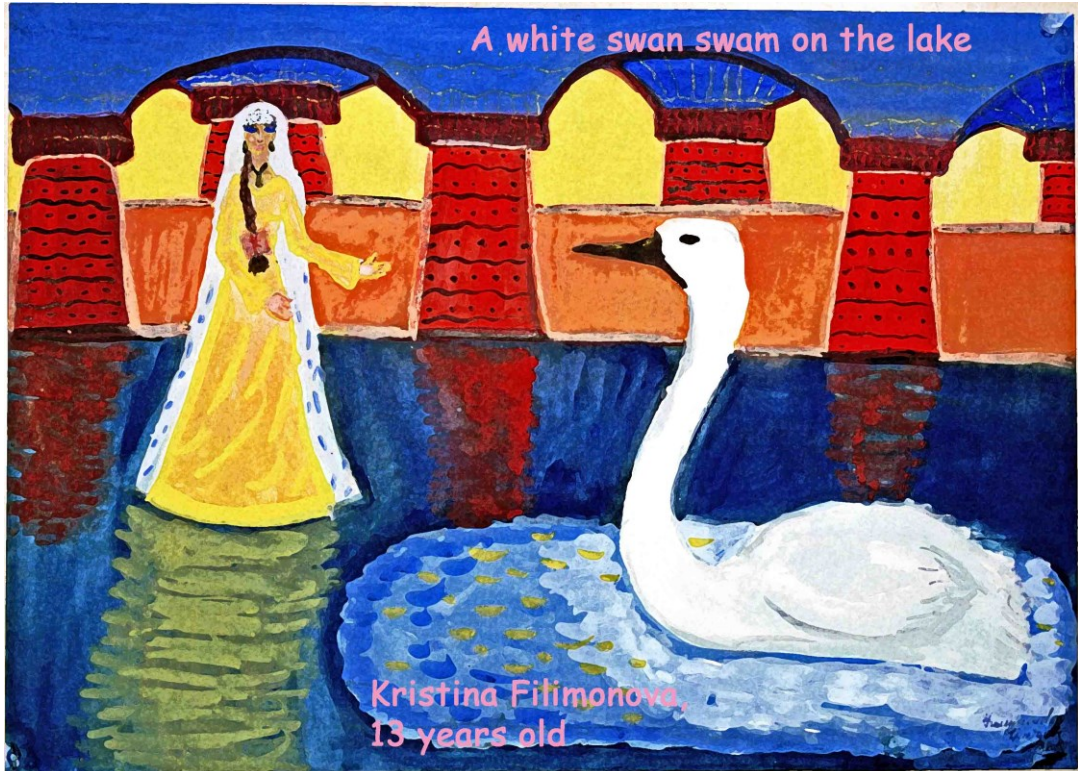
“How can I not be sad?” answered Prince Ivan. “His majesty, my father, has ordered that I appear before him with you at the ball tomorrow. But how can I show you, a frog, to the people?”

“Don’t worry, Prince Ivan, go alone to the Tsar, and I will follow later. When you are at your father’s tomorrow, you will hear a great trampling and thunder, and then you must say, “There comes my dear little Froggy in her box.””

The elder brothers arrived with their wives who were clad in their best. When they saw their younger brother, Prince Ivan,

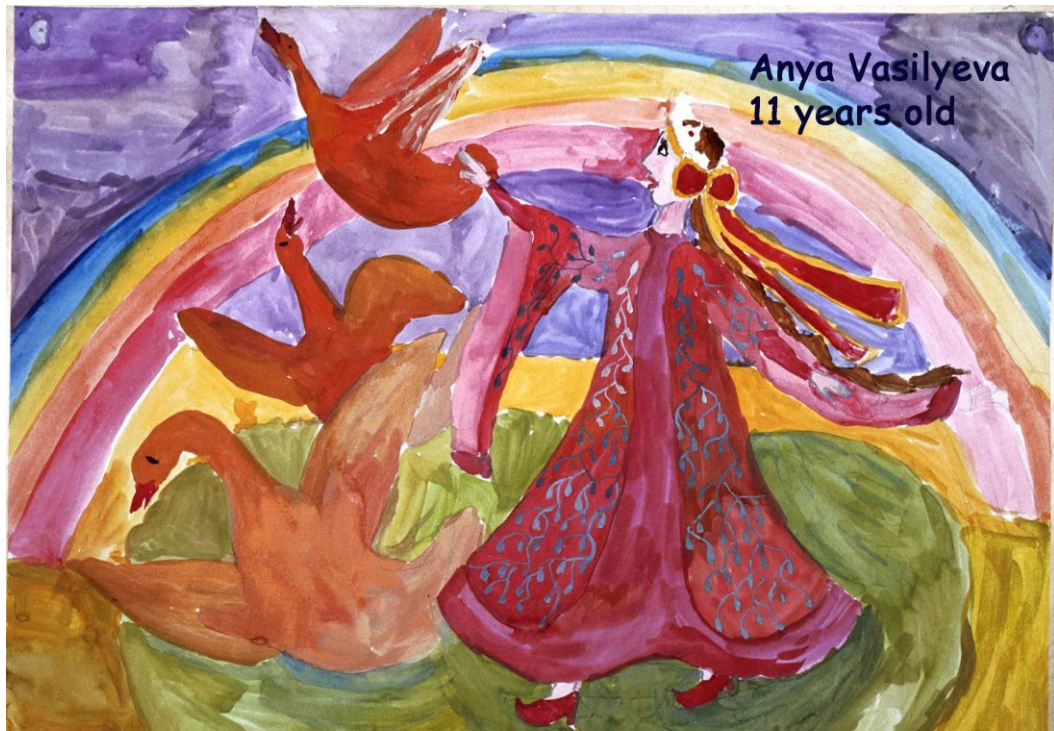
they laughed and said, “Why have you come without your wife, brother? You could at least of brought her in a kerchief. And where did you find such a beauty? You must have searched all the marshes, I would say.”

Suddenly there was a great trampling and thunder, and the whole palace shook and trembled. The guests became very frightened and jumped out of their seats and didn’t know what to do. Prince Ivan said, “Don’t be afraid, it’s only my dear little Froggy arriving in her little box.” A gilded coach drawn by a team of six horses flew up to the steps of the Tsar’s palace, and out stepped Vasilisa the Wise. Her beauty cannot be imagined, but only told of in tales. She took Prince Ivan by the hand, and led him to the oaken tables, which were covered with



embroidered cloths. The guests began to eat and drink and make merry. Vasilisa drank wine, but put the dregs of her glass in her

left sleeve. She ate some roast swan, and put the bones in her right sleeve. The wives of the elder brothers saw these cunning tricks, and started to do the same. Later, when Vasilisa the Wise was dancing with Prince Ivan, she waved her left arm and a lake appeared. She then waved her right arm and white swans were seen swimming on the lake. Such sights amazed the Tsar and all his guests. The wives of the elder brothers were dancing, and they also waved their left arms, but sprayed everyone with dregs of wine. They then waved their right arms, but a bone landed right in the Tsar's eye! The Tsar became furious at such behaviour and had them driven from his court in disgrace.



Anya Vasilyeva
11 years old



Sveta Markelova
12 years old

The Frog Princess
turned into a white swan

In the meantime, Prince Ivan ran home and finding the frog's skin he burnt it in the fire. When Vasilisa came and saw that her frog's skin was gone, she became sad and said to Prince Ivan, "Oh, Prince Ivan what have you done! If only you had waited a little, I would have been yours forever, but now I must say

farewell! You must seek me beyond the Thrice-Ninth Land in the Thrice-Tenth Tsardom in the house of Koschei the Deathless. She then turned into a white swan and flew out the window.

Prince Ivan wept bitterly, prayed to God in all four directions, and went where his eyes led him. He walked on and on. It was perhaps near, perhaps far, perhaps a long time, perhaps a short time, who can say. On his way he met an old man. “Good morrow, good fellow!” said the old man. “What do you seek, and where are you bound?”

Prince Ivan told him of his misfortune. “Alas! Prince Ivan, why did you burn the Frog’s skin? Neither was it yours to wear, nor to do away with! Vasilisa the Wise was born wiser and more cunning than her father, and this so angered him that he turned her into a frog. Here, take this tangle-ball, and wherever it rolls you must follow it bravely.”

Prince Ivan thanked the old man and followed the tangle-ball across the open plain until he met a bear. The prince wanted to kill it, but the bear implored in a human voice, “Do not kill me, Prince Ivan, for one day I may be of use to you!”

The prince went on, and this time he saw a drake flying high above him. Prince Ivan took aim at the bird with his bow and was about to shoot when the bird implored in a human voice, “Do not kill me, Prince Ivan, for one day I may be of use to you!” He spared the drake and followed the tangle-ball further, until a hare crossed his path.

He took aim at the hare with his bow, but the hare begged, “Pray, do not shoot me Prince Ivan, for one day I may be of use to you!”

So Prince Ivan spared him and went on to the blue sea, where he saw a pike stranded on the beach. “Ah, Prince Ivan,” said the pike, “take pity on me.” He cast her into the sea and walked on along the shore.

Perhaps it was a long time, perhaps a short time, but eventually the tangle-ball rolled to a little hut. The hut was standing on chicken’s legs and spinning round and round. Prince Ivan said:

*Little hut, little hut!
Stand as thy mother placed thee,
With your front towards me,
And your back towards the sea.*

The cottage turned with its back facing the sea and its front towards him. Prince Ivan entered the cottage and once inside saw the bony-legged Baba-Yaga, the witch. She was lying on the stove sharpening her teeth, and her nose grew to the ceiling and dripped over the doorsill.



“What brings you here good fellow?” Baba-Yaga asked the prince.



“Ah, you old hag! First give me some food and drink and then let me steam myself in the *banya*, and then you can ask me questions afterwards,” said Prince Ivan.

Baba-Yaga fed him and gave him drink, and let him steam himself in the bath-house. The prince then told her that he was looking for his wife, Vasilisa the Wise. “Ah, I know!” said Baba-Yaga. “She is now with Koschei the Deathless. It will be hard to get her back though. It is not easy to defeat Koschei. His death is in the eye of a needle, the needle is in an egg, the egg is in a duck, the duck is in a hare, the hare in a chest and the chest at the top of a tall oak tree, which Koschei guards as he does his own eye.”

Baba Yaga showed the place where the oak tree was growing. Prince Ivan went there, but he didn't know what to do. How would he be able to reach the chest? Suddenly the bear appeared from nowhere and pulled up the oak tree, roots and all. The chest fell down and was smashed on the ground, and then the hare ran out of the chest in full flight. Another hare pursued him and caught him, tearing him to bits. A duck flew out of the hare and soared up into the air. She flew high, but a drake flew after her, striking her so she dropped the egg, which fell into the sea. Prince Ivan wept bitter tears on realising that he would never be able to recover the egg. But a pike suddenly floated to the shore holding the egg in its mouth. The prince took the egg, cracked it and took out the needle. The more Prince Ivan bent the needle the more Koschei twisted and writhed. But when Prince Ivan broke off the eye of the needle Koschei fell down dead.

Prince Ivan went to Koschei's house and found Vasilisa the Wise there. They returned home and lived a long and happy life together.