Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Vasilisa The Beauty

Unknown writer

Once in a certain country lived a merchant. He had been married twelve years and had only one child, a daughter Vasilisa, whom everyone called Vasilisa the Beauty. When her mother died the little girl was eight years old. On her deathbed she called her young daughter to her, took out from under the bedclothes a Doll, gave it to her, and said:

"Listen, dear little Vasilisa! Remember and fulfil my last words. I am dying and I leave you, with a mother's blessing, this Doll. Keep it always with you and show it to no one, and whenever any misfortune happens to you give it something to eat and ask its advice." Thereupon the mother kissed her little daughter and died.

The merchant, after his wife's death, mourned as long as was reasonable, and then began to think about getting married again. He was a good, sensible man and did not concern himself with the maidens, but best of all he liked a certain young widow. She knew about children, had two daughters of her own about the same age as Vasilisa, and, of course, could keep house and do all that a mother should do.

The merchant married the widow, but he made a mistake: he did not find in her a good mother for his child. Vasilisa was the prettiest girl in the whole village, and the stepmother and the step-sisters were envious of her beauty. They treated her cruelly and made her do impossible tasks, so that she might grow thin under the burden and her complexion might turn dark under the wind and sun. Indeed, it was no life at all for her!

But Vasilisa bore it uncomplainingly, and every day she grew more beautiful and plump than ever, while her stepmother and stepsisters grew uglier and thinner from ill-temper, in spite of the fact that they never did anything but sit round with folded hands like fine ladies. How did this happen?

Vasilisa's Doll helped her. Had it not been for that the poor girl could not have stood so much work.

Vasilisa did not eat the daintiest morsels of her scanty fare, but she used to put them aside for her little Doll, and in the evening when the rest had gone to bed she would shut herself into her little room and give it the good things, saying:

"Here, little Doll, eat something and listen to my tale of woe! Here I live in my papa's house, but I do not get any pleasure out of it. My wicked stepmother is trying to drive me out of the bright world. Teach me! How must I behave and what must I do?"

The Doll would eat a little and then give her good advice and console her for her sorrow, and before morning came it would finish every one of Vasilisa's tasks. While she was resting in the cool air or gathering flowers, the beds were weeded for her, the cabbages watered, the pails filled, and the fire made. The Doll also taught her how to avoid sunburn. It was fine to live with the Doll!

Several years passed. Vasilisa had grown up into a beautiful maiden. All the young men in town sought her, though not one of them would so much as look at her stepsisters. The stepmother was crosser than ever and replied to all the suitors: "We will not give the youngest one before the older ones."

And as soon as she had sent the suitors away she would vent her spite on Vasilisa with blows.

Now it happened that the merchant was obliged to go away from home for a long time on important business. The stepmother went to live in another house which stood near a dense forest, and in this was a hut where Baba Yaga the Witch dwelt. She was a wicked hag who never permitted any person to approach her, and she ate men like chickens.

Having settled in her new home, the merchant's wife kept inventing pretexts to send the detested Vasilisa into the forest, but the girl always came back without accident. The Doll showed her the way and did not let her go near the Baba Yaga's hut.

Autumn came. The stepmother one time gave the three girls their evening's work to do: she bade one to make woven lace, and the second to knit stockings, but she set Vasilisa to spinning. She put out the lights throughout the house and left only one little candle where the girls were working, and she herself went to bed. While the girls were working the candle began to gutter. One of the girls took the snuffers to trim the wick, but instead of doing so she followed her mother's directions and, as if accidentally, put out the candle.

"Now what are we going to do?" asked the girls. "There is not a light in the whole house and our stints are not finished! We must go to the Baba Yaga after a light."

"I have all the light I want from my bosom-pin," said the one who was working on the lace; "I won't go."

"And I won't go," said the one who was knitting stockings; "I have enough light from my knitting needles."

"Vasilisa must go after the light," cried both of them. "Hurry to Baba Yaga the Witch and get it!"; And they drove her out of the room. Vasilisa went into her little room, set before her Doll the supper that she had saved for her, and said: "Now, Dollie, take your supper and listen to my tale of woe. They are sending me to the Baba Yaga after fire, and the Baba Yaga will eat me!"

The Doll ate the food and her eyes gleamed like two candles. "Do not be afraid, little Vasilisa," she said. "Go whither they send you; only keep me always with you. When you have me you have nothing to fear at the Witch's hut."

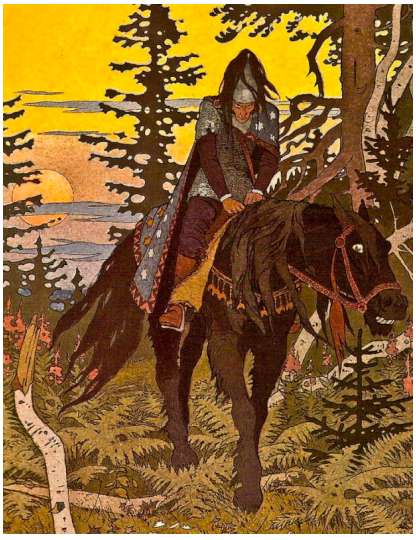


So Vasilisa made haste, hid the Doll in her pocket, and having crossed herself went into the dense forest. As she went along tremblingly a horseman suddenly galloped past her. He was white, his dress was white, the horse he rode was white, and the horse's trappings were white. Outdoors it began to grow light.

She walked farther, and another horseman galloped past. He was red, his clothing was red, and he rode a red horse. The sun began to rise.



Vasilisa walked all night and all day, and only toward the next evening did she reach the clearing where stood the Baba Yaga's hut. The fence around the hut was of men's bones, and the posts were decorated with human skulls. Instead of door-posts were men's leg-bones; instead of shutters were arms; instead of a lock was a mouth with sharp teeth.



Vasilisa was benumbed with terror and stood as if rooted to the spot. Suddenly another horseman came riding along. He was black, his clothing was black, and he rode a black horse. He galloped up to the Baba Yaga's gates and disappeared as if he had sunk through the earth. Night had come. But the darkness did not last long. In the skulls on the fence the eyes gleamed, and it was as light as noon all over the clearing. Vasilisa shook with terror, but not knowing where to run she remained where she was.

Soon a terrible noise was heard in the forest. The trees trembled and the dry leaves rustled. It was the Baba Yaga coming. She stormed along in a mortar, she whipped it up with her pestle, she swept away the tracks with her besom. She came up to the gates, paused, and sniffing all around cried out: "Fu! fu! fu! I smell Russian breath! Who is here?"



Vasilisa approached the old dame with fear and trembling, and bowing low said: "It is I, grannie. My stepmother's daughters sent me to you to get some fire."

"Good!" exclaimed the Baba Yaga. "I know them. Live on, and do some work for me and then I will give you some fire; but if you do not do it, then I will eat you up."

She turned to the gates and cried: "Hey! my strong fence give way! Oh my high gates open!"

The gates opened and the Baba Yaga went in, and Vasilisa followed her, and then all was closed tight again. As soon as she entered the room the Baba Yaga stretched herself out and said to Vasilisa: "Bring me here what is on the stove; I want to eat."

Vasilisa lighted a splinter at the skulls' eyes on the fence and began to take down the food from the stove and give it to the Baba Yaga. There was enough for ten men. From the cellar she brought bread and meat, beer and wine. The old dame ate and drank, leaving for Vasilisa only a bit of soup, a crust of bread, and a morsel of roast pig.

Then the Baba Yaga lay down to sleep, saying: "When morning comes I am going out. Keep your eyes open, clean the court, sweep the hut, get the dinner, prepare the bedclothes; then go into the cornbin, take forty bushels of wheat and clean it of fennel. Have all this completely done, or I will eat you up."

After giving this command the Baba Yaga began to snore. Vasilisa put the old dame's leavings before the Doll, burst into tears, and said:

"Now eat, little Doll, and listen to my tale of woe! The Baba Yaga has given me such a heavy task to perform, and she threatens to eat me up if it is not all accomplished. Help me!"

The Doll replied: "Fear not, Vasilisa. Eat your supper, say your prayers, and go to sleep. Morning is wiser than Evening."

Vasilisa did so. She awoke rather early, but the Baba Yaga was up before her and was looking out of the window; the eyes in the skulls were growing dim, and now

the white horseman galloped by and it became quite bright. The Baba Yaga went outdoors, whistled, and before her appeared her mortar and pestle and besom. The red horseman flashed by and the sun came up.

The Baba Yaga got into her mortar and started off. She spurred it on with the pestle and swept away the traces with her besom.

Vasilisa was left alone and she began to investigate the Baba Yaga's house. She was amazed at the abundance of everything, and she could not make up her mind which task she would take hold of first. But she soon discovered that her work was done for her already. The Doll was just separating out from the wheat the last grains of the fennel.

"Oh, you are my dear deliverer!" exclaimed Vasilisa. "You have saved me from misfortune!"

"All that is left for you to do is to get dinner," replied the Doll, climbing into Vasilisa's pocket. "Get it, and God be with you; but now take a good rest for your health."

Toward evening Vasilisa laid the table and waited for the Baba Yaga. It began to grow dark. The black horseman galloped by the gates. Then the eyes in the skulls began to gleam. The trees trembled, the leaves rustled—up came the Baba Yaga. Vasilisa met her. "Is your work all done?" asked the hag.

"You can see for yourself, grannie," replied Vasilisa.

The Baba Yaga looked all around, and became very angry because there was nothing to be angry about. "Very good!" she said sullenly; then she cried: "My faithful servants, my bosom friends, grind my wheat for me!" Instantly appeared three pairs of hands, seized the wheat, and carried it out of sight.

The Witch ate her supper, lay down to sleep, and again gave Vasilisa her orders.

"To-morrow do the same as you did to-day; but above all, take from the corncrib the poppy, and clean it of all dirt to the last seed. You'll cause trouble for someone if the least bit of earth is mixed with the poppy."

Then she turned her face to the wall and began to snore as before.

Vasilisa gave her Doll something to eat. The Doll ate and told her what she had told her the evening before:

"Pray to God and go to sleep; Morning is wiser than Evening; all shall be done, dear little Vasilisa!"

In the morning the Baba Yaga again flew away in her mortar, and Vasilisa and the Doll quickly accomplished the work that was to be done. In the evening the old hag came home, inspected everything, and cried out: "My faithful servants,

my bosom friends, make some oil out of the poppy." Three pairs of hands appeared, seized the poppy, and carried it out of sight. The Baba Yaga sat down to supper, and while she ate, Vasilisa stood by in silence.

"Why don't you have something to say to me?' asked the Witch; "you stand there like one tongue-tied."

"I did not dare to," said Vasilisa; "but if you will allow me, I should like to ask you something."

"Ask away! Only remember—not every question leads to good! If you come to know too much you will quickly grow old."

"I only wanted to ask you about what I saw, grannie. As I was coming to you I was overtaken by a white horseman on a white horse in white clothes. Who is he?"

"That is my bright Day," said the Baba Yaga.

"Then I was overtaken by another horseman on a red horse. He was red and in red clothes. Who is he?"

"That is my red Sun," replied the Baba Yaga. "And what was the meaning of the black horseman who overtook me just at your gates, grannie?"

"That was my black Night. All are my faithful servants."

Vasilisa remembered the three pairs of hands, but said nothing more.

"Why don't you ask something more?" demanded the Baba Yaga.

"I am afraid of what you said might happen to me: if one comes to know too much one grows old."

"It is good," said the Baba Yaga, "that you should ask only about what you have seen out of doors and not what you have seen in the house. I do not like people to tell tales about me out of school, and I eat up those who are too inquisitive! And now I am going to put a question to you. How did you succeed in doing the work which I gave you to do?"

"My mother's blessing helped me," replied Vasilisa.

"What is that? Begone from me, you daughter-with-the-blessing! I don't want people who have been blessed!"

And she dragged Vasilisa from the room and pushed her out of the gates. Then she took down from the fence one of the skulls with the lighted eyes, put it on a stick, and gave it to her, saying: "Here is the light for your stepsisters. Take it! That is what they sent you here for."

Vasilisa hastened home on the run, by the light of the skull, and it did not go out till the next morning. At last toward the evening of the second day she reached her home. As she went through the gates she was going to throw the skull away.



"Why, of course," she said to herself, "they won't need the light now." But suddenly she heard a quiet voice from the skull saying: "Don't throw me away! Take me to your stepmother."

She looked up at her stepmother's house, and not seeing a light in any window, she resolved to go in with the skull. The first persons she met spoke kindly to her, and told her that since she had been away they had had no light in the house. They could n't make anything burn, and the fire which they tried to bring from the neighbours went out the moment it was brought into the house.

"Perhaps your light will keep!" said the stepmother. They carried the skull into the house, when the eyes gazed so steadily at the stepmother and her daughters that it burnt them. They tried to hide, but wherever they went the eyes always followed them. In the morning they were burnt to ashes, but it did not touch Vasilisa.

Then Vasilisa buried the skull in the ground, locked the house up, went into the city, and asked for shelter with an old woman who had no relations. She said to the old woman: "It is tiresome for me to have nothing to do, grannie. Come buy me the very best flax and I will spin for you."

The woman bought some of the very best flax and Vasilisa sat down to her task. The work fairly glowed under her hands and the thread that she made came out as smooth and even as hair. She made a lot of thread the finest that ever was seen. No one could equal it. Vasilisa had gone to ask her Doll's advice, and the Doll had said: "Bring me an old comb and an old shuttle, even a curry-comb: I will do it for you."

So Vasilisa got her all that she asked for, and went to bed; and the Doll during the night made a splendid loom.

Toward the end of the winter the linen was all spun, and it was so fine that one could pass it through the eye of a needle like a thread. In the spring they bleached the linen, and Vasilisa said to the old woman: "Grannie, take this linen and get some money for it!"

The old dame looked at the stuff and exclaimed: "No, my dear child, no one except the Tsar should wear such linen. I will take it to court."

So she went to the Tsar's palace and kept marching up and down in front of the windows. The Tsar saw her and asked: "What do you want, old dame?"

"Your majesty," she replied, "I have brought you some wonderful cloth. I do not want to show it to anyone except yourself."

The Tsar commanded that it be brought before him, and when he saw the linen he was dumfounded.

"What will you take for this?" he asked.

"It will not cost you anything, Tsar-father! I have brought it to you for a gift."

The Tsar thanked her and sent her off with handsome presents.

From that linen they started to make the Tsar some shirts. They cut them out, but they could not find a seamstress anywhere to make them. They searched long, and at last the Tsar summoned the old dame and said to her: "You were clever enough to spin and weave this cloth, you must be clever enough to make some shirts out of it."

"Sovereign, it was not I who spun and wove this cloth," said the old dame; "it is the work of my adopted daughter."

"Well, let her make them," he said.

The woman went home and told Vasilisa all about this.

"I knew," said Vasilisa, "that this work of my hands would not suit them."

She shut herself in her room and took hold of the work. She sewed steadily without once letting it out of her hands, and soon a dozen shirts were ready.

The dame took the shirts to the Tsar and Vasilisa washed her face and hands, combed her hair, dressed herself, and sat down at the window, waiting to see what would happen. Presently one of the Tsar's servants came into the old dame's yard and said: "Our sovereign Tsar wishes to see the clever artist who has made him the shirts and to reward her from his own hands."

Vasilisa went and showed herself before the eyes of the Tsar. When he saw the fair young girl he fell passionately in love with her. "No!" he exclaimed, "I will never part with you: you shall be my wife." So the Tsar took Vasilisa by her white hands and caused her to sit by his side, and so they celebrated a great wedding. Vasilisa's father soon afterwards returned home. He was delighted with her good fortune, and from that time forth he lived at his daughter's. Vasilisa took the old dame also to be with her; but the Doll she kept in her pocket to the very end of her days.

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