

# **A Story of True Magic**

**Narrated by Bayan  
and written down by Anna Zubkova**

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A long time ago there lived on Earth a minstrel and storyteller. His name was Bayan. Indeed, his name literally told its own story because it came from the very old word *bayat* which means to tell stories. This was a name known to many people in olden times, and everywhere it meant *bearer of truth, speaker of the truth, and one who clearly expounds wisdom*.

Bayan would travel around the villages and towns with his dulcimer, singing his songs and telling his tales.

He was a tall man with a powerful physique and pleasing countenance. His hair, however, had turned gray even as a young man. But the grief or misfortune which caused his hair to turn as white as snow was something about which Bayan never told anyone.

The songs he sang were only about love, joy, kindness, how to be happy, and how to live a righteous life on Earth. He would relate fables about the heroes of folk legend and recount stories to uplift and transform the soul.

And that was how Bayan walked the Earth for many years. He had neither family, nor home, nor children.

But those were times of great turmoil. Princes and nobles feuded with one another, dividing up the land and killing each other to gain dominion. The people, too, argued over the old established beliefs and the new beliefs that came from outside.

But these feuds arose because they had forgotten the Truth of the One God!

This was the Truth that Bayan sang about in his songs and spoke about in his stories and fables. His heart, like the sun, burned with love! His words of wisdom taught how peace could exist on Earth and how people could live with kindness from the heart!

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One day Bayan was going about his business when he noticed smoke from the scene of a fire that was burning out: bad people had set a village on fire!

Walking through the ashes, Bayan could not find anyone alive.

Then suddenly at the very edge of the village he heard a child crying, as if the crying was coming from the heavens! It was as if all the world around was weeping for these acts of people filled with evil!

Bayan noticed that from a large birch tree hung a basket with a baby inside, miraculously safe and

**sound! Its mother had evidently managed to hide the child by hanging it high in the tree!**

**Bayan lowered the basket and took the child in his arms.**

**The baby turned out to be a little girl, still an infant, and she would need to be fed with mother's milk!**

**He gave the baby a little water from his flask and set off to find a nursing mother. After all, it would be quite inconvenient for a wandering minstrel to go about his occupation in the villages and towns with a tiny baby to care for!**

**He searched and searched for a long time, but no one was willing to take the baby into their family! Indeed he was lucky to even find any kind-hearted woman who would be willing to breastfeed the little one.**

**"Life is hungry and hard enough for us already," they would tell Bayan. "We don't even have anything to feed our own children!" And so no one took the little girl into their house and family.**

**So it was that the baby girl remained with Bayan, and he named her Vassilisa.**

**She became Bayan's beloved daughter, and he her wise and kind father.**

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**Vassilisa grew up quickly, and she saw many things living the life of a wanderer with Bayan! And she learned much more by listening to his songs and stories and by taking in his wisdom.**

**Vassilisa was convinced that Bayan knew everything, he knew about ordinary worldly matters and he knew all kinds of magic.**

**Indeed, Bayan knew how to tell his tales in such a magical way that they made the characters in his stories come to life, and each tale became a living reality. He would describe a bird singing, and people could see the bird and hear it! When Vassilisa was still a young child, she would even come up to stroke the bird, squirrel, or hare in the story.**

**One day Vassilisa made this request to Bayan:**

**"Teach me how to do true magic!"**

**"What kind of magic?"**

**"Like in your stories. How to sew and embroider a shirt in a single night, how to bake a bread that is tastier than any other that you can find."**

**"I cannot do that just yet, daughter of mine. How will I teach you to make magical bread if you do not yet know even how to make ordinary bread? You have not yet spun a simple yarn, you have not yet embroidered any patterns with your own hands, how can I teach you to make magical patterns on a magical shirt?"**

**From that day forward, whenever they were invited into a house, Vassilisa would take every opportunity to help the housewife with her work. She would be alongside the housewife making bread and cakes, preparing beetroot soup or porridge, and spinning yarn. In that way she learned not only basic sewing, but embroidery too. She began to sew patterns with her needle and threads on Bayan's shirt and on her own dresses.**

**Bayan always pointed things out to Vassilisa: look how the leaves and flowers seem to embrace**

each other, and what truly magical beauty results from this! Observe, Vassilisa, how this natural beauty can produce the most beautiful pattern on cloth!

He would also draw her attention to the colors on the wings of a butterfly. See what exquisite clothes God has given this butterfly to wear! If you, too, observe the beauty gifted by God, you yourself will become skilful in creating beauty!

Bayan also taught his daughter about counting, reading, and all the important things she needed for life!

Usually he would hold these lessons just for Vassilisa alone. But sometimes children from all over the village would gather, and after his stories, Bayan would teach them all how to read and write.

It often happened that neither Vassilisa nor the other children were able to master the new things they learned immediately, and this is what Bayan would tell them:

"With everything in life, it is God's intention that it will take time for different beings to acquire wisdom, strength, beauty, and perfection. Look at a flower bud: it does not grow in a single day. The stamens and petals form inside it. And only later, when the time is right, does the beautiful flower blossom forth!

"In the same way, a little bird cannot fly as soon as it is hatched, its wings must gain strength, it must overcome its fear and weakness, and only then will it learn to fly through the air!

"It is the same with people. We cannot master everything right from the start. It takes time!"

And Vassilisa grew up, acquiring knowledge about the ways of the world and learning kindness from Bayan.

But he was not only a master at telling stories, he also knew about medicinal herbs and could treat people and animals. That was something Vassilisa also tried to learn, which herbs to gather and how, and for which ailments they could be beneficial.

The animals of the forest did not fear Bayan in the least. They would come up to him for help, as if they knew he would not harm them and could heal their injuries and ailments.

For Vassilisa, the natural world was something kind and beautiful! And the forest animals were like friends!

Vassilisa grew up to be bold and clever. Bayan made sure that she became skilled not only in running a household, he also taught her how to gallop a horse so that she could outride a young man from any village. If there was a friendly stave-fighting contest, he taught her to acquit herself as well as any boy. Wherever she lacked strength, Vassilisa would always win through on her wits and agility!

And she was very keen to learn anything and everything from Bayan!

\* \* \*

One day they were sitting by a campfire in the forest, resting after their long journey.

"Where do you find your stories, your songs, and your music?" Vassilisa asked Bayan.

"In the *silence!*"

"But how? Is there magic in your dulcimer?"

**"Why don't you try it yourself!"**

**"It does not work when I try it. But with you, it seems as if the dulcimer is playing by itself!"**

**"That is because I can hear the music which the dulcimer wants to play!"**

**"But I cannot hear it..."**

**"Start by listening to what the dulcimer does not play. When I am not playing the dulcimer, the *silence* around it — is special and magical. We can learn to hear that *silence*. And then, in this *silence*, everything will become clear and wonderful!**

**"But we can learn to listen to the *silence* not only from the dulcimer, but also from the forest, from the lake, and from the meadow when there is no wind. In that *silence* we can also hear what the stream is saying, what the bird is chirping, what the wind is telling us, what question the gentle sun is asking, what the trees are whispering, and what the stars and the bright moon are keeping back from us."**

**And so it was that Vassilisa began to learn to listen to the *silence*. And when she had learned how to enter into the *space of transparent silence*, it was such a wonderful feeling for her! It was as if she herself were now in a magical world — a world in which God was beside her and no misfortune could happen!**

**As Vassilisa learned from Bayan about the world of Divine Kindness and Beauty, she would be surprised and ask:**

**"Why are people sad when God's world is so beautiful? Why do they suffer, ache, worry, and die? Why do they quarrel and kill one another?"**

**"It is not easy to answer your question, Vassilisa! After all, a person is not a body but a living**

soul! The body is like a vessel which God pours a soul into so that the soul can grow and develop itself!

"The body grows, then it becomes old and dies. But the soul does not die!

"The soul can also live without the body in a world of light and beauty if this soul has learned how to be in a state of love and kindness. On the contrary, if it has lived in anger or fear, the world around it will also become cruel! The destiny of such a person will be bitter!

"Furthermore, there tends to be a link between people's destiny and the way they conduct their affairs.

"That is why you and I need to tell people about how to live in the kindness that comes from the heart, try to restore good will in every person, and put a stop to evil intentions!

"Would you like me to teach you how to dance so that the love and light in your dancing becomes visible to people?"

"Yes, I would!"

"Well, look at how the flame somehow seems to dance in our fire! Now you try to dance like that!"

Vassilisa tried. Her body seemed to move of its own accord in a beautiful dance!

"And now try to imitate how the gentle morning sun shines from your heart, caressing and embracing everyone with the arms of its rays!"

Her dancing became even more beautiful as her movement filled with love from the heart!

It took more than one day, of course, for Vassilisa to learn this, but on each occasion her dancing became more and more beautiful! And

thanks to this, she too, as a soul, became even more beautiful!

Vassilisa and Bayan started to perform for people. She would dance to the music he played, lighting up everything around with the warmth of her heart!

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One day they came to a large settlement. Alongside the settlement was a wealthy prince's residence enclosed by a stone wall. The rooms were finished in white stone, with high towers. There were many servants and soldiers, and guards at the gates.

"So where shall we sing our songs first, Vassilisa, in the settlement or at the prince's residence?"

"In the prince's house! I have never seen such rooms and towers before!"

They knocked at the gate. The guards came out. When they saw that Bayan had a dulcimer, they allowed them in, thinking: "Prince Mstislav has invited guests. They are having a big feast. Everyone is preparing for a military campaign. The prince is gathering his allies together. A minstrel is just the thing we need!"

They escorted Bayan and Vassilisa to the place where the prince and his guests were having their feast.

The rooms were opulent with painted ceilings, glazed windows decorated with colorful patterns, the dishes were of gold and silver, the tables replete with food!

However, the prince did not invite Bayan and Vassilisa who were hungry and tired after their journey to feast from the plentiful table, saying instead:

"Well, minstrel, show us what you can do. Entertain us!"

Bayan started singing his songs, with Vassilisa doing her dancing.

But the guests hardly listened to them or looked in their direction.

The guests had become very merry after the wine they had drunk!

Then the prince asked Bayan:

"I have heard, Bayan, that you can see both the future and the past! Is that true?"

"I can see the past, and I know the present. As for the future, this is to a large extent a matter of man's own will," Bayan told the prince. "But I can say something about what the future might hold."

"So tell each guest who wishes it what this person wants to know!"

"Very good, sir!"

The guests started asking their questions, and Bayan gave them his answers.

At first everything was very light-hearted.

"What is my wife's name?" asked one.

Or "How many sons and daughters do I have?"

Bayan answered all their questions correctly, holding the guests in amazement and laughter.

And so the fun continued for some time.

Then the prince himself asked a question.

"And how do you see my future? Does victory lie in store for me in the impending campaign?"

This was Bayan's reply:

**"I see your many victories, Prince Mstislav. I also see many soldiers vanquished in those battles. I see other princes who have submitted to you. I see the villages and towns there ravaged. Your might will be great! You will command fear and respect among other princes! But I also see sorrow. Your earthly might will bring doom to your son! Your future will not be a happy one! After your death, your principedom will be vanquished and subjugated by others."**

**"How dare you predict this for me!" the prince said angrily.**

**"But this prediction is not a predestined future, but a warning to you. It is in your power not to allow this to happen! If you do not sow death, sorrow will not come into your life!**

**"Courage has many different faces! The power of good and the power of evil are not at all the same!**

**"Now people kill one another for their different beliefs, for riches, power, land, or out of petty grievances. Vengeance fuels this kind of blood-letting.**

**"Valor, honor, justice, and strength do not count for as much in people's values these days as they should!**

**"People have become confused about what is sinful and what is good!**

**"They speak of 'righteous anger' and 'holy war'. But there is no righteous hatred! And killing cannot be holy!"**

**At this point the Prince could not contain his anger and ordered his guards to seize Bayan and lock him up in the dungeon.**

Vassilisa did not know what to do! She started to try to protect Bayan and fight the guards. But it was farcical — one young girl against so many soldiers!

Bayan said "Go away, daughter of mine, as fast as you can!" But Vassilisa did not listen. One of the guards seized her, and the others all set upon Bayan together and took them off to the prince's dungeon. They locked them underground behind bars.

Vassilisa cried, but Bayan stroked her head and consoled her. He began thinking how he might save his daughter.

He himself had never been afraid of dying even the cruelest death. But he was determined to get Vassilisa out of this predicament at all costs!

Vassilisa said through her tears:

"Why are they such bad people? Why did they not even listen to you? You were telling them about kindness, about justice! They were all eating and drinking, but they did not invite us to the table! In return for all our kindness, they have locked us in the dungeon! Why?"

"It is often the case, Vassilisa, that people do not notice the bad in themselves. And if you begin to tell them about this, they become angry with the person who told them the truth.

"Not every seed that is sown falls on fertile land. That is why not every seed grows!

"Do not be sad! Have something to eat now!"

Bayan took a small piece of bread from his pocket, wrapped in a clean cloth, and his flask of spring water which he always kept on his belt, and held them out to Vassilisa.

Vassilisa broke the bread in half and gave one piece to Bayan.

"I do not want any!" Bayan said. "You eat it!" In the meantime I will tell you a magic story.

And he began to tell his story.

\* \* \*

Once upon a time there was a tsar who had three sons. The oldest was Kassyan, the middle one was Demyan, and the youngest Ivan.

His tsardom was a small one. Not many people lived there. Life was quiet and settled. No one feuded or had arguments with anyone else. There was agricultural land aplenty. There was enough land available for everyone who could work it. The grain grew well year after year; nuts, mushrooms, and wild strawberries grew in the forests in abundance. Everyone had enough, everyone was content!

It would happen, of course, that a man and his wife would squabble, or two neighbors fell out somewhere. Then the people would rally round to reconcile them. But if they did not want to be reconciled, they would be taken to the tsar for him to give a ruling, and the tsar would settle all disputes fairly so as to prevent discord and strife from taking root in his tsardom.

And that is how their life was lived — quietly and peaceably.

Time passed, the tsar's sons grew up into strong and fine young men. The tsar began to ponder over which one of them he could entrust his tsardom to.

He summoned them and said:

"I will soon have to choose who should rule the tsardom after me. Go out into the big wide world, seek out spiritual guides, learn from them about the ways of the world, and then come home. The one who acquires the most useful knowledge about how to live a just life on Earth and how to rule the tsardom is the one to whom I will pass on my power. The other two will be his assistants and advisors. That is what my father ordered me to do: not to divide up the tsardom into separate lots, but to live amicably as a single family!"

The three sons bowed to their father and set out on their journey.

Along they went until suddenly they came upon a stone. Leading from the stone were three paths, and on the stone was written these words:

He who takes the right-hand path will acquire great might.

He who takes the left-hand path will win enormous riches.

He who takes the path straight ahead will win love, but will *lose himself*."

The three sons began to wonder which path they should take.

"We should take the path where we will acquire strength," Kassyan, the eldest, said. "We need to be strong to defend the tsardom!"

"We must choose the path that will take us to riches," retorted the middle brother, Demyan. "If we find out how to achieve riches, we will be able to buy off any enemies!"

"But what use are strength and riches without love?" said the youngest, Ivan. "I would go straight ahead!"

**"But it is written here that you will win love, but lose *yourself*," the other brothers objected. "With that path, we might not return alive!"**

**The brothers thought about the different choices, wondering which one to take, but since their father had taught them not to have arguments and not to fall out with one another, they decided that each of them would put his luck and wisdom to the test by taking the path he preferred.**

**And that is just what they did. They embraced one another, said their goodbyes, and then each one set out on his own separate path.**

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**Kassyan, the eldest, took the path to the right and came across a small house where a teacher lived. The teacher instructed Kassyan how to fight and wage war, to defeat everyone else and win glory for himself.**

**But the eldest did not realize that as his might grew, so too did his pride and cruelty, and that he became angry with those who did not serve him and submit to his will.**

**Time passed.**

**Kassyan acquired enormous strength, he conquered many lands and became tsar over many people. His tsardom became powerful, and in that tsardom he was the most powerful of all!**

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The brother Demyan took the path to the left and also found a house in which there lived another teacher.

This teacher taught Demyan how to trade for profit, make a big surplus, increase wealth, and become very rich indeed.

But the middle brother did not realize how — alongside this useful knowledge — greed and envy began to take hold of him, how trickery and deceit held no shame for him in the pursuit of wealth.

Much time passed, he seized large areas of land and became tsar over them. His tsardom became large and rich, and in that tsardom he was the richest of all!

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Ivan, the youngest brother, set out on the path straight ahead. He walked and walked until he came across a dilapidated cottage in the forest, in which there lived a wizened old woman.

"Do not pass by, my fine young man!" said the woman. "Please cut me some wood, fetch some water, and heat up the bath hut."

"Of course, dear old lady!"

Ivan gathered together a heap of dry wood in the forest, sawed it, and chopped it up for firewood, fetched water from the stream, and heated up the bath hut. This was hardly work for a tsar, but he completed it all skillfully!

The old woman washed herself in the steam bath, and when she came out of the bath hut, she had

become so young again that she was unrecognizable. Now Ivan could not call her "dear old lady".

"That's a magical bath hut you have there, ma'am! You were an infirm old woman, you had a steam bath, and you came out about 50 years younger or more!"

"With love and care, Ivan, everyone grows younger!"

"What kind of love is that? I have given you a little help around the house, and now I am going out into the world to find *real love!*"

"Well, that is exactly how people find *real love*. The path leads from one act of kindness to another!

"Or to put it another way, from one small act of caring this path leads to great kindness!

"Why not take a steam bath yourself, Ivan? You will gain health and strength! In the meantime I will prepare some food."

"But how do you know my name?"

"I know many things! If you like, I will teach you!"

Ivan took a steam bath, and he did, indeed, feel stronger, but also more tired than ever before. It was as if his body had been infused with purity and the soul cleansed in the clear Light.

Ivan went into the front room, where the table was spread with a white tablecloth. On the table was everything you could imagine: pies, pancakes, pastries that seemed to be freshly baked, delicious preserves and pickles, nuts, wild strawberries and fruit that was not yet even in season!

Ivan was surprised.

"How did you manage to prepare such a feast?"

**"This is my magic tablecloth! Anything I might want immediately appears on it!"**

**She began to fill his plate with everything he wanted.**

**They finished their meal and gave thanks to God for the feast.**

**Then the tablecloth rolled up of its own accord, and the table was empty!**

**"That tablecloth of yours is really something, ma'am!"**

**"I have two more magical curios: a flying carpet and an invisibility hat. Because you have helped me, I will give them to you!"**

**"Those are useful things for a wayfarer! But how will you manage without them?"**

**"Oh, I will manage alright!"**

**Ivan thanked the woman, took her gifts, and went on his way.**

**As he went along, his curiosity got the better of him, and he decided to try out the magical curios the woman had given him.**

**He unfurled the carpet and found that yes, it floated in the air! However, Ivan found that he was unable to climb onto it, his body kept falling through! He would put one leg on the carpet, but it would go straight through and land on the ground!**

**Ivan unfurled the magic tablecloth. It was full of more good things to eat than anyone could imagine, the smells were mouth-watering. But it was impossible to pick up the food, take it in his hand, or put it in his mouth.**

**He tried on the invisibility hat, setting it on his head every which way. The hat certainly disappeared, but Ivan himself remained visible! He almost lost the**

hat completely, and could barely find it once it had become invisible!

"Oh! I took these things, but I didn't ask how they work!" thought Ivan, and he returned to the woman's cottage to seek greater wisdom.

"Please tell me how your magical curios work, ma'am! How can I fly on the carpet, how can I eat from the tablecloth, and how can I disappear in the hat?!"

"Well it's like this, young man! It takes special mastery for miracles to happen. Those who have not yet become wise enough cannot work magic!

"It is just as well that you did not show off in front of people with these curios, you would have made a fool of yourself!"

"Can you teach me all this?"

"Yes, I will teach you!"

"But who exactly are you anyway?" Ivan asked in surprise.

"I serve God, and I try to establish and maintain order here on Earth!

"But I am not the only such person in the wide world. I have Brothers and Sisters in the Divine Light! They all serve God and help people to discover the Truth!"

So Ivan, too, began to learn from the woman.

She started by explaining to him how to love all beings — children of God! — with love from the heart.

This is what she said:

"In the rib-cage, where the air fills the lungs, there is a special place. This is where love from the heart grows. When a person has learned this love, this person can feel God, because the main quality of

**God is His Infinite Love, Gentle and Wise for everything and everyone!**

**"For God is the Creator of all things! He is the Father and Mother of each of us!**

**"Therefore, we need to learn to love Him!**

**"Then God will be able, through such a person, to demonstrate His Love for people and other beings! Divine Love will then manifest itself and flourish, both in great acts of goodness and in those which, at first sight, are even insignificant!**

**Then the woman taught Ivan how to shine from the spiritual heart, like the sun.**

**Then she taught him how to be the Unburning Fire of Love.**

**"The Great Power of God is in the Divine Fire of Love. This Fire can also be ignited in the spiritual heart of each person! And a person who listens to God can connect with this Power to help and protect everyone!"**

**She also taught Ivan how to substitute his own will for the Divine Will and how to live in the Divine Light. But that also meant to *lose himself*, and in exchange acquire Divine Love, Wisdom and Power! This was what the words on the stone meant!**

**She taught Ivan how to be one with the Divine Will so that he could always understand and feel the Wishes of God, and not his own wishes, so that he could live according to the Divine Command, and not according to his own volition! So it was that Ivan acquired Great Divine Power — the Power of Love and Divine Knowledge!**

**He also learned from the woman how to make his body weightless. Now he could ride on the flying carpet. And he learned how to make the body**

**invisible and how to disappear in the invisibility hat. And he learned how to take anything from the Divine Light. Then the magic tablecloth began to obey him.**

**He also learned how to pass straight through the hardness of this earth and through any other material object.**

**Ivan asked the woman:**

**"And why do I need these magic things now? For I will be able to work any magic even without them!"**

**"Take them, perhaps they will be helpful for someone else! In your case, they have been of great help. You have learned the special knowledge."**

**They said their goodbyes.**

**"Thank you for this knowledge, ma'am!" Ivan said.**

**"Do not go yet! I have something I would like you to do.**

**"Look over here."**

**She pointed to the surface of the lake which was calm, like a mirror. Suddenly there was an apparition on the water: a maiden of astonishing beauty!**

**"That is Marya, the daughter of the tsar<sup>1</sup>," she said. "She was kidnapped by an evil sorcerer. He wished to marry her and have her beauty in his own possession and be subservient to him! But Marya would not agree! He holds her in a crystal mountain, in a dungeon.**

**"Everything created by God is intended for good and for a purpose. But it is sometimes the case that people do not understand the Divine Intention, and**

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<sup>1</sup> She was the daughter of another tsar, not the same one of Ivan (translator's note).

something that has been assigned for good by God can then bring misfortune.

"Take fire, for example. It can provide warmth, but it can also bring destruction from terrible conflagrations.

"Or water. It can quench our thirst, nourish plants with the rain, replenish the rivers and seas, and give life to all. But it can also produce floods, destruction, and disaster.

"And so it is with all human capabilities: they can be good and useful, or evil and destructive.

"That sorcerer, an evil person, learned how to work magic and then began to use his sorcery to satisfy his own evil desires.

"He went to live on a mountain and then began to try to impose his own way on all around. He also began to spread rumors that his power 'held sway everywhere under the ground' in order to make people afraid of him and submit to his evil will!

"You must defeat the sorcerer and break the magic spells that he has cast! Then you will be able to tell all the people that evil does not "live underground", *but in those souls inclined towards vice.*

"Tell the people that the Tsardom of God is everywhere, both under the ground and above the ground. Everywhere, God is Almighty! And love opens the way for human hearts to live in the world of God!

"Now climb aboard the flying carpet and fly! It will take you to where the evil sorcerer has established his rule and is holding Marya captive!"

The woman told him how to find his way into the mountain and advised to put on the invisibility hat

before doing so, because that mountain was defended by guards — warriors who were under the spell of the sorcerer.

Ivan thanked the woman for her teachings and for the Divine gifts, climbed aboard the flying carpet, and off he flew.

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As Ivan, the tsar's son, flew along, he admired the beauty of the Earth, the meadows, the vastness of the steppe, the dense, tall forests, the clean lakes and rivers!

The magic carpet landed in front of the mountain. Ivan rolled it up and put it in his shoulder bag. Then he put on the invisibility hat.

He went up to the mountain, saying: "Let me in, mountain, I do not have evil in me! The Light always merges with the Light. Any barrier against it disappears!"

Then the mountain opened up in front of him.

The warrior-guards let him through, because they could not see him.

In went Ivan in a sense of wonderment. Inside were crystal vaults decorated with gemstones and gold patterns. Rivers flowed between banks of gold and silver.

The sorcerer realized that something wrong was happening in his domain: an intruder had gained entry and was approaching his living quarters.

So he, using his invisible power, confronted Ivan, speaking to him in a frightening voice that seemed to come out of the air.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?"

**"I am Ivan, son of the tsar!"**

**"How is it that the guards allowed you in?"**

**"A kind woman gave me this hat!"**

**"You will not be able to hide from me!"**

**Then Ivan took off the invisibility hat and said:**

**"But I do not intend to hide! I have come to see you, to break your evil spells, and to set Marya, the tsar's daughter, free!"**

**"Do not dare go further! You will not see Marya, the tsar's daughter! She is mine! Everything here is mine! The Earth is mine! The gold is mine! The gemstones are mine! Here there is only my rule and my power! Go away, or I will destroy you!"**

**"The Earth is not yours, but God's! Whether above the surface or below, God is the Lord of everything and of everyone everywhere! His Order must not be violated! All human dominion is temporal, all human power is nothing before His Power!**

**"And His Rule is eternal! You have no right to frighten people with your magical fear and make them subservient to you!**

**"And you cannot hold the beautiful maiden against her will!"**

**The sorcerer began to cast magic spells, wanting to frighten Ivan into going back. But Ivan was not afraid, because the power of Love is stronger than any fear!**

**Then the sorcerer used his magic power to raise the underground water level and flooded the chamber where Ivan was. But Ivan did not perish, he came through the water unharmed!**

**The sorcerer then called up a wall of flames from the depths of the earth, creating a river of fire**

which blocked Ivan's way. But Ivan, son of the tsar, became the Unburning Divine Fire, he filled his body with this Fire and walked unharmed through the flaming river as if it were dry land!

Ivan was now face to face with the sorcerer, who had nowhere to run, nowhere to hide.

"What is this mysterious power of yours that is stronger than mine?" the sorcerer asked.

"It is not my Power, but the Power of God! That is stronger than any power!"

"Alright, I surrender! Take as much gold, silver, and valuable gems as you wish! Then go!"

"That is not what I have come for! Take away your magic spells on this mountain! Do not frighten people with sorcery, do not subjugate their will with your magic power! Do not force them to live in fear and be subservient to you! Do not teach them to admire your evil power!

"And set Marya, the tsar's daughter, free! Otherwise you yourself will turn into stone for thousands of years, and you will lie here motionless until you realize that evil cannot be more powerful than good!

"If you pronounce even one more single curse, it will backfire against you yourself!"

The sorcerer took fright and was even afraid to think, because his thoughts consisted entirely of evil sorcery.

Ivan, the tsar's son, entered the farthest chamber of the mountain and saw Marya, the tsar's daughter, sitting there, so beautiful that he could not take his eyes off her!

But she was sad. She was setting gemstones into a picture of green fields, meadow flowers, birds,

and other animals, as if they were all alive! The sun in the picture seemed to shine and light up all the beauty of nature!

Ivan bowed to Marya, the tsar's daughter.

Marya fell in love with Ivan at first sight, and Ivan fell in love with Marya with all his heart!

"Why are you sad, beautiful one?" asked Ivan.

"It has been a long time since I saw the blue sky and the golden sun, or heard the sound of birdsong, or walked in the green forest!"

"Then come with me! If you love me, be my wife! We will go to the tsardom of my father!"

"But what about the sorcerer?"

"The sorcerer is no longer fearsome! He no longer has magical power!"

They walked unnoticed past the guards and out of the mountain.

When they were out, Ivan broke the spell on the warriors guarding the entrance, and the other spells cast by the sorcerer also disappeared.

The two of them got on to the magic carpet and flew off. Where it landed, Ivan would tell the people about good, about evil, and what the Truth is. He told them about Divine Love, Wisdom, and Power, and about the simplicity of the Divine Laws of Kindness and Love!

\* \* \*

Over that time, the tsardoms of Ivan's brothers Kassyan and Demyan grew so much that they merged their borders.

Anger grew in Kassyan and greed grew in Demyan to such an extent that they forgot the

wisdom of their father and took to arguing about dominion over land and people.

When there is argument, people fall out! And when people fall out it is but a short step to conflict!

And, indeed, misfortune struck and the brother Kassyan went to war with his brother Demyan!

People and animals perished, the fields became deserted!

The war brought pain, death, terrible mutilation, ruination, tears, and grief!

But the brothers paid no attention, measuring the might of their tsardoms by who would crush and subjugate the other!

Ivan saw this woeful state of affairs.

He landed the magic carpet and started to cry shame on the brothers and reconcile them.

But Kassyan and Demyan caught sight of Marya, and each wanted to take her as his wife. They both decided to put up a pretence of being reconciled in order to take the beautiful maiden away from their brother. Thus to their sins was added deceit, which concealed their underhand intentions.

They all returned together to their father.

When he had heard his sons' stories, he said:

"How well everything has turned out! Your journey into the big wide world was not in vain, since you have learned about the ways of the world! Each of you will now have one tsardom. So let my successors be Ivan and Marya! And may all of you live in peace!

The preparations began to be made for the wedding of Ivan and Marya.

But the evil thoughts of Ivan's brothers prompted by envy and greed only grew stronger!

**The brother Kassyan decided to kill Ivan and Demyan in the night and make himself the ruler of everyone.**

**And he did what he had decided.**

**He killed Demyan, but was unable to kill Ivan.**

**He plunged the sword in, but Ivan, unharmed, carried on sleeping and only turned over.**

**Kassyan took fright.**

**The next morning Ivan saw his brother Demyan dead and guessed what had happened. So he decided to bring his brother back to life and explain how this had happened to him.**

**The same day, out of revenge for Kassyan and envy for Ivan, Demyan decided to poison both of them.**

**That was the very day that the wedding took place. People came to the banquet from all over the tsardom to congratulate the young couple and wish them happiness.**

**While everyone was dancing, Demyan put poison into Ivan's and Kassyan's food without being noticed. When they sat down at the table again, Ivan ate his food and was none the worse for it. But Kassyan dropped dead on the spot.**

**Thus Ivan had to bring his older brother back to life too.**

**That was when the truth was revealed to everyone about the evil intentions and actions of the older brothers. In front of their father, in front of the tsar's daughter Marya, and in front of all the people, their guilt and shame was clear. And in front of the All-Seeing God they were put to shame!**

The elder brothers realized how far into the abyss of vice and sin they had been taken by anger, greed, envy, and deceit.

They repented.

Then Ivan said to them:

"You have turned to evil all the good abilities that you developed!

"There is nothing wrong with the ability to fight and to protect the weak! There is nothing wrong with the ability to trade honestly!

"But if someone is not possessed of love from the heart, that person may not notice how the desire for *personal gain* tends towards evil, and how *personal wishes* take precedence over other people!

"Someone who genuinely has love shows concern for others and stands up for them, not for oneself! Through this, this person can learn to *lose himself* in selfless love and acquire Divine Love and Will.

"Now each of you go to your own tsardoms! Put your house in order there!

"And tear out all your vices and their roots in yourselves! Nurture love from the heart and strengthen it!"

"Yes, that is what we will do! But first, tell us this: how were you able to remain alive, and how were you able to bring us back to life?"

"I have learned how to be one with the Divine Power! Therefore, no evil holds any fear for me!

"You have brought so much misfortune upon other people! It is time for you to put this right as soon as possible! That is why God has allowed you to be brought back to life in these bodies, in order for you to correct your mistakes!"

The brothers returned to their homes and began to learn how to live in love and kindness.

When they had learned this, they each found the bride intended for them. They married their chosen one.

And so they all began to live in peace and prosperity.

Ivan and Marya continued to teach all the people how to be in a state of peace, goodness, and love on Earth!

They found a good young man to whom they gifted the invisibility hat, the magic tablecloth, and the flying carpet, and then taught him all the Divine Knowledge.

After all, it is important that *true magic* should never disappear from the Earth.

\* \* \*

Vassilisa became so caught up in the story that she forgot about the dungeon in which she and Bayan had been locked up.

"What a wonderful story! If only we had a flying carpet and an invisibility hat, we would get away from here!"

"But how would we both fit together in one hat?"

"We would take it in turns! We would think up a way of getting the hat back to the other person!"

"Alright, that's what we will do, then!"

"What? Do you mean you have a hat like that?"

"No, daughter of mine, but now I am going to try to set you free from here so that other people will not notice this."

**"What do you mean? I am not going anywhere without you!"**

**"You have to, my daughter! And when you are free, you must go away from here! And do not worry about me, I will get out of here afterwards and find you. In the meantime go and live amongst good and kind people!"**

**When the guard came with bread and water for the prisoners, Bayan told him to allow Vassilisa to go free:**

**"Bring a sack, we will hide the girl in it. It will look as if you are taking the old hay bedding out of the dungeon. Carry her out like that, then outside the gates, set her free! After all, she is not guilty of anything! I daresay you have a daughter or a son! How would you yourself feel if someone tried to starve them to death in a dungeon?"**

**"But what about Prince Mstislav's order?"**

**"The Prince did not give any order about the girl, only about me!"**

**"And what if they ask where she has gone? What do I say?"**

**"Say you don't know, but you were told the minstrel performed a magic trick."**

**"Okay!"**

**The guard turned out not to be an evil man. He brought a sack:**

**"Get in, girl. Keep quiet, don't do anything to get yourself noticed."**

**The guard carried Vassilisa outside the gate, walked a little further away, and let her out of the sack.**

\* \* \*

So Vassilisa was now free, but Bayan was still in the prince's dungeon.

"What can I do now?" she thought. "How can I rescue Bayan?"

Vassilisa went to the river, washed her clothes, and washed and bathed herself. She collected medicinal healing herbs and other edible plants in the meadow. Then she went into the forest and picked mushrooms and wild strawberries. She set off to find good people.

But she did not intend to go too far away.

At the edge of the village, she noticed a rickety little cottage. She saw that an elderly and infirm woman lived there.

Vassilisa bowed down to her and said:

"Can I come and stay with you for a little while, ma'am?"

"Do you think you would have any kind of life here, my child? Here there is nothing but sorrow! There is only me here to cope by myself! I cannot see very well now, I cannot do very much with my hands, and I can barely walk. I have no food to offer you!"

"Then I will give you some help around the house, ma'am! And you can help me with your advice!"

"Where there is nothing but sorrow, that is a misfortune. But where there is misfortune for one and misfortune for another, if the two work together, there will be no more misfortune! That is what my father Bayan used to tell me. Perhaps, we will manage to overcome all our misfortunes together!"

"Alright, come and live with me then. You will be my granddaughter! I do not have any grandchildren.

**My sons served our Prince Mstislav and laid down their lives, they died for nothing.**

**"Stay here with me for as long as you like!"**

**"Thank you, ma'am!"**

**Vassilisa tidied up inside the cottage and soon had everything spick and span. She fetched firewood and lit the stove. She made a soup out of mushrooms and herbs, and a compote from wild strawberries.**

**They sat at the table to take their meal. The old lady praised Vassilisa for making everything clean and preparing the food. Then she asked:**

**"And what sort of misfortune do you have, my child?"**

**"Your prince has locked away my father Bayan in a dungeon. I must think of a way to rescue him."**

**"Yes, that is misfortune, indeed.**

**"In the past, people would all come to the defense of the minstrel-storyteller. But now people do not stand together for the good of the cause. One man does not make an army, and that's the way it is!**

**"If people all stand together for the sake of good, then there will be peace! But when that does not happen, then there is no peace either.**

**"But wait! I have just had a thought. I know that the prince has a wife, Princess Efrosinya, and she has a kind heart.**

**"Those who are poor are not always kind, and those who live in luxury are not always cruel and arrogant.**

**"If you were able to make a request to her, perhaps she would be able to help.**

**"However, she has been unwell and ailing of late. She sits upstairs in her rooms and does not go**

out anywhere. But her guards will not allow you to see her."

Vassilisa made some healing herb infusions. She administered them to the old lady so that she would regain her strength, so that her arms and legs would not ache, and so that she could see better.

She also made some more of the infusions to treat the princess.

\* \* \*

Now Vassilisa had to think up a way of getting to Princess Efrosinya in her upstairs rooms.

The next day she decided to go and see how she could find a way into the prince's palace by avoiding the guards and get to see the princess.

The prince's mansion and living quarters were very large, and their courtyard was surrounded on all sides by a high stone wall like an impenetrable fortress! There was a gateway on one side only.

"Well then, prince's residence, turn round and show me your other side — the side that is hidden by the forest! I will see how I can find a way to avoid the sentries and reach the princess in her upstairs rooms!" Vassilisa said jokingly to spur herself on. She set off alongside the wall in the direction farthest from the gateway and closest to the forest.

But all the trees over a great distance alongside the wall had been cut down to make it possible to spot any enemies. It was impossible for Vassilisa to climb onto the wall or even take a look behind it.

However, then Vassilisa noticed a single spruce tree directly opposite the princess's rooms close to the wall: Princess Efrosinya had prevailed upon them

not to destroy this tree because at dawn and at twilight a song thrush would perch there and sing beautifully, and the princess liked to listen to it.

Vassilisa climbed up into the tree, and from there she could see the courtyard, the princess's upstairs rooms and the prince's chambers.

In the courtyard was the young prince — the prince and princess's son — playing and enjoying himself, having a wooden sword-fight with the servants. But the servants were afraid of striking him, so they quickly let him win. The little prince soon became bored with that and chased the servants away.

Then he picked up his bow and arrow and began to look for something to aim at. In the spruce tree he spotted a blue tit and took aim.

Vassilisa frightened the bird away immediately so that the young prince did not hit it.

The arrow thudded into the tree and the young prince noticed Vassilisa.

"What are you doing here, servant girl?"

"I am not a servant girl! I am like a bird flying free! You wanted to shoot your arrow at the blue tit, but you almost hit this fair young maiden!"

She took the young prince's arrow, clambered down a long branch, and jumped off into the courtyard.

"Give me my arrow!" said the young prince.

"Here, take it, but do not shoot it at birds any more!"

"I am Vsevolod, the son of the prince. When I grow up, I will become prince and master of everyone. I will shoot my arrow at whoever I like!"

**"And I am Vassilisa! When I grow up, I will become Vassilisa the Wise!**

**"But I know already that someone who shoots his arrow at a bird destroys his own happiness."**

**"So where should I shoot my arrow?"**

**"I know, I will draw a target for you!"**

**Vassilisa drew a target with seven rings on a wooden post with a piece of coal.**

**"Let's play a game: the one who shoots most accurately is the winner, and the other one has to fulfill the winner's wish!"**

**"Alright! If you win, you will be my servant girl, and you will play with me just as I order you!"**

**"And if I win, you will take me to see your mother, I have something important to discuss with her!"**

**"Alright, I agree!"**

**So they began to shoot their arrows. Vassilisa hit the very center of the target, but the young prince's arrow landed near the edge.**

**"That was not fair," he said. "A gust of wind caught my arrow and blew it off course. I have a better idea: let's have a wooden sword fight!"**

**"Alright then! And this time you won't be able to blame the wind!"**

**They began their sword fight. The young prince tried as hard as he could, but Vassilisa would not give in.**

**Vassilisa seized the moment, and in a move which Bayan had taught her, she knocked the sword out of the young prince's hand before he even knew what had hit him!**

**"Now keep your word as a prince: take me to your mother, the princess! Later I will teach you how**

to use your cheek to tell how far the wind will blow an arrow off course. And I will teach you a secret way of disarming an adversary."

The young prince accompanied Vassilisa to his mother's upstairs rooms.

Vassilisa told Princess Efrosinya about Bayan. She told her how — because of Bayan's words of truth — the prince became angry and ordered him to be locked in the dungeon. She also spoke of the threat posed to the young prince's life by the war which his father the prince was planning.

The princess was saddened:

"I do not know how to make the prince listen to my advice right now. We must think how to get Bayan released and how to avoid the fate foreseen for the young prince."

"You can tell the prince that you are longing to hear tales of magic, and that they should bring my father Bayan to you! He will play his dulcimer, tell you happy stories, and then you will let us go, and we will go away from here!"

"The Prince is angry right now, he will not agree to carry out my request. We must wait for a suitable occasion. Just now he is in a bad mood, worse than storm clouds, he will not speak to anyone!

"Stay here for now, miss, stay with me. Play with the young prince, tell us Bayan's stories!"

So Vassilisa stayed in Princess Efrosinya's living quarters, she prepared herbal infusions for her: one to restore her health, another to cleanse her skin, to get rid of wrinkles, and prevent her beauty from fading, and a third to thicken her hair.

Vassilisa also began to tell them stories and tales of magic. Although she could not tell them as

wonderfully as Bayan, she spoke wise words about kindness and love.

During the day she played with the young Prince Vsevolod. She taught him how to feel the wind on his cheek so that his arrow would hit the target accurately, and how to disarm an adversary.

But Vassilisa became bored by spending her time playing sword fights!

"There is an old woman I need to go and see," she told the young prince. "She will be worried whether something bad has happened to me. Will you come with me?"

"Yes!"

"Take some small treats to make her happy!"

"Alright!"

They climbed a ladder onto the wall, then along a branch of the spruce tree, climbed down the tree and set off to see the old woman.

She was so happy to see the visitors and asked Vassilisa about everything that had happened.

The young prince saw the old woman's run-down cottage and the poverty in which she lived on her own. He had never seen anything like it before.

The visitors gave the woman their small treats and returned to the prince's residence by the same route.

The young Prince Vsevolod wanted so much to do kind deeds that the next day they visited another poor cottage, helped out as much as they could, and left small treats.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile Prince Mstislav was a troubled soul. He could not get Bayan's predictions out of his mind! He did not know what to do next! Even if he were to order the minstrel Bayan to be put to death, that would not change anything that he had foreseen!

The prince could no longer bear it, and he went to talk to Bayan.

Bayan was very pleased.

"It is good that you have come to see me, Prince Mstislav! What you are planning to do is not good! Do not start a war against your cousin, do not try to seize his principedom, do not try to convert him to your beliefs! Live in peace!"

"But how is it that you know all my thoughts? I have not yet told anyone whom I was intending to go to war with!

"Which gods do you worship? By what power do you know everything about other people? What is that witchcraft you command?"

"How will you prove the truthfulness of your predictions?"

"How will you demonstrate that if I do not go to war against my cousin, my son will not die?"

"I will not prove anything to you, Prince Mstislav! If you wish to, believe me, if you do not wish to, do not believe me! I do, indeed, know your evil thoughts, and I wish to spare both you and other people misfortune!

"You ask me which god I worship? But there is only one God!

"A long time ago His Great Messengers came here to Earth on several occasions among the different peoples, and over the course of time

changes came about in the religions and in the names for the Divine Power.

**"I know the Living God Who, beyond every faith, is the Alpha and the Omega! He is the Creator of the Universe and the loving Father and Mother for all His children!**

**"Every faith would be good if people did not replace God with idols, and the fulfillment of the Divine Commandments of Love with rituals!**

**"And there would not be feuding between people because of their beliefs if everyone understood that there is no other One Divine Power, no matter what name people gave it!**

**"Brother would not go to war with brother, nor neighbor with neighbor, if people understood what God really wishes of them!**

**"Belief in the existence of God should unite all people and eliminate all conflict!**

**"If people were aware of these eternal spiritual values, they would surely realize the insignificance of their quarrels here on Earth and of their empty claims against others.**

**"Before the Greatness of God's Love and Power, all would surely feel themselves to be His children, and brothers and sisters to one another!**

**"But as yet, that is not the case! People wage war for land, for dominion, and for worldly riches! People even quarrel over their beliefs, they fight 'for the faith'!"**

**"If people could understand that God knows all their thoughts, that their preoccupations — even the "secret" ones — are apparent to Him, and that they will be held to account for everything, then there would be more peace and order on Earth! Evil always**

**exacts its penalty. Good comes to those who do good deeds!"**

**"As I see it, minstrel, in real life, things do not always turn out as you say in life!" Prince Mstislav objected. "Those who do evil do not always get their comeuppance! And those who do good are not often destined to be rewarded!**

**"See, you think I am an evil-doer! But I am the one at liberty here! I live in luxury! And you are stuck here in my dungeon! I just have to give the order, and you will be put to death! I just have to give the order, and you will be tortured! Isn't that how it is?"**

**"Yes, but it is *you*, prince, who have come to see *me* in the dungeon for advice!**

**"My advice to you is this: do not begin the war which you are intending!"**

**The prince became angry again and left.**

**This was only one of several discussions that the prince had with Bayan. He turned many things over in his mind. But he could not make up his mind what to do next.**

**\* \* \***

**Princess Efrosinya noticed the change in her husband's frame of mind. She decided to try to talk him into releasing Bayan.**

**She went to see him and started a discussion.**

**"You are wise, wife of mine!" Mstislav replied. "I also think that if there is a way of sparing our son misfortune, the right thing will be to agree with Bayan and set him free.**

**"But I fear that he will harbor a grudge against me for keeping him in the dungeon. He will think up**

some cunning revenge or summon up some sorcery!"

"He will not do that, Mstislav! All he wants for you is not to start a war! Set him free and wish him Godspeed! And do as he has advised you!

Mstislav agreed. He did not ask Bayan's forgiveness, he said no word of kindness, but he ordered Bayan to be freed from the dungeon.

\* \* \*

When Bayan was set free, he began to think how to find Vassilisa.

But she had already discovered from Princess Efrosinya that Bayan had been released, had thanked her for her help, said her farewell to the young prince, and caught up with Bayan herself!

They were so happy!

"Look what a magician you have become now!" Bayan said to Vassilisa. "You have managed to set me free!"

"But Prince Mstislav would have released you even without my help, hearing your words!"

"I wouldn't be so sure about that! When even a few people join their efforts together in pursuit of a just cause, their power is increased many times over!"

"So you see, Vassilisa, it turns out that the songs we sang here and the stories we told have not been in vain! Now there is hope that we have managed to prevent a murderous war and rekindle some kindness in people.

"Now you have seen for yourself how true magic is revealed and takes root in love from the heart! And

how that magic manifests itself in life through good people!

"Those who think not of *themselves* when they do good deeds bring peace and joy for others through the Will of God, they create true magic!"

The two continued on their way on this Earth. Everywhere they sowed the seeds of love in people, they told tales of righteous deeds, and spread kindness in all they did.

\* \* \*

And that is where our story ends.

If anyone, reading or listening to this, has become a better and smarter person, then good for them!