



Lidushka and the Water

Demon's Wife

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Intermediate

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In a certain place lived a young housewife, whose name was Lidushka. One day, as she was washing linen in a rivulet, a large, swollen frog swam towards her, looking so ugly that Lidushka, alarmed at the sight of it, jumped back a pace or two. The ugly looking frog approached nearly to the spot where Lidushka had just been washing, spread its legs out on the top of the water, and opening its mouth as if it wished to say something, stood perfectly still.

“You great, fat frog,” said Lidushka to herself; “what do you want here, and why do you open your mouth at me so?”

She then threw a piece of linen that she happened to have in her hand at the frog, wishing to drive it away that she might go on with her washing. The frog dived, and before Lidushka had time to look about her, it reappeared at the other side of the water, and began to swim directly towards her. Lidushka again drove it away; but the frog would persist in swimming towards her, opening its mouth all the time; it would not be driven away, but continued to interrupt her in her work.

“Go away, you great, fat thing!” cried Lidushka at last, quite angrily. “Let me know when you have got your baby, and I will come and be its godmother;” and she threw another piece of linen at the frog.

“Very good, very good!” croaked the frog. Then it disappeared under the water, and disturbed Lidushka no more at her washing.

Not long afterwards, Lidushka came again to the rivulet to wash her linen at the usual place, when suddenly, the same frog she had before seen, only that it was much thinner now, swam towards her.

“I have got my children now,” croaked the frog, “and have come to ask you to be their godmother, as you promised.”

Lidushka remembered that she had said, not long before, that if the frog had a little one, and would let her know, she would be its godmother; she therefore, although alarmed, did not refuse to do what she had once promised.

“But you silly thing,” said Lidushka full of anxiety, “where am I to go with you to gratify your wish, and to fulfil my promise?”

“Come, come, come!” croaked the frog, spreading out its legs and swimming on the water.

The promised godmother followed it sorrowfully along the bank of the rivulet. The frog swam on until it came to a dam, when it stopped and croaked, “Fear not, fear not! Remove that stone, and under it you will see a flight of stairs; they will lead you down to my house. Come, come! I will go before you.”

Having thus croaked, the frog disappeared under water, and the good-natured Lidushka saw no other way to get out of her trouble than simply to do what the frog told her. She removed the stone, and saw that there was really a flight of stairs leading under the dam. They were most wonderful stairs; neither of wood nor of stone, but as if made of the purest crystal, clear and transparent, like layers of water placed one below the other.

Lidushka went timidly down a few steps, when the frog appeared hopping and croaking joyfully before her, because she was about to fulfil her promise of becoming godmother to its little ones. Lidushka, without further hesitation, descended the remainder of the beautiful steps. They soon reached the object they had in view—the frog’s house. It also was built entirely of crystal water. Like the stairs, by which they had come down, was the whole house—bright, sparkling, and transparent as crystal. The frog, full of joy, hopped about Lidushka, and

took her to her little ones.

When the ceremony was over, Lidushka, in fulfilment of her promise, having taken her part in it as a godmother, a splendid entertainment followed, to which many frogs from far and near had been invited. They all hopped about Lidushka, and croaked with great joy. There were various courses—boiled and pickled, roast and fried—but they all consisted of fish: the finest carp, jack, chad, trout, whiting, perch, and many other fish which Lidushka did not know even by name. She was amazed at the sight of all this. The dinner at an end, she took a walk about the house to see everything more closely.

In the course of her walk, she came to a small room, which looked like the kitchen. It was full of long shelves, and on the shelves stood rows of little jars. Lidushka was much surprised when she noticed that all the jars stood upside down. She was curious to know what was under them, and lifted one up. In a moment a little white dove flew from under it, joyfully fluttered its wings, rose up and disappeared. Lidushka lifted another jar, and, oh, wonderful! there flew from it another beautiful white dove, which joyfully fluttered its wings, and also disappeared. Then Lidushka lifted a third jar, and a third white dove flew out of it, fluttered its wings with joy, rose up in the air and vanished from her sight. She wondered greatly why these little doves were here confined: for Heaven has given an immortal soul to man, that he may live for ever; and wings to the birds, that they may fly freely over the earth.

“Oh, how cruel!” said Lidushka to herself, “to keep you here in everlasting darkness. Wait a moment, you dear little doves, and I will give you all your liberty.” Thus saying she began to raise the little jars, one after another, and as from the first three, there flew from each successive jar a white dove. As if wishing to thank her for their release from their dark prison, each of them fluttered its wings with joy, then rose up and disappeared in the air.

Scarcely had Lidushka finished lifting up the little jars, when the mistress of the house, the ugly looking frog, hopped up to her croaking in a most dismal manner. She could see from afar what Lidushka was doing with the little jars.

“Unhappy woman!” cried the frog; “why did you let those souls free? Quick! make haste and fly! Search for a lump of dry earth or a piece of toasted bread. There comes my husband! Quick! or he will rob you of your soul!”

When the amiable Lidushka heard this dreadful croaking, she turned round to see from what quarter the husband was coming; but she could see nothing of him. Only at a distance she observed a few buds of a

beautiful red water-plant floating towards her on the top of the water. Suddenly she remembered what she had often heard before, that the Water Demon sometimes shows himself on the surface of the water in the shape of a cluster of red flowers. He does this especially to young girls as they are haymaking near a stream or pond, to induce them to try to reach the flowers with their rakes. He then pulls them in and drowns them.

Lidushka dashed up the stairs as fast as she could run, and fortunately reached the dry land in time. She was overjoyed at having released all the little white doves; they were the souls of the unfortunate people whom the Water Demon had drawn into his power, and had cruelly drowned. Each soul had been kept in a separate dark prison, in the shape of a little jar. Lidushka was the deliverer of them all.

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