**Fenist The Bright Falcon**

Once upon a time there lived a peasant. His wife died and left him three daughters. The old man wanted to hire a servant-girl to help about the house, but his youngest daughter Maryushka said:

"Don't hire a servant, Father, I shall keep house alone."

And so his daughter Maryushka began keeping house, and a fine housekeeper she made. There was nothing she could not do, and all she did she did splendidly. Her father loved Maryushka dearly and was glad to have such a clever and hard-working daughter. And how lovely she was! But her two sisters were ugly creatures, full of envy and greed, always paint-ed and powdered and dressed in their best. They spent all day putting on new gowns and trying to look better than they really were. But nothing ever pleased them long -- neither gowns, nor shawls, nor high-heeled boots.

Now, one day the old man set out to market and he asked his daughters:

"What shall I buy you, dear daughters, what shall I please you with?"

"Buy us each a kerchief," said the two elder daughters. "And mind it has big flowers on it done in gold."

But his youngest daughter Maryushka stood silent, so the father asked her:

"And what would you like, Maryushka?"

"Dear Father, buy me a feather of Fenist the Bright Falcon."

By and by the father came back with the kerchiefs, but the feather he had not found.

After a while the man went to market again.

"Well, daughters, make your orders," said he.

And the two elder daughters replied eagerly: "Buy each of us a pair of silver-studded boots."

But Maryushka said again: "Dear Father, buy me a feather of Fenist the Bright Falcon."

All that day the father walked about the market and bought the boots, but the feather he could not find. And so he came back without it.

Very well, then. He set out on his way to the market for the third time and his elder daughters asked him: "Buy us each a new gown."

But Maryushka said again: "Dear Father, buy me a feather of Fenist the Bright Falcon."

All that day the father walked about the market, but still no feather. So he drove out of town, and who should he meet on the way but a little old man.

"Good day, Grandfather!"

"Good day to you, my dear man. Where are you bound for?"

"Back to my village, Grandfather. And I don't know what to do. My youngest daughter asked me to buy her a feather of Fenist the Bright Falcon, but I haven't found it."

"I have the feather you need; it is a charmed one, but I see you are a good man, so you shall have it, come what may."

The little old man took out the feather and gave it to the girl's father, but it looked quite ordinary, so the peasant rode home and he thought: "What good can it be to my Maryushka?"

In a while the old man came home and gave the presents to his daughters. And the two elder ones tried on their new gowns and kept laughing at Maryushka:

"Silly you were, and silly you are! Stick it in your hair now -- won't you look fine with it!"

But Maryushka made no answer, she just kept away from them. And when the whole house was asleep, she cast the feather on the floor and said softly: "Come to me, dear Fenist, Bright Falcon, my cherished bridegroom!"

And there came to her a youth of wondrous beauty. Towards morning he struck the floor and became a falcon. And Maryushka opened the window and the falcon soared up into the blue sky.

And so for three nights she made him welcome. By day he flew about in the blue heavens as a falcon; at nightfall he came back to Maryushka and turned into a handsome youth.

But on the fourth day the wicked sisters caught sight of them and went and told their father.

"Dear daughters," said he, "better mind your own business."

"All right," thought the sisters, "we shall see what comes next." And they stuck a row of sharp knives into the window-sill and hid by watching.

And after a while the Bright Falcon appeared. He flew up to the window, but could not get into Maryushka's room. So he fluttered and fluttered there, beating against the pane, till all his breast was cut by the blades. But Maryushka slept fast and heard nothing. So at last the falcon said:

"Who needs me, will find me, but not without pains. You shall not find me till you wear out three pairs of iron shoes, and break three iron staffs, and tear three iron caps."

Maryushka heard this and she sprang from her bed to the window. But the falcon was gone, and all he left on the window was a trace of red blood. Maryushka burst into bitter tears, and the little tear-drops washed off the trace of red blood and made her still prettier.

And then she went to her father and said to him: "Do not chide me, Father, but let me go on my weary way. If I live to see you, I shall, but if I do not, then so must it be."

The man was sorry to part with his sweet daughter, but at last he let her go.

So Maryushka went and ordered three pairs of iron shoes, three iron staffs, and three iron caps. And off she set on her long weary way to seek her heart's desire Fenist the Bright Falcon. She walked through open fields, she went through dark forests and s he climbed tall mountains. The little birds cheered her heart with merry songs, the brooks washed her white face, and the dark woods made her welcome. And no one could do harm to Maryushka, for all the wild beasts -- grey wolves, brown bears and red foxes -- would come running out towards her. At last one pair of iron shoes wore out, one iron staff broke and one iron cap was torn.

And Maryushka came to a glade in the woods and she saw a little hut on hen's feet spinning round and round.

"Little hut, little hut," said Maryushka, "turn your back to the trees and your face to me, please. Let me in to eat bread within."

The little hut turned its back to the trees and its face to Maryushka, and in she went. And there she saw Baba-Yaga, the witch with a broom and a switch, a bony hag with a nose like a snag.

Baba-Yaga caught sight of Maryushka and growled: "Ugh, ugh, Russian blood, never met by me before, now I smell it at my door. Who comes here? Where from? Where to?"

"Granny dear, I am looking for Fenist the Bright Falcon."

"It's a long way off, pretty maid! You will have to pass through the Thrice-Nine Lands to the Thrice-Ten Kingdom to find him. A wicked sorceress, the queen there, has charmed him with a magic drink and made him marry her. But I shall help you. Here, take this silver saucer and golden egg. When you come to the Thrice-Ten Kingdom get hired as a servant to the Queen. After the day's work is done, take the silver saucer and put the golden egg on it. It will start to roll about all by itself. Should they want to buy it, do not sell it - ask them to let you see Fenist the Bright Falcon."

Maryushka thanked Baba-Yaga and went off. The woods became darker, and she got too frightened to move, when all of a sudden there came a Cat. It jumped up to Maryushka and it purred: "Have no fear, Maryushka, it will be still worse farther on, but g o on and on and do not look back."

And the Cat rubbed against her feet and was gone, while Maryushka went farther. And the deeper she went into the woods the darker it grew. She walked and she walked, till her second pair of iron shoes wore out, her second iron staff broke and her second iron cap got torn. And soon she came to a little hut on hen's feet with a strong fence all round and terrible glowing skulls on the pales.

Maryushka said: "Little hut, little hut, turn your back to the trees and your face to me, please. Let me in to eat bread within."

The little hut turned its back to the trees and its face to Maryushka, and Maryushka went in. And there she saw Baba-Yaga, the witch with a broom and a switch, a bony hag with a nose like a snag.

Baba-Yaga caught sight of Maryushka and she growled:

"Ugh, ugh, Russian blood, never met by me before, now I smell it at my door. Who comes here? Where from? Where to?"

"I want to find Fenist the Bright Falcon."

"And have you been to my sister?"

"Yes, Granny dear, I have."

"All right, then, my beauty, I shall help you. Take this gold needle and silver frame. The needle works all by itself and embroiders red velvet with silver and gold. Should they want to buy it, do not sell it - ask them to let you see Fenist the Bright Falcon."

Maryushka thanked Baba-Yaga and went on her way. It crashed and it banged and it whistled in the forest, and a weird light shone from the skull, hanging round. How terrible it was! But suddenly up ran a Dog:

"Bow-wow, Maryushka, have no fear, darling, it will be still worse, but you go on and never look back."

So it spoke and was gone. Maryushka went on and on, and the woods got darker, scratching her knees and catching at her sleeves. But Maryushka walked and walked and never looked back.

How long she walked is hard to say, but the third pair of iron shoes wore out, the third iron staff broke and the third iron cap was torn. And she came to a glade in the forest and saw a little hut on hen's feet with a tall paling all round and glowing horse skulls on the pales.

Then said Maryushka: "Little hut, little hut, turn your back to the trees and your face to me, please."

The hut turned its back to the trees and its face to Maryushka, and in she stepped. And there she saw Baba-Yaga, the witch with a broom and a switch, a bony hag with a nose like a snag.

Baba-Yaga saw Maryushka and she growled: "Ugh, ugh, Russian blood, never met by me before, now I smell it at my door. Who comes here? Where from? Where to?"

"I'm looking for Fenist the Bright Falcon, Granny!"

"It is no easy task to find him, my beauty, but I shall help you. Here, take this silver distaff and this gold spindle. Hold the spindle in your hands and it will spin all by itself and the thread will come out all gold."

"Thank you, Granny."

"All right, save your thanks until afterwards, and now listen to me. Should they want to buy the gold spindle, don't sell it, but ask them to let you see Fenist the Bright Falcon."

Maryushka thanked Baba-Yaga and went on her way. And it roared and rumbled and whistled in the forest. The owls wheeled round, the mice crawled out of their holes and rushed straight to Maryushka. Then all of a sudden a Grey Wolf ran up to her and said:

"Have no fear, Maryushka. Get on my back and never look behind."

So she sat on the Wolf's back and off they flashed out of sight. They passed wide steppes and velvet meadows, they crossed honey rivers with custard banks and they climbed tall mountains that touched the clouds. On and on raced Maryushka till she reached a crystal palace with a carved porch and fancy windows. And there was the Queen herself looking out of a window.

"Well," said the Wolf, "we've come, Maryushka. Climb down from my back and get hired as a servant at the palace."

Maryushka climbed off, took her bundle and thanked the Wolf. Then she went up to the Queen and bowed.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I don't know your name; aren't you in need of a servant-girl?"

"Yes," said the Queen, "it is long I have looked for a servant, but the one I need must be able to spin, weave and embroider."

"All that I can do," said Maryushka.

"Then come in and set to work."

And so Maryushka became a servant-girl. She worked all the day until night-time, and then she took out her golden egg and silver saucer and said:

"Roll about, golden egg, on your silver saucer, show me my Fenist dear."

And the golden egg rolled about till Fenist the Bright Falcon appeared before her. Maryushka gazed and gazed at him and her tears ran fast.

"Fenist, my Fenist, why have you left poor me to shed tears without you?"

And the Queen overheard her and said: "Maryushka, sell me your silver saucer and golden egg."

"No," replied Maryushka, "they are not to be sold, but you may have them free if you let me see Fenist the Bright Falcon."

The Queen thought for a while and then she said:

"All right, let it be so. To-night, when he falls asleep, I will let you see him."

So when night came, Maryushka went to his bedroom and saw Fenist the Bright Falcon. Her darling lay fast asleep and could not be awakened. She looked and she looked and she could not look enough, and she kissed him on his sweet mouth, and she pressed him to her white bosom, but her darling slept on and did not awaken. Morning set in, but still Maryushka could not rouse her beloved.

All that day she worked and in the evening took her silver frame and gold needle. And as it sewed, Maryushka kept saying:

"Get embroidered, little towel, get embroidered, little towel, let my Fenist the Bright Falcon wipe his face."

The Queen overheard her and asked:

"Maryushka, sell me your silver frame and gold needle."

"Sell I will not," replied Maryushka, "but you may have them free if you let me see Fenist the Bright Falcon."

The Queen thought hard, but at last she said: "All right, let it be so. Come and see him to-night."

Night came on, and Maryushka entered the bedroom and she saw her Fenist the Bright Falcon lying fast asleep.

"O my Fenist, Bright Falcon, arise, wake up!"

But her Fenist slept on as fast as ever, and Maryushka could not wake him up, try as she might.

At daybreak Maryushka set to work and took out her silver distaff and golden spindle. And the Queen saw her and began asking her to sell them. But Maryushka replied:

"Sell them I will not, but you may have them for nothing if only you let me see Fenist the Bright Falcon."

"All right," said the other and she thought to herself: "She won't wake him up anyhow."

Night drew on and Maryushka entered the bedroom, but Fenist lay as fast asleep as ever.

"O my Fenist, Bright Falcon, arise, wake up!"

But Fenist slept on and would not awaken.

Maryushka tried and tried again to wake him, but she could not. And soon it would be morning. So Maryushka burst out weeping and she said:

"Dearest Fenist, arise and open your eyes, look at your Maryushka, press her close!"

And a hot tear fell from Maryushka's eyes on the bare shoulder of Fenist and burnt it. Fenist the Bright Falcon stirred and he opened his eyes and saw Maryushka. And then he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Can it be you, my Maryushka? So you have worn out three pairs of iron shoes and broken three iron staffs and torn three iron caps? Cry no more. Let us go home, now."

And they started getting ready for the homeward journey. But the Queen noticed it and she bade her trumpeters spread the news of her husband's betrayal through all the towns of the land.

And the princes and merchants of her land came together to hold council and decide how to punish Fenist the Bright Falcon.

And then Fenist the Bright Falcon stood up and said: "Who do you think is the real wife, the one who loves me truly or the one that sells and betrays me?"

Everyone had to agree that only Maryushka was fit to be his wife.

After that they went back to their own land. And they had a grand feast there, and all the guns fired and all the trumpets blew at their wedding. And the feast they had was so grand, it is still remembered. And they both lived happily ever afterwards.