

Fairy Tales of Grandpa Vanya¹

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These fairytale stories can help thoughtful readers and listeners, both adults and children, to ask themselves the following questions: what is kindness, how can we fight against evil, what is real magic, and do we have magic in our daily lives? So, adults and children, if these questions have already arisen in you, start seeking the answers without fail and you will find them!

The fairytales were told by Igor Vysotin, Sarkar, Yeremey and were written down by Anna Zubkova.

Anechka² and Grandpa Vanya (Introduction)

Once upon a time, not long ago, a little girl lived in a big city. Her name was Anechka.

She had a wonderful mother, father, and two grandmothers: her mother's mother and her father's mother. This big and amicable family lived in a really large apartment, which was called a communal apartment at that time. It meant that other families lived in other rooms of the same apartment, and one really really lengthy corridor was common for all rooms.

Anechka was the only child in this communal apartment. Even though all the people in this apartment quarreled with each other from time to time, they all loved Anechka very much.

Anechka loved everyone too. She loved her mother, father, and both grandmothers. She loved the neighbors too, and she was always the first person to politely greet the other person.

In one room of this big apartment, there lived a wife and a husband. Their names were Ivan Petrovich and Akulina Andreyevna. They lived in love and harmony and were elderly. Their children had already grown up long ago and lived separately from their parents in other places.

Anechka had two grandmothers but did not have any grandfathers.

But she wanted to have at least one, so she chose Ivan Petrovich to be one for her.

¹ A unisex diminutive of the Russian given name Ivan (translator's note).

² A unisex diminutive of the Russian given name Anna (translator's note).

One day she came to visit him and simply asked him to become her grandfather. He agreed without even a momentary hesitation!

After that, a miraculous friendship began between the youngest dweller of that apartment and the oldest one.

Even though Anechka was a child, she understood that grandpa Vanya was not her real grandfather. However, this fact made him even more wonderful, for real grandfathers, just like grandmothers, had to not only praise their grandchildren but bring them up strictly as well. Grandpa Vanya was a little “magical”: he was never angry with Anechka, he played and talked to her as to a best friend.

He also would tell her fairy tales and true stories and allowed her to do whatever she asked for.

However, it should be noted that Anechka never wanted anything bad because she was a kind and intelligent little girl.

Usually Anechka asked permission of her grandmothers or parents to visit grandpa Vanya, and if they allowed, she visited him.

She would gently knock on the door and ask:

“May I come in?”

“Who is there?” grandpa Vanya would ask.

“It’s me!”

“Then come in!” grandpa Vanya would say greeting Anechka in this way, and Anechka would come in gladly.

Then she usually gave a “performance”, for example, she danced or read a poem that she learned, and every time Akulina Andreyevna and grandpa Vanya would applaud and praise her.

Afterwards, Akulina Andreyevna would invite her to taste some delicious refreshments, such as mushroom patties, which she cooked with great mastery, or tea with jam. Then Akulina Andreyevna would quietly sit down on a chair to do her needlework or would begin to cook in the kitchen. She never interfered in the conversation between Anechka and grandpa Vanya except for those occasions when she was asked for.

Grandpa Vanya would also drink tea with Anechka, and she would ask him to tell her something interesting.

Usually grandpa Vanya asked before beginning his story:

“Well, what would you like me to tell you a fairytale story or a true one?”

“Please tell me a story that has a little bit of fairy tale and a little bit of truth!” Anechka would answer.

So, grandpa Vanya began to tell her his story.

This amazing friendship started when Anechka was a very little girl, and the fairy tales would change as she grew up.

A Fairy Tale about a Fisherman, a Little Fish, and the Underwater Kingdom

Grandpa Vanya asked:

“Anechka, would you like me to tell you a fairy tale about a fisherman and a little fish?”

“No,” answered Anechka, “I know this fairy tale very well. It was written by Pushkin!”

“I’m going to tell you a completely new story, which happened to me when I went on my last fishing trip.”

“Then yes please, tell it to me!” Anechka said and sat comfortably.

“So, every summer,” grandpa Vanya started, “I spend time with Akulina Andreyevna not on the shore of the blue sea but on the shore of a huge lake. We have a little house there.

“And it needs to be said that we have lived together for thirty three years and never quarreled. Everything that we do we do by love and by mutual consent.

“One day I woke up early before the sunrise, took my fishing tackles, and went fishing.

“I went out of the house and saw how beautiful everything around was! The mist was rising above the lake! The path went down off the hill to the lake, and my legs moved as if by themselves! I was so joyous!

“Soon the sun began to rise! It lighted everything around with its light, warming and beautifying nature!

“Every dewdrop started shining in the sunlight like a diamond or even better!

“The mist made everything around me magical!

“I reached the shore. My boat was hitched by a chain and was waiting for me. I opened a lock, put oars in the rowlocks, and cast off.

“The lake was very very big! When you come to visit me there, you will see it with your own eyes.

“There was not even a breeze. The light mist was rising from the water like steam is rising above my cup of tea now.

“The smooth surface of the lake looked like an enormous mirror!

“The clouds, illuminated by the rising sun, were reflecting in the water.

“I could clearly see the bottom of the lake through the transparent water.

“I rowed softly and admired the surrounding beauty!

“I could see sand and stones under my boat. I could see how aquatic plants grew. Shoals of little fish were swimming by and shining with their silvery scales.

“Birds started waking up. Swallows began to fly very close to the surface catching midges for their children. Gulls were also soaring close to the water and sat from time to time near my boat.

“I cast the line waiting for the fish that would be first on my hook. However, no fish bit.

“I was not upset though, because everything was so peaceful and pleasing all around!

“I was sitting so and then fell asleep.

“Suddenly I saw how the bobber budged and submerged, and the fishing line became taut. It seemed that a big fish was on the hook and even dragged the boat towards itself! I grasped my fishing rod with my both hands.

“Thus I was pulling the fish out of the water, and it was pulling me into water!

“Soon it happened that the fish pulled me abruptly, and I lost my balance, fell into the water, and began to sink, for my clothes — a tarpaulin raincoat and high rubber boots — were heavy.

“I thought the end of my life was approaching: I would drown! Before I had been stronger than any fish and pulled all of them out of the underwater kingdom to the surface where they couldn’t breathe and began to die. Now it was my turn to die underwater where I couldn’t breathe.

“At that point miraculous things started happening!

“The fish that swallowed my hook appeared before my face. But this time everything was the other way round: I was caught by it and it pulled me to the

bottom! It was a sheatfish of gigantic size! I had never seen such a gigantic fish before.

“We looked at each other. My eyes were opened wide out of amazement and the fish’s eyes were opened wide as well! I had a moustache and it had a moustache! But my hook was in its lips, and it did not have hands to remove it. The blood was flowing and it was in great pain!

“Then the sheatfish said to me:

“Pull out the hook, it hurts me!”

“I didn’t hear how it said this but I miraculously understood what it said.

“I carefully pulled the hook out.

“And I was waiting for what would happen next.

“The sheatfish said:

“I wanted to destroy you for the evil that you caused to my fish kingdom! But now I see that you still have kindness!

“That’s why you are still alive.

“I will let you go if you promise me to never kill any fish, neither large nor small!”

“I promised this because I felt very deeply how painful it was for fish to be on a hook and how they did not want to die before their term that was prescribed by nature.

“You know, Anechka, that I always do what I promised! I’m faithful to my word and I will not break it at any price!

“It seemed that the sheatfish also found out about my faithfulness, because we were hearing the thoughts of each other and answering each other with thoughts.

The sheatfish said to me:

“According to our fish law, you are granted three wishes for your kind act. You just need to think about what you want to wish for, and it will come true!

“Your first wish is obvious. If you don’t want to stay in the underwater kingdom forever, you should wish to appear in your boat or on the shore.

“Two other wishes will remain with you! Don’t waste them on something useless!”

“I thanked the sheatfish and imagined myself in my boat as if none of this had happened. I imagined it fervently! And it did become real: I found myself in my boat as if nothing had happened.”

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“You must have fallen asleep, and it was a dream!” Anechka said.

Grandfather Vanya answered:

“I thought the same exact thing: I most likely fell asleep and saw this marvelous dream. But I couldn’t find my fishing rod anywhere!”

“So, you dropped it when you were sleeping!”

“I thought about this as well and I began to look for it, thinking that maybe it got stuck in the reed thicket. But I didn’t find it.”

“Were your clothes wet or dry?” Anechka asked.

“My clothes were dry, but I had imagined myself in dry clothes. It’s inconvenient and cold to be in wet ones.

“Well, I myself didn’t believe in this miracle completely, that I was deeply underwater and talked to the sheatfish.

“I took the oars and rowed to the shore.

“After docking, I thought about how would I come empty handed to my Akulina Andreyevna? From which ingredients would she cook soup?

“So I decided to collect ceps³, but not just any ceps. I wished that they were beautiful, robust, big, and tasty and that there should be no less than 10 of them!

“As soon as I wished it, I saw something in a coastal bush that looked like a cep.

“I came closer and indeed it was a cep, a big, robust, and very beautiful one! I made two more steps and saw another one!

“They grew in a line, all ten ceps, each one bigger than the next! I searched again and didn’t find any more of them.

“Wasn’t it a miracle? I had never found such big and beautiful mushrooms before and after this.

“I went home very pleased, thinking that the soup would be outstanding, and that there would be many mushrooms leftover to be fried. My Akulina Andreyevna would be glad!

“I was walking and thinking whether it could be a coincidence or a miracle.

“If it really was a miracle, what could I ask as a third wish?

“I came home and told everything to my Akulina.

“We ate the mushroom soup and began to discuss what wish should we make.

“It seemed that we had everything: a house near the lake and vegetable beds not far away. The house, though, was small, just one room where only our bed, table, two chairs, and a little stove were, but, on the other hand, because of this we didn’t have many troubles with it!

“We couldn’t think of what to wish for. Everything we had was good, everything we didn’t have was not necessary!

“Out of the blue, our neighbor’s boy, Petya, came to us.

“Akulina gave him the mushroom soup! She felt sorry for Petya and always tried to feed him. This boy grew up as an orphan, even though he had parents. He was seriously ill, and I went with him to the doctors in the city on more than one occasion. They all said that he needed an expensive surgery, but his parents did not have enough money even for food because they wasted all of it on vodka. Akulina and I had our little pensions only. Even if we saved them for the rest of our lives, we couldn’t collect even a fraction of the money that the doctors asked for the surgery.

“As soon as Petya left, Akulina and I decided to give the third wish to this little boy so that he could recover! We desired it very much!”

“And what? Did it come true?” Anechka asked.

“It did come true! I went with him to the doctor, and he said that his tests were better and that he did not have to do the surgery anymore! He just needed to continue tempering and strengthening his body, and then the disease would pass!”

“At that time I had been already teaching Petya to temper his body by pouring cold water from a bucket on it every morning.

“So, the sheatfish didn’t lie to me! And I didn’t lie to it as well, for from that moment on I did not fish anymore and did not eat fish! I stopped buying fish that were caught by other people, because if I buy them, it would mean that they were caught and killed for me!

“And, from that moment on, I also started finding mushrooms everywhere miraculously. Even when people come from the forest with empty baskets, my basket is full!”

“Grandpa, your story is great!

³ An edible mushroom *Boletus edulis* (translator’s note).

“I know the fairy tale about the seven colored flower. But in that story, only the last wish of the girl was good. In your case, however, all three of your wishes were good!”

“And what about you, Anechka? What would you wish?”

“I should think about this and I will tell you next time.”

[Translation will be continued.]