

## «MONSTER»

Once upon a time, there lived a Monster-Tsar in the magical Realm of In-Between, which is between Land and Water. And he dreamed of a son, to whom he would give his power and magical salt-crystal. But instead of a son, a daughter was born!

The Monster-Tsar was oh, so angry, but the little girl was so sweet, he couldn't be angry for long. He came to love his daughter, and named her Vasilisa. But he worried – what fate awaited her? The evil witch Murena appeared: she predicted that Vasilisa would grow to love a land-boy and run away to live on land! The Monster-Tsar grew sad – what could he do? But the Tsar's advisor Vodochet found the answer in a magical book: they must tempt the land-boy into the land of In-Between. But in order for him to live there, his parents must give him up of their own free will. Otherwise, he would die, for land-dwellers cannot remain in In-Between for more than an hour, as in-betweeners cannot live on Land.

The Monster-Tsar lay in wait for the Land-Tsar Yeremey. When the Land-Tsar was thirsty after a long trip, the Monster-Tsar tempted the unsuspecting Land-Tsar to a well and seized him by the beard!

"I'll let you go," he promised, "if you give me what you don't know of in your kingdom!" Yeremey was frightened, and he promised; when he returned home, he found that his wife had given birth to a son, Ivan. Horrified, he realized that he had promised his own son!

But the Tsar's sly advisor Afonka thought up a cheat: they could switch the fisherman's baby Vanechka and the Tsar's Ivan! And when the time came to pay off the debt – they would give away the fisherboy to the Tsar-monster, and take their own boy back home.

That very night, Afonka and his wife Praskova made the switch. But they, in their agitation, didn't notice that they switched the babies twice! The Tsar's baby remained in his own cradle, and the fisherman's baby in his.

Time in fairytales flies quickly – sixteen years passed in the blink of an eye. Vasilisa grew up, a real tomboy. She even thought up her own ball game – she just needed nets in order to play. And only fishermen on Land had them. Vasilisa slipped away to Land, but when she tried to cut some nets, she got stuck in them. Vanechka the fisherman pulled her up in the nets. They fell in love at first sight.

Vasilisa promised Vanechka that she would return.

Things were wonderful in her father's realm of in-between – she could fly to the heavens, ride on the caramel-carousel, dance on cotton-candy, and make wishes on the shooting stars... but Vasilisa longed for the Land, for her beloved Vanechka.

Vasilisa slipped away from her father's vigilance – and she met Vanechka again for Christmas.

They promised each other to get married and be together – in sadness and happiness, forever and ever. But how could Vasilisa live on Land? How could she turn into a land-girl?

When the Tsar-monster found out that Vasilisa was making trips to Land, he locked her in a high tower.

Vasilisa pined in the tower, and the evil Murena with her servant Croak-Croak appeared to her and offered her magical herbs with a choice: if Vasilisa drank them, she would immediately become a land-girl. But if she were to ever venture back to the realm of in-between, she would never be able to return to Land.

Vasilisa secretly drank the potion, and appeared instantly on Land! She and Vanechka were happily married.

The Tsar-monster, unaware of the latest happenings, demanded that Tsar Yeremey pay back his debt, and received the Tsar's son Ivan. He wanted to host a wedding – but the bride was missing! Vasilisa had run away to Land!

How could her father's sorrow be helped?

Once again the sly Murena appeared, and she offered the Tsar-monster a deal: she would bring Vasilisa back, and in exchange the Tsar-monster would reward her with the salt crystal. This crystal was no simple item – it gave the surrounding waters their salt. Without it, the seawater would become tasteless and spoiled. What else could he have done? The Tsar-monster took the deal, but on one condition: Murena must keep the crystal in the realm of In-Between.

And when Tsar Yeremey told Vanechka the fisherman that the babies were switched all those years ago, and the Tsar's son was given to the In-Between instead of him, Vanechka jumped into the well, to the In-Between! After all, he thought, if he is the Tsar's son, it is his duty! And Vasilisa jumped after him – she had promised to be with him in sadness and happiness...

Murena had done her part – she had returned Vasilisa to the In-Between. She demanded the crystal. There was nothing that could be done – the Tsar-monster handed it to her. No sooner did Murena take the crystal than she closed it away in her trunk.

Salt stopped entering the water, and the water became stifling... the fish were falling asleep, the sea-plants faded; there was no more oxygen in the In-Between! Murena's time had come! All the in-betweeners would soon die!

But Vanechka was a land-creature. He could still fight. He valiantly engaged in battle with Murena and Croak-Croak. He almost perished – but with his last efforts he broke the chest open, and all the salt exploded out at once! There was so much of it that Murena became a salt-statue!

But, dying, she whispered that Vanechka was, after all, the son of a fisherman; there was a mistake during the exchange. He cannot survive in the Realm of In-Between, and Vasilisa cannot return to Land. They will be separated forever...

What will become of Vasilisa and Vanechka? Fairytales cannot have such unhappy endings! Come to see Monster – there, you will find out how the fairytale ends. And for now – good night to all! Until soon...