

Firebird

by Rose Scollard



FIREBIRD

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS
BY ROSE SCOLLARD

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Firebird was written with the aid of a grant from Alberta Foundation for the Literary Arts and premiered with Maenad Productions at the Pumphouse Theatres June 7 to 23, 1990 with the following people:.

Baba Yaga — Alexandria Patience
Ivan — Shaun Fry
Irenka — Tania D. Sablatash
Koshchei the Deathless — Brian Jensen and Jeff McGrail
Rimsky Dimsky — Brian Jensen and Jeff McGrail Alexandria Patience
Firebird — Nicole Mion, Trina Rasmuson

Director — Alexandria Patience
Designer — Heather Kent
Choreographer — Nicole Mion
Maskmaker and Poster designer — Geoffrey Gerwing
Stage manager — Susan McNair
Assistant Designer/Technician — Elisa Filipetto
Lighting Designer — Bill Torrie
Producer — Nancy Cullen
Technicians — Mark Washeim, Martin Brock, Marion Grove

SYNOPSIS:

When Koshchei the Deathless abducts Firebird to satisfy the whim of Princess Irenka the Principality of Zhar is laid waste and Irenka is turned into a wolf. Guided by Baba Yaga, Irenka and Prince Ivan set out to free Firebird and restore Zhar to its former glory. Obstacles are placed in the way of this goal by the Magician Koshchei and his two-headed cyborg dragon Rimsky Dimsky. But Irenka and Ivan prevail at last and the play ends in celebration and marriage.

CAST:

BABA YAGA -- *WISE WOMAN*
(*IN THE GERMAN PRODUCTION THIS ROLE WAS PLAYE BY A MAN, ACCORDING TO
RUSSIAN STAGE TRADITION*)
IVAN -- *RULER OF ZHAR*
IRENKA -- *HIS FIANCÉE*
KOSHCHEI THE DEATHLESS -- *VILLAIN*
RIMSKY DIMSKY -- *TWO HEADED CYBORG DRAGON*
FIREBIRD -- *NON SPEAKING DANCING ROLE, MALE OR FEMALE*

SETTING:

Zhar -- a mythical principality. The set is general and flexible and represents at various times the courtyard of IVAN's palace, the endless steppes, and KOSHCHEI's treasure-filled garden. There are a number of precious items strewn around, among them an ornate oversized matoushka doll and a jeweled cage large enough to hold two people. There are some white painted trunks with bright red and black decorations. While the style of the ornaments and design should be Ukrainian folk art, the sets and props and should be more abstract than real. The effect should be simple clean with rich items standing out like embroidery on a white cloth

Ever present on the stage though not always spotlighted or used is the cyborg Rimsky/Dimsky, a mix of computer and two-headed dragon. With a five member cast the dragons may be performed by any two performers who are not on stage at the time. If five performers are used then the dragons may come to life at the end without detaching from their computer component.

ACT ONE

(The play opens with trilling sounds of flutes. In the dim light the trunks seem lumpy and mysterious. Spot slowly rises on Dragons.)

RIMSKY: Far away and well beyond. . . .

DIMSKY: Beyond what?

RIMSKY: Just beyond, OK? Don't interrupt. Far away and well beyond there lies the principality of . . . *Zhar*.

DIMSKY: That's where we are, right?

RIMSKY: Do you want to tell this?

DIMSKY: No. Just make sure you tell them where *Zhar* is. Far away and well beyond doesn't do it for me.

RIMSKY: Well. Let's see. . . *Zhar* is somewhere between Minsk and Pinsk, a little to the left of Kiev, a little south of . . . Oh, this is ridiculous! You'll know you're in *Zhar* when you see a flash of red in the brush, a glowing wing, a feathery heap of fire.

(A heap of scarlet feathers is spotted centre stage. As RIMSKY speaks the music swells and the heap gradually stretches and unfolds, revealing itself to be a bird, and does a preening and joyous dance. As it dances, its feathers seem to glow like fire.)

RIMSKY: Firebird -- Bird of the Sun. Only in *Zhar* does Firebird still dance. In more than a thousand years no one has ever captured or hurt this splendid creature. And indeed, it is written somewhere . . .

DIMSKY: What do you mean, somewhere? It's right here in our computer banks.

RIMSKY: It was fed into our computer banks by the wise ones of old . . .

TOGETHER: "As long as Firebird is free, the Principality of Zhar shall flourish."

RIMSKY: So you see, no one has even tried to capture it. That is, till *now*...

(FIREBIRD, alarmed, runs off.)

(During RIMSKY's speech IRENKA enters. She picks up a feather that FIREBIRD dropped and fans herself with it. In the background shadowy figures pull dark gauze over parts of the set.)

RIMSKY: Now, the Bird of the Sun is in great danger. Events and personalities are conspiring to imprison it and to stop its rejuvenating dance.

IRENKA: Oh stop dithering and tell them about me!

RIMSKY: You do it, Dimsky.

DIMSKY: I'm not going to introduce her. You do it.

RIMSKY: Oh, if I must. Lady Irenka. One of Zhar's national treasures.

IRENKA: And? Go on!

RIMSKY: (Sighs. He's said this many times before.) Irenka is as white as lilies and as red as roses and every man in the kingdom is madly in love with her. Every day at least ten men of wealth and power make offers of marriage, but she never says yes because none of them is ever good enough.

(Behind IRENKA, IVAN has entered, weighed down with gifts, among them a small casket and some ornate loaves of bread. He sets the packages down and slips his hands over IRENKA's eyes.)

IVAN: There is one, however, who is good enough.

IRENKA: It's . . . Boris Alexandrovich.

IVAN: Uh uh.

IRENKA: Could it be . . . Count Milovan?

IVAN: No! I'll give you a hint. He's bold, brave, a devil with a sword, not bad looking.

IRENKA: Ah! I know. It's Koshchei!

IVAN: Koshchei! Koshchei?

IRENKA: Calm down! I was only teasing.

IVAN: He's been around again, hasn't he.

IRENKA: I haven't seen Koshchei in weeks. Not since our engagement was announced.

IVAN: So he knows you're going to marry me. You have actually refused him.

IRENKA: I always refuse him. I don't want to marry Koshchei. I'd sooner marry a bulldozer.

IVAN: But you told him you were marrying me?

IRENKA: Three weeks ago.

IVAN: Hmm. Well I don't think he's going to give you up that easily.

IRENKA: Give me up! He doesn't own me.

IVAN: I think he and I will come to blows before the wedding. Yes we will definitely come to blows.

IRENKA: The wedding's only three days away. If he was going to make a fuss, he'd have done it by now.

IVAN: Three days is plenty of time to make a fuss.

IRENKA: Oh! Quit worrying about it. I can handle Koshchei. Ooooh. (Spotting presents) What's all this?

IVAN: A few wedding presents. (Pretends to keep them from her.)

IRENKA: Well let's open them. (Circumventing IVAN she picks up a package and reads the card.) "Best wishes, Uncle Vasily and Auntie Elenia." (Rips open parcel) A tablecloth! how boring!

IVAN: Looks like she embroidered it herself.

IRENKA: I know! (Picks up an elaborately twisted loaf of bread from the pile that IVAN carried in) And all this bread!

IVAN: From the people of Zhar. A traditional gift.

IRENKA: Quaint.

IVAN: Of course there will be plenty of other things to eat and drink. Caviar, roasted meats, cakes. But bread is traditional. You know that.

IRENKA: Traditions are boring. (Spotting the casket) What's in there?

IVAN: (Teasing. Keeping it from her.) A present from me.

(She wangles it from him and opens it eagerly. It's full of jewels. She loses interest.)

IVAN: They don't please you? I ransomed half the kingdom to get these.

IRENKA: They're fine, really they are. The truth is, Ivan, I already have more jewels than anyone could possibly wear.

IVAN: I knew that. I should have got something else. What would you like? You have only to name it.

IRENKA: I don't *know*. I have everything it's possible to have.

IVAN: Anyone as beautiful as you deserves to have everything.

IRENKA: If you knew how boring it is to have everything.

(Suddenly there is a rickety sound and a trunk in the foreground wobbles.)

RIMSKY: Oh oh. Here's trouble.

DIMSKY: (Wails a little) Oh my sainted nostrils!

RIMSKY: Calm down.

DIMSKY: (His wail matches the wobble of the trunk and rises with it climactically.)
Ohhhhh. Ohhhhh. Ohhhhh. Ohhh!

(The trunk opens with a bang and the rotund, brightly arrayed figure of BABA YAGA tumbles out.)

BABA YAGA: Oshki Petroszki! I've got to stop traveling this way! It's expected of course. Impresses the socks off everyone. But I'm going to break something one of these days. (Rubs her behind) And I don't mean the speed record.

IRENKA: Who's this? Your Auntie Elenia?

(IRENKA laughs. IVAN tries not to.)

IVAN: Shhh! It's the Baba.

IRENKA: The who?

IVAN: Baba Yaga. She used to be one of the court advisers. I haven't seen her in years.

BABA YAGA: There you are. I have something to tell you young man. Now let me see. . . . why am I here?

IVAN: Perhaps you'd like a glass of tea, Baba. Or some wedding cake.

BABA YAGA: I'm not here for a tea party! I have important information to reveal. Just let me get my breath.

(They look at each other and make fun of her silently.)

BABA YAGA: Don't fidget. Ohh! (Holds her head as though she's witnessing something dreadful.) Oh yes! It was a dream I had. Ooohhh! I've come to tell you my dream.

IRENKA: I think I'll take a tour of the garden.

IVAN: No. (Getting serious) We must listen. The Baba's dreams are always listened to. It's a Royal tradition.

BABA YAGA: I'm glad to see you still have some manners left, Ivan. My dream is terrible -- too terrible to tell really — but when a wise woman knows the worst she can't keep it to herself.

IRENKA: (Under her breath) Get on with it.

BABA YAGA: I dreamt that Firebird was captured.

IVAN: No one has ever captured Firebird, Baba.

BABA YAGA: In my dream Firebird *was* captured. By Koshchei the Deathless.

IVAN: Koshchei! He couldn't catch a cold!

BABA YAGA: I dreamt that you tried to stop him, Ivan. (The rest of her speech is muffled in tears)

IVAN: And? Come on, you can tell us.

BABA YAGA: He *killed* you.

IVAN: Koshchei killed me? Ridiculous!

BABA YAGA: You can't treat Koshchei as just another rival, Ivan. He is a force, a power. A magician of great strength.

IVAN: A magician? That's news to me.

BABA YAGA: Koshchei's been biding his time, waiting his chance. He's come forward now because the country is in trouble. The morale of the people is low, the government weakened by bad management and extravagance, the . . .

IVAN: This sounds like nagging to me.

BABA YAGA: I'm here to warn you, Ivan. Koshchei isn't any ordinary man. He's Koshchei the Deathless. No one on this earth can kill him.

IVAN: Everyone can be killed.

BABA YAGA: Not Koshchei. His death is hidden where no man can find it. If you try to fight him you'll meet a quick and brutal end. And when he's finished with you he'll chop your body into a thousand pieces and scatter them on the endless steppes.

IRENKA: (Shivering a little) A fine tale for a wedding.

BABA YAGA: Have we met?

IVAN: Baba. Allow me to present Lady Irenka.

BABA YAGA: Irenka. So you're the one he's making all the fuss about.

IVAN: Irenka is about to become my . . .

BABA YAGA: Yes. Yes. I know what she's about to become. Do you know what this fool has done in your name, my fine lady? Rivers damned up, forests cut down. Do you have any idea of the destruction?

He's turned the country into a wasteland for a box of trinkets. Look at this. (Pushes the cask of jewels with her toe) This would buy bread for everyone in Zhar for fifty years.

IVAN: What is bread next to the beauty of Irenka?

BABA YAGA: You are burdened with illusions, Ivan. You believe that the problems of the world have nothing to do with you.

IVAN: Well there are so many problems. What could I do that would make a difference?

BABA YAGA: You also have this childish notion that you deserve only the best.

IVAN: Only the best is worth having. (He looks at Irenka when he says this. They join hands.)

BABA YAGA: And that beauty is it's own reward.

IVAN: Beauty is the only reward.

BABA YAGA: Yes such beauty. (She strokes IRENKA's face) If Firebird is captured, it won't be worth a pinch of dandelion fluff. This lovely skin will turn as rough as leather.

IRENKA: What are you talking about!

BABA YAGA: It was in my dream. This silky hair will turn gray and spread down your cheeks and across your shoulders.

IRENKA: Will you still love me, Ivan, when I'm wrinkled and leathery?

(IVAN, as an answer, kisses her fingers.)

BABA YAGA: Those fine fingers of yours will turn hard and yellow.

(IRENKA pulls her hand away)

BABA YAGA: Your lips will curl back and your tongue will lengthen and your ears will turn pointy and furry.

IRENKA: (Laughs uncertainly) Sounds like a lap dog.

BABA YAGA: Nothing so pretty. You will become a wolfish creature, skulking in the shadows.

IVAN: Get away from here, hag!

IRENKA: Why would this happen to me?

IVAN: Don't listen to her.

BABA YAGA: Because you are the reason that Firebird will be captured.

IRENKA: Firebird captured! I would never do such a thing.

BABA YAGA: (Plucks the feather from IRENKA's belt) You will do it in ignorance but you will do it nevertheless. You will bring about the imprisonment of Firebird.

IVAN: It's time you were gone, old woman. (Grabs her arm.)

IRENKA: Ivan! Take it easy!

IVAN: (He escorts BABA off) Next time you have a foolish tale to tell, don't bring it here.

BABA YAGA: In the old days Baba's dreams were taken seriously.

IRENKA: Maybe there's something to what she says. (BABA and IVAN exit and she calls after them.) Ivan! Wait!

BABA YAGA: I warn you. *Dire* things will happen!

(Ground shaking noise)

(KOSHCHEI stomps in, in a flurry of laser lights, flashing swords etc.-- an impressive hulk in black armor)

KOSHCHEI: Irenka! *Irenka!*

IRENKA: Stop shouting! I'm right here.

KOSHCHEI: Just as prickly as ever, I see. I like lippy women.

IRENKA: Look I'm not in the mood for small talk.

KOSHCHEI: Small talk? Hey, I'm here on serious business.

IRENKA: Would you mind if I didn't listen right now.

KOSHCHEI: I'm ready to take the plunge, Baby. I'm going to marry you. We'll do it right away. I guess you'll want new clothes, a honey moon. That's okay. I can afford it. I can afford the best.

IRENKA: I don't want to hear this.

KOSHCHEI: You don't know what you're saying!

IRENKA: Yes I do. I'm saying, "No!"

KOSHCHEI: No one says "No!" to me! I'm Koshchei the Deathless! Ruler of the dark! Victor of every battlefield! Koshchei the invincible! I could smash you to smithereens with one little tap of my hand!

IRENKA: I won't say I'm not grateful. It's just that I'm already engaged. I'm marrying Prince Ivan in three days time. Didn't I tell you this before?

KOSHCHEI: Ivan! That pin head!

IRENKA: You're lucky Ivan isn't here. He'd soon cut you down to size.

KOSHCHEI: Ivan! Ivan! Are we talking about the same Ivan It would take a hundred Ivans to stand up to one Koshchei.

IRENKA: Ivan could finish off three Koschei's before breakfast!

KOSHCHEI: Is that so! I'll tell you Irenka, if Ivan is all that stands between us then Ivan isn't worth a little puff of sand. I'll cut his body into a thousand pieces and scatter them on the endless steppes!

IRENKA: What did you say?

KOSHCHEI: I'll cut his body into a thousand pieces and scatter them on the endless steppes!

IRENKA: Those were the Baba's very words.

KOSHCHEI: And don't think I wouldn't do it. I am Koshchei the Deathless. Do you know what that means? (Light gets dark and ominous.)

IRENKA: It means no one can kill you.

KOSHCHEI: Right! No one can kill me because my death isn't in my body. It's hidden away where no one can ever find it. And if they can't find it they can't kill me.

IRENKA: And where is this death of yours hidden, Koshchei? (Flirting)

KOSHCHEI: That's for me to know and you to find out. And you'd have a lot better chance of finding out if you were Mrs. Koshchei.

IRENKA: (Drawing back) I don't want to find out that much.

KOSHCHEI: Oh yes you do!

(His hand reaches out in a threatening way. The ominous light deepens.)

IRENKA: Give me a minute. I want to think this through.

KOSHCHEI: I don't go for a lot of thinking in a woman.

(He twists his hand and the darkness deepens. IRENKA is surrounded by strange and uneasy sounds.)

IRENKA: Yes! All right. I'll marry you. But. . .

KOSHCHEI: But? . . . *But!!*

IRENKA: (Gathering courage against the threatening effects of his magic) If you are as powerful as you say, you won't mind if I assign you an impossible task? It's the custom, you know. A guy should always perform an impossible task or two for his girl. That way she knows she's really worth something in his eyes.

KOSHCHEI: If it's impossible, how am I supposed to do it?

IRENKA: Well, if you're afraid. . .

KOSHCHEI: Afraid! I am Koshchei the Deathless. Ruler of the dark. Victor of . . .

IRENKA: I know. I *know!*

KOSHCHEI: Tell me what you want me to do.

IRENKA: Well this task I'm about to give you must be completed in three days.

KOSHCHEI: No sweat.

IRENKA: And if you don't complete it in three days. That's by (consults watch) four o'clock three days from now. . .

KOSHCHEI: I said, no sweat, didn't I? I'm going to complete it.

IRENKA: But if you don't. Then you must promise to leave me in peace and let me marry Ivan.

KOSHCHEI: (Shouting and stomping amid even more threatening light and sound.) No! No! No! No! No! *NO!*

IRENKA: Then the deal's off.

KOSHCHEI: All right. All right. I'm going to complete the task anyway so there's no problem.

IRENKA: But I have your word? (Chanting the words like a children's game she raps him smartly on either shoulder and bonks him on the forehead.) Stampsies, acies, no erasies?

KOSHCHEI: (Knocked off balance) You have my word.

IRENKA: (Aside) Good going, Irenka. All it takes is a little brain work.

KOSHCHEI: So. What do I have to do?

(The storm of light and sound is still going on and IRENKA looks at him crossly)

IRENKA: Do you mind.

KOSHCHEI: Uh. Oh. Yeah. (He restores normalcy with a snap of his fingers) So, go ahead.

IRENKA: The task is that, in three days time, you must bring me three things in the world that I do not have.

KOSHCHEI: Easy. I won't need three days to do that. I'll bring you peacocks from India.

IRENKA: I have dozens of peacocks.

KOSHCHEI: A trunk full of rubies and diamonds.

(IRENKA opens the trunk Ivan gave her.)

KOSHCHEI: A matched set of Arabian ponies.

IRENKA: I have a stable full of Arabian ponies.

KOSHCHEI: Fur coats? (IRENKA shakes her head) Ferraris? Perfume.

IRENKA: I have all the perfumes of the Orient. And of the Occident.

KOSHCHEI: Silk dresses.

IRENKA: I have dresses of every material known to man.

KOSHCHEI: Don't worry. I'll think of something. (Stomps off)

IRENKA: I doubt it.

(IVAN enters)

IVAN: Was that Koshchei? I suppose he was after you to marry him.

IRENKA: Yes. And I accepted.

IVAN: (Draws his sword) You said you'd marry him? I'll fix him! I'll make him sorry he was ever born!

IRENKA: Calm down. I said I'd marry him only if he could bring me three things in the world that I don't already have.

IVAN: Clever. (Calming down reluctantly) Yes, very clever.

IRENKA: Brain beats brawn, every time.

IVAN: I hope you're right. (They exit)

(Spot on RIMSKY/DIMSKY. RIMSKY is fast asleep. DIMSKY fidgets and groans then explodes.)

DIMSKY: How much longer! How long!

RIMSKY: Uhggm? (Wakes up suddenly) What's wrong, Dimsky?

DIMSKY: How much longer do we have to sit here?

RIMSKY: Forever, no doubt. Till the end of time, I should think.

DIMSKY: Ohhhhhhhhhhh! Don't say that!!!

RIMSKY: Koshchei put us here to guard his death. As long as we guard his death, he will stay alive. As long as he stays alive he will keep us here to guard his death. So it isn't really an understatement to say we'll be here forever.

DIMSKY: You don't suppose we could just stop guarding his death. Let someone dispose of it?

RIMSKY: Unfortunately, no. We're programmed to do everything in our power to protect it.

DIMSKY: But I don't want to be a cyborg any more, Rimsky. I want to be a dragon again. A real dragon, belching smoke and flame and terrorizing the countryside.

RIMSKY: Forget it, Dimsky. The days of dragons are over.

DIMSKY: Over!

RIMSKY: Well, think about it. Belching flame, knocking trees over, tearing up the landscape. The environment can't take that sort of thing any more.

DIMSKY: I miss eating too. Remember all those yummy snacks we used to have. Terrified peasants. Tender little damsels. Incompetent heroes.

RIMSKY: Ueghh! I think if I were on the loose again, Dimsky, I'd like to try vegetarian.

DIMSKY: There! See what being holed up like this has done to you? What self respecting dragon would be vegetarian? We're losing our *edge* Rimsky. We used to be *terrifying*. People trembled in their *boots*. Now no one gives us a second look.

RIMSKY: It's not all bad, being away from the hustle and bustle. There's plenty of time for thinking and (thoughtfully) plenty of time for. . . medi-tay-shun.

DIMSKY: Meditation! No way, Rimsky! You promised. You're only supposed to meditate when I'm sleeping.

RIMSKY: Ohm!

DIMSKY: I *hate* it when you do that.

RIMSKY: Ohm!

DIMSKY: Rimsky! Rats. I hate being left alone like this.

(KOSHCHEI enters)

KOSHCHEI: (Goes to keyboard and pulls a switch or two.) Well you mangy fire snorters. What mischief have you been up to?

DIMSKY: None, Your Lordship!

KOSHCHEI: Tell the truth! Or I'll rearrange your scaly, incapable hide!

DIMSKY: No mischief, Boss. Really.

KOSHCHEI: Anyone been nosing around?

DIMSKY: No sir!

KOSHCHEI: No one inquiring about the little matter of my death?

DIMSKY: Uh uh. Your death is right where you left it.

RIMSKY: Ohm.

KOSHCHEI: What's he doing?

DIMSKY: Meditating. He read a book on expanded consciousness last week and now every time I turn around he's humming his mantra.

KOSHCHEI: Well, tell him to snap out of it.

DIMSKY: No way! Last time he gave me a really nasty bite. You wake him up.

KOSHCHEI: I will. (Reaches out a hand to nudge RIMSKY.)

RIMSKY: Ohm!

KOSHCHEI: (Thinking better of it) So maybe you can help me. Lady Irenka has agreed to marry me.

DIMSKY: Great news!

KOSHCHEI: Maybe. She'll only marry me if I bring her three things she doesn't have.

DIMSKY: Tough one. I've heard that Irenka has everything it's possible to have. But let's see . . . (Computer clicks.) . . . There must be something . . .

KOSHCHEI: There'd better be *three* things. If not, someone round here is going to be disconnected!

RIMSKY: Ohm!

DIMSKY: Yes. Well, it's a long time since we did any serious computing. Just give me a minute to warm up... (Rumble , flicker, squeak, groan.) O.K., feed in the question.

KOSHCHEI: (Keyboards as he speaks.) "Name three things that Irenka does not have." (The computer wobbles and rattles and DIMSKY giggles.) Stop that! How can I concentrate with that racket?

DIMSKY: Ticklish questions always make me giggle.

KOSHCHEI: Answer the question!

DIMSKY: Just give me a minute. I'm a little rusty. Uh huh. Uh huh. Ahhhhyes. Yes. There are three things that Irenka doesn't have and only three. If she'd asked for four you'd have been out of luck.

KOSHCHEI: Quit babbling and tell me what they are.

DIMSKY: First there's the Tree of Good and Evil. (A printout emerges.)

RIMSKY: Ohm.

KOSHCHEI: (Examines the page.) The Tree of Good and Evil. I've never heard of it.

DIMSKY: There is such a tree. It's been hidden for centuries in the deepest darkest forests of Northern Zhar. Many have sought it: no one has found it.

KOSHCHEI: Don't worry. Koshchei will find it. What next? (The computer rumbles and another printout emerges.) What are these little bottles? Perfume? She's already got perfume.

DIMSKY: No. Those bottles contain the Waters of Life and Death.

RIMSKY: Ohm.

KOSHCHEI: (Reading printout) "Waters of Life and Death. They are to be found in Southern Zhar hidden in the valley of a thousand waterfalls."

DIMSKY: It's next to impossible to find them.

KOSHCHEI: Nothing is impossible for Koshchei! What's the third thing?

DIMSKY: Now here's where it gets sticky. There is something else that Irenka doesn't have. But it's really not possible.

KOSHCHEI: Name it.

DIMSKY: I don't know. You really . . .

KOSHCHEI: Spit it out! (The printer rattles and delivers. He tears off the printout and reads it.) Firebird! Yeah! Why didn't I think of that?

DIMSKY: But Firebird has lived in Zhar for a thousand and one years and no one has ever captured it. No one has even tried.

KOSHCHEI: There's always a first time.

DIMSKY: You don't understand. Firebird is what makes Zhar special.

KOSHCHEI: So?

DIMSKY: If Firebird is captured Zhar will become a wasteland. A desert! Do you want that on your conscience?

KOSHCHEI: Conscience? I'm the villain! I don't have a conscience. The Tree of Good and Evil. The Waters of Life and Death. And Firebird. Well done guys! Irenka, Bride of Koshchei! I like the sound of that. You know, I'm going to enjoy this. There's nothing like a few impossible tasks to get the adrenaline flowing.

(Moves off)

DIMSKY: Excuse me? Koshchei, sir? I don't suppose you'd like an assistant on your adventures. A very amenable, companionable dragon?

KOSHCHEI: No way, Dough Head! (Exits)

DIMSKY: Ohhhhhhhhh! I can't go on like this, Rimsky. I can't! I want to have adventures. I want to *fly* again!

RIMSKY: Ohm.

(Lights fade on dragons as lights come up on IRENKA looking in a mirror. IVAN enters.)

IVAN: What are you doing?.

IRENKA: I was wondering what I'd look like with leathery lips.

IVAN: You're not still worrying about that are you. It was a dream.

IRENKA: If I wasn't beautiful any more would you still love me?

IVAN: You'll always be beautiful.

IRENKA: I would love *you* no matter what.

IVAN: Well of course.

IRENKA: Before, I just loved you. Now I *love* you.

IVAN: Uh huh.

IRENKA: And I know why I love you. You see, you act like a jerk a lot of the time.

IVAN: Jerk!

IRENKA: But you're not. Basically you're a very good and kind person. That's why I love you.

IVAN: Good and kind. Terrific. I kind of hoped it was because I'm such a handsome guy, romantic, heroic.

IRENKA: You were so nice to Baba when she arrived.

IVAN: I threw her out on her ear.

IRENKA: And you did everything you could to please me. You ruined the kingdom to make me happy.

IVAN: Ruined is a bit of an overstatement.

IRENKA: I'm not saying it's your fault. If I hadn't been so difficult to please. I was such a fool. And Koshchei, I just treated him like any other suitor. How could I be so arrogant to think I could handle Koshchei.

IVAN: You did handle him.

IRENKA: I was smart and I outwitted him.

IVAN: Then what's the problem?

IVAN: I don't know if it was enough to stop him. There's so much more to be known. So much to understand. I'm learning, but there isn't time... It's all happening so fast.

IVAN: What's happening?

IRENKA: We have so little time. (There is a faint rumbling sound like distant thunder.)
Do you love me, Ivan?

IVAN: Of course I love you

IRENKA: You love that fathead Irenka, but do you love *me*?

IVAN: I don't get it.

IRENKA: What if I really was turned to a wolf, would you love me then?

IVAN: It will never happen.

IRENKA: But would you?

(Fanfare. KOSHCHEI enters carrying a small tree with golden fruit. IVAN watches the following slightly in shock at the boldness of it all.)

KOSHCHEI: There you go. (Plunks tree in front of IRENKA)

IRENKA: What's this?

KOSHCHEI: The Tree of Good and Evil. You got one?

IRENKA: No, I haven't.

KOSHCHEI: Didn't think so.

IRENKA: You must have had a lot of trouble getting it.

KOSHCHEI: Piece of cake. It was supposed to be hidden in the deepest, darkest forests of North Zhar but it was standing right out in the open. Some dummy cut down all the trees. (IVAN reacts to this by reaching for his sword. IRENKA holds him back. KOSHCHEI absorbed in his own cleverness doesn't notice.) See you tomorrow with present number two. Same time, same place. (Exits)

IRENKA: You see what I mean? We're in trouble!

IVAN: I thought you said it was an *impossible* task you gave him.

IRENKA: Well it would have been impossible if the trees had still been standing.

IVAN: You don't have to get self righteous. I did it for you.

IRENKA: Oh, I know. It's just dumb luck for Koshchei. He'll never find a second thing.

(Interlude of lights and ominous desolating music. IVAN and IRENKA frozen. The dark figures pull dark gauzy cloths over some of the trunks. FIREBIRD dances through in a frenzied hunted fashion and runs off at the sound of KOSHCHEI approaching. He stomps on.)

KOSHCHEI: Where is she! Where's Irenka. Hey Irenka, Baby! It's day two.

(IVAN and IRENKA unfreeze)

IRENKA: Already? You found something else I don't have?

KOSHCHEI: In these little bottles. The Waters of Life and Death. They were hidden in South Zhar in the valley of a thousand waterfalls. Normally they would have been impossible to find. . .

IVAN: (Aside) But some dummy damned up all the rivers.

KOSHCHEI: . . . when I got there, there wasn't one waterfall in the whole valley. It only took me an hour to spot what I was looking for. The Waters of Life and Death, Kiddo. Present number two.

IRENKA: I don't believe this.

KOSHCHEI: It was nothing, eh. Why didn't you give me something hard to do? I didn't even get an aerobic buzz on this one. I'm gonna be outa shape if I keep this up.

Don't go away. Present number three coming up. Uh, maybe you should pick out what you're going to wear for the wedding. (Exits)

IVAN: Wedding! That pompous idiot actually thinks he's going to marry you.

IRENKA: What will I do, Ivan? I don't want to marry Koshchei. I want to marry you.

IVAN: Don't worry. He shall never have you. Not as long as I can draw sword and breath. Besides he has to find a third gift. It's pretty unlikely, isn't it?

(IRENKA looks in her mirror as though she sees something fearful in there.)

IRENKA: I think I know what the third thing is going to be, Ivan. Remember Baba's dream? She said it would be my fault.

(In the background the figures pull gauzy cloths over more of the set. Music slow, heavy and depressing. FIREBIRD floats on in slow motion.

KOSHCHEI follows, sword drawn, net in hand.)

IVAN: Ridiculous! No one has ever captured Firebird.

(In slow dreamlike motion KOSHCHEI pursues FIREBIRD.)

IRENKA: Perhaps Koshchei will. Perhaps we've made it easy for him.

IVAN: You're starting to sound like Baba. Don't worry about it. Think about our wedding. This is going to be the best, most spectacular wedding Zhar has ever witnessed. Dancing, music, feasting — every delectable dish that's ever been created...

IRENKA: (Picking up the ornate loaf) And bread. It's very beautiful, isn't it.

(At this moment the net is thrown over FIREBIRD. IRENKA cries out. BABA hurries forward to stop IVAN but, sword in hand, he pursues KOSHCHEI off. We hear clashing of swords and their alternating exchange of insults off. The lights dim. IRENKA unable to bear the fighting puts her hands over her ears and sinks to the ground.)

IVAN: (Off. His insults alternate with Koshchei's.) Wart! Stinkweed! Noodle brain! Cheese ball! Tuning fork! You lobotomized bone heap! Stigma! Turkey guts! Dollop!

KOSHCHEI: (Off) Pimple! Mouse Turd! Numbskull! Snake breath! You offensive odour! Fishbone! Stench! Spider breath! Lump!

(BABA enters. She looks off to where KOSHCHEI and IVAN are fighting.)

BABA YAGA: It has all come to pass, just the way I dreamed it.

IRENKA: What's happening?

BABA YAGA: (Peering into the gloom) They're still fighting. Koshchei seems to be winning. No wait! Ivan is taking the upper hand.

IRENKA: Thank Heavens. And Firebird?

BABA YAGA: Still in Koshchei's net. Ivan can't reach her.

(IRENKA moans and clutches her head.)

BABA YAGA: What is it?

IRENKA: I feel strange. Too much excitement.

BABA YAGA: I'll get you a glass of tea.

IRENKA: My jaw feels so big, as if it's pulling apart from my face.

BABA YAGA: Here, drink this.

IRENKA: ((Tries to drink then gives the cup back) I can't. My teeth are too big for the cup. And my *hands*. Do they seem rough to you? The fingers are all yellow. It's a trick of light, isn't it? (Uproar off) What's happening out there?

BABA YAGA: I can't see them.

(The light has been steadily dimming.)

IRENKA: It's strange sitting in the dark like this. I wish Ivan were here

BABA YAGA: I'll light a candle.

IRENKA: Every bone in my body aches. What's happening to me? Look at my hands.

BABA YAGA: It's a trick of light.

IRENKA: Your dream is coming true.

BABA YAGA: Perhaps Ivan will win after all. If only I could see...

IRENKA: It's coming true. Every word you said. "That skin of yours will turn as rough as leather."

BABA YAGA: It was only a dream.

IRENKA: "Those fine fingers of yours will harden and yellow. Your lips will curl back and your ears will turn pointy and furry."

BABA YAGA: There they are! Ivan is winning. He's overcoming Koshchei! Yes. Yes. Yes! No... he 's falling back.

IRENKA: You will become a wolfish creature, skulking in the shadows.

BABA YAGA: Koshchei is so *powerful*.

(There is a sudden flare of yellow light off and BABA cries out as is she's seen something terrible.)

IRENKA: What is it! It's Ivan, isn't it.

(KOSHCHEI comes on triumphantly, dragging Firebird. IRENKA approaches him fearfully.)

KOSHCHEI: Koshchei rules!

IRENKA: Whose blood is that?

KOSHCHEI: No one beats Koshchei!

IRENKA: Oh my poor Ivan. Where is he?

KOSHCHEI: Dead.

IRENKA: And his body?

KOSHCHEI: Cut into a thousand pieces and scattered on the endless steppes. And now let's get down to business. Where is she?

IRENKA: Who?

KOSHCHEI: My bride! This is Firebird, the final present for Irenka.

IRENKA: Do as you please. Without Ivan I don't care what happens.

KOSHCHEI: Come on! I haven't got all day. Tell me where she is. Where's Irenka?

IRENKA: Don't you recognize me?

BABA YAGA: (Pulling IRENKA back) Irenka has gone where no one can ever find her.

KOSHCHEI: Don't worry. I'll find her. No one escapes Koshchei the Deathless. Irenka!
Irenka! (He storms off) *Irenka!*

IRENKA: But *I'm* Irenka. He looked right at me and didn't know me?

BABA YAGA: And lucky for you that he didn't.

IRENKA: I've changed that much? Oh Baba! What are we to do? What *can* we do?

BABA YAGA: There is always something one can do Irenka. Don't give up hope yet.

IRENKA: What is there to hope for? Ivan is dead and I have become a beast of the wilderness.

(IRENKA raises her head and the light catches her face. She has become a wolf. She howls inconsolably as darkness falls.)

ACT TWO

(Darkness and dirge-like music punctuated with wolf howls. Dim lights arise. The gray drapes now cover everything, giving an effect of desolation and decay.)

IRENKA: Awooooooh! Awooooooh!

(While BABA bustles about gathering things, IRENKA, fully transformed to a wolf, sits alone, solemn and sad. Beside her is the Tree of Good and Evil and a knapsack. In the foreground is a large embroidered cloth with a lumpish form underneath it.)

IRENKA: (Pulling a wedding veil from knapsack) Just yesterday I was trying this on and dreaming of my wedding. And now I shall never wear it. Awooooooh! Awooooooh!

BABA YAGA: Oshki Petroshki! You'll drive me mad with that wailing. Do something constructive. Ah! (Stoops, picks something up and puts it happily into her basket.) Nine hundred and Ninety! And here's 991. (Stoops again) Good, good, good! Not as bad as I thought. Just nine pieces to go. Ahh! 992! Very good.

IRENKA: (Sniffing round the Tree of Good and Evil, whining a bit.)

BABA YAGA: You should eat one of those fruits. They will make you wise.

IRENKA: I needed to be wise sooner than this.

(Something catches her attention at the foot of the tree. She stalks it hungrily. while Baba picks up 994 and 995)

IRENKA: (Pounces) Ughhgrh!

BABA YAGA: Stop bouncing around like that and help me.

IRENKA: (Her paws are on the object she's been stalking and she licks her lips.) A nice little snack. Juicy and crunchy...

BABA YAGA: Umm? Bring me those two little bottles, will you? I'm just about ready for them. (Gathers 996 and 997.) Irenka?

IRENKA: (She picks up a paw and whatever it is escapes. She chases it wildly about the stage.) Ughhgrh! Ughhgrh!

BABA YAGA: Irenka! *Irenka!* (IRENKA stops short and looks guilty.) What on earth are you doing? (IRENKA shrugs sheepishly) I said bring me those bottles Koshchei gave you.

IRENKA: The Waters of Life and Death? I have them here. (IRENKA reads the labels on the bottles.) "Use with caution for the reversal of metamorphosis and death." (Looks thoughtful) Baba?

BABA YAGA: Just three more fragments and we can relax. Oh dear, oh dear. It's always those last few bits that are the hardest. Ah, 998! Oh! Move your foot! (Picks up 999 and beams happily at it.) 999!

IRENKA: What's metamorphosis?

BABA YAGA: It's when something is changed into something else.

IRENKA: Such as?

BABA YAGA: Such as when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. Such as when a frog becomes a prince.

IRENKA: And when a woman becomes a wolf?

BABA YAGA: That's metamorphosis, all right.

IRENKA: Then I'm saved!

BABA YAGA: (Worriedly looking for the last bit) Oh my dear, my dear. To come so close. I've got to find it. We must have that last piece.

IRENKA: (Grabbing BABA and dancing about) Baba! Everything's wonderful!

BABA YAGA: Not yet it isn't. We have one more piece to go. And it could be anywhere on the endless steppes.

IRENKA: What are you looking for? (Runs sniffing about.)

BABA YAGA: I'm not sure exactly. (Pokes about in her basket.) A knuckle bone, I think.

IRENKA: A knuckle bone? I'd like a nice knuckle bone, right now. Any kind of a bone. (Looks a little wistful. Then spots something.) Does it have a ring on it?

BABA YAGA: Yes! That's it! One thousand! We're saved, *saved!* (She snatches it up and hurries with her basket to the large sheet in the foreground and begins adding the contents of her basket to what's already under there.)

IRENKA: Yes, it's wonderful, isn't it. I'm going to be a woman again. All I have to do is figure out how to use these.

BABA YAGA: (She is now arranging the things under the cloth.) This goes there I think. Yes. The last bit! (Looks at her work in satisfaction.)

IRENKA: All I have to do, apparently, is sprinkle the contents of these bottles over myself and, *PRESTO!* (Starts to open bottle)

BABA YAGA: Irenka! What are you doing? No! Wait a minute! (Shouts) *SIT!!!*

IRENKA: (Automatically sits like a puppy looking puzzled.) What?

BABA YAGA: If you use those potions on yourself, you will never see Ivan again.

IRENKA: But Ivan is dead. And not just dead. Scattered all over the place.

BABA YAGA: And what do you think I've been doing for the last twenty four hours? Come here. Come on. Have a look at this.

IRENKA: What is it?

BABA YAGA: Come and see.

(She lifts blanket and IRENKA peeps underneath.)

IRENKA: Supper! (Pants happily)

BABA YAGA: (Snatching her back) Irenka! Don't you see who it is?

IRENKA: Oh! It's *Ivan*! But he's all in pieces. Oh poor Ivan! Seeing him like this... (She breaks down and whimpers.)

BABA YAGA: I don't know what you're sniveling about. He's all there, all one thousand pieces of him.

IRENKA: It was kind of you to gather him up, Baba. I guess now we can give him a... a decent burial.

BABA YAGA: I didn't spend all that time gathering him up just to bury him. We're going to revive him.

IRENKA: Bring him back to life? But how?

BABA YAGA: You read the labels on the bottles.

IRENKA: "For the reversal of metamorphosis and . . . *death*." You mean these potions will bring him back to life? That's wonderful!

BABA YAGA: I know. Hand them over.

IRENKA: Wait a minute. How much are you going to use?

BABA YAGA: All of both bottles.

IRENKA: Couldn't you spare a drop or two for me?

BABA YAGA: It's your choice. Ivan's life. Your looks.

IRENKA: It's a bit more than looks. If I give these up I'll have to remain a wolf all my life. I can't give up my only hope.

BABA YAGA: As I said it's your choice.

IRENKA: Here! Before I change my mind. (She hands over the bottle and moves off.)

BABA YAGA: Where are you going? I need you to help me.

IRENKA: Do I have to?

BABA YAGA: Hold this coverlet up.

IRENKA: (Holds cover then spots something) Wait! Isn't that bit upside down?

BABA YAGA: Oshki Petroshki! His knee! He wouldn't have thanked me for that! There. I think everything's in order. First a little fragrance to help things along. (She removes a small bowl from her pocket and lights the contents. Smoke drifts up like incense.) Give me the vial marked "Death". (She takes the vial from IRENKA and sprinkles it ceremoniously on IVAN.) Flesh and bone and cloth and leather. Assemble all and join together. (Strange lights and music.) There! That did the trick!

IRENKA: Wow! All the pieces have joined together!

(They remove the sheet revealing IVAN's still and lifeless body.)

IRENKA: Even his clothes are mended. But he's so still.

BABA YAGA: Give me the vial marked "Life". From the valley of the shadow to the vale of tears, restore to this sinner his appointed years. (She sprinkles the water over his body. More lights and sound. IVAN comes to life jerkily.)

IVAN: I'm thirsty. Bring me water.

BABA YAGA: There's no water to drink here.

IRENKA: Oh Ivan. You look wonderful. How do you feel?

IVAN: A little unsteady. What happened to me?

IRENKA: You were dead Ivan. Koshchei. . .

IVAN: Koshchei! Where's my sword?

BABA YAGA: Snatched from the jaws of death and all he can think of is his sword.

IVAN: A man needs his sword.

BABA YAGA: Firebird won't be regained by your sword.

IVAN: Firebird. I remember now. I've really been dead?

IRENKA: And cut into a thousand yummy little pieces.

IVAN: Then how can I be here?

IRENKA: Baba restored you, with the Waters of Life and Death.

IVAN: Thank you Baba. I will pay you well for your trouble.

IRENKA: She didn't do it for pay, Ivan.

IVAN: I know that. All the same... (He notices IRENKA for the first time.) You're a wolf! I'm talking to a wolf! Perhaps I'm dreaming after all.

IRENKA: Don't you know me Ivan?

IVAN: No, I can't say. . . Irenka? But what happened?

IRENKA: Baba's dream came true.

IVAN: My poor beautiful Irenka.

IRENKA: Don't worry about it.

IVAN: But can nothing be done?

BABA YAGA: There is plenty to be done. First, you must find and release Firebird. Nothing can progress without that. Second, you must seek out the death of Koshchei. As long as he's on the loose no one in Zhar will be safe. And lastly, you must restore Zhar to it's former splendour.

IVAN: And how are we to do all this? I don't even have my sword.

CLAIRE: I give up. You've learned nothing. Nothing! (Moves off)

IRENKA: Wait! Have you no advice for us, Baba?

BABA YAGA: Choose the plain over the fancy, the difficult over the easy. Beware of gaudy bedazzlements and USE YOUR NOODLE!

IRENKA: That's it?

IVAN: What kind of advice is that!

BABA YAGA: The kind I give.

IRENKA: But how do we find Firebird?

IVAN: Firebird is easy. We just find that devil Koshchei and make him release it.

IRENKA: Really easy.

IVAN: I can handle Koshchei.

BABA YAGA: We noticed

IVAN: I almost had him. It was a pure fluke that he overpowered me.

BABA YAGA: Listen Ivan. At some point you are going to have to gain wisdom. I can't help you do that. I can give you instructions. But if you don't have the sense to follow them, why should I waste my breath?

IVAN: I won't make the same mistake twice.

BABA YAGA: You'd better not. If Koshchei kills you again there are no more magic potions to bring you to life. Now, here's what you do. Koshchei has imprisoned Firebird in his garden. You can find that garden by walking always to the east, for as long as it takes. You will find Firebird in a jewelled cage. The cage can not be opened by hand. It opens only to a special word.

IVAN: Do you know that word, Baba?

BABA YAGA: It is the name of the most precious thing in the garden. If you say that name three times the cage will open.

IRENKA: And will we get Firebird?

BABA YAGA: You must free Firebird immediately and you must not under any circumstances touch the cage. That is all I can tell you.

IVAN: It sounds easy enough.

BABA YAGA: It could be the easiest thing in the world. Unless...

IVAN: Unless?

BABA YAGA: Just do as I said. May fortune bless you.

IRENKA: Baba?

BABA YAGA: Good-bye. And Good luck. (She goes into the trunk and vanishes.)

IRENKA: Wait Baba! Rats! I wanted to ask her about Koshchei's death.

IVAN: We'll worry about that once we've freed Firebird. We'd better get going -- we have a long journey ahead of us.

IRENKA: Let me get my pack. (She fastens it and packs it up. Almost as an afterthought she picks two fruits from the Tree of Good and Evil. She catches Ivan looking at her.) What?

IVAN: Nothing.

IRENKA: What's so fascinating?

IVAN: Nothing!

IRENKA: I'm not crazy about looking like this.

IVAN: Oh you don't look so bad.

IRENKA: No?

IVAN: No. You look . . . Well to tell you the truth, I like the way you look. You remind me of Vereniki.

IRENKA: Who's Vereniki?

IVAN: He was a hunting dog I once had.

IRENKA: A dog!

IVAN: He was a really great dog.

IRENKA: We'd better go.

IVAN: It's a compliment Irenka!

IRENKA: We have a lot of walking to do.

IVAN: Wolfie! I mean Irenka! Wait up! (They exit.)

(Scene shifts to music. Time and space change.)

(FIREBIRD limps on, still bound with the net, bedraggled and lusterless. KOSHCHEI follows with a brightly jewelled cage. He strips the net from FIREBIRD and pushes it into the cage.)

KOSHCHEI: In you go. And don't look so miserable. This garden is reserved for the most beautiful and valuable things in the world. You're lucky to be here.

(FIREBIRD beats against the cage.)

KOSHCHEI: Don't waste your energy. This cage is locked up tight and Koshchei is the only one who can open it, because Koshchei is the only one who knows the magic word. And it isn't *please!*

(FIREBIRD slumps down in a dejected heap)

KOSHCHEI: Look at you! You're not much of a prize, are you. You're supposed to be a Firebird. Where's the fire? Brighten up! Or you won't get any supper! (Stomps off)

(FIREBIRD does a sad little dance in its cage, a dance of mourning and imprisonment. Then slumps down again in despair.)

(The light dims to pitch black. IVAN comes on. In the background a loping figure can be seen stalking IVAN.)

IVAN: Irenka! Where are you? Darn it. Why can't you walk along like a normal person. (He sits down and the shadow comes up and sits behind him.) You're supposed to be helping me. How can we ever get there if you keep running after rabbits and things.

IRENKA: (Right behind him) There are no rabbits and things.

(IVAN jumps)

IRENKA: Relax. It's only me.

IVAN: You're driving me crazy with all your jumping about.

IRENKA: I'm just looking for something to eat. But there's nothing. Zhar is a desert.

IVAN: I wonder how much further it is to the garden. We've been walking forever.

IRENKA: It just seems like forever.

IVAN: And it's so dark. I can't see a thing.

IVAN: I like it better in the dark. You can't see how ruined everything is.

IVAN: Zhar used to be so beautiful and now it's a wasteland. No flowers, no birds. No animals of any kind.

IRENKA: Not even a mouse.

IVAN: And no water. I'd give anything for some water, right now.

IRENKA: I'd give anything for a mouse. Wait a minute!

(IRENKA suddenly remembers the bread.)

IVAN: What are you doing?

IRENKA: I brought our wedding bread along. Do you want some?

IVAN: Wedding bread? We're not still engaged are we.

IRENKA: No! Animals and people can't be engaged.

IVAN: I thought so.

IRENKA: Have some bread.

IVAN: (Accepts bread) Thanks. (Tastes it) This bread is delicious. I've never tasted anything so good.

IRENKA: Me either.

IVAN: Is there any more?

(IRENKA pulls out the loaf and the veil comes with it.)

IVAN: If we're not engaged why are you hauling that wedding veil around?

IRENKA: To remind me how foolish I was not to know when I was happy.

IVAN: Yes we were happy, weren't we. (Remembers) You can sit next to me if you like.

IRENKA: You want me to?

IVAN: Well yes. It's warmer that way.

IRENKA: (Sitting next to him) It is pretty cold.

IVAN: (Puts his arm round her.) But having someone with you makes the cold and the dark better somehow.

IRENKA: Do you think we'll ever find Firebird.

IVAN: Baba said we would. She's been right about everything else.

IRENKA: *Too* right.

IVAN: Hey cheer up. Let's have some more bread. (He picks up the loaf and the bottles fall out.) What's this. These are the vials that Koshchei gave you. Waters of Life and Death. Keeping them for sentimental value? (She pulls away) Just kidding.

IRENKA: That's what Baba used to bring you back to life.

IVAN: There's some writing on them.

IRENKA: Put them away. You can't read in the dark.

IVAN: I can. The letters are glowing. "Use with caution to reverse metamorphosis and death." To reverse metamorphosis? But Irenka, these potions would have made you a woman again. Did you know that?

IRENKA: Of course.

IVAN: But what if you remain a beast forever?

IRENKA: Better than have you dead forever.

IVAN: Do you really mean that?

IRENKA: I brought you back, didn't I? (She runs off)

IVAN: Irenka! Wait! Where are you going?

(He pursues her and they come into the garden area. FIREBIRD glows with joy to see them. There are sounds of running water.)

IVAN: Did the moon come out? I thought I saw a light.

IRENKA: I saw it too.

(FIREBIRD glows more warmly.)

IVAN: Look! Firebird!

IRENKA: We must be in Koshchei's garden.

IVAN: See how everything's lighting up. It's so beautiful.

IRENKA: The only place in Zhar that isn't ruined. What are you doing?

IVAN: I'm going to free Firebird.

IRENKA: Remember not to touch the cage.

IVAN: Oh my stars! I almost forgot. What did Baba say we should do?

IRENKA: Name the most precious thing in the garden three times and the cage will open.

IVAN: There are so many precious things. Maybe it's this matouchka. Look how fine it is. Matouchka, matouchka, matouchka.

IRENKA: This flower. A flower's more precious than a matouchka. Flower. Flower. Flower.

IVAN: This jewelled bird. This isn't getting us anywhere.

IRENKA: Think! Out of everything in this garden what would you want most?

BOTH: (Think. Then, inspiration.) What we came to get!

IVAN: Firebird, Firebird, Firebird! (At each repetition FIREBIRD brightens but the cage doesn't open. They slump down again trying to think.)

IVAN: We're never going to get it. Is there anything else to eat in there?

IRENKA: (Rummaging in pack) Some fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil. But it's not to stop hunger, it's to make you wiser.

IVAN: Isn't that what we need right now?

IRENKA: Yes! (Pulls out golden fruit and they each eat take a bite. They chew thoughtfully) This is so good. Do you feel any wiser?

IVAN: I just feel thirsty. I wish you'd packed something to drink.

IRENKA: Some champagne, maybe?

IVAN: No, water. That's what I'd really like right now.

(FIREBIRD flutters and gestures frantically)

IRENKA: Listen Ivan, Can you hear something?

IVAN: It sounds like water!

(FIREBIRD gestures again. This time IRENKA notices and following FIREBIRD's gestures, pulls back a branch to reveal a fountain. They both drink thirstily.)

IVAN: Who would have thought simple water would taste so good. Water is the most precious thing (He looks up at IRENKA in discovery) in the world!

IRENKA: In the world! (She flings some of it in the air.) In the Garden!

IVAN: It's worth a try. Water, water, water! (The cage opens and IVAN steps in to untangle FIREBIRD from the net.) Here, I'll help you. (He frees Firebird's foot, then is captivated by a jewel in the cage door.) This cages is really something. Look at the size of that ruby! It must be worth a fortune!

IRENKA: Ivan! *Don't!*

(But IVAN reaches out and touches it and while clanging alarm bells go off, the door closes shut on IVAN and FIREBIRD.)

IRENKA: Ivan!

IVAN: I just wanted to see what it felt like. I wasn't thinking Oh, Irenka, I thought this would be so easy.

(IVAN shakes the cage in frustration and bells ring again.)

(KOSHCHEI enters.)

KOSHCHEI: Well, well, well. What's this caught in my snare? Ivan? I thought I had disposed of you. What have you got to say for yourself.?

IVAN: Let me out of here, snake breath, and I'll have plenty to say.

KOSHCHEI: I see you like dying. (He raises his sword. IRENKA rushes between them.)

IRENKA: No!. We wanted Firebird, that's all. What use is she to you. She's only valuable when she's free.

KOSHCHEI: She's a fake. I haven't seen any fire. I've a good mind to kill them both!

IRENKA: No! Please! Maybe we can work a deal. I could pay a rich ransom for them. Money. Jewels.

KOSHCHEI: There is only one thing I will take in exchange for these worthless insects. Only one jewel. Irenka. She promised to marry Koshchei. Make Irenka keep her promise and I'll let them go.

IRENKA: It shall be done.

(Koshchei turns to leave.)

IVAN: Quick Irenka, the password, say it.

KOSHCHEI: Oh and don't waste time trying to spring those two. I've changed the password.

(KOSHCHEI exits.)

IVAN: Oh I'd like to get my hands on him. What good is it to promise him Irenka? Do you think he wants to marry a wolf? We'll be in here forever.

IRENKA: Oh brighten up!

IVAN: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Wolfie. Wolfie. Come here. (She goes over reluctantly. He scratches her behind the ear.) You're beautiful just the way you are.

IRENKA: Oh sure!

IVAN: And if Koshchei doesn't see that it's his problem.

IRENKA: And you'd love to marry me yourself if only you were free, right?

IVAN: I would. I *will*!

IRENKA: Lucky for you that wolves and men can't marry.

IVAN: Well I'll tell you one thing. I'll never marry anyone else.

IRENKA: Really, Ivan? Oh rats. Why are we daydreaming like this. Mooning about here isn't going to solve anything.

IVAN: What are you doing?

IRENKA: I have an idea

(She gets the wedding veil and wraps it heavily about her face. FIREBIRD looks on with interest and glows from time to time. IVAN looks unconvinced.)

IRENKA: So what do you think?

IVAN: Your tail's showing. (She tucks it up) Do you think Koshchei will be fooled for one minute? It'll never work.

IRENKA: Have you got a better idea? Shake the cage. Go on! Shake it.!

(IVAN shakes the cage and the bells ring KOSHCHEI comes storming out in a rage.)

KOSHCHEI: Stop that racket or I'll . . . (He spots IRENKA.) Well, well, well. What have we here?

IRENKA: Your bride, oh Great Koshchei. I regret that I took so long to honour my vow. I had to say good-bye to my dear, dear family. I'm very attached to them and we cried a lot, you know?

KOSHCHEI: Hey, I know. I understand.

IRENKA: So this is Firebird.

KOSHCHEI: Your last present, Irenka.

IRENKA: Oh Koshchei, my beloved, let her out of the cage so I can see her dance.

KOSHCHEI: I will my dearest Irenka, just as soon as we are married.

IRENKA: Just one little dance?

KOSHCHEI: Uh, uh, uh, uh! Marriage first.

IRENKA: You're so cute. Who's this in with Firebird? Ivan? Is that you?

IVAN: (Groans in frustration)

KOSHCHEI: Yes. I'm going to sharpen my sword on him just as soon as we're married.

IRENKA: I don't want any violence on my wedding day.

KOSHCHEI: How about the day after?

IRENKA: I don't know why a big strong fellow like you wants to bother with that poor little wart.

IVAN: Wart! (Shakes his cage. Bells ring.)

KOSHCHEI: You're right, Beloved. I'll let him go. Just as soon as we're married. (Behind IRENKA's back and to IVAN) As if. Speaking of which, time to get on with the wedding. I can't wait to lift that veil and give you a big smooshy kiss!

IRENKA: Neither can I, my turtle dove. But first... I must walk in the garden to prepare myself.

KOSHCHEI: I will walk with you, my treasure.

IRENKA: Oh, no-no-no, my Jewel. I want to be alone. I want to dispel the cruel grief that lies in my heart for my family.

KOSHCHEI: I'll send for your family. Come!

IRENKA: Wait! I...

KOSHCHEI: No more delays. Let's have that kiss. Smoosh, smoosh, smoosh!

IRENKA: After the wedding darling.

KOSHCHEI: Let me see that cute little face. (He lifts the veil.) What? What's this.

(IRENKA bites his nose. KOSHCHEI bellows in pain and lets go of her.)

KOSHCHEI: By dose! She bit by dose! No one bites Koshchei!

(In a rage, he rushes about trying to catch her, brandishing his sword. Grabs her tail and it comes off. She cries out in pain and escapes.)

KOSHCHEI: I am Koshchei the Deathless and I'll smash you to smithereens with one blow of my hand!

(He storms out. Ivan who has been rattling the cage all this time so that the bells ring madly, cries out.)

IVAN: Irenka! Irenka! (In despair) Irenka.

(Lights fade to black and noisy chaos, come up on RIMSKY/ DIMSKY. IRENKA comes on stripping off her veil. She spots the dragon.)

IRENKA: The cyber dragon. Maybe it can tell me the secret of Koshchei's death. No harm in trying. I'll just feed in a few questions. (Types) "What happened to Koshchei's death and how can I find it?" (As she fools with the keyboard RIMSKY and DIMSKY wake up from their snooze.)

DIMSKY: What are you doing! Get out of here!

RIMSKY: Wolf thing.

IRENKA: I was just asking a question or two.

(They snap at her hands and she withdraws.)

IRENKA: I was just trying to find out about the death of Koshchei.

RIMSKY: Impossible

DIMSKY: It's a secret!

IRENKA: Then you know where it is.

RIMSKY: We don't give away secrets, Wolf thing.

IRENKA: Oh really. What's that over there?

BOTH DRAGONS: Where? What?

IRENKA: On that tree.

RIMSKY: I don't see anything.

DIMSKY: Neither do I.

RIMSKY: I don't even see a tree.

(While they fluster she types in her question.)

IRENKA: "Where is Koschei's death?"

BOTH DRAGONS: Oohhh! Get away. Buzz off!

IRENKA: Too late I've fed in the question already, and now you have to answer it.
Where is Koshchei's death?

DIMSKY: Our banks are sealed.

IRENKA: (Thinks a minute) Obviously I must catch these boys off guard. Let me see.
Ah! Dimsky. I really didn't realize you were so handsome.

DIMSKY: Oh well you know we dragons...

RIMSKY: Watch it, Dimsky. She's trying to get you off guard. If you think you can
distract us, Wolf thing, you're greatly mistaken.

IRENKA: You're cute too, Rimsky. I bet you were a really cute baby.

RIMSKY: I was actually. I was the cutest baby in all of Zhar.

DIMSKY: What! No you weren't! I was the cutest baby in Zhar.

RIMSKY: I was the cutest, Dimsky. Mom even said.

DIMSKY: She did not!

RIMSKY: Did too!

DIMSKY: Did not!

RIMSKY: Did too!

DIMSKY: Did not!

(While they argue IRENKA types in the message again.)

IRENKA: Where is Koshchei's death? (They go on arguing as the printer spews out the answer. She reads it) "Matouchka, Petrouchka, chicken and egg."

BOTH DRAGONS: What did you say?

IRENKA: Matouchka, Petrouchka, chicken and egg. What does that mean?

DIMSKY: Oh my claws and nostrils! She knows! She's accessed the memory banks.

RIMSKY: Shh! It's nothing, my dear. Just a little riddle we sometimes say.

IRENKA: Oh say it to me. I like riddles.

DIMSKY: No way.

RIMSKY: Never.

IRENKA: If you don't tell me. I'll show this to Koshchei!

RIMSKY: I'll see if I can remember it.

Matouchka, Petrouchka,

Where can it be

Somebody's death is hidden from thee.

IRENKA: Somebody? Must be Koshchei. Go on. I said, go *on*.

DIMSKY: Oshki Petroshki, Minsk and Pinsk.

He hid it away

And it ain't been seen since.

IRENKA: But *where* did he hide it.

BOTH DRAGONS: Matouchka, Petrouchka, Chicken and Egg

It's no use to plead it's no use to beg.

No use in asking where it might be.

Somebody's death is hidden from thee.

IRENKA: Matouchka, Petrouchka. (Wanders about in thought) Matouchka, Petrouchka.
Oh! (She stops in front of the big matouchka.) Matouchka! Am I getting
warm?

DIMSKY: No-no-no-no-no!

RIMSKY: You're waaaaay off.

DIMSKY: Cold.

(IRENKA opens the Matouchka. Inside is a Clown figure)

IRENKA: Petrouchka!

BOTH DRAGONS: Oh my claws. Oh my poor wings. He's going to... Koshchei will unplug us.
Oh Oh Oh Oh Deconstruct Decon concon (Computer babble winding down to
slow slow slow and a puff of smoke comes out. The dragons shrink, deflate
and collapse.)

IRENKA: I think they've burnt out. Now let's see what's in here. Matouchka, Petrouchka,
Chicken! (There is a chicken inside the Clown.)

(KOSHCHEI come in.)

KOSHCHEI: Stop!

IRENKA: You're looking a little pale, Koshchei. Is something troubling you? Is there
something you don't want me to find? Matouchka, Petrouchka, Chicken. . .
(Opens the Chicken. There's an Egg inside.) Oh. Egg!

KOSHCHEI: Give me that.

IRENKA: I want to see what's inside

KOSHCHEI: No don't.

IRENKA: Your death's in here, isn't it.

KOSHCHEI: Do you realize that I could turn you to stone with a snap of my fingers.

IRENKA: And what would happen to your death then? Would it fall out of my hands?
Would it escape you? Would it fly out into the world and you would never be
safe again?

KOSHCHEI: Wait. Look Wolf. I'll let them go, Ivan and Firebird. Just give me the egg.

IRENKA: Let them go first.

KOSHCHEI: All right, all right! Just don't...

IRENKA: Go on. I'll follow you.

(KOSHCHEI leads the way back to the garden looking anxiously over his shoulder.)

KOSHCHEI: Just don't drop it.

(IVAN leaps up.)

IVAN: Irenka! Are you all right?

IRENKA: Let them out.

KOSHCHEI: Life. Life. Life! (Opens the cage with a snap of his finger. FIREBIRD dances off joyously and exits.) Now give me that.

IRENKA: I don't think so.

KOSHCHEI: You mangy hound. (He lunges forward.)

IVAN: Irenka, be careful.

(IVAN deflects KOSHCHEI so that IRENKA has time to open the egg. But he does not deflect KOSHCHEI's blow. As the egg opens she falls to the ground. KOSHCHEI catches the egg but his death eludes him, flutters just beyond his grasp as he tries to contain it again. He races off after it, crying piteously.)

IVAN: Irenka. She's dying. What shall I do? (He cradles her) Irenka please don't die.

(BABA YAGA enters.)

BABA YAGA: They have done well, Ivan and Irenka. They saved Firebird and stopped that villain Koshchei. He will have no more time for wicked deeds. He will chase

his death around the world and back. By then he will be old and helpless. So far they have been successful. But it remains to be seen if they can restore Zhar to its former glory.

IVAN: Wolf is dying, Baba. Nothing else is important to me. Not Zhar. Not Firebird. Not Koshchei. How can I save her?

BABA YAGA: There is a way.

IVAN: Just tell me!

BABA YAGA: You must give up the thing most precious to you.

IVAN: She could have been beautiful again and she gave it up for me. I would give up anything for her.

BABA YAGA: So be it.

IVAN: My horse? Dogs? Kingdom? No. It must be my life. What could be more precious than that? Yes I will give my life for hers. Just let my dear Irenka live. Ahh! Ohh!

(Dark and changing lights swirl about and ominous sounds and snatches of music can be heard. Ivan writhes and spins and leaps about in what seems like death agony.)

IVAN: Kill me quickly this is torture!

BABA YAGA: Let go!

(Light and sounds become even more frenzied.

IVAN: This is too painful! It's agony! Can't you finish me off?

BABA YAGA: Just let go!

IVAN: Oh please!

(IVAN falls to the ground as though dead. Then realizes — a wiggling toe, a flexing hand — he's not dead.)

IVAN: Well?

BABA YAGA: Well what?

IVAN: I'm not dead.

BABA YAGA: Who said anything about dying?

IVAN: But I thought I was giving up the thing most precious to me. Irenka! (He goes back to her and sorrowfully gathers her in his arms.) Irenka.

BABA YAGA: It appears that the most precious thing to Ivan, as is it for most people, was not his life but his point of view. He has just had all his most cherished opinions ripped from him.

IVAN: It hurt like anything

BABA YAGA: Not surprising. All those comforting lies, all those illusions, all those prejudices. It hurts to give them up.

IVAN: It didn't work, though. Irenka's still dead. Irenka!

IRENKA: (Wakes up. She has shed her wolfish appearance) What happened?

IVAN: Thank the stars! Are you all right?

IRENKA: I think so. Yes. I am. I'm fine. (She touches her face.) My fur! Where did it go? I'm not a wolf any more. Is it true?

IVAN: Yes it's true.

IRENKA: Not a wolf. Oh Ivan. (Jumps up) It just seems like a bad dream.

IVAN: Everything's back as it was.

BABA YAGA: Not everything.

IVAN: But it will be soon. With Irenka back everything's possible.

IRENKA: Suppose we can't restore Zhar, Ivan. You saw how wasted it was when we came here.

IVAN: We'll start here with Koshchei's garden. And we'll work hard. Whatever hard work can accomplish that at least will be done

IRENKA: Where is Firebird?

BABA YAGA: Flew away in all the panic.

IRENKA: But how can we restore Zhar without Firebird?

IVAN: We'll do what we can. Make it as good as we can. We have to try, don't we?

IRENKA: Yes we do. And we have each other. That's something.

IVAN: That may be everything. (He holds her close)

(FIREBIRD comes on tentatively)

IRENKA: Look Ivan! Firebird!

IVAN: She's lighting up everything!

(FIREBIRD begins to dance. Soon IVAN and IRENKA dance too, pulling the gauzy drapes from the trunks, letting the cheerful colours show through.

BABA picks up one of the drapes and folds it up.)

BABA YAGA: Will you look at that! Happy as beets in borscht. They don't know how hard it's going to be. They don't have a snowball's hope in Honolulu of making things work. But that's the effect Firebird has on people. Ridiculous, optimistic fools!

(FIREBIRD dances more wildly. When it comes to the cyborg dragon it touches them lightly. RIMSKY and DIMSKY come to, drowsily, and find they are not only alive but free once more.

RIMSKY: Free! We're free!

DIMSKY: Oh my claws and nostrils. *We are!* Free!

(They dance too, a little smoke and flames of joy bursting from their nostrils.)

IVAN: And now let us go to our wedding. We'll sing till our feet hurt and dance till our throats are sore! Everyone's invited! Rimsky and Dimsky you must come too and especially you Baba, our most treasured friend and advisor.

BABA YAGA: (Shrugs) It's nice to be appreciated.

IVAN: We'll name our first daughter after you.

IRENKA: (Loud distracted whisper) Ivan! We can't name a baby BABA YAGA!

IVAN: Why not?

BABA YAGA: Actually, my given name is Vasilisa. Lisa for short.

(IVAN and IRENKA continue dancing. BABA holds up an ornamental wedding loaf and dances between them.)

THE END