

Read the short story. Then answer each question.

## The Princess Who Never Smiled

Many long years ago, there was a Tsar in Russia. The Tsar had a beautiful daughter who grew more and more lovely every year. To keep her happy, the Tsar gave her everything she could want. She had the finest clothes, the most beautiful jewelry, the most delicious food, and the best entertainment. Still, the princess never smiled. This pained the Tsar, and each night he asked, "Are you happy, my dear?"

"Yes, Father. I am very happy," the princess replied.

The Tsar did not believe her. After all, happy people smiled, and the princess never did.

After years and years of watching his beautiful daughter's sad face, the Tsar announced that whoever made her smile would have her hand in marriage.

Young men came from all over Russia.

A clown dressed in colorful stripes and polka-dots juggled glasses filled with water. The princess didn't smile.

A troupe of actors performed a skit dressed as donkeys. The princess did not smile.

A comedian told jokes dressed as a giant chicken. The princess didn't smile.

The Tsar looked on with tears in his eyes. Would anyone ever be able to make his beautiful daughter smile?

The seasons passed. The birds sang in the spring. The crops grew in the summer. Gorgeous colors stretched as far as the eye could see in the autumn. Snow covered the land and shone like crystals in the winter.



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Still, the princess did not smile.

The Tsar did not know what else to do. Young men continued to come to the palace. Some brought sparkling jewels and laid them at the princess's feet. Some brought gowns of the softest silk with the most delicate handmade lace. Others brought the fattest geese or the most delicious chickens. Still, the princess did not smile.

In a nearby village, a young man named Jack worked for a farmer. He plowed the fields. He cared for the animals. He repaired the barn. He constantly worked, and the farmer was pleased.

At the end of the year, the farmer called Jack into his house. A large bag of money sat on the table. "You've worked well this last year," the farmer said. "Take as much money as you would like." The farmer left the room.



Jack thought for a few moments, then he took a single coin. He was an honest man, after all, and he did not want to appear greedy.

Jack went to the town well for a sip of water. As he drank, the coin slipped out of his hand and tumbled into the water with a *splash!* The young man stared into the well for a long moment. *Perhaps, I didn't work hard enough,* he thought. *That must be why I had such bad luck.* He resolved to work harder the next year.

Meanwhile, more and more people came to the palace. A zookeeper brought a dancing bear. The king of a far-off country brought the princess a pet parrot that spoke three languages. A falconer had his birds perform an aerial dance. Still, the princess did not smile.

The seasons passed again. Jack planted the corn in spring. He cared for it throughout the summer, and harvested it in the autumn, so the farmer had a full bin of corn by the time the snow sparkled in winter.

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Once again, the farmer placed the money on the table and told the young man to take what he wanted and left the room. Again, Jack took a single coin so as not to be greedy. Again, the coin slipped from his hand and landed in the well with a *splash!* Again, the young man decided to work harder the following year, since he had such bad luck.

The third year came and went. Jack worked as hard as he could. He rarely slept. He rarely ate. He worked around the clock. At the end of the year, he took a single coin and went to drink at the well.

“Ah!” Jack cried.

The two coins from the previous years floated to the top of the water. Jack grabbed them and placed them in his pocket. “It is now time for me to see the world,” he said, and he left the village.



Jack walked through a grassy field. The sun shone overhead and warmed him, so he stopped for a moment to enjoy its glow. A small mouse ran up to him as he stood with his eyes closed.

“Please, sir. Give me a coin, and I will help you.”

Jack smiled down at the mouse and gave him the coin. The mouse scampered up the young man’s leg and settled in his pocket.

Jack and the mouse continued their journey and soon came to a dense forest. The trees grew close together and kept the ground in darkness, and the creatures of the forest were unusually silent. Jack and the mouse proceeded carefully, but they soon met a beetle.

“Please, sir. Give me a coin, and I will help you.”

Jack gave the beetle a coin, and the insect settled into Jack’s hair. The group continued their way and soon came to a stream.

“Let’s stop for a drink,” Jack said. Mouse and Beetle agreed.

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“Please, sir. Give me a coin, and I will help you.”

Jack looked down to see a toad swimming at the edge of the water. He could not refuse, so he gave Toad his last coin. The toad joined Jack and his friends on their journey.

Jack soon came to the city. People bustled here and there. Horses filled the street. Voices shouted. The young man looked around, not sure where to go. At last, he noticed the Tsar’s palace at the end of a long street and decided to go in that direction.

Jack dodged people throughout the city and soon stopped for a break in front of the Princess’s window. He looked up and was shocked by her beauty.

Dizziness washed over Jack, and he fell into the mud in front of the castle. Toad dove into the puddle and gently flapped Jack’s face to wake him. Beetle quickly cleaned Jack’s boots, and Mouse took his coat to rid it of mud.

High above the street, the princess watched the small creatures take care of the young man. Their actions touched her heart. “He must be a very special man to inspire these creatures to care for him so well,” she whispered, and she smiled.

“Look!” cried an old woman in the street.  
“The princess is smiling!”

A cry of joy went through the city, and the Tsar nearly burst with happiness. He had the guards bring Jack to the palace and treated him to a banquet. As the Tsar had promised, Jack and the princess were married. They lived happily ever after.



**Questions:**

1. In what country does the princess live?

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2. What kinds of entertainment does the princess see?

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3. Where does Jack work?

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4. What creatures join Jack?

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5. Why does the princess smile when she sees the creatures caring for Jack?

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6. What can we learn from the story?

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**Answers:**

1. In what country does the princess live?

The princess lives in Russia.

2. What kinds of entertainment does the princess see?

The princess sees a clown juggling glasses of water, actors dressed as donkeys, a comedian dressed in a chicken suit, a dancing bear, and falcons flying.

3. Where does Jack work?

Jack works for a farmer in a nearby village.

4. What creatures join Jack?

A mouse, a beetle, and a toad join Jack.

5. Why does the princess smile when she sees the creatures caring for Jack?

The princess smiles at their kindness and caring, and she thinks the young man must be very special as well.

6. What can we learn from the story?

Answers may vary. An act of kindness and caring can be more rewarding than the best entertainment, the best food, and the best clothes and jewelry.