“I have already helped you more than enough, Prince Ivan,” said Grey Wolf. “But we have grown to be friends, so I shall do what I can. Just promise me that the next time you see the full moon, you will call out my name.”

Grey Wolf patted the damp earth with his paw and in an instant turned into a young woman who was identical to Princess Helen.

Ivan presented him to King Afron, who had no reason to suspect trickery. Claiming the horse with the golden mane, he then galloped back to the real Princess Helen, who has been hiding in a shepherd’s hut outside the palace.

It has grown dark, and the prince and princess were well on their way to King Dolmat’s castle when Ivan looked up at the moon and suddenly remembered the wolf.

“Grey Wolf! Grey Wolf!” he cried.

At his palace, King Afron was about to put a wedding ring on his bride’s finger when – in a flash – she turned back into a snarling wolf and leaped over the palace wall. The king called for his guards, but no armed guards were a match for a Grey Wolf. In no time at all, the wolf met up with Ivan and Helen near King Dolmat’s palace.

Outside the palace, Ivan said to Grey Wolf, “Princess Helen does not want to part with the mare. Can you help us again?”

“Yes,” replied Grey Wolf, “but Ivan *please* do not forget this time to call my name when you see the full moon.”

He changed himself into a horse exactly like the mare with the golden mane, and Ivan left with King Dolmat in return for the firebird in its golden cage.

Later that night, when King Dolmat was riding near his castle, Ivan saw the full moon and called out, “Grey Wolf! Grey Wolf!” Instantly the king’s horse changed into a wolf that leaped away into the forest.

King Dolmat summoned his guard, but what soldier can find a wolf in a dark forest? In no time at all, the three friends had met up once more.

When they came to the boulder at the crossroads, Grey Wolf said, “I fear the time has come for us to part.”

Ivan and Helen both hugged Grey Wolf, who then slipped away into the shadows, never to be seen again.

That evening, King Vaslav welcomed them home with open arms. As a wedding present, he gave Ivan half of his kingdom, as well as the glorious firebird in her cage.

But Prince Ivan decided to set the firebird free, for no one likes to live in a cage, and she feasted in the golden-skinned apples for the rest of her days.