

**LITHUANIAN EGLĖ – THE QUEEN OF THE GRASS
SNAKES**



LITHUANIAN TALE

Once upon a time there lived an old man and his wife. Together they had twelve sons and three daughters, the youngest of whom was called Eglè. One summer evening, the sisters went for a swim in a lake. When they got out of the lake and wanted to put on their clothes, Eglè saw a grass snake in the sleeve of her shirt. He started to speak in a human voice and said, ‘Eglè, my dear, promise to marry me and I will come out from your shirt. Eglè moved to tears. Eglè was desperate and did not know what to do, so she promised to get married to the grass snake and to be his wife.

Three days later, old parents saw a lot of grass snakes crawling into the old people’s front yard. Eglè’s parents understood that their daughter promised to be a wife of the grass snake. Their youngest daughter left the parents’ house. The grass snakes and Eglè went away. Eglè was walking along the seashore and suddenly she saw a handsome man, who was waiting for her. He said that he



was the same Grass Snake that she had found him in the sleeve of her shirt. His name was Žilvinas. They moved to the near island and then landed under the sea, reached the bottom of the sea, where she saw a rich and amazing palace. It was the place where they got married. Eglè began to feel peaceful,

her life became brighter and as the days went by, she forgot her parents and her old home. Eglè was happy.

Nine years passed, and Eglè now had four children – three sons, Oak, Ash and Birch, and a daughter named Little Aspen. All children were given the names of the trees. One day, Eglè’s oldest son asked his mother about her parents. At that moment, Eglè remembered her all her family. So, she pleaded her husband if she could go to visit them. At first the Grass Snake did not want to hear

anything about that, but her wife Eglė repeatedly reminded him about her strong desire to see her sisters, brothers and parents. Finally, Žilvinas agreed to let her go. Unfortunately, Eglė was allowed to visit her parents after she had done three tasks.



She had to make a ball of thread out of this tow and pointed at the spinning-wheel. Eglė worked all day and night, but nothing happened. She understood that she was being tricked. Eglė knew that there was a woman who used evil spirits to do magic things and only she might help her. So, she went to her to ask for help. Eglė came home and lighting the stove as if to bake some bread, threw the tow in the fire. It flared up and she saw a toad (i.e. small animal that is similar to a frog) the size of a large battledore (a light flat bat) jumping about in the flames. A silky ball of thread was running out of its mouth.



This time her husband gave her wife a pair of iron shoes. Eglė put on the shoes and began walking and stamping about in them and trying to break them on some sharp stones. But the shoes were strong and she could not wear them out. Eglė went to ask the old witch for her counsel again. She took the shoes to a blacksmith. She put them in a forge and heat them to white heat. Eglė did it and once the shoes were burnt through, she wore them out in three days. The last task was to bake a pie without a bowl, a bucket and dough and a sieve. Eglė racked her brains for a long time. She went to see the old woman again. The old woman gave her some advice and she baked a cake. Finally, Eglė could visit her relatives.

When family members saw Eglė, they were very delighted. In the evening, everybody was having fun, they were having a wonderful time together. Meanwhile her brothers, sisters and parents were thinking what to do that she would stay with them. They created a cunning plan to deceive the youngest sister and her children. Their idea is to find out how Eglė will call her husband when she returns home. Knowing these words, brothers will go to the seashore, to their palace and kill Žilvinas. Her brothers took the youngest of Eglė's children, Little Aspen, to the forest and she revealed the secret. Then Eglė's twelve brothers took their sharp scythes, went to the shore of the sea and killed Žilvinas.

Nine days passed and it was time for Eglė to leave. When she returned home with her children to the shore of the sea, she started calling out her husband: *Alive you are, my husband, White the foam will be and milky. Dead you are, beloved, Red the foam will be and bloody.* The sea darkened and Eglė saw that the waves were blood-red. Suddenly, she heard her husband's voice calling out to her, "It was your twelve brothers who killed me with their scythes, and it was Little Aspen, our beloved little daughter, who betrayed me." She turned to Little Aspen and said, *Be a tree, a fearful little and timid tree, you will never know peace of heart, but you will always tremble. Let the rain wash your mouth, let the wind brush your hair!..* Then, addressing her brave sons, she said, *You will grow to be great and handsome trees, and your mother Eglė-Spruce will be always standing next to you.* As she has said it, everything came true. And now Oak, Ash and Birch are the strongest trees while Aspen starts shaking even from the smallest wind, for betraying her real mother and father.

