



Dragon-Child and Sun-Child

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Armenian

Intermediate

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here was once a King who had no children, and whose life was very desolate. He asked the advice of all the doctors and learned men of his realm to relieve him of his trouble, but it was of no avail. In order to forget his dejected condition, he gave his time to hunting. One day, as he was walking in the forest he saw a snake coiled in the sun, surrounded by its little ones. For a long time he gazed wistfully at this family circle, and recognizing that his condition was inferior to that of the reptile parent, he sighed deeply and complained against Heaven, saying:

“O Heaven! have I not so much value before you as this reptile, that you torment me by denying to me offspring and happiness?”

He never forgot the sight of this snake-family. One day a child came to the palace, but it was a monster, half man and half dragon. Now the grief of the King was heavier than before. They could not kill the monster because it was of royal birth. They therefore cast the Dragon-child into a dry well, where they fed him by giving him a skinful of goat’s milk every day. Soon the Dragon-child grew and required meat for his diet. Then they cast to him, every week, a tender girl; and when he grew older, they gave him a maiden to devour. Every house of the land furnished a maiden for the Dragon-child. It came the turn of a poor man who, being a widower, had a daughter from his former wife, and had married a widow who had a daughter of her own. The husband said that they must cast the wife’s daughter to the Dragon-child, but his wife insisted that they must cast the husband’s daughter. The woman’s will was followed and so the stepmother prepared her stepdaughter to be

cast to the Dragon-child on the following day. The maiden was very beautiful and graceful. She wept all night and prayed God to pity her. At midnight she heard some one speak to her in her dreams, saying:

“Maiden, do not fear being cast to the Dragon-child. Tell your father to send with you three skinfuls of the milk of a black goat, and do you provide a knife for yourself. Let your father wrap you in a bull’s skin and lower you and the milk by a rope into the well. When the Dragon-child bids you come out from the bull’s skin in order that he may devour you, tell him to come out from the dragon’s skin, that you may bathe him with milk. When he comes out, do you also cut the bull’s skin with your knife and come out of the skin and bathe him.”

On the following morning the maiden told her dream to her father, who got the required things ready, at the same time praying Heaven that what the maiden had dreamed might come true. The maiden being lowered into the well, the Dragon-child bade her come out of the bull’s skin; to which the maiden answered as she was advised. Thereupon in its fury, the dragon’s skin burst, and lo! there issued from it a handsome lad. The maiden cut the bull’s skin with her knife, in a hurry to emerge, but in her haste she fell down, and one of her front teeth was broken. She bathed the lad with goat’s milk and he became a sound, gallant youth, who at once expressed his gratitude to her for releasing him from his horrible bondage. Just then the maiden’s father came to the mouth of the well, to see whether her dream was true or false, and perceiving them, ran to inform the King, who hastened to the spot accompanied by the Queen and his peers. They drew the Dragon-child and his deliverer from the well with great joy and ceremony. They celebrated a wedding festival for forty days and nights, and the youth and the maiden loved one another and were married.

It came to pass, after a time, that on account of a war the Dragon-child had to go away from home. When he was about departing he asked his mother not to send his bride away, not even to her father’s, lest some misfortune should befall her. The Queen promised. But a thousand devils had entered the heart of the bride’s stepmother, who was jealous of her good luck. She came and invited the bride to their house, saying that both she and her husband were longing to see her. When this was refused she sent her husband, who urgently entreated the Queen to send his daughter to his house at least for one day. The Queen thought there could be no harm in this, and so she let the bride go. The stepmother took her daughter and the bride for a walk on the seashore. When they came there she said to them:

“Daughters, let us bathe.”

They entered the sea to bathe. The wicked woman, pretending to help the bride, took her toward the deep sea,

where she gave her a violent push and she was caught by the waves and was drawn by the current out to the open sea. When she was sure that the bride had been drowned, she hastened to the shore with her own daughter, and putting the bride's dress on the latter, sent her to the King's palace as the true bride.

Let us turn to the fortunes of the maiden in the sea. For a long time she struggled against the violent waves, and was saved from being drowned by catching hold of an empty cask which happened to float near her. The wind blew from the shore, and the current carried the cask and the maiden away to the open sea. For three days and nights she floated with the cask, and then she was cast upon an uninhabited shore. She walked for a time on the coast, but saw no sign of a human being. She was hungry, naked and very tired. The first thing she did was to gather rushes and moss and weave for herself something like an apron to hide her nakedness. She then gathered wild berries and ate, and quenched her thirst from a brook nearby. While she was lingering on the banks of the brook she noticed a small hut hidden among the bullrushes and weeds. Proceeding thither, she looked in, and lo! a lad was sleeping in the hut. She sat down near the door of the hut. Soon after sunset the lad awoke, and as he was coming out of the hut, he noticed the maiden. Thinking that she was a fairy or a demon, he made upon his face the sign of the cross, at the same time stepping backward. But to his surprise, seeing that she did not vanish, he said to her:

“Are you a fairy, a demon or a human being? Disclose yourself.”

The maiden told him her story.

“My own story is as strange as yours,” then said the lad. “I was the only son of a rich man and had plenty to spend and enjoy. I led a dissipated life and went hunting every day. Once it happened that I did not shoot any game for three days in succession. I was enraged to the verge of madness, and wandered all the night. At daybreak my madness reached its climax, and I resolved to shoot the sun and drop him dead from his orb that darkness might cover the world, since I could take no game and have no pleasure. At once I grasped my bow and arrow, took aim at the sun, who had just lifted his shining face from behind the hills, and had hardly loosed the bowstring when I felt a blazing palm slap me in the face; a hand of fire took hold of my hair and cast me into this wilderness, and I heard an angry voice thundering at me from the overhanging clouds, declaring that I was cursed and should never see the light of the sun any more. I thus remain abandoned here, and sleep in the hut all the day while the sun shines, and go out only at night to procure food. If I go out of this hut after daybreak I am doomed to die a horrible death.”

As fate had so strangely cast these two youthful beings into the same lonely place, they decided to live together, accepting one another as husband and wife. Thus she who had been the consort of the Dragon-child was now the companion of the Sun-child. The woman worked in the daytime, and the man at night, and so they earned their living. But soon married life brought a change upon the woman, who needed the help of others, and they decided that she must go to the parents of the Sun-child. The lad wrote the following letter to his parents:

“I herewith send you your daughter-in-law; keep her and take care of her as my wife. But do not seek me; I cannot see the sun, I cannot come home, neither can I enter the city. If I do come I shall surely die; I am cursed.”

Walking during the nights, and hiding himself in caves in daytime, the lad brought his wife to the vicinity of his parents' house, and himself went back to his lonely hut. The woman gave the letter to her father-in-law, and was accepted. The lad's father and mother hearing that their son was alive, said they would go and bring him, but the bride dissuaded them, saying that they would be the means of his death. In the fullness of time the family was cheered by the birth of a son, which the young mother put in a cradle and rocked, singing to it melodious lullabies from the incidents of her own life. One night as the young mother was putting her baby to sleep, another voice was heard out in the darkness singing a melodious lullaby. The bride recognized the voice to be that of the Sun-child, who had come from such a great distance, being drawn by the love of the baby; but he could not enter. This was repeated several times until the bride's father and mother-in-law heard that somebody was in the habit of coming at night, and singing lullabies by turns with their daughter-in-law. Suspicion entered into their minds that the bride might have a lover who was making nightly calls on her. The young woman, seeing that they were watching her with mistrust, said:

“It is your son who comes and sings lullabies; the love which he bears to the baby draws him, but he cannot enter; the moment you compel him to come in he dies.”

“Nay, you are lying!” exclaimed her father and mother-in-law with rage; “there must be some foul play here. We will keep watch and catch the nightly visitor; if he proves to be our son, well and good; if not, woe be unto you.”

That night they kept watch, and when the voice from outside was heard they ran and took hold of the man, and lo! it was their son, who begged them, saying:

“For Heaven’s sake, let me go! If by the time the sun rises I am not hid in my hut, I die. Spare my life; I am cursed!”

This sounded to his father and mother like deceit, and they kept him at home until daybreak. As soon as the first rays of the sun beamed from the East, lo! the lad sank in the arms of his father and mother, and died. He died, but strange to say, his spirit did not depart from him entirely. They said he would revive at sunset. But not so; at night also he was in the same benumbed state. The house was changed into a house of sorrow; but worse than that befell. He was not dead so that they could bury him and he was not alive so that they might talk with him or administer a remedy. The parents took stones and beat their own heads, they pulled their hair, and sat in ashes and sackcloth. They lamented and wailed, but it was all of no avail. One night the afflicted mother dreamed a dream in which this revelation was made to her:

“Get up, put on iron sandals, take in your hand an iron rod and travel toward the West, until your sandals are worn and your rod is broken. Wherever holes are opened in your sandals and your rod is broken, there you will find a remedy for your son.”

There is no limit to a mother’s love and pity. As soon as she awoke in the morning she ordered the blacksmith to make her a pair of iron sandals and an iron rod, and she set out toward the West, walking day and night. She traveled through the countries of white men, red men, black men; she passed through the lands of fairies, giants and genii: she went farther than beasts and birds would dare to go; she had gone to the very limits of the earth. There she saw at a distance a palace built of blue marble, whither she proceeded. Before the palace door the iron rod fell from her hand and was broken; she got out her sandals to shake off the dust, and lo! they were worn and there was a hole in each. She said to herself:

“It is here that I shall find a remedy for my son!”

She entered and passed through twelve courtyards in succession. Each courtyard was surrounded by four arches, where thousands of myriads of stars were sleeping. At the center of each courtyard there was a marble pond with a stream of crystal water gushing from an orifice. There were no trees, no grass, no birds, no beasts, and no other creature. A deep silence was reigning everywhere. Upon the pond in the middle courtyard there were four golden arches, upon which there was a golden room of great splendor with a pearl bed in the center. Near the window there was, sitting upon a golden throne, a Queen so fair and beautiful, that no human being can describe her loveliness. From head to foot she was covered with diamonds and her face beamed with rays

of light. At sight of this grandeur the poor woman was greatly amazed; she turned pale and began to shiver like an autumn leaf before a cold blast from the North. She fell upon her knees, and lifting her hands, was about to speak, when suddenly the Queen interrupted her, saying:

“Human being, Heaven has never permitted a member of the human race to enter this palace before. As you are the first mortal who has been allowed to come so far, you must have some valid reason. From your appearance I judge that you are a mother and have some maternal grief. Tell it to me; be not afraid.”

These words of the Queen encouraged the woman, who said:

“Long live the Queen! Yes, I am a mother, and have traveled so far to ask the life of my only son.”

And she told her story, to which the Queen made answer:

“Your son was an evil boy. I am a mother myself. The Sun is my son, by whose living rays heaven and earth are illumined. Your son was so wicked that he wanted to shoot my son, the giver of life to the universe. All kinds of sins may be pardonable to a man, but a sin against the sole source of life is not pardonable. Your son was therefore doomed to be deprived of life. He is cursed. He will live, but not live; he will die, but not die.”

“I am a mother,” repeated the woman, “come to beg the life of my son. I have come so far that my iron sandals are worn out, and my iron rod is broken. I would willingly go still further if it were necessary. For the love you bear your son, O Queen of this luminous orb, devise a remedy for my grief!”

These words served to arouse the compassion of the Queen, who replied:

“There are very many unworthy children who enjoy life simply because of their virtuous mothers. Let it be so with your son, O virtuous woman, who bear such great maternal love in your heart! Now, go hide yourself behind yonder stars. The day is growing towards evening and my son will soon be here; if you do not hide yourself you will be burned. The first thing he does after reaching this place is to dive in this pond; then he comes to be nursed from my breast. Just then take a bottle full of the water of the pond where he has been washing, and carry it home. As soon as you sprinkle that water upon your son he will be healed.”

Soon the Sun came embodied in flames. The Stars waked and stood on their feet for a time to salute their mighty King; then they scattered over the surface of the blue dome to twinkle in their respective orbits, because it was night. The Sun dove into the pond, and the Queen stretching out her hand took him out of the water.

She placed him in the bed of pearl and began to nurse him, for the Sun, who never wears out, never grows old, is a baby from everlasting to everlasting. The woman came out from her concealment and taking a bottle of water from the pond, quickly retraced her steps. She arrived safely at her home, and sprinkled the water upon her son, who was healed. The report of this most wonderful journey of the woman was published all over the world, and princes and philosophers came from distant countries and from the ends of the earth to see the woman and the Sun-child, and to hear of all these wonderful things.

Among those who came from distant lands was the Dragon-child. He had returned safe from the wars and was surprised to find his bride changed, although the two step-sisters very much resembled one another. But as the Dragon-child had put a golden tooth in the place of the front tooth of his bride, which was broken in the well, he was able to detect the substitution. Upon a strict examination of his mother, he discovered that the bride had been sent to her stepmother's where, as he supposed, she had been gotten rid of, and was replaced by her stepsister. All his efforts to find his lost bride being in vain, the Dragon-child had come to see the Sun-child and his mother, with the expectation of finding some means for the discovery of his wife. He became a guest in the Sun-child's house, and told his story while they were eating supper. The bride, who was serving at the table, smiled and showed her golden tooth. This caused her to be discovered, and the Sun-child told how she had come and found him. Now as they had partaken of bread together, they had become friends, and agreed to solve the difficulty in a friendly manner. They decided to roast salt meat and make the bride eat it, without letting her drink. Each was to take a pitcher of water, and they all were to go riding in the fields. He whom she should ask for a drink must be her husband. They did so, and took a ride in the fields, the wife accompanying them with her child in her arms. She was thirsty, but not wishing to offend any one of them, she kept silent for a time. Finally she saw that she would faint and must put an end to the perplexed state.

"Sun-child! Sun-child!" she exclaimed.

The Sun-child dismounted and prepared to give her a drink. Thereupon she exclaimed:

"Dragon-child! Dragon-child!"

He also dismounted and prepared to give her a drink. Turning to the Sun-child, she said:

"Here, take this child whose father you are; but I am the wedded wife of the Dragon-child."

And she drank from the Dragon-child's pitcher, and went home with him.

Thus their trouble ended and they attained their wishes. May all who are afflicted find consolation. Three apples fell from heaven; one for me, one for the story-teller, and one for him who entertained the company.

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