



He Wins Who Waits

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Armenian

Intermediate
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Once upon a time there reigned a king who had an only daughter. The girl had been spoiled by everybody from her birth, and, besides being beautiful, was clever and wilful, and when she grew old enough to be married she refused to have anything to say to the prince whom her father favoured, but declared she would choose a husband for herself. By long experience the king knew that when once she had made up her mind, there was no use expecting her to change it, so he inquired meekly what she wished him to do.

‘Summon all the young men in the kingdom to appear before me a month from to-day,’ answered the princess; ‘and the one to whom I shall give this golden apple shall be my husband.’

‘But, my dear — ‘ began the king, in tones of dismay.

‘The one to whom I shall give this golden apple shall be my husband,’ repeated the princess, in a louder voice than before. And the king understood the signal, and with a sigh proceeded to do her bidding.

The young men arrived — tall and short, dark and fair, rich and poor. They stood in rows in the great courtyard in front of the palace, and the princess, clad in robes of green, with a golden veil flowing behind her, passed before them all, holding the apple. Once or twice she stopped and hesitated, but in the end she always passed on, till she came to a youth near the end of the last row. There was nothing specially remarkable about him, the bystanders thought; nothing that was likely to take a girl’s fancy. A hundred others were handsomer, and all wore finer clothes; but he met the princess’s eyes frankly and with a smile, and she smiled too, and held out the

apple.

‘There is some mistake,’ cried the king, who had anxiously watched her progress, and hoped that none of the candidates would please her. ‘It is impossible that she can wish to marry the son of a poor widow, who has not a farthing in the world ! Tell her that I will not hear of it, and that she must go through the rows again and fix upon someone else;’ and the princess went through the rows a second and a third time, and on each occasion she gave the apple to the widow’s son. ‘Well, marry him if you will,’ exclaimed the angry king; ‘but at least you shall not stay here.’ And the princess answered nothing, but threw up her head, and taking the widow’s son by the hand, they left the castle.

That evening they were married, and after the ceremony went back to the house of the bridegroom’s mother, which, in the eyes of the princess, did not look much bigger than a hen-coop.

The old woman was not at all pleased when her son entered bringing his bride with him.

‘As if we were not poor enough before,’ grumbled she. ‘I dare say this is some fine lady who can do nothing to earn her living.’ But the princess stroked her arm, and said softly:

‘Do not be vexed, dear mother; I am a famous spinner, and can sit at my wheel all day without breaking a thread.’

And she kept her word; but in spite of the efforts of all three, they became poorer and poorer; and at the end of six months it was agreed that the husband should go to the neighbouring town to get work. Here he met a merchant who was about to start on a long journey with a train of camels laden with goods of all sorts, and needed a man to help him. The widow’s son begged that he would take him as a servant, and to this the merchant assented, giving him his whole year’s salary beforehand. The young man returned home with the news, and next day bade farewell to his mother and his wife, who were very sad at parting from him.

‘Do not forget me while you are absent,’ whispered the princess as she flung her arms round his neck; ‘and as you pass by the well which lies near the city gate, stop and greet the old man you will find sitting there. Kiss his hand, and then ask him what counsel he can give you for your journey.’

Then the youth set out, and when he reached the well where the old man was sitting he asked the questions as

his wife had bidden him.

‘My son,’ replied the old man, ‘you have done well to come to me, and in return remember three things:

“She whom the heart loves, is ever the most beautiful.” “Patience is the first step on the road to happiness.” “He wins who waits.” ‘

The young man thanked him and went on his way. Next morning early the caravan set out, and before sunset it had arrived at the first halting place, round some wells, where another company of merchants had already encamped. But no rain had fallen for a long while in that rocky country, and both men and beasts were parched with thirst. To be sure, there was another well, about half a mile away, where there was always water; but to get it you had to be lowered deep down, and, besides, no one who had ever descended that well had been known to come back.

However, till they could store some water in their bags of goat-skin, the caravans dared not go further into the desert, and on the night of the arrival of the widow’s son and his master, the merchants had decided to offer a large reward to anyone who was brave enough to go down into the enchanted well and bring some up.

Thus it happened that at sunrise the young man was aroused from his sleep by a herald making his round of the camp, proclaiming that every merchant present would give a thousand piastres to the man who would risk his life to bring water for themselves and their camels.

The youth hesitated for a little while when he heard the proclamation. The story of the well had spread far and wide, and long ago had reached his ears. The danger was great, he knew; but then, if he came back alive, he would be the possessor of eighty thousand piastres. He turned to the herald who was passing the tent:

‘I will go,’ said he.

‘What madness !’ cried his master, who happened to be standing near. ‘You are too young to throw away your life like that. Run after the herald and tell him you take back your offer.’ But the young man shook his head, and the merchant saw that it was useless to try and persuade him.

‘Well, it is your own affair,’ he observed at last. ‘If you must go, you must. Only, if you ever return, I will give you a camel’s load of goods and my best mule besides. And touching his turban in token of farewell, he entered

the tent.

Hardly had he done so than a crowd of men were seen pouring out of the camp.

'How can we thank you !' they exclaimed, pressing round the youth. 'Our camels as well as ourselves are almost dead of thirst. See here is the rope we have brought to let you down.'

'Come then,' answered the youth. And they all set out.

On reaching the well, the rope was knotted securely under his arms, a big goat-skin bottle was given him, and he was gently lowered to the bottom of the pit. Here a clear stream was bubbling over the rocks, and stooping down, he was about to drink, when a huge Arab appeared before him, saying in a loud voice:

'Come with me !'

The young man rose, never doubting that his last hour had come; but as he could do nothing, he followed the Arab into a brilliantly lighted hail, on the further side of the little river. There his guide sat down, and drawing towards him two boys, he said to the stranger:

'I have a question to ask you. If you answer it right, your life shall be spared. If not, your head will be forfeit, as the head of many another has been before you. Tell me : which of my two children do I think the handsomer ?'

The question did not seem hard, for while one boy was as beautiful a child as ever was seen, his brother was ugly. But, just as the youth was going to speak, the old man's counsel flashed into the youth's mind, and he replied hastily: 'The one whom we love best is always the handsomest.'

'You have saved me !' cried the Arab, rising quickly from his seat, and pressing the young man in his arms. 'Ah ! if you could only guess what I have suffered from the stupidity of all the people to whom I have put that question, and I was condemned by a wicked genius to remain here until it was answered ! But what brought you to this place, and how can I reward you for what you have done for me ?'

'By helping me to draw enough water for my caravan of eighty merchants and their camels, who are dying for want of it,' replied the youth.

'That is easily done,' said the Arab. 'Take these three apples, and when you have filled your skin, and are ready

to be drawn up, lay one of them on the ground. Half-way to the earth, let fall another, and at the top, drop the third. If you follow my directions no harm will happen to you. And take, besides, these three pomegranates, green, red and white. One day you will find a use for them !'

The young man did as he was told, and stepped out on the rocky waste, where the merchants were anxiously awaiting him. Oh, how thirsty they all were! But even after the camels had drunk, the skin seemed as full as ever.

Full of gratitude for their deliverance, the merchants pressed the money into his hands, while his own master bade him choose what goods he liked, and a mule to carry them. So the widow's son was rich at last, and when the merchant had sold his merchandise, and returned home to his native city, his servant hired a man by whom he sent the money and the mule back to his wife.

'I will send the pomegranates also,' thought he, 'for if I leave them in my turban they may some day fall out,' and he drew them out of his turban. But the fruit had vanished, and in their places were three precious stones, green, white and red.

For a long time he remained with the merchant, who gradually trusted him with all his business, and gave him a large share of the money he made. When his master died, the young man wished to return home, but the widow begged him to stay and help her; and one day he awoke with a start, to remember that twenty years had passed since he had gone away.

'I want to see my wife,' he said next morning to his mistress. 'If at any time I can be of use to you, send a messenger to me; meanwhile, I have told Hassan what to do.' And mounting a camel he set out.

Now, soon after he had taken service with the merchant a little boy had been born to him, and both the princess and the old woman toiled hard all day to get the baby food and clothing. When the money and the pomegranates arrived there was no need for them to work any more, and the princess saw at once that they were not fruit at all, but precious stones of great value. The old woman, however, not being accustomed, like her daughter-in-law, to the sight of jewels, took them only for common fruit, and wished to give them to the child to eat. She was very angry when the princess hastily took them from her and hid them in her dress, while she went to the market and bought the three finest pomegranates she could find, which she handed the old

woman for the little boy.

Then she bought beautiful new clothes for all of them, and when they were dressed they looked as fine as could be. Next, she took out one of the precious stones which her husband had sent her, and placed it in a small silver box. This she wrapped up in a handkerchief embroidered in gold, and filled the old woman's pockets with gold and silver pieces.

'Go, dear mother,' she said, 'to the palace, and present the jewel to the king, and if he asks you what he can give you in return, tell him that you want a paper, with his seal attached, proclaiming that no one is to meddle with anything you may choose to do. Before you leave the palace distribute the money amongst the servants.'

The old woman took the box and started for the palace. No one there had ever seen a ruby of such beauty, and the most famous jeweller in the town was summoned to declare its value. But all he could say was:

'If a boy threw a stone into the air with all his might, and you could pile up gold as high as the flight of the stone, it would not be sufficient to pay for this ruby.'

At these words the king's face fell. Having once seen the ruby he could not bear to part with it, yet all the money in his treasury would not be enough to buy it. So for a little while he remained silent, wondering what offer he could make the old woman, and at last he said:

'If I cannot give you its worth in money, is there anything you will take in exchange?'

'A paper signed by your hand, and sealed with your seal, proclaiming that I may do what I will, without let or hindrance,' answered she promptly. And the king, delighted to have obtained what he coveted at so small a cost, gave her the paper without delay. Then the old woman took her leave and returned home.

The fame of this wonderful ruby soon spread far and wide, and envoys arrived at the little house to know if there were more stones to sell. Each king was so anxious to gain possession of the treasure that he bade his messenger outbid all the rest, and so the princess sold the two remaining stones for a sum of money so large that if the gold pieces had been spread out they would have reached from here to the moon. The first thing she did was to build a palace by the side of the cottage, and it was raised on pillars of gold, in which were set great diamonds, which blazed night and day. Of course the news of this palace was the first thing that reached the

king her father, on his return from the wars, and he hurried to see it. In the doorway stood a young man of twenty, who was his grandson, though neither of them knew it, and so pleased was the king with the appearance of the youth, that he carried him back to his own palace, and made him commander of the whole army.

Not long after this, the widow's son returned to his native land. There, sure enough, was the tiny cottage where he had lived with his mother, but the gorgeous building beside it was quite new to him. What had become of his wife and his mother, and who could be dwelling in that other wonderful place? These were the first thoughts that flashed through his mind; but not wishing to betray himself by asking questions of passing strangers, he climbed up into a tree that stood opposite the palace and watched.

By — and — by a lady came out, and began to gather some of the roses and jessamine that hung about the porch. The twenty years that had passed since he had last beheld her vanished in an instant, and he knew her to be his own wife, looking almost as young and beautiful as on the day of their parting. He was about to jump down from the tree and hasten to her side, when she was joined by a young man who placed his arm affectionately round her neck. At this sight the angry husband drew his bow, but before he could let fly the arrow, the counsel of the wise man came back to him:

'Patience is the first step on the road to happiness.' And he laid it down again.

At this moment the princess turned, and drawing her companion's head down to hers, kissed him on each cheek. A second time blind rage filled the heart of the watcher, and he snatched up his bow from the branch where it hung, when words, heard long since, seemed to sound in his ears:

'He wins who waits.' And the bow dropped to his side. Then, through the silent air came the sound of the youth's voice:

'Mother, can you tell me nothing about my father? Does he still live, and will he never return to us?'

'Alas! my son, how can I answer you?' replied the lady. 'Twenty years have passed since he left us to make his fortune, and, in that time, only once have I heard aught of him. But what has brought him to your mind just now?'

‘Because last night I dreamed that he was here,’ said the youth, ‘and then I remembered what I have so long forgotten, that I had a father, though even his very history was strange to me. And now, tell me, I pray you, all you can concerning him.’

And standing under the jessamine, the son learnt his father’s history, and the man in the tree listened also.

‘Oh,’ exclaimed the youth, when it was ended, while he twisted his hands in pain, ‘I am general-in-chief, you are the king’s daughter, and we have the most splendid palace in the whole world, yet my father lives we know not where, and for all we can guess, may be poor and miserable. To-morrow I will ask the king to give me soldiers, and I will seek him over the whole earth till I find him.’

Then the man came down from the tree, and clasped his wife and son in his arms. All that night they talked, and when the sun rose it still found them talking. But as soon as it was proper, he went up to the palace to pay his homage to the king, and to inform him of all that had happened and who they all really were. The king was overjoyed to think that his daughter, whom he had long since forgiven and sorely missed, was living at his gates, and was, besides, the mother of the youth who was so dear to him. ‘It was written beforehand,’ cried the monarch. ‘You are my son-in-law before the world, and shall be king after me.’

And the man bowed his head.

He had waited; and he had won.

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