

The Betrothed of Destiny

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Armenian

Intermediate

6 min read

Once upon a time the King of the West had a son who, one night, dreamed a dream in which destiny betrothed him to the daughter of the King of the East. In the morning he awoke, and lo! the betrothal ring of the maiden was on his finger. On the very same night the same dream had come to the sleeping maiden, who on the morrow found on her finger the betrothal ring of the son of the King of the West. The lad at once started to find his betrothed, and after a long journey came to the city of the King of the East. He entered into the service of the King as a stranger, because he could not make himself known on account of the continuous strife existing between his father and the King of the East.

He served the King seven years, during which he spent many happy hours with the young princess, his betrothed. At the expiration of the seven years he asked the hand of the princess as a remuneration for his services. The King, who was pleased with the lad, consented to give him his daughter in marriage. But the lad said he must take her to his country, where the wedding should take place. The King consented to that also, and let his daughter go, giving her a precious dowry. On their way to the country of the King of the West they had to cross the sea, and so went on board a ship. The captain, being a wicked man, was charmed by the beauty of the maiden, and before the ship sailed he sent the lad ashore, bidding him to make further preparation, as the voyage would probably be long on account of contrary winds. As soon as the lad disappeared the captain weighed anchor and set sail. The lad came back only to find that the ship had sailed away with his love on board. There remained nothing for him to do but to lament and bewail his ill-luck. The maiden, who was in the

cabin, did not discover the truth until it was too late. To her censure and upbraiding the vile captain answered with the proposal that she should become his wife.

“I marry you! such an ungracious beast as you!” she exclaimed. “I would rather make my grave in the unfathomable sea.”

But the captain was strong, and they were on the open sea where no help could be expected. Seeing that she could not resist force if the captain resorted to it, she resolved to use craft.

“Well, then,” she answered finally, “I will be your wife, but not upon the sea. We will go home to your city and there be married lawfully.”

The captain consented, and they soon reached the city.

“Now, do you go first,” said the maiden, “and make preparation. I will wait here until you return.”

Without suspicion the captain went ashore. As soon as he had disappeared the maiden bade the sailors weigh anchor, and she set sail without knowing where to go. At last she reached a certain city and cast anchor. The King of that city was a young lad of marriageable age, who was celebrating his wedding festival. Thirty-nine beautiful maidens were already elected; only one maiden was missing to complete the number forty from among whom he would choose his queen, while the others were to become hand-maids to the queen-elect. The King, hearing that a beautiful maiden had come to the haven, hastened thither, and seeing the princess, said to her:

“Fair maiden, come and by your presence complete the number forty. You are the jewel of all the maidens, and will surely be my dear queen, while the rest shall become your handmaids.”

“Very well, I will come,” answered the princess; “only send hither your thirty-nine maidens, that I may come to your palace with great pomp.”

The youthful King consented and sent his maidens on board the ship. As soon as they came, the princess weighed anchor and set sail. She told the thirty-nine maidens who she was, and asked them to accompany her until destiny showed them what to do. The maidens were fascinated by her beauty and commanding appearance, and promised to follow her wherever she went, even to the end of the earth. After sailing for a long time, they came to an unknown shore where there was a castle. They cast anchor and all the party landed.

Entering the castle, they found in it forty rooms with a bed in each, all richly decorated. The castle contained great wealth and abundant food. Satisfying their hunger, they went to bed, each maiden occupying a chamber. In the middle of the night the door of the castle suddenly opened, and there entered forty brigands, who were the owners of the stronghold, and who were just returning from a nightly foray, bringing with them great booty.

“Aha!” exclaimed the brigands, seeing the maidens, “we hunted elsewhere, and lo! the antelopes have come to our own home.”

“Enter, you brave heroes,” said the maidens; “we were waiting for you.”

And they pretended to be very much pleased to see the brigands, who entered the rooms occupied by the maidens without suspicion. When they had laid down their arms and retired to rest, each maiden took the sword of the brigand who lay in her room and cut off his head. Thus the maidens were the owners of their wealth and property. In the morning the maidens rose, and putting on the clothes and arms of the robbers, appeared as youthful knights. They mounted the brigands' horses, taking in their saddlebags gold, silver, jewels and other portable wealth. After a long journey they came to the city of the King of the West, and encamped in a meadow on the outskirts of the city. Soon they heard a herald crying that on the following day there should be elected a King of the realm, for inasmuch as the late sovereign had died and the heir-apparent was lost, it was necessary to choose a new ruler. On the following day all the people of the realm were gathered in the park adjoining the palace; the forty strangers also went to gratify their curiosity. Soon the nobles let loose the royal eagle, which flapped its wings and soared over the immense crowd, as though searching with its keen eyes for the true candidate for the throne. The multitude held their breath and stood stone-still. The royal bird once more flapped its wings, and descending from its towering flight, perched upon the head of the princess, who was disguised as a knight.

“That is a mistake,” exclaimed the noblemen; “we must try it again.”

Once more they let loose the royal eagle, but again it alighted upon the head of the same stranger. A third trial gave the same result. Thereupon all the multitude saluted the disguised princess, the elect of destiny, exclaiming with one voice: "Long live the King!" And with great pomp they took her and her companions to the royal palace, where the princess was anointed with holy oil, and crowned King over the realm, and her companions were made ministers.

This new King proved to be the wisest and most just ruler that that country had ever enjoyed, and all the people of the realm loved and honored their sovereign with all their hearts. She built a splendid fountain in the midst of the city, on which she caused her image to be carved, so that every one who came to drink might see it. She put guards to watch the fountain day and night, and said to them:

"Watch carefully, and when you perceive a stranger who, on seeing my image, shows signs of knowing me, bring him hither."

One day there came a stranger who, after drinking, raised his eyes and saw the image. He gazed for a long time, and sighed deeply. Immediately he was arrested and taken to the King, who, looking at him from behind a curtain, ordered him to be imprisoned. This was the captain of the ship. On another day there came another stranger, and he also sighed. It was the King, the owner of the thirty-nine maidens. He was kept in an apartment of the palace. And at last, disguised as a stranger, came the Prince, the betrothed of the ruling sovereign, and the heir-apparent to the crown. He also looked at the image and sighed, and was taken to the palace. Thereupon the princess summoned a parliament of all the nobility and the learned and wise men of the realm. She caused the three strangers to be brought before the assembly, and told her story from beginning to end.

The captain was condemned to be hanged, and was executed forthwith. The lord of the thirty-nine maidens received them all, to whose number the princess added one of her most beautiful handmaids, thus making up the forty. The prince and the princess, the betrothed of destiny, celebrated their wedding with great joy and pomp for forty days and forty nights. The prince, as the true heir, was crowned King, his consort became Queen, and they reigned together.

Thus they reached their desire. May all of us attain our desires and the happiness ordained to us by an all-wise Providence.

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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