

The Enchanted Princess

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Russian

Easy

12 min read

In a certain kingdom there once served in the king's army a soldier. He served him honestly and faithfully for twenty-five years. For his good service the king gave him a leave of absence, and presented him with his war-horse and armor. The soldier bade farewell to his comrades and went home. He traveled one day, another day, a third day, and a whole week. The soldier had no money to buy food for himself or for his horse, and his home was still very far off. He was very hungry and tired. He looked all around and saw a large and beautiful castle.

"Well," thought he, "I will try to enter it; perhaps they will take me into service and I can earn something."

He entered the castle, put his horse in the stable, gave it food, and went to the palace. In one of the rooms a table was set with the best foods and drinks a person could wish for. He ate and drank and thought of taking a rest.

Suddenly a bear entered. "Do not be afraid, young man. You can do me some good. I am not a frightful bear; I am a fair maiden, an enchanted princess. If you will pass three nights here, my enchantment will be broken, and I will marry you."

The soldier consented. The bear left, and he was all alone. He felt so sad. A great anxiety took hold of him, and he felt such a longing to depart that he almost lost his mind. The third night he decided to leave the castle, and to flee. But no matter how he looked and searched, he could find no way of escape. He had to remain in the castle against his will. In the morning the princess came in. She was as beautiful as a dream. She thanked him

for the service and told him to get ready for the wedding. The wedding was celebrated and they lived happily together.

After some time the soldier thought of his old home and wanted to visit it.

“Stay here, my friend! Do not go. Aren’t you happy here?” asked the princess.

But the soldier insisted upon going to see his old parents. Before departing, his wife gave him a small bag full of seeds. “Wherever you go throw these seeds on both sides of the road; wherever they fall trees will grow up; upon the trees rare fruits will grow, beautiful birds will sing.”

The soldier mounted his good old horse and departed. Wherever he went, he threw the magic seeds; and after him forests rose as if creeping out of the earth. On the third evening of his journey, in the middle of an open field, he saw a group of men sitting upon the grass, playing cards. Near them a kettle was hanging, and though there was no fire under it, the soup inside was boiling.

“What a wonder!” thought the soldier. “No fire is to be seen yet the kettle is boiling hot. Let me look at it.” He turned his horse, approached the men and said, “Good evening, honest people. You have a wonderful thing: a kettle boiling without fire, but I have something more wonderful.”

He took out one seed and threw it upon the ground. In a minute a tree grew up, rare fruit upon its branches, wonderful birds singing beautiful songs. Now the soldier did not know that these men were the magicians that had enchanted the princess, his wife. They recognized him.

“Oh,” said they, “that is the same fellow, who saved the princess. Let us make him sleep for half a year.”

They treated him with an enchanted drink. The soldier immediately fell fast asleep, and the men with the kettle disappeared.

Soon after this the princess took a walk in her garden. There she saw that all the tree-tops were dry and dead. “That foretells me nothing good”; thought she. “Something wrong must have happened to my husband. He has been away for three months already. It is time for him to come back, and as yet I have heard nothing of him.” She decided then to go to look for him.

She went by the same road over which the soldier had gone. On both sides forests were growing, and birds were singing. But after a while she reached the place where there were no more trees. The road was clearly

marked in the open field. She thought, "Where could my husband have gone? I hope he has not been swallowed up by the earth." She looked around and saw aside from the road a wonderful tree, and under it her husband. She ran to him, shook him, called him, but could not wake him up. She pinched him, stuck pins into his body but he felt no pain. He was lying as one dead and did not move.

The princess became angry, and in her anger she cursed him. "O, you wretched sleepyhead! I wish a storm would raise you, and carry you off, far away to unknown countries!"

Hardly had she spoken these words, when raging winds came blowing and whistling, and raised the soldier and carried him off before the princess' eyes. The princess felt sorry for her bad words, but it was too late. She cried bitterly, but could not get her husband back. She returned to her palace, and lived there a sad and lonely life.

The poor soldier was carried by the wind through many lands and seas, and was thrown upon a very lonely sand-bank between two seas. If in his sleep he should turn to his right or to his left, he would fall into the sea and perish. For half a year he slept and did not move a finger. When he awoke, he jumped straight upon his feet and looked around. From both sides the waves were rising, and there was no end to the waters. He asked himself in surprise, "How did I come here? Who brought me hither?"

He went along the bank and came to an island. There he saw a very high and steep mountain. Its top reached the clouds. Upon it there was a large stone. He approached the mountain and saw at its foot three men fighting. They were the sons of a malicious magician.

"What is the matter?" asked the soldier. "What are you fighting for?"

"You see," answered they, "our father died and left us three wonderful things: a flying carpet, seven-league boots, and an invisible cap. But we cannot divide them peaceably."

"O you silly magicians! Stop your fighting! If you wish, I will divide the things between you so that everyone shall be satisfied."

The magicians consented.

"Now," said the soldier, "do you see that large stone upon the mountain top? Climb up to it, push it down the mountain, and run after it; whoever shall reach the stone first, shall choose among the three wonders; the

second one, between the two wonders; and the third shall take that which shall be left.”

The magicians climbed up, pushed the stone, and ran after it. It was rolling down very quickly. One reached it, seized upon it—the stone turned over, fell upon him and killed him. The same happened to the other two magicians.

The soldier took the seven-league boots, the invisible cap, sat down upon the flying carpet and went to look for his kingdom. After some time he came to a hut; and entered. An old fairy lived there.

“Good morning, grandmother! Tell me how to find my dear little princess.”

“I do not know, my dear! I have never seen her, nor heard of her. Go to the other side of the ocean. There lives my older sister. She knows more than I do; perhaps she will tell you.”

The soldier flew upon his carpet to the older fairy. The journey was very long. When he felt hungry or thirsty, he had only to put on his invisible cap, go to the shops, and there he had everything he wished. At last he came to the older fairy.

“Good morning, grandmother. Can’t you tell me how to find my beautiful princess?”

“No, dear! I can’t tell you. But you cross many oceans and many lands until you reach the end of the world. There lives my oldest sister; perhaps she knows about the princess.”



“At last he flew to the end of the world, where there was no hut and no road beyond.” Illustration by Maurice Day, published in *Wonder Tales from Russia* by Jeremiah Curtin (1921), Little, Brown, and Company.

The soldier felt very much discouraged, but he was anxious to find his wife. He went then to look for the oldest fairy. He traveled for a very, very long time over many seas and many lands until he came to the end of the world. A single hut was standing, and beyond it nothing could be seen but thick darkness.

“Well,” thought the soldier sadly, “if I don’t find out anything here, I can fly no further.”

He went into the hut. There he saw an old, old fairy. Her teeth had fallen out, her hair was white like snow. She was half blind and lame.

“Good morning, grandmother! Tell me, please, where to find my princess?”

“Wait awhile,” said the fairy. “I will call all the winds and ask them. They blow all over the world, so they must know where she lives.”

She went out upon the porch and called in a loud voice. Suddenly from all sides raging winds arose and blew, so that the hut trembled. “Be calmer!” cried she, and said, “O you, my raging winds, you blow all over the world; have you seen anywhere the beautiful princess?”

“No, we have not seen her, answered all the winds.”

“Are you all here?”

“All but the South Wind.”

After a short time the South Wind came. The old fairy asked him angrily, “Where were you until now? I have been waiting impatiently for you.”

“Pardon me, grandmother! I went into a new kingdom where a beautiful princess lives. Her husband disappeared no one knows where. Now different kings and princes come to woo her.”

“And how far is it to that kingdom?”

“It will take thirty years to walk thither, ten years to fly upon wings, and if I blow I can carry one over in three

hours.”

Then the soldier with tears in his eyes, begged the South Wind to carry him to his princess.

“Well,” said the South Wind, “I will do it if you will allow me to blow in your kingdom for three days and three nights.”

“You may blow for three weeks if you like.”

“All right. Let me take a rest of three days. I will gather my strength, and then we will go.”

The South Wind rested and then said to the soldier, “Now, my friend, get ready for the journey; but do not be afraid; I will not hurt you!”

Suddenly the strong wind whistled and blew, the soldier was raised in the air, and carried over mountains and seas, right under the clouds, and in just three hours he was in the new kingdom where the beautiful princess lived.

The South Wind said, “Good-bye, young man! I pity you, and do not want to blow in your kingdom.”

The young prince asked, “Why so?”

“Because, if I begin to blow, not one house will be left in the cities, not one tree in the gardens. I will overthrow everything.”

“Good-bye, South Wind! Thank you for your service to me,” said the soldier, put on his invisible cap, and went into the palace.

All the time while he had been away, the trees had been standing with dried and faded tops; now when he appeared again, they revived and began to blossom. He entered the large room. Around the table there were sitting all the many kings and princes that had come to woo the princess, feasting. When one of them put the wine-glass to his lips, the soldier hit upon the glass and broke it. All the guests were surprised, but the beautiful princess guessed the meaning of it immediately.

“My husband must have come back,” thought she. She looked through the window into the garden. There all the trees were alive again, and covered with blossoms. So she gave to her guests a riddle to solve: “I had a wonderful hand-made casket with a golden key to it. I had lost my key and had never expected to find it; and

suddenly the key has found itself. Whoever shall guess the riddle shall be my husband.”

All the kings and princes tried in vain to solve it. Then the princess said, “Come out and show yourself, my beloved!”

The soldier took off his invisible cap, took the white hands of the princess, and kissed her sweet lips.

“Here is the key to my riddle,” said the fair princess. “The casket is myself, and the golden key is my faithful husband.”

All the wooers had to go home with nothing, and the princess and the soldier lived happily ever after.

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