

The Maiden who was Wiser

×than the King

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Serbian

Easy
7 min read

There once lived a poor man in a miserable hovel, who had no one with him save an only daughter. But she was very wise, and went about everywhere seeking alms, and taught her father also to speak in a becoming manner when he begged. It happened once that the poor man came to the king and asked for a gift. The king demanded whence he came, and who had taught him to speak so well. The man said whence he came, and that it was his daughter who had taught him.

“And who taught your daughter?” asked the king.

The poor man answered: “God, and our great poverty.”

Then the king gave him thirty eggs, saying,—

“Take these eggs to your daughter, and tell her to hatch chickens out of them, and I will reward her handsomely; but if she cannot hatch them, it will go ill with you.”

The poor man went crying back, to his hovel, and related what had passed to his daughter. The maiden saw at

once that the eggs had been boiled, but she told her father to go to rest, and assured him that she would see that all went well. The father followed her advice, and went to sleep; the maiden took a pot, filled it with water and beans, and set it on the fire. On the following morning, the beans being quite boiled, she told her father to take a plough and oxen, and to plough along the road where the king would pass.

“And,” she added, “when you see the king, take the beans, sow them, and cry, ‘Hi! go on, oxen mine! Heaven be with me, and make my boiled beans take root and grow!’ And when the king asks you how it is possible for boiled beans to grow, answer him, that it is quite as possible as for boiled eggs to yield chickens.”

The poor man hearkened to his daughter, went away, and began to plough. When he saw the king coming he began to cry,—

“Hi! go on, oxen mine! God help me, and make my boiled beans take root and grow!”

The king, hearing these words, stopped on the road, and said to the poor man,—

“Here, fellow! how is it possible for boiled beans to grow?”

And the poor man answered him,—

“Heaven prosper you, king! just as possible as for boiled eggs to yield chickens.”

The king guessed at once that it was the poor man’s daughter who had taught him this answer. He ordered his servants to seize him and bring him into his presence. Then he gave him a bundle of flax, and said to him,—

“Take this flax and make out of it ropes and sails and all that is wanted on shipboard; if you do not, you shall loose your head.”

The poor man took the bundle in great fear, and went crying home to his daughter, to whom he related all that had passed. But the maiden sent him again to rest with the promise that all should go well. On the following day she took a small piece of wood, awoke her father, and said to him,—

“Take this wood, and carry it to the king; let him cut a spinning-wheel, a spindle, and a loom out of it, and I will do all that he demands of me.”

The poor man again followed the directions of his daughter; he went to the king and delivered the maiden's message. The king was astonished at hearing this, and began to think what he should do next. At last he took up a small cup, and said as he gave it to the father,—

“Take this cup to your daughter, and let her empty the sea with it, so that it shall become like a dry field.”

The poor man obeyed with tears in his eyes, and took the cup to his daughter with the king's message. But the maiden told him he need only leave the matter till the morning, when she would see to it.

In the morning she called her father, and gave him a pound of tow to take to the king, and bade him say:—

“Let the king stop up all the springs and rivermouths of the earth with this tow, and then will I dry up the sea for him.”

And the poor man went and told this to the king.

Now the king saw that this maiden was wiser than he was himself, and he ordered her to be brought before him. And when the father and daughter stood in his presence and bowed before him, he said to the daughter,—

“Tell me, girl, what is it that man hears the farthest?”

And the maiden answered,—

“Great king! that which man hears the farthest is the thunder, and a lie.”

Upon this the king took hold of his beard, and turning to his councillors, demanded of them:

“Tell me what my beard is worth?”

And when one valued it at so much, and another at so much more, the maiden told them outright that they could not guess it. “The king's beard,” she said, “is of as much worth as three rainy days in summer-time.”

The king was astonished, and exclaimed, “The maiden has made the best answer!”

Then he asked her if she would be his wife, nor would he desist from pressing his suit, until she agreed to it. The maiden bent before him and said,—

“Glorious king! let it be as you will; but I beg of you to write on a piece of paper with your own hand, that, should you ever be angry with me, and should drive me forth from your palace, I shall be at liberty to take whatever I love dearest away with me.”

And the king agreed and wrote out the paper.

After some time had passed away, it came, in fact, to pass, that the king became one day so angry with his wife, that he said to her,—

“I will have you no longer for my wife; leave my palace, and go where you will.”

“Illustrious king!” answered the queen, “I will obey you. Permit me, however, to stay here over the night, then in the morning I will go forth.”

The king granted her prayer; and the queen before supper mixed some brandy and some sweet herbs in the king’s wine, and pressed him to partake of it, saying,—

“Drink, oh king, and be merry. To-morrow we part; and believe me, I shall then be happier than when I married you.”

The king drank too much, and when he was fast asleep, the queen had him laid in a wagon ready prepared, and drove with him into a rocky cavern. And when the king awoke in the cavern, and saw where he was, he cried out,—

“Who has brought me here?”

“I have brought you here,” answered the queen.

The king demanded of her:

“Why have you done this? Have I not told you that you are no longer my wife?”

Then said she, as she drew forth a sheet of paper,—

“It is true what you say; but see what you yourself have laid down on this sheet: that when I should leave you, I might take with me, from your palace, that which I loved best.”

When the king heard this, he kissed her, and went back with her to the palace.

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