

The Silent Princess

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Turkish

Intermediate

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There was once a Padishah who had a son, and the little Prince had a golden ball with which he was never tired of playing. One day as he sat in his kiosk, playing as usual with his favourite toy, an old woman came to draw water from the spring which bubbled up in front of the mansion.

The Shahzada, merely for a jest, threw his ball at the old woman's jug and broke it. With out a word she fetched another jug and came again to the spring. For the second time the Prince threw his ball at the jug and broke it. The old woman was now angry, yet, fearing the Padishah, she dared not say a word, but went away and bought a third jug on credit, as she had no money. Returning a third time to the spring, she was in the very act of drawing water when again the young Prince's ball struck her jug and shattered it to pieces. Her anger could no longer be suppressed, and, turning to ward the Shahzada, she cried: "I will say only this, my Prince: may you fall in love with the Silent Princess." With these words she went her way.

The Prince ere long found himself brooding on the old dame's words and wondering what they could mean. The more he dwelt upon them the more they took possession of his mind, until his health began to suffer; he grew thin and pale, he had no appetite, and in a few days he was so ill that he had to remain in bed. The Padishah could not understand his son's malady; physicians and hodjas were summoned, but none could do any good.

One day the Padishah asked his son whether he could throw any light on the strange complaint from which he

was suffering. Then the boy described how three times in succession he had broken an old woman's jug, and related what she had said to him, finally expressing his conviction that neither physicians nor hodjas could effect his cure. He asked his father's permission to set out in quest of the Silent Princess, for he felt that only in this way could he be freed from his affliction. The Padishah saw that the boy would not live long unless his mysterious disease were cured; so, after considerable hesitation, he gave his permission and appointed his lala to accompany the young Prince on his journey.

Toward evening they set out and as they took no care of their appearance, in six months they looked more like wild savages than a noble prince and his lala. They had quite forgotten rest and sleep; the thought of eating and drinking never occurred to them. At last they arrived at the summit of a mountain. Here they noticed that the rocks and earth glistened like the sun. Looking round, they saw that an old man approached them. The travellers inquired the name of that region. The old man informed them that they stood on the mountain of the Silent Princess. The Princess herself wore a sevenfold veil, but that fact notwithstanding, the glitter they observed around them was caused by the extraordinary brilliance of her countenance. The travellers now inquired where the Princess resided. The old man answered that if they proceeded straight on for six months longer they would reach her serai. Hitherto many men had lost their lives in vain attempts to elicit a word from the Princess. This news, however, did not dismay the Prince, who with his lala again set off on the journey.

After long wanderings they found themselves at the summit of another mountain, which they noticed was blood-red on every side. Going forward, they presently entered a village. Here the Prince said to his lala "I am very tired; let us rest a while in this place and at the same time make some inquiries." Accordingly they entered a coffeehouse, and when it became known in the village that travellers from a distant land were in their midst the inhabitants came up one after the other to offer their greetings. The Prince inquired of them why the mountain was blood-red. He was informed that three months' journey distant lived the Silent Princess, whose red lips reflected their hue on the mountain before them; she wore seven veils, spoke not a word, and it was said that many men had sacrificed their lives on her account. On hearing this the youth was impatient to put his fate to the test; he and his lala accordingly set out to continue their journey.

After many days they saw another great mountain in the distance, and concluded it must be the dwelling-place of the object of their quest. In due time they arrived at the foot of the mountain and began the ascent. Above them towered a proud castle, the residence of the Silent Princess; and as they approached near enough to see, they observed that it was built entirely of human skulls, The Prince remarked to his lala, " These are the heads

of those who have perished in the attempt to make the Princess speak. Either we attain our object, or our skulls will be used for a similar purpose.”

Before attempting to enter the castle they took up their lodgings in a han for a few days. All this time they heard nothing but weeping and lamentation: “Oh my brother!” “Oh my son!” Inquiring the cause of the general grief, the travellers were answered: “Why do you ask? It appears you also are come to die. This town belongs to the father of the Silent Princess. Whoever wishes to attempt to make her speak must first go to the Padishah, who, if he permits it, will send an escort with the hero to the Princess.”

When the youth heard this he said to his lala: “We are nearly at the end of our journey. We will rest a few days longer and then see what fate has in store for us,” They continued their sojourn at the hân, and took daily walks about the tscharschi. While thus occupied one day the Prince saw a man with a nightingale in a cage.

The bird caught his fancy so much that he resolved to buy it. The lala remonstrated, reminding the youth that they had a more weighty affair on hand. The Prince, however, refused to listen, and finally purchased the bird for a thousand piasters, took it to his lodging, and hung up the cage in his room. Once when the Prince was alone and wondering by what means he could make the Princess speak, somewhat saddened by the gloomy reflection that failure meant death, he was startled to hear the nightingale thus address him: “Why so gloomy, my prince? What troubles you?” The Prince trembled, not being sure whether it was the bird or a spirit that spoke to him. Growing calmer, he thought that perhaps it was the manifestation of Allah’s grace, and accordingly told the nightingale the story of his love for the Silent Princess, and that he was at his wits’ end to think how he should get into her presence.

The bird replied: “There is nothing to worry about. It is as easy as can be. Go this evening to the serai, and take me with you. The Sultana wears seven veils; no one has ever seen her face, and she sees no one. Put me in my cage under the lamp-stand, and ask the Sultana how she is. She will vouchsafe no answer, however. Then say that as she will not condescend to speak you will converse with the lamp-stand. So begin to speak, and I will reply.”

The Prince followed this counsel and went direct to the Padishah’s palace. When the Shah was informed that the newcomer wished to go to his daughter, he received the Prince and endeavoured to dissuade him from his intention. He represented that thousands already had tried in vain to make the Princess speak. He had vowed, however, to give her in marriage to the one who could succeed in eliciting a word from her; on the other hand,

he who tried and failed forfeited his head. As the Prince might see for himself, his daughter's castle was built entirely of human skulls.

The hardy youth could not be moved from his purpose; he cast himself at the feet of the Padishah and vowed either to accomplish his object or perish in the attempt. Thus there was no more to be said: the Padishah ordered the Prince to be taken into the presence of his daughter.



“I will now address the lamp-stand.” Illustration by Willy Pogany, published in *Fourty-Four Turkish Fairy Tales* by Dr. Ignác Kenos (1913), George C. Harrap and Co, London

It was evening when the youth found himself in the Princess's apartment, He put down his cage under the lamp-stand, bowed himself low before the Princess, inquired after her health, and spoke also on matters of less importance. No answer came. Then said the Prince to the Princess: “It is getting rather late, and you have not yet favoured me with a single word. I will now address the lamp-stand. Even though it has no soul it may have more feeling than you.” At these words he turned to the lamp-stand and asked: “How are you?” And the answer came directly: “Quite well; though it is many years since anyone spoke to me. Allah sent you to me this day, and I feel as glad as if the whole world were mine. May I entertain you with a story?”

The Prince nodding assent, the voice proceeded: “Once there was a Shah who had a daughter, whom three Princes desired to marry. The father said to the wooers: ‘Whichever of you excels the others in enterprise shall have my daughter.’ The young men accordingly set off together, and coming to a spring they resolved to take different directions, in order to avoid any collision with each other's pursuits. They agreed, however, to leave their rings under a stone, at the spring, each to take his own up again when he returned to the spot, thus furnishing an intimation to him who returned last of all that the others had already reached home.

“The first learnt how to go a six months' journey in an hour, the second how to make himself invisible, the third how to bring the dead to life again. All three arrived back simultaneously at the spring. He who could make himself invisible said the Padishah's daughter was very ill and would die in two hours; the other said he would prepare a medicine that would restore her to life again; the third volunteered to deliver the medicine. Quicker than lightning he was at the palace, in the chamber where the Princess lay dead. Hardly had the medicine touched her lips than she sat up as well as ever she had been. Meanwhile both the others came in and the Shah commanded all three to relate their experiences.

The nightingale paused for a few moments and then resumed: “Oh my Shahzada, which of the three Princes thinkest thou best deserved the maiden?” The Prince answered: “In my opinion, he who prepared the medicine.” The nightingale contended for him who acquainted the others of the Princess's condition, and so they hotly disputed the matter. The Silent Princess thought to herself: “They are quite forgetting him who could go a six months' journey in an hour.” As the dispute continued she could endure it no longer, and, lifting her sevenfold veil, she cried: “You fools! I would give the maiden to him who brought the medicine. But for him

she would have remained dead.”

The Padishah was immediately informed that his daughter had at length broken her silence. But the Princess protested that as she had been the victim of a ruse the youth should not be considered to have succeeded in his task until he had induced her to speak three times. Now said the Shah to the Prince: “If you can make her speak twice more she shall belong to you.”

The youth left the monarch’s presence, went to his lodgings, and began to ponder the matter. While deep in thought, the nightingale said: “The Sultana is angry at having broken her silence, and has smashed the lamp stand, so tonight put me on the other stand by the wall.”

Accordingly, when evening was come the Prince repaired with his nightingale to the serai. Entering the Princess’s apartment, he put the birdcage on the stand by the wall, and addressed the Sultana. As she disdained to answer, he turned to the stand and said: “The Princess refuses to speak; therefore I will converse with you. How are you?”

“Quite well, thank you,” came the answer at once. “I am glad the Sultana would not speak, otherwise you would not have spoken to me. As it is, I will tell you a story, if you will listen.” “With great pleasure,” returned the Prince. “Let me hear it.”

So the nightingale commenced: “In a certain town there once lived a woman with whom three men were in love—Baldji-Oglu the Honey. maker’s Son, Jagdji-Oglu the Tallowmaker’s Son, and Tiredji-Oglu the Tanner’s Son. Each used to visit the woman in such wise that neither knew of the others’ visits. While brushing her hair one day, the woman discovered a grey strand, and said to herself, ‘Alas! I am growing old. The time will soon come when my friends will become tired of me. I must make up my mind to get married.’ Next day she invited the three lovers to visit her, at different hours. The first arrival was Jagdji, who found the woman in tears. Asking the cause of her grief, he was answered: ‘My father is dead, and I have buried him in the garden; but his spirit appears to torment me. If you love me wrap yourself in the winding-sheet and go and lie for three hours in the grave; then my father’s spirit will haunt me no more.’ Saying this, the woman led him to the open grave which she had made, and as Jagdji would have drowned himself for her sake he cheerfully donned the winding-sheet and lay down in it.

“In the meantime came Baldji, who inquired of the woman why she wept. She repeated the story of her father’s death and burial, and giving him a large stone, told him to go to the grave, and when the ghost appeared, to hit

him with it. No sooner had Baldji taken his leave and gone to the grave than Tiredji came in. He also sympathised with the woman and inquired what was the trouble. 'How can I help but weep,' said the woman, 'when my father is dead and buried in the garden. One of his enemies is a sorcerer; he is now lying in wait to carry off the body; as you may see he has already opened the grave with that intention. If you can bring me the corpse out of the grave all will be well; if not, I am lost.' The words were scarcely uttered before Tiredji had gone to the grave to take up Jagdji and bring him into her presence. But Baldji, thinking there were two ghosts instead of one, endeavoured to hit both with the stone. Meanwhile, Jagdji, believing the ghost had struck him, sprang out of the grave and dropped the winding-sheet. Then the three men recognised each other and explanations were demanded.

"Now, my Prince," said the nightingale, "which of the three most deserved the woman? I think Tiredji." But the Prince was for Baldji, who had put himself to so much trouble; and so they commenced to argue as before, taking care to avoid mentioning Jagdji. The Princess, who had been listening attentively to the narrative, was disappointed that the deserts of Jagdji were not taken into consideration, and she delivered her opinion with some warmth.

The news that the Silent Princess had again spoken was carried to the Padishah in his palace. Yet once more must she be compelled to speak. As the youth was sitting in his room the nightingale informed him that the Princess was so furious for having been tricked into speaking again that she had broken the wall-stand to pieces. Next evening, therefore, he must put the birdcage behind the door.

The third and final interview found the Princess no more amiable than usual; and as she refused to open her mouth the Prince tried his conversational powers on the door. The door (or rather the bird behind it) related the following story:

There once were a carpenter, a tailor, and a softa travelling together. Coming to a certain town, they hired a common dwelling and opened business. One night when the others were asleep the carpenter got up, drank coffee, lit his chibouque, and formed an image of a charming maiden out of the small pieces of wood lying about the room. Having finished, he lay down again and fell asleep. Shortly afterwards the tailor woke up, and, seeing the image, made suitable clothing for it, put it on, and went to sleep again. About dawn the softa awoke, and, seeing the image of the lovely girl, prayed to Allah to grant it life. The softa's prayer was heard, and the image was transformed into an incomparably beautiful living maiden, who opened her eyes as one waking from a dream. When the others rose all three men set to disputing as to the possession of the lovely creature.

Now to which, in justice, should she belong? In my opinion, to the carpenter.” Thus the nightingale broke off.

The Prince thought the maiden should belong to the tailor, and as on the previous occasions a lively debate ensued. The Princess’s ire was aroused at the softa’s claim being neglected, and she exclaimed: “you fools! the softa should have her. She owed her life to him; she therefore belonged to him and to no one else.”

Hardly had she finished speaking than the news was carried to the Padishah. The Prince had now rightfully won the Princess—silent no longer. The whole town put on a festive appearance and began preparations for the wedding. The Prince, however, wished his marriage to take place in his father’s palace; and great was the rejoicing when he arrived home with his bride. Forty days and forty nights were the festivities kept up; and the old woman whose jugs had been broken was installed in the palace as dady, a post she filled happily to the end of her days.

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