



The Widow's Son

A. G. Seklemian

Armenian

Intermediate

10 min read

Once upon a time there was a King who had a daughter who was quite beautiful. When she was of marriageable age the King sent heralds inviting all the young men of his realm to come to court in order that the Princess might make her selection. On the appointed day all the young men of the country passed before the Princess, who was standing with a golden apple in her hand that she might throw it at the choice of her heart. She threw the apple, and lo! it hit a poor widow's son. It was reported to the King, who was angry, and said:

"It cannot be; we must try it once more."

On the following day the Princess again threw the apple, and once more hit the same poor widow's son. On the third trial the same lad proved to be the maiden's choice. Thereupon the King was very angry, and expelled both the maiden and the lad from the court and the royal city. The lad took the maiden to the house of his mother, a poor old hut near the bridge without the city. The old widow, seeing the maiden, said to her son:

"We had not bread enough to keep us alive, and lo! you have brought a tender maiden. How shall we live now?"

"Be not angry, mamma," said the maiden, humbly, "I know how to spin yarn, and we shall be able to earn our living."

In this manner they lived a few months. Then they decided that the youth should travel and sojourn in other

countries in order to earn money. On the following day they saw a merchant crossing the bridge with eighty camel-loads of merchandise destined for Arabia. The lad offered the merchant his services in the caravan. The merchant accepted, and the lad came home to make ready.

“Before you set out,” said the bride, “go to yonder convent where there is a wise monk and ask him to give you some good advice, which you may need in your travels.”

The lad went, and the old monk gave him the following maxims for his guidance:

First, “She whom one loves the best is the most beautiful;” secondly, “Patience leads to safety;” thirdly, “There is a good in every patient waiting.”

He came back to his bride, who said:

“Commit these wise words to memory; you will no doubt have need of them.”

“Farewell!” said the youth.

“Farewell!” said the young bride.

The lad departed from her. After a long journey the caravan camped in a desert near Arabia. There had camped before them also a large caravan composed of eighty other merchants. The lad was tired and soon fell into a deep sleep. There were many men and animals in the caravan, and all were thirsty. In that desert there was only one well, and that was dangerous; of all who had gone down to draw water, not one had ever come out. In the middle of the night, the lad was wakened by the crying of a herald in the caravan, who announced that each merchant was offering ten pieces of gold to the man who would descend into the well and draw water for men and animals. The lad, coveting the sum, promised to go down. His master pitied him, and tried to prevent him, but it was too late.

“You are going down into that dangerous well of your own free will,” he said; “your blood shall be upon your own head. But if you come out safely, one of my camels shall be yours with the merchandise upon it.”

They let the lad down with a rope. Reaching the bottom, he saw a flowing river of fresh water; he drank and quenched his thirst. Lifting up his eyes, nearby he saw a Giant sitting with a maiden on each side, one colored and the other white.

“Look, human being,” exclaimed the Giant; “I will ask you a question. If you answer it rightly I will let you go; if not, I will kill you with this club, as I have killed so many men before you. Which of these two maidens is the beautiful one, and which the ugly?”

The lad remembered the first maxim of the old monk, and said: “She whom one loves the most is the most beautiful.”

The Giant jumped up, and kissing the lad on the forehead, said: “Well done, youth! you gave me the only right answer; all the rest were wrong.”

He then asked the lad the cause of his descent, and said:

“This well is enchanted; I must therefore give you a safe conduct. Take these three apples, and after drawing water enough, when you go up, drop one of these apples as soon as your feet are lifted from the ground; drop the second one when you reach the middle, and the third apple when you approach the well’s mouth. Thus you will have a safe return.”

And the Giant gave to the lad three pomegranates as a present, one white, one green and one red. The lad put them in his pockets, and after sending a sufficiency of water for the caravan, gave a sign to be drawn up. He threw the three apples just as he was directed by the Giant, and reached the surface safely. The merchants gave him the 800 pieces of gold and his master a camel’s load of merchandise, as previously promised. The lad said to his master that he wanted to send the camel’s load of merchandise and the money to his wife. His master consented, and the lad, putting the three pomegranates in the load, sent it with a driver to his hut near the bridge under the sycamore tree. The merchant promoted the lad, and made him superintendent of the camel drivers. After a time the merchant died, and his wife continued to do the business. She liked the lad and adopted him as her son. Thus he worked with that merchant and his wife for twenty years. One day he was granted permission by his adopted mother to go and visit his family, and he set out on his journey.

Leaving him on his way for a moment, let us turn to his family. A few months after the departure of the youth Heaven blessed his humble home by the birth of a son. When the camel's load of merchandise, money and pomegranates arrived, both the old widow and her young daughter-in-law were greatly pleased. At first sight the Princess knew that the pomegranates were not common fruits, but jewels; but the old widow, who thought they were common pomegranates, prepared to cut them, saying:

“Heaven's blessing rest upon you, my son, that you have remembered your aged mother by sending her fruits to eat!”

The bride snatched them from her hand and kept them in the drawer. Thereupon the old woman was offended, cursed her daughter-in-law and withdrew to the adjoining room. The bride ran to the neighboring shop, and buying three common pomegranates, brought them to her, saying:

“Mamma, be not offended; pardon my harsh conduct. Here are the pomegranates; you may eat them.”

And mother and daughter were reconciled. The Princess then bought new dresses for her mother-in-law, herself, and the baby. She filled her mother-in-law's pocket with gold pieces, and cutting a slice from one of the pomegranates, put it in a costly golden box and gave it to her, saying:

“Now, mamma, go to the King's palace, and giving the gold pieces as a present to the attendants, say you want to see the King, and give him this golden box with the slice of pomegranate in it. When he asks you what you want, say that you have brought it to him as a present, and that you want nothing but a decree sealed with the royal seal, permitting you to do whatever you please without being molested.”

The old woman, making herself as trim as she could, started on the errand and did all that the Princess had bid her. The King, upon seeing the jewels in the shape of a pomegranate slice, at once called the royal jewelers to set a price on them. The jewelers, examining the slice of pomegranate, said:

“No one can set a price on this. Let a lad of fifteen stand and throw a stone with all his might toward the sky; a heap of gold as high as that would hardly equal the value of this wonderful row of precious stones.”

The King thought there was not so much gold in his treasury.

“Do you want the price of this jewel, or have you brought it as a present to the King?” asked the King of the woman.

“I have brought it as a present to your majesty,” answered the woman.

“What favor do you want in recompense?” asked the King.

The old woman answered as she had been advised by her daughter-in-law. The royal decree was immediately signed, sealed, and given to the old woman, who brought it to her daughter-in-law. As soon as the Princess took the royal edict, she sent slices of the three pomegranates to all the seven Kings of the world and received in recompense treasure inestimable. She then built a splendid palace in the place of the poor old hut, and decorated it with silver, gold, and the rest of the jewels, which illumined the palace by night, making it as bright and lustrous as the twinkling morning star. The fame of this palace spread all over the world, and people came to see its splendor. The King also came to see it and admired it, because it contained so many beautiful things which were not to be found in his own palace. He visited all parts of it and sighed deeply from his heart, saying:

“I wish my only daughter was not lost, and that she lived in this magnificent building!”

From behind the curtain his daughter heard him speak, and she also sighed. The Princess' son had by this time grown into a good-looking, intelligent lad, and it was he who made a grand princely reception to the King in the new palace. The King greatly liked the lad and took him into his service. Seeing that he was an uncommon youth, displaying extraordinary ability in everything he handled, the King was so much pleased with him that he advanced him to the position of commander of his forces, without knowing that he was his own grandson.

Now let us return to the father of the commander. He arrived in his country and went directly in search of the bride, with the expectation of finding his lowly hut under the sycamore tree. But to his disappointment and surprise he found in its place a magnificent palace, the most magnificent indeed that he had seen in his travels of twenty years' duration. There was nothing left of the old hut, only the sycamore tree which had grown taller and thicker during the past twenty years. As a stranger he walked into the yard, approached the old sycamore tree, his only acquaintance in the neighborhood, and climbed it. Soon he saw a woman and the commander come to the porch and sit upon the sofa near one another. He knew the woman; she was his wife, the Princess. Twenty years seemed to have made little change in her. But why was she in this splendid palace and not in his

hut? And what was the business of the commander there? Suspicion filled his mind, and he drew his bow and arrow with the intention of killing both of them. Just at that moment he remembered the old monk's second maxim—"Patience leads to safety," and he did not use his arms. Presently he saw the commander and his wife embracing one another. This time his blood ran to his brain and he drew his bow and arrow to shoot; but remembered the old monk's third maxim—"There is good in all patient waiting," and again he did not shoot. He began, however, to listen attentively to their talk, and heard the commander saying:

"Mother, is my father living? Where is he? Last night I dreamed in my dream that he had come home."

Thereupon his mother told him all this story, which she had till then kept secret from him.

"What!" exclaimed the young commander, "you the daughter of the King; I the commander of his army; this palace our home, and my father a wanderer in foreign lands! It is impossible! I will to-morrow take my army and go and find my father."

His father, who was listening to his words from the tree, felt the great tears rolling down his cheeks. After nightfall he came down from the tree, and spent the night in a neighboring inn. The following morning he sent messages to his wife and son, bearing the good tidings of his arrival. Their meeting was a very happy one. The King, hearing of the return of his dear commander's father, hastened to express his congratulations and best wishes. Entering the palace he met, to his great surprise, his daughter, who with her husband and son fell on their knees, begging the blessing of the King. The old King was almost mad with joy, and embraced them all, shedding tears.

"Now I see," he exclaimed, "that it is useless to strive to undo what destiny has decreed. It was destined that you should marry one another, and lo! you prove to be the best match that I could desire."

As the King had no other child except that daughter, upon his death his son-in-law succeeded him upon the throne. Thus they reached the highest glory of this world. May Heaven grant that we may all reach the highest glory of the world to come!

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com