



Bravery And Valour Is Always Rewarded II

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Historical

The Kingdom of Artois spread from Eastern Bavaria to the River Seine in the south. This French Riviera with the most fertile soil would be any Kings ultimate wish for his subjects.

King Jean Marie and his Queen Sofia had two grandsons, the elder Jerome who had a wife Rafael and younger Joel. The old king had acceded his administrative powers to Jerome and made Joel Commander-in-Chief of his armed forces.

Apart from the Royal Family there also lived in the kingdom the family of Peter, the once farmer, his thrifful wife and their two sons, Mark and Stefan.

With the sincere efforts of their wives, Clare and Jane, Mark and Stefan were now in charge of the administration of two of the bigger provinces of Artois.

Mark and Stefan had proved to be able administrators who were able to make the lives of the people of Artois easier.

All this had brought the families of Mark and Stefan closer to the Royal Family bettering the condition of the family of Peter. Prince Jerome and Prince Joel had started confiding in the brothers in a lot of important matters.

A bond had been formed among the two princes, the brothers and their families which only grew stronger with the passage of time.

Years passed on and there was peace and prosperity in the Kingdom of Artois. Everything seemed to be in place but for Queen Sofia there seemed to be something incomplete somewhere. The Queen had been searching for a suitable match for Prince Joel though her efforts had been unsuccessful. She had sent emissaries to Bavaria, England, Spain and the Northern Kingdoms to get details of suitable princesses for the handsome prince. The paintings and details the emissaries brought back could not persuade the young prince to agree for marriage. No princess in the region seemed attractive enough for the young prince.

The Queen was prompt to persuade the King to convene a meeting of the Royal Council. The next day the meeting was convened and apart from the King, the Queen, the elder prince Jerome, prince Joel, the Chief Minister, the Governors and the administrators of the provinces including Mark and Stefan were there.

The King was quick to thank the Almighty for the peace and prosperity in the kingdom. He wished that as Prince Jerome could find a suitable match by the Grace of God, Joel too may find one soon. The King added that the prince could not find any princess in the region attractive enough. Which gave them no other alternative but to try in the distant kingdoms. The Chief Minister, the King's son in law, after showing due respect to the King and the Queen started to speak. He said there was a requirement to purchase superior breed of horses to be used by the armed forces and at other functions. As these could only be bought from kingdoms beyond the Hindu Kush, there was a plan being envisaged for sending someone to Mewar, a wealthy kingdom beyond the Hindu Kush. Secondly the "Swayamwara" – matchmaking of Princess Poonam was also due very soon. The King of Mewar had invited the kings and princes from kingdoms far and near and Artois had also received an invitation for the grand event.

The Queen interrupted and began to speak. She suggested that as Joel was the chief of the armed forces he should be sent to Mewar and as the opportunity was good, he too could participate in the "Swayamwara" in

case he found the princess of Mewar – Poonam, attractive.

The King finally spoke that Prince Joel should be accompanied by his brother Jerome on his trip. As the region beyond the Hindu Kush had been untreaded by two princes; they should be accompanied by the two administrators Mark and Stefan. The Elite Brigade of Artois, a small army of well trained archers and swordsmen would also accompany the foursome. As this was a peaceful mission they should carry a white flag at all times during the journey which would put straight their intentions to one and all.

So it was decided that they would depart for Mewar on the first day of the forthcoming month as it was considered ominous and lucky. There was a prayer service offered by the Bishop of Calais for the success of the trip at the majestic church in the capital.

It was a long journey of several weeks on horsebacks to the Kingdom of Mewar beyond the Hindu Kush mountains of the Himalayas. The team would have to cross several mountain ranges through mountain passes along popular routes, through forests, valleys and plains. Once they crossed the Hindu Kush, the region beyond was full of rivers several times bigger than the beautiful Sonne, the lifeline of Artois. Crossing these was difficult and required tact more than strength. Temporary rope bridges were the only way to cross these.

Prince Jerome, Prince Joel, the brothers Mark and Stefan after prayers set off on the journey with the Elite Brigade. The King, Queen, Princess Rafael, Clare and Jane were there to see them off.

Both princes were trained swordsmen and very good at horse riding. Prince Jerome and Prince Joel commanded the team in turns and as decided they carried a white flag. They travelled by the day and at night took rest at any village that they came across. Most of the villages in the kingdoms neighbouring Artois were very helpful to the team, providing them with food and other day to day essentials. Thus without major obstacles or hindrances the team was able to reach the Hindu Kush ranges. From there they followed a popular route to Mewar. On the way they had to cross several rivers. Prince Jerome, Prince Joel assisted by Mark and Stefan were able to make rope bridges without much difficulty.

After travelling for several months the team reached Mewar just in time for the “Swayamwara” of the Princess of Mewar, Poonam.

Mewar, one of the wealthiest kingdoms beyond the Hindu Kush was ruled by Rajah Bhoj Singh. He had a very

beautiful daughter, Princess Poonam whom he had given lots and lots of love and care...

Princess Poonam though having been pampered a lot by her father, was a very sombre person. Her mother had died very early in her life. Rajah Bhoj Singh's distant cousin, Rajah Roop Singh was the ruler of Jaisalmer, a neighbouring kingdom. Rajah Roop Singh had a daughter, Princess Roopali of the same age as Princess Poonam, and a son Prince Roop Kumar. Both Roopali and Poonam had grown up together. Princess Poonam had a liking for Prince Roop Kumar from childhood.

Mewar was an ally of the mighty moghuls who ruled over the Gangetic Plains. In a tragic and deplorable event some years back the moghul King Barbar Hassan had abducted Princess Roopali from her palace garden in Jaisalmer. This had strained the otherwise friendly relationship of the two cousins – Rajah Bhoj Singh and Rajah Roop Singh. Rajah Bhoj Singh wary of the might of the moghuls was in no mood to estrange ties with Barbar Hassan and did nothing to help Rajah Roop Singh in getting back Princess Roopali safely.

As planned the “Swayamwara” was on. Many kings and princes including Prince Joel had arrived after receiving their set of invitations. Though Prince Roop Kumar, the prince of neighbouring Jaisalmer was not invited.

Prince Roop Kumar loved Princess Poonam and disguised as an Afghan prince arrived for the “Swayamwara”. Princess Poonam recognized her beloved prince. Rajah Bhoj Singh had advised his daughter to select (by putting the Swayamwara garland around the neck of) any king or prince from a neighbouring kingdom rather than a kingdom far away having a culture totally different from that of Mewar.

Prince Roop Kumar befriended the team from Artois and confided in Prince Jerome. Prince Jerome assured of his full support and pledged that he would get Princess Poonam married to the young prince and even get Princess Roopali rescued.

Prince Jerome and Prince Joel conceived a plan. They decided that few men of the Elite Brigade dressed as moghuls would kidnap Princess Poonam and hide her at a safe place. This would make Rajah Bhoj Singh to sever ties with the moghul king and send his army to rescue his daughter. But Prince Jerome would try to persuade the Rajah to allow their Elite Brigade to get the Princess back using tact and cleverness rather than fighting a full fledged war with the moghul state. The two princes and Prince Roop Kumar were confident that

Rajah Bhoj Singh would be willing to use force to get his daughter back and would take help of the team from Artois. They also decide that the situation would be apt for Prince Roop Kumar to disclose his identity.

As planned Princess Poonam was kidnapped. The Rajah was totally broken and as expected was willing to go by the plan of Prince Jerome, of sending the Elite Brigade to get the Princess back. Later when Prince Roop Kumar disclosed his identity and revealed his love for Princess Poonam, the Rajah apologetically agreed to get the two married once Princess Poonam was rescued.

Prince Jerome and Prince Joel decide to secretly attack the palace of the moghul king, Barbar Hassan. Dressed as a dance troupe the Elite Brigade manage to enter the palace. They are able to outsmart the few guards guarding the cell of Princess Roopali. Being early morning hours most in the palace were asleep. The Brigade managed to slip away with Princess Roopali. So that the moghul king would not attack the kingdoms of Mewar and Jaisalmer, the shrewd Prince Jerome managed to keep a corpse of a dead moghul guard dressed like Princess Roopali in the cell where she was held captive and set the cell ablaze.

As the moghul king Barbar Hassan woke up in the morning, the Princess' cell and what it housed had turned to ash. The moghul king had to believe the inevitable.

When the team reached Mewar, Princess Poonam and Prince Roop Kumar were already there to receive them.

Rajah Bhoj Singh and Rajah Roop Singh were back to their friendly ways. They decided to get Princess Poonam and Prince Roop Kumar married. All the kings and princes who had come from far and near were there at the wedding ceremony to bless the couple. Rajah Roop Singh decided to reward Prince Jerome with ten horses of the most superior and rarest breed and formally invited Prince Joel to Princess Roopali's "Swayamwara" scheduled for the forthcoming year.

So the Elite Brigade safely returned to Artois to a grand welcome. The entire kingdom was yearning to get a glimpse of their new heroes. The King, Queen, Princess Rafael and the family of Peter were there along with hoards of people shouting slogans of "Long Live Artois" and "Long Live the King and Queen

To be continued.....

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