



The King's Gathering

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Historical, Magic

The year was 315! The enormous wooden door, with fruits and animal heads carved on it, drew the eyes of the crowd, waiting to rush inside. The gate opened, and men and women hurried to sit inside the beautiful theatre – the pride of the great architect Nalbantian.

The theatre was one large hexagon, built with different in form stones, called tuffs, in their natural colour, flowing from pale yellow to dust of roses.

The light was entering from the six massive windows, which welcomed the sun with hospitality. There were beautifully crafted metal candlesticks hooked on the walls, and in the middle, there were benches, arranged in the form of an ellipse, like in an Amphitheatre. The benches were made from a solid wood material with different ornaments.

A middle-aged man stepped into the centre of the Amphitheatres, glanced at the audience and raised his hand to salute with the words:

– Welcome, dear people. On this day our great leader, the King of the Ararat Kingdom, send me here to tell you his covenants and requests.

A loud greeting was heard, smiles lit the faces of the subjects of the Kingdom.

– I stand before you and feel how strong and united you are – the speaker stopped, stepped forward with the words – Our King tells you:

“Your words are the laws of the Kingdom.”

“Your faith – the strength and eternity of the Kingdom.”

“Your skills are the future of the Kingdom.”

The wild shouting of joy and applause carried away, and the echo did not stop!

The orator waited patiently, and trusting his instinct, repeating the three great messages of the King, but this time he continued with an exalted voice:

– Let the Kingdom live with its talented and brave people. There will be a meeting coming up between kings, khans from the Caucasus and the Balkan regions, a meeting dedicated to peace.

The people clapped fiercely and shouted:

– We want peace with the Assyrians, with the Persians, with the people from the Caucasus, past the Caucasus, from the Balkans.

– We want to trade beyond Ararat’ – shouted a young woman.

The orator curiously looked around, trying to find the brave subject of the Ararat Kingdom, but she had already stood up:

– Here, look, I made this Kachkar cross from wood and stones from Lake Van, and I embroidered this handkerchief with the image of the sacred Mount Ararat – continued the young Zabel.

People rose up, and everyone wanted to look. Voices of admiration, approval:

– It is wonderful!

Then the orator approached her, looking curiously at her beautiful face:

– This is commendable; you are brave and skilful. Let me take these souvenirs to the King with your message “for trade beyond Ararat.”

Zabel’s delicate face blushed, her eyes got even darker. Under the beautiful headscarf, two chestnut braids came forward.

The orator raised his hand as a sign of approval, asking for silence.

– Dear people, here in this cloister will be convened the World Gathering Council.

– World Gathering Council – was heard from the crowd.

A man with enigmatic age stood up. His white hairs were as white as his shirt.

– Yes, say what you have to say, come here- the orator turned around to the old man.

The old man stepped down the stairs energetically with a light step and went to the orator, smiling and looking at the seated people.

– I live in this land before our people to be baptized before these doors were carved so beautifully before the building of this cloister. I remember times of trekking, of starvation, of wars, victories, and greatness.

It was quiet; everyone was staring at the old man. Some stood up, some nodded, straining to hear the soft voice of the white-haired man.

– I remember the birth of our great King and even the birth of his father. I remember the foreign rulers, their conquests, robberies, treachery- the old man continued, his voice was trembling – After each battle, I walked a long way, climbed to the top of Ararat. I breathed the crystal-clear air, pure, calm. I gulped of courage, of love, of the hope that the fighting would end, that the weeping of women and children would stop. I felt nature as our Lord; I wanted her to reign the peace of mankind. But she also wept with us, with our hearts. The mountain was angry; snow avalanches were dragging in. Then I hid in a cave.

Zabel was looking at the old man, and secretly she wiped her tears.

The old man stopped as if he was swallowing a big bite...

– Continue, continue – the crowd shouted.

– I lit a fire in the cave; it was my second home. I often went there and left my special “helpers” in case the snow had accumulated.

The audience held her breath. The old man continued with a playful look this time.

– I had made thick wooden sticks, like canes, the ends of which I had carved in the form of a bird’s foot, a rapacious bird, flying only in our holy mountain. I had watched her landing in the snow, and the power of nature awakened my mind. This bird is active, and in the shape of its legs, my canes can flounder in the snow. My message lies in one word- the old man said and stopped.

Then the brave Zabel guessed the message, which it was the magic and power of Ararat. Zabel stood up and said:

– Ararat, Ararat-and then the crowd took over:

– Ararat! Ararat!

The echo seemed to carry the sacred name infinitely.

– Dear people, peace lovers, all your desires, words, objects, souvenirs I will bring to the King. Until the convening of the World Gathering, there are 12 sunrises and 12 sunsets. Let’s honour the high guests, with a lively market, with dishes, with music – the orator said at one breath.

There was full activity; people were discussing the upcoming Great meeting. They came out of the great cloister.

The doors closed, the local blacksmith locked up with a large padlock and handed the key to the orator with the

words:

– Give this key to the Great King of the Ararat Kingdom. This key keeps all the words spoken here today in this cloister.

The speaker took the key and set off.

Eleven sunrises and eleven sunsets changed.

Crafty carpenters were making wooden wine vessels, wooden dolls, craftsmen were selling adornments, colourful rugs, fabrics, and were shouting in the market. Inheriting the mastery of their predecessors from the Kingdom of Urartu, the locals produced copper objects combined with timber and precious stones from Lake Van.

A young man appeared in the marketplace in apparel strangely for the subjects of the city of Van, the capital of the Ararat Kingdom. The stranger looked with curiosity, stopped and bought various items from different stalls. He moved away and nodded to the sellers with gratitude.

Walking with a bundle on his shoulder and looking around the stone buildings, the stranger's gaze stopped on a beautifully crafted Kachkar. He reached for the wall made from tuffs, on which the cross had been carved, he touched it with his hand, his fingers were dangling as if they felt lace.

The stranger walked away with a sense of admiration, and the joy in his soul doubled, and his steps accelerated.

The sun went down – Sunset!

On the next day, the sun rose slowly, until it reached the highest peak of Mount Ararat. This was the twelfth sunrise from the day, in which the orator had announced the start of the World Gathering. The roads were loud, lively. People ran from different directions in front of the large gates of the hexagonal stone cloister. The friends, Rose and Thelma followed the revival and were glad that they could see the Great King of the Ararat Kingdom and the guests from the Kingdoms of Caucasus, past the Caucasus, and the Balkans.

The girls skilfully made their way and managed to get to the big doors.

– Rose, I have my wooden doll with the moon stone-necklace – said Thelma, pulling a small wooden doll out of her embroidered cloak.

Rose looked at her friend's doll and said:

– How beautiful she is, her legs move, her hands are so exquisite, and her necklace is like that of the Queen-mother of Persia!

– But how do you know what is the necklace of the Queen-mother of Persia? – asked Thelma; with a surprise.

– I love listening to the tales of my grandpa Vosken. He has seen the Queen of Persia, who received a Moonstone gift from the King of the Ararat Kingdom. The Queen of Persia wrote a poem about ‘the Moonstone of Lake Van’ as a sign of gratitude – Rose replied.

– And do you know the poem of the Persian Queen, please, please, Roe, tell me... – Thelma asked her friend.

– I do not know it, but today we can find out if we are allowed to enter the King’s Gathering – I will ask the King of Persia – Rose proudly said.

A hand touched Rose’s shoulder, and the little beauty jumped with joy:

– Grandpa, Grandpa, I knew you’d come. Thelma and I have a critical mission – said the ten-year-old granddaughter of Vosken seriously. – We need to ask the King of Persia if he knows the poem of his mother – the Queen-mother, the poem of ‘the Moonstone of Lake Van.

The old man could not hide his excitement from the request of his granddaughter, from the brave little girls.

The gates were unlocked, and a loud creak was heard, the ground shook, under their weight. But the noise was dispersed when the soft music of duduk spread, the air shuddered as if a hundred birds sang the songs of a hundred people (nations), different, sad, cheerful and intoxicating.

The guests arrived, dressed in beautiful robes from silk, velvet, with jewels of gold, stones of different colours.

The orator entered the last, and the gates were closed!

Thelma and Rose were almost squashed from the crowd at one of the ends of the theatre path, and grandpa Vosken was looking at how to get the girls out of this lively place, when he glimpsed Zabel, trying to sneak in.

– Zabel, Zabel, here – the old man was waving.

The girls turned around, to see who was grandpa Vosken calling and in front of them they saw a slender young woman.

– Hello – said Zabel – we can’t enter, I just wanted to peer.

– Yes – said grandpa Vosken, but one more sunset and one more sunrise of the sun and we will hear the decision of the King, of the khans. – This is my granddaughter Rose and her friend Thelma. They are here on a mission-said the old man jokingly.

– Hello, I am Zabel, and you have managed to win me over, as you’re on a mission – and a smile brightened the face of the elegant Zabel.

– We want to learn the poem of the Queen-mother of Persia called ‘The Moonstone of Lake Van’ – Rose said and got her friend Thelma’s hand.

Zabel was about to say something when a squeaky boy's voice interrupted them:

– And I want to learn about the poem of the Queen-mother of Persia – said the curly-haired Karen, dressed in white with stains of pomegranate on his shirt.

– Karen, what are you doing here? You had to be on the market and help dad – Zabel said.

Thelma and Rose looked at each other and grinned slightly.

– Children – said grandpa Vosken – we can look around the mountain and the lake. We will come back for the answers of the high-ranking guests, and probably for yours too girls- said grandpa Vosken to the little friends.

Grandpa Vosken was making his way, followed by Zabel, Rose, Thelma, and finally the little Karen, who was carrying a pomegranate, and he was picking seed by seed, and his hands were all in red-cyclamen colour.

Looking around the high cloister and the crowd in front of her, the stranger in white, who was walking for days, noticed Grandpa Vosken and the children who followed him, and his gaze stopped on the slender Zabel.

He approached them and asked:

– Do you know when the Great Gathering will end, the King's Gathering? – And he stared at the old man.

Grandpa Vosken looked at the stranger, who spoke the language of the Ararat kingdom correctly, and asked:

– Boy, what is your name and where you come from?

– My name is Ara, and I'm from the neighbouring Persia. I, like you, want to know what will be decided at the King's Gathering.

– Then join us, we will look around Ararat and Lake Van, and we will return here again before the opening of the huge gates of this theatre, which gathered the kings of our neighbours.

They walked for a long time until they reached the foot of the magnificent mountain. Tired, they sat down at the rocky heights and enjoyed the song of the birds, the trembling of the little flowers, scattered indiscriminately, on slender pine trees, and breathed in the crystal air of Ararat. Ara was the only one standing up, and he wanted to swallow up the whole mountain with his eyes. His eyes grew brighter, and their dark grey colour was like a dark cloud, but his smooth face with matte skin collected the sun's rays and gave a sense of nobility and tranquillity. His sophisticated features did not escape from the eyes of the wise Grandpa Vosken. The group continued to climb the weedy hill. They climbed the height and very quickly went down the steep side, following grandpa Vosken, who did not let anyone in front of him with his lively nature.

Rose slipped away and Thelma, in her desire to keep her up, fell with her friend.

The two girls stopped in front of the entrance of the cave. Soon, the others joined them. Grandpa Vosken set

fire on a wood stick, and everyone followed him.

For a moment the cave was lit. Thelma pulled out her small wooden doll from under her cloak, where she kept it when Karen looked at it and pulled it with his full power from Thelma's hands. Everyone was confused. Rose was trying to pull the doll from Karen, Thelma was talking and crying at the same time, but Zabel caught her brother's ear and calmly said to him:

– Give the doll back to the girls, you impish boy.

– But I, I carved this doll it from wood, and I assembled the hands and feet, and dad added the Moonstone and the dress – Karen was explaining.

Zabel wanted to answer, but she instead felt shameful, when grandpa Vosken intervened:

– It is commendable that you are so talented, hard-working and skilled in carving at this age. You will help me make wonders from wooden sticks. Return the doll to the girls.

At that moment, Zabel noticed the “helpers” – canes on the ground. She bent down and picked up one of them. The end of the cane was indeed with a bird's foot. Karen put the doll in front of the girls' feet, making it sit and playfully apologized to them:

– The doll had to take a little rest ... I would not take it away ... grandpa Vosken, this is a miracle what you've done with these canes, does your walking stick step like a bird?

– Yes, child, when the next snow falls, we'll get through it with these canes-replied joyfully the old man.

– But I can make a huge bird of pine tree and wings from the leaves of the tree, and we can fly, instead of walking in the snow-said the little-shrewd boy.

Ara felt that this little boy was not only naughty but smart, brave and very charming, and he told him, though briefly following what had happened:

– Karen, I would fly with your wooden bird to look at this beautiful mountain.

Karen looked at him with a joyous glance, and he quickly responded to Ara, as if he was seeing him as a defender.

– Yes, children, there will be birds, we will use to fly with- answered grandpa Vosken wisely – and such gifted and smart men Karen as you will build them, but I will need to live a very, very long life to see this happen and get on such winged bird.

The old man prepared a tea of shrubs picked up in the mountains. The cave was like his home; he had decorated it with colourful rugs, a teapot, and candlesticks.

– I know, you are surprised how a cave can be cosy. For years I carried something here so that I could spend more time here. I turned it into a home where you are the first guests!

They tried the miraculous mountain tea, and Karen continued to tease Thelma and Rose, who quickly hid the doll out of his sight, and Ara continued to think of the Moonstone hanging on the beautifully carved wooden doll.

They rested in the cave, and then they left and walked toward the lake. They walked on rocky surfaces, followed by grassy, weedy hills when Zabel stopped suddenly and looked around -the lake was at their feet.

– Turquoise waters in the embrace of the mountain- said Ara and then he glanced at Zabel.

Rose, Thelma, and Karen approached them, and to great surprise to everyone, Karen again did not resist the temptation and grabbed the doll from Thelma's hands. They started to quarrel, and while Grandpa Vosken intervene, they saw the wooden doll fly towards the turquoise lake.

Rose squeezed Thelma's hand and stretched out her other hand into the air, but it was too late. Everyone watched as the doll approached the lake and waited for the most painful moment- its fall into the water and sinking.

Karen looked guiltily and did not know what to say, standing aside, his eyes staring down at the doll, his heart beating loudly.

– What have I done? In my desire to keep the doll for a while with me, I became the reason to lose her at the bottom of Lake Van – the little boy said desperately.

– The people of Van are proud, open, hard-working, but also a very friendly – the voice of the white-haired old man was heard – this lake was called by the Mesopotamians “River of Nairi.” In this lake has sunk the great fortress of the time of the Kingdom of Urartu.

Everyone was listening as if they were under a spell, how quickly Grandpa Vosken drew the sadness from the faces of the girls and the curly haired man.

– The great River Tiger inflows in Lake Van, and this lake has secrets. Your wooden doll will become a princess in the turquoise lake – grandpa Vosken said to calm them.

Ara smiled and stared at the lake as if he was trying to read something. He took a breath and proclaimed:

The Moon has sent its glance to the Lake Van

And there she has left a part of her charm!

The Lake in a sign of gratitude

Gave her back with lunar Pledge.

And this pledge was the Moonstone

That carries all the magic of Mount Ararat

That shines in Pearl-white for peace and grace,

for love, for wisdom, for delight.

– This is the poem of the Queen-mother of Persia of ‘the Moonstone of Lake Van,’ is not it?’ – realized Rose and hugged her friend Thelma.

Thelma was repeating:

– The Moon has sent its glance to the Lake Van

– Son, you have to be from the king’s family line of Persia – excitedly said grandpa Vosken.

-Yes, grandpa Vosken, I am the grandson of the Persian Queen-mother. When I was young, she was telling me about Old Persia, about wealth, about ancient culture, but something that had captured her heart was the purity and magnanimity of the King of Van. For her, the Moonstone was more than an ordinary stone – she was born here, near Lake Van. She told me about the lake and trusted me, believing, that I would inherit the kingdom of Persia and make peace between the two nations -the Ararat and the Persian. That is why I am here today with you to get to know the people of your kingdom, and my father, the Great King of Persia, is in the great monastery of the King’s Gathering.

The meeting at the King’s Gathering continued for a long time. There were arguments, laughter, but no one could look through the thick walls of the hexagonal cloister. People outside had gone away. Only grooms and expensive saddled horses oversaw the beautiful night.

It was late evening, and just as they brought the rich supper to the high guests who kept chatting lively, the Orator asked for silence:

– Dear guests, please let the King of the Ararat Kingdom relay to you the words of his people – and then the orator gave the key for the gates in the hands of the King:

– Dear guests:

“The words of my subjects are the laws of the Kingdom.”

“The faith of my subjects is the power and eternity of the Kingdom.”

“The skills of my subjects are the future of the Kingdom.”

The guests were trying the delicious, sweet red wine from pomegranate and were waiting for what would

follow next.

The King of the Ararat Kingdom held the key up in front of the eyes of Kings and Khans and turned it three times in the air. The guests stayed quiet and were confused until voices were heard:

– We want peace with the Assyrians, the Persians, the people of the Caucasus, past the Caucasus, and the Balkans. We want trade beyond Ararat- an appealing female voice was heard. Then followed the fragile voice of the wise man, an old man with the story of Ararat, echoing the name of the mountain.

The guests turned their heads around, trying to look from where these voices came from.

Then the king returned the key, again, to the orator.

They continued to feast with the wine of peace.

In this way, the king of the Ararat Kingdom kept the peace for another few decades.

Zabel followed Prince Ara in the Kingdom of Persia, where she was welcomed as the Princess of peace from the kingdom of the moonstone.

Karen remained a faithful friend to Rose and Thelma, and grandpa Vosken forever remained in the cave of the holy Mount Ararat.

Happy end!

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