

The princess and her stones

Far, far away in a little but beautiful kingdom there lived a young princess. She was well known for her beauty. Her hair was like gold and her skin like the finest silk. On one day seven noble princes gathered at the gate of the royal castle to win the princess her heart. Because the princess didn't know those princes personally, she invited them to stay at the royal castle for a while in the hope she would get to know them a bit better. After a month spending time with all the seven princes, she agreed they were all fine and noble man, but she still couldn't decide who was to be her husband. She did not only feared they wanted her as their wife only because of her incomparable beauty, but she also feared that even the most kindest of heart would not become the wise and beloved king she had in mind for ruling her family's kingdom at her side as her husband.

But the young princess had a plan and sent the seven princes on a quest. She gave them the task to go on a journey on foot to buy her something very special, all by themselves without the guards and servants they were used to. She promised them that the one who would impress her the most would become her husband. But before the princess had let the princes go on their journey, she gave them each a stone so heavy that a man needs both his hands to carry it with him, and so ugly that no man would do such a thing voluntarily. But the princess told them these seven stones were her most precious possession, so the princes didn't dare to refuse her gift and left as soon as they could.

After one month the first prince returned from his journey. The first thing he did, was visiting the princess and offering her his present. "My shrewd princess" he said. "I understand you want us to fight for you, to know which prince is worth your love. But you tricked us all by giving us each such a heavy worthless stone! Clearly, you don't want to have a fool as your husband. That's why I've never carried this stone with me on my journey. No, I'm not a fool. Instead I'll give you the most venomous snake in the world. Only such a slippery animal could represent a cunning princess like yourself. And I am the clever prince you are looking for, take me as your husband." The princess, though, remained silent.

After two months the second prince came back to the castle. The first thing he did, was visiting the princess and offering her his present. "My fearless princess" he said. "I offer you the most strong and fierce stallion you ever saw. Every other animal would negatively affect your bravery and beauty, but this horse will do justice to your astonishing appearance." The princess looked at the beautiful white horse, and then upon the prince:

“Where is the stone I had given you?” she asked. The prince looked surprised, and answered he had to make a choice: the horse or the stone. “I assure you, my princess, the horse is of more value than the stone. With me you will not only be beautiful but also strong and powerful. Take me as your husband!” The princess, though, remained silent.

After three months the third prince arrived at the royal castle. The first thing he did, was visiting the princess and offering her his present. “My trustful princess” he said. “I am very sorry, but I think someone has tricked you. After I crashed the stone, there was nothing inside of it: no colour, no crystal, it was worthless. Here, you can see it by yourself.” And he laid down the pieces of the broken stone in front of the princess. “I am not a man who likes to disappoint you of course, and that’s why I’ve bought you the beauty the stone wasn’t to give you.” And he showed her a necklace of pure gold with shining rubies. “Take me as your husband, and you will shine forever”. The princess, though, remained silent.

After four months the fourth prince made his return. The first thing he did was visiting the princess and offering her his present. “My beloved princess” he said. “I’ve gone to one of the farthest places you could imagine to buy you the most unique dress ever made”. A dress as blue as the sea glittered in the hands of the prince. “Where is the stone I’d given you?” the princess asked. The prince looked puzzled: “At the moment the stone is in my chamber my princess, but if I may ask, what makes the stone so special to you?” The prince blushed and he added: “Oh my princess, don’t get me wrong, I’ve carried it with me all along the dangerous roads and back. And I would do it again if you take me as your husband!” The princess remained silent though.

After fifth months the fifth prince entered the courtyard of the castle. The first thing he did, was visiting the princess and offering her his present. “My wonderful princess,” he said. “When you gave me one of your amazing stones, I knew I had to give you a stone even more precious and beautiful than the seven you already had. It was difficult to find such a stone, and it was even more difficult to own one, but I’ve spent all my money to buy you such a rare present.” On the floor two stones laid next to each other, one even more uglier and heavier than the other. “You should know my princess, that if we were married, I would always give you the best. Therefore I am asking you, take me as your beloved husband!” The princess remained silent though.

After sixth months the sixth prince arrived. The first thing he did, was visiting the princess and offering her his present. “My tender princess” he said. “From the first moment I looked at the stone you had given me, I’ve known why you did so. Such a stone

is maybe ugly at the outside, but it has its own history, its own life and if I am not mistaken my princess, you've always appreciated even the smallest things of nature. Your stone inspired me in finding the present I've brought with me." The prince laid down the heavy stone he was still holding, put his hand in his pockets, and pulled out a small sparkling golden leaf. "Hereby I give you the most unique leaf from the yellow tree of the forbidden forest. The leaf is small and fragile, but I think only you can give him the admiration it deserves. And I admire you, my princess, so please! Take me as your husband!" The princess remained silent though.

After seven months the last prince entered the royal castle. The first thing he did was visiting the princess and offering her his present. "My dearest princess," he said. "For seven months I've carried the stone you had given me, and every night I placed it right in front of me in the hope I would discover the secret that makes this stone so special to you. But I am afraid I have to disappoint you: the stone didn't reveal his secrets to me. I have no idea why it means so much to you, but since it does I've bought a holder for it." The princess looked at a beautiful white golden holder, specially fitted for the stone. "I hope this holder will be well-suited for your precious stone. I can only promise you that if you'll have me as your husband, I will do my best to suit you as well my princess." Now, the princess didn't remain silent, but summoned the other princes to join the last arrived prince in the royal chamber.

There was a tangible tension in the castle; which prince would the princess choose to marry? Some of the servants thought the princess would accept the white stallion, because she loved horse riding, and so would marry the second prince. Others thought she would choose the prince who gave her the necklace with the rubies or the dress so blue as the sea.

When all princes had arrived in the royal chamber she directed her word to the first prince. "I appreciate your gift my prince and I'd like to thank you for your compliment," she said. "But you were wrong to think I tried to trick you. I never did. The stone was dear to me. By not appreciating my gift, you are unable to appreciate me the way I am. Therefore, you will not become my husband."

Then the princess directed her word to the second prince. "I appreciate your gift my prince and I'd like to thank you for your compliments," she said. "But you were mistaken to think that the horse was of more value than the stone. I like the horse, but I had rather seen my stone. By not recognizing the stone's value, you will not be able to know what I'm worth. Therefore, you will not become my husband."

Then the princess directed her word to the third prince. “I appreciate your gift my prince and I’d like to thank you for the necklace”, she said. “But by breaking the stone, my prince, it lost his value. It makes me feel sad. By underestimating the splendour of the stone, you were underestimating my discernment. Therefore, you will not become my husband.”

Then the princess directed her word to the fourth prince. “I appreciate your gift my prince and I feel honoured knowing you carried my stone all along your journey”, she said. “But because you considered my gift as a burden, you would only be able to see me as a burden if I were your wife. Therefore, you will not become my husband.”

Then the princess directed her word to the fifth prince. “I appreciate your gift my prince and I’d like to thank you for your pledge”, she said. “But there is no other stone that carries the worth of the stone I’ve given you. You cannot mislead me my prince. The stone I had given you I got for free, I can’t imagine you had to pay for a stone far less worth than mine was. By not taking the stone seriously, you are not taking me seriously. Therefore, you will not become my husband.”

Then the princess directed her word to the sixth prince. “I appreciate your gift my prince and I admire your refinement”, she said. “But you were too quick in assuming that it is the stones history, its life, or its nature, that I admire. By not taking a humble attitude, you won’t be able to know what you do not know. Therefore, you will not become my husband.”

Then the princess directed her word to the seventh prince. “I appreciate your gift my prince and I’d like to thank you for your interest in the stone I’d given you”, she said. “To answer your question what makes this stone so precious to me, I can answer you straightforward: you are its worth! It is your faith in me what makes this stone so precious; it is your open mindedness what gives this stone its beauty. By showing your interest in the stone, you showed your interest in me. All the other six stones became trash, but this stone deserves the beautiful holder you bought for it. And you, my prince, deserve my love. If you still want me as your wife, you may become my husband and king of my father’s realm.” After the princess had announced her choice, the princess and the seventh prince married as soon as possible. They lived happily ever after.

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