



The Blue Rose

(A story from Algeria)

There was once a king who had only one child, a daughter called Aicha. The king was old and sick, and never got out of bed. He felt so ill that he was afraid he might die before his daughter got married, and he wanted to be sure that the man she married would be a good husband. So, he decided he would try to bring about a marriage by offering the kingship to the man his daughter considered the most worthy. He instructed his chief servant to make an announcement in the village that anyone who wanted to marry his daughter should come to the palace, and the servant went to the village and made this announcement.


The next day seven candidates appeared at the palace. Six of them were the richest men of the village, while the seventh was very poor, in fact, the poorest man in the whole village. All seven presented themselves to the old king, and he called to his daughter to come and choose one of them, whichever one she wanted to be her husband. Aicha considered them, one by one, noticing the rich clothes of the first six and the ragged clothes of the poor man.


Then she told them what they must do to win her hand in marriage. 'I will give you three tests,' she said. 'The man who passes all three will be the man I marry.'

Firstly, he must be the best horseman.'

So, from the king's stables, each of the suitors was given a fine horse. Then they had to compete in a fast and dangerous race. At the finishing line, three of them, the poor man and two of the rich men, crossed neck and neck. The other four were eliminated.

To the remaining three, Aicha said, 'the one I will marry will be the one who catches the biggest fish. This is the second test.'





So, the three candidates went to the river and began to fish. All three were skilful fishermen and soon reeled in a fish and laid it on the riverbank. One of the rich men had caught only a medium-sized fish. Princess Aicha told him that he could go home. But the other rich man and the poor man had caught very large fish. In fact, when they measured them, they found they were exactly the same size.


‘To decide between you, I have one last test,’ said Aicha. ‘Now you must travel far away until you reach the mountain called Bouzegza. You must then climb to the top and there find one flower: the blue rose. This you must pluck and bring to me immediately.’


Though both men were taken aback by this new request, they prepared themselves for their quest. The rich man had several advantages. He had a fine horse, food of all kinds, weapons, such as a bow and arrows, and everything else that might be needed for a long journey. The poor man had to travel on foot and all he had was a little bread and a gourd of water.

Naturally, the rich man was first to reach the forest. After he had travelled for miles along a little path overgrown with trees, he came to a clearing and there sitting on a stone, weeping, was a poor, old man. ‘Please give me something to eat,’ he cried, ‘I am very hungry.’

But although the rich man had plenty of everything, he refused to give the old man any food, saying, ‘I need everything I have to last me on my long journey.’

So, he rode on deeper into the forest. Suddenly he heard a very loud and strange cry, and there in his path stood a very angry, dangerous looking black panther. Immediately, the rich man drew his bow and shot two arrows in quick succession. The first arrow hit the panther in the right eye, the second in the left eye. The creature howled in pain and ran off into the forest.





Then he continued on his way and after a while he saw in the distance the mountain, Bouzegza. It was still a long way off, and to reach it he had to cross a wide river. So he tethered his horse and began to swim across. When he reached the middle, suddenly there appeared a gigantic, three-headed snake swimming towards him. Before it could attack, the rich man whipped out three knives and threw one at each of the three heads of the snake. Each knife hit its target, and the snake writhed in pain and swam away.


Finally, he reached the foothills of Bouzegza. Now he had to tackle the steep sides to reach the summit. He climbed and climbed, and eventually found himself on a plateau. In the middle, on a small peak completely surrounded by giant plants, was the blue rose. Eager to claim his prize, the rich man hurried across the plateau. Unfortunately, he didn't know that the giant plants that surrounded the blue rose were carnivorous. When he was just about to reach his goal, one of them opened its huge mouth and swallowed him.


Some way behind him the poor man entered the forest and after a while he too met the old man, sitting on the stone, weeping. 'Why are you crying?' asked the poor man. 'Can I help you?'

'I am very hungry,' replied the old man.

Though he had barely enough food for the journey, the poor man gave him some of his bread. Then the old man said: 'I am very cold.' And, before he continued on his way, the poor man gave him his coat.

After a long time on the path through the forest, the poor man heard the sound of an animal crying in pain. Following the sound into the bushes, he came upon the black panther whose eyes had been pierced by the rich man's arrows. It begged him to help it and without hesitation the poor man pulled out the arrows, and the panther groaned with relief.






The poor man journeyed on and now, in the distance, he could see Bouzegza, the mountain where the blue rose grew. Soon he reached the river he had to cross. Before he had swum halfway, he heard a strange cry. It was the three-headed snake, suffering from the pain inflicted by the knives of the rich man. It asked for his help, so the poor man pulled out the three knives, and the snake was well again.


So, the poor man arrived at the foot of Bouzegza. As he was preparing to climb the steep mountainside, he was met once again by the old from the forest. But now he was dressed in beautiful clothes. 'You gave me bread when I was hungry,' he said. 'You gave me a coat when I was cold. You relieved the black panther and the snake of their pain. Now I will help you to gain the blue rose.'

He told the poor man that he would find the rose surrounded by man-eating plants. In order to prevent the plants from eating him, he had to say the magic word, *Chamron*.

So the poor man climbed the mountain up to the plateau, and saw the blue rose surrounded by the giant, man-eating plants. When he said the magic word, *Chamron*, as the old man had told him, all the plants withered and fell to the ground. Then he was able to walk to the peak and pluck the blue rose.

When he returned to the palace, he presented it to Aicha, who was overjoyed. Immediately, she ran to the bedside of her dying father and held the flower under his nose. Within a few seconds of smelling the perfume of the blue rose, the king began to feel better. In a little while, he rose from his bed, in good health again.





Aicha had known that the blue rose was a healing plant and that it would cure her father. She knew it would take a good man to return with it from Bouzegza. That was why she devised the dangerous quest as one of the tests for the marriage candidates

The poor man and the princess were married, and they had a celebration that lasted for seven days.

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