

Story 1785 (1994 Tape 5)

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The Cradle with a Pearl in It

Once there was and once there was not a land where there was a padishah with three daughters. When the padishah was about to depart on a visit to another country, he said to his daughters, "What do you want me to bring for you from the place where I am going? I shall bring back whatever you request."

The oldest daughter asked for a beautiful dress. The middle daughter asked for a beautiful pair of shoes. youngest and wisest daughter asked for a cradle with a pearl in it--something which she had seen in a dream.

On his journey the padishah fulfilled the requests of his two older daughters, but he could not find anywhere the cradle with a pearl in it requested by his youngest daughter. In place of the cradle he brought her an attractive mirror.

Although her two older sisters were very pleased with their gifts, the youngest sister went to her room

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and wept. She was bitterly disappointed that her father had not brought her what she had requested. She picked up the mirror and threw it on the floor, but suddenly a very handsome young man came out of that mirror. She was at first startled and surprised at that. The young man said to her, "Whenever you throw down the mirror and say, 'Cradle with a pearl,' I shall come to you."

During the days that passed after that, whenever the girl was bored, she would throw down the mirror, say "Cradle with a pearl," and then await the arrival of the young man. As a result of this, a great love affair developed between the two

The two older sisters were suspicious about the behavior of their younger sister. She never talked with anyone. She never left her room. She was, however, becoming more and more beautiful all the time, and she seemed to be very happy. One day they said to the girl, "We are going to spend some time at the public bath. Come along with us." While the youngest sister was bathing, her two older sisters left the bath and returned to the palace where they went in order to search her room. When they entered her room, they saw the mirror which their father

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had given her. Disliking this mirror, they slammed it to the floor so hard that it was cracked and broken in several places. While they were still looking at it, however, the face of the handsome young man appeared on its surface. He was unable to come forth into the room because the mirror was now broken. But the older sisters had discovered what they had been looking for, and they now understood the reason for their younger sister's happiness. They went back to the bath without revealing to their sister where they had been

When they all got back to the palace, the older sisters went at once to their father. They reported to him everything that they had discovered about their sister, including the fact that a young man had been visiting her. The padishah was furious about this, and he immediately gave orders to have her taken to a distant forest and abandoned.

The girl wandered aimlessly about in the forest, completely lost. She walked and walked, passing through streams and climbing over hills. When she had become completely exhausted, she sat down in the shade of a tree and fell asleep. When she awoke, she found herself in a

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large palace. She was surprised and somewhat frightened to see standing near her a huge black Arab woman with one lip touching the ground and the other touching sky. Without showing any fear--she was quite a clever girl--she arose, embraced the Arab woman, and kissed her on the cheek.

The Arab woman said, "If you had been afraid of me and had not embraced me, I should have killed you as I have others in the past. But because you acted as you did, I shall not harm you."

Time passed, and the youngest daughter remained in that palace, for she had nowhere else to go. The terrifying Arab woman spent part of every day somewhere else in the palace. With nothing better to do, the girl became more and more curious where the Arab woman went. Finally one day she decided to follow the woman to discover where she went and what she did. She followed the Arab woman carefully so that she would not be seen, and when the woman entered a door in another part of the palace, youngest daughter slipped in behind her unobserved. then hid herself in that room and watched to see what would happen. She was amazed to see there the handsome young man who used to come to her out of the mirror. She

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was even more surprised to see the Arab woman make love to this young man and then leave.

As soon as the Arab woman had left, the youngest sister ran to the young man. Surprised and very pleased to see her, the young man said, "If you hadn't believed your older sisters and gone to the bath with them, and if they had not entered your room and broken the magic mirror, all of our difficulties would not have occurred. That powerful Arab woman has imprisoned me here, and every day she forces me to make love with her. She does not allow me to see anyone, and so there was no way in which I could report my situation. But I know a secret which we can use to destroy her. Her life is linked with that of an Emerald-Green Anka¹ which is locked in the twelfth room of this palace. You must somehow get possession of the key to that room, a key which the Arab woman always carries with her. Then you must enter that twelfth room

¹The anka is one of the giant birds (along with the rukh, the simurgh, and phoenix) in Middle Eastern and Near Eastern mythology. So large that it can carry a human being from one world to another or blot the sunlight from a whole region with the spread of its wings, the anka could not be captured and locked in a room. The narrator is unfamiliar with the tradition she is trying to use.

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and smash that anka, throwing its left leg to one side and its right leg to the other side. When you destroy the anka, the Arab woman will die at the same time, for the two of them share the same soul."²

"Don't worry," answered the youngest daughter. "I shall somehow get the key to that room and do as you say. It was only a short time before she killed the anka. When the bird died, the Arab woman also died, just as the handsome young man had said.

The young man came out of his imprisonment, embraced the girl, and said, "Tell me what you wish for most, and I shall get it for you." They talked for a while and then decided that what they both wanted most was to be married. The young man then revealed that he was the son of a padishah who ruled a land in the Mountains of Kaf,³ to which they then traveled.

²The motif of the "external soul" is well known in folkloristic studies. Usually the person's external soul or life force is hidden in some small and/or weak creature or object: a pigeon; one or more pigeon eggs; three or four small fish kept in a jar; the stomach of a red deer.

³In mythology the Kaf Mountains form a circumambient guardrail around the edges of the world. It is always very distant from almost any place on earth. It is sometimes thought to be inhabited by jinns, demons who were exiled there.

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When they arrived there, the padishah father of the young man announced that there would be a great wedding celebration for them that would last for forty days and forty nights. Invitations to this luxurious and spectacular wedding were sent everywhere. The father the bride and her two older sisters made plans to attend the wedding. When the youngest daughter discovered this, she ordered that a balloon⁴ go to their land and transport them to the Kaf Mountains.

When the balloon brought them to the palace in the Kaf Mountains, the father of the three sisters was embarrassed about the way he had treated the youngest one. He apologized to her. But the youngest daughter already forgiven him. She said, "No, no, Father I am not angry. Unless everything had happened just the way it did, would I now be marrying this handsome prince? How could I have become the happiest princess in the world? How could I now soon have a beautiful baby?"

During the time that he remained in that land, father of the three sisters arranged to have built a

⁴Obviously an anachronism in a tale that includes so much ancient myth and magic.

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cradle with a pearl in it.⁵ He hired the best carpenter in that land to make it. When he finally presented this unique cradle to his youngest daughter, she was very pleasantly surprised. She said, "My dear father, this is the cradle that I asked for, the cradle which I had earlier seen in a dream. Now all of my wishes have been fulfilled, and I am very happy

During the forty days and nights of the wedding celebration, the beautiful and noble princess made certain that all of the poor people in the land were well fed.

They all had what they most desired, and may we all be equally fortunate.

⁵When a young woman dreams of a cradle containing a pearl, the pearl referred to could well symbolize a baby. The present tale does not actually suggest that, however. The word pearl is always taken literally--right through this final reference.