

Once upon a time...

There were three mortals that God decided to put to a test. He endowed all of them with special gifts, and it was time to see if they were worthy of those gifts.

The three people were: a fisherman, a knight and a very beautiful Turkish woman. The fisherman's name was Plunk - a good craftsman in building boats. The knight's name was Greuceanu, a worthy name for a mighty man.

The woman did not have a name, so she was always quiet and had a mysterious appearance. She was very wise and extremely beautiful.

Each of them received a magical tool: Plunk had two water bottles in which there was living water and dead water; Greuceanu had the stone of patience and the Turkish woman received the gift of understanding animal speech.

Our three heroes set off and started their journey without knowing what was lying ahead or where the adventure would end.

Near Turkey, on the river Ebro, Plunk had to show his skills in boat building and so he did. He designed and built a boat to carry all of them on the rough waters of the river - the first challenge that God had sent. For 40 days he worked on this boat with a friend, Dauntless Little John. When they finished, God sent a bird to show them the way across the river.

Once they reached the river bank, by a thick forest, the woman asked the bird:

“ Dear bird, please tell us what to do next”.

”Follow this path until you reach a fountain, but be careful not to turn away from the road.”

Answering this, the bird disappeared by magic, without giving the woman enough time to ask more questions. They realized they were alone, on a dark path that seemed to direct their steps to an enchanted forest full of dangers.

Suddenly the trees started swaying, coming to life in a beautiful dance, revealing to them the way they had to follow. A new path enlightened, led to a bridge, and the three heroes happily rushed to get there.

Looking back, the woman saw the forest closing down behind them, as if the road had never been there. However, approaching the bridge, they felt a chill down their

spines. The bridge, tied to wooden poles, about two feet tall at each end, bore traces of the unfortunate soldiers who dared to pass it.

Suddenly they heard a terrible roar coming from under the bridge. The woman went closer, not knowing what creature was lying there. A huge ogre made its appearance. Everyone froze with terror but as soon as its burning eyes met the woman's gentle face, it fell powerless.

Without any hesitation, Greuceanu lifted his sword and hit the ogre in its right shoulder. Mad with pain, the ogre lifted up Greuceanu and thrust him into the earth up to his knees. Then Greuceanu caught hold of the ogre and thrust him into the earth up to his neck and quickly cut off his head. It was a terrible fight.

Plunk, who was not very brave by nature, was hiding during all this time.

When there was silence, he came out of hiding place and found Greuceanu weeping near the woman's lifeless body. With tears in his eyes, the brave knight was crossing the bridge, carrying in his arms the feeble body of the beautiful woman whom he had fallen in love with. Finally they arrived at the well with sad hearts.

All of a sudden, out of the bushes, a furry hare and a wise turtle made their appearance. Approaching our heroes, the rabbit turned into a princess with golden hair .

"Why don't you use your gift, dear Plunk?", she asked the fisherman. Plunk had forgotten about the living water and dead water.

"Please, teach me what to do", he said, taking out the two little bottles.

The golden haired princess' tortoise said:

"Pour the living water and dead water in this fountain and then spray the beautiful woman. And when she wakes up, give her more water to drink! "

What a great wonder and joy they felt when the woman's eyes opened again. Greuceanu turned to thank the hare and the tortoise but they had vanished.

After a short while our three heroes fell into a deep sleep.

When they awoke, they were near the boat and the same bird that had helped them before, was flying round above them.

"You did well but you still have one more trial", the bird said. "However, the road is long and tricky."

For three days they drifted away on the whirling waters, having lost all hope that this journey would end soon. Suddenly, the waters started swelling and a two-headed snake suddenly came out of the water, near their boat. To their astonishment, it began to speak:

”My name is **Zo**”, said the first head.

”And my name is **Ra**”, said the second. ”Your journey is almost over. You have only one trial. You must answer a riddle: What goes on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon, and on three legs in the evening? You have the right to three answers. Each wrong answer will send one of you to death. ”

They prayed to the patience stone and after two days, the beautiful woman, Greuceanu and Plunk summoned ZO, RA to appear.

”The answer to the riddle is man, who crawls on all fours as a baby, walks on two legs as an adult, and walks with a cane in old age”, she said in a brave voice.

Zo Ra vanished in flames and the same bird appeared in front of our three heroes:

”You succeeded in passing the three trials. You showed courage, patience and wisdom. I will show you the way to your final destination. ”

They reached the gates of a palace by the sea, where they were greeted by an angel who led them in the great Garden of Eden. In the middle there was a giant silver tree.

” I will fulfill one wish for each of you, as a reward for your deeds”, a voice echoed in the heart of the tree.

”I want to be rich”, said Plunk. ”Everyone will respect me when I am a rich man”.

” I am very disappointed”, the voice replied. ”You have not learned any important lessons from the journey that you did. Modesty and humility are virtues that you, my dear Plunk, have not acquired. But may it be as you wish. You will be rich, but will be alone forever.”

Then it was the woman’s turn:

”What do you wish for? ”

After a moment of silence, the woman said:

”I want a name and a place of my own in this world. ”

”Very well. Your name will be Leyla. You will soon find your happiness. ”

It was Greuceanu’s turn.

”What do you wish for? ”

”A family”, he said turning his eyes to Leyla.

And they lived happily ever after.

Our tale has come to an end. Our heroes learned their lessons, some got what they wanted and some- what they deserved. One thing is certain: life is a journey, full of trials and everyone is endowed with gifts from God. No matter the nationality, religion, age or colour of skin, we need to be brave, determined, honest, wise and kind to receive what we want in life.