



The Rose Prince

Romania

At a time when wonders were credible, and therefore possible, a rose bush grew on the edge of a forest. It produced large and fragrant roses, the like of which had never been seen before in that region. One day, from that rose bush grew a bud more beautiful and aromatic than any other. When that bud opened, it revealed a child within. The rosebush had mothered a son.

That day, Queen Rhoda happened to be passing by and heard the cry of a child. Alarmed, she asked her ladies and her entourage to leave the road and accompany her to discover what was going on. Imagine her surprise when she saw the baby wrapped in the petals of the huge rose! Not hesitating for a moment, she took the baby in her arms, wrapped him in her own clothes and took him to the palace.

A few days later, King Laurin returned from one of his innumerable battles in the far north, and found the queen rocking a baby in the palace gardens. As soon as he saw the child, his heart softened.

Laurin and Rhoda had had seven sons, and Laurin had enjoyed the little ones very much. But then they grew into men and demanded to accompany him to the battlefield. One after another they had been killed in the endless war that consumed the north. He had forgotten the reason for the war, but he continued with it to avenge the deaths of his seven sons.

The arrival of that baby, now that Rhoda could no longer conceive, was a source of joy for both of them, so they decided to raise him as if he were their eighth child.

Years passed, and the Rose Prince grew in strength and intelligence. He also grew in sensitivity. While his father instructed him in the art of knighthood, his mother taught him to sing, to play the lute, to write poetry and to listen to and understand the songs of the birds.

And so, finally, the prince came of age and was to be knighted. The night before, while he was in his vigil, his mother came and told him the truth about his origin: that he was not entirely human, that his mother had been a rose bush on the edge of the forest.

When dawn came, the prince was knighted, and immediately he begged his father, the king, that he be allowed to put right the wrongs that had led to the deaths of his seven elder brothers. So, after saying goodbye to the queen, he left with his father to the far northern border, where that war whose origins they had all forgotten continued to rage.

The battle came, and shouts of anger mingled with the cries of agony from the soldiers. The smell of blood penetrated deep into the prince's nostrils ... that sweet, metallic smell. The prince felt cheated. This was not what he had thought it would be. The war was not noble or heroic. The war was savage, cruel, horrible, ruthless ...

Suddenly, he saw his father, the king, get hit by a lance and fall from his horse. Horrified, he raced to his father's side in time to hear his last words, asking his son to avenge his death.

His vision clouded with anger, the Rose Prince went after the man who had brought down his father. He chased him to the edge of a forest, where he finally caught up with him, split the man's lance and knocked him from his horse. Dismounting, the prince put the point of his sword to the throat of the terrified knight. Just as he was about to sink the blade in the knight's neck, the Rose Prince spotted a wild rose bush growing among the trees of the forest.

There were drops of blood on the rose petals!

He looked again at the man on the ground and felt the hatred clouding his mind drain away.

‘Go!’ he said to the defeated knight. He raised his sword. ‘Go while I’m still in my right mind!’

The astonished knight scrambled to his feet and ran into the trees. The prince lowered his head, the bloodied sword drooping in his hand. He swore to himself that he was going to end the absurd and stupid butchery that was the war.

He rode back to the battle and mysteriously managed to cross the field from one side to the other, without being attacked by anyone. He, picked up the fallen banners of each side and raised them above his head shouting:

‘Stop the fight! I order you to stop the fight!’

One after the other, soldiers and knights stopped fighting to stare at the noble, young prince who was carrying the banners of both sides.

The Rose Prince addressed everyone, from one side to the other, telling them about the absurdity of war, telling them about forgiveness and reconciliation. And the soldiers, tired of so much struggle, of so many years of hatred and fear, of so many horrendous memories, threw down their weapons, stripped off their armour and left the battlefield, never to return.

As the warriors were leaving, the prince returned to the forest, plunging into its depths shouting:

‘I am one of you. Please tell me, where is the rose bush that grew such huge flowers?’

A nightingale replied:

‘That rose bush died years ago. You know? She mothered a prince in one of her flowers!’

‘I am that prince!’ He said tearfully. ‘Through my veins runs the blood of the roses ... I want to return to that life, to a life of beauty, serenity and fragrance. I do not want to continue being human.’

And the nightingale said to him:

‘Dear prince, I will stay with you and I will sing you a special song, a song that will return you to your original form.’

When night fell, the nightingale began to sing as no one had ever heard her sing before. Her melody dissolved all memories of what his life as a man had been like. The prince sank down into the moss of the forest, and his legs took root in the earth. When dawn came, there was a new rose bush in the forest, one without thorns, from which bloomed the most fragrant and aromatic roses that the world has ever known.

While that beautiful rose bush lived, peace reigned unblemished over those lands. □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2019).

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Comments

There is another story also titled “The Rose Prince”, from Bram Stoker, author of “Dracula,” but in reality there is no relationship between them. They are certainly different stories, despite having the same title.

Sources

MacDonald, M. R. (2005). The rose prince. In *Peace Tales: World Folktales to Talk About* (pp. 94-96). Little Rock: August House.

Stoker, B. (2016). The rose prince. In *Under the Sunset* (pp. 14-37). Auckland, New Zealand: The Floating Press.

Stoker, B. (s.d.). The rose prince. Retrieved from <http://www.bramstoker.org/pdf/stories/01sunset/02prince.pdf>.

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 16c: Demilitarise national security systems to the level of a non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Principle 16f: Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.

