

The Littlest Bird

By Grace Germany

Once upon a time, very long ago, there lived a rather eccentric king. He was called thus on account of his tendency to disappear for weeks on end into his extensive palace build for solely this purpose. The general populace of the kingdom thought this was due to his upbringing; he had been raised by a cobbler, and the rustic ways in which he had been brought up, sometimes overcame his better sense and forced him into reclusion. But this was not the only reason that he was considered eccentric, for unlike most kings who enjoyed hunting, riding, feasting, and the sort, this king collected birdhouses. Now, of course, this in itself was not very odd, but he never got any birds for them. He had rooms and rooms in his palace devoted to empty birdhouses. No one in the kingdom could guess what was meant by these, nor why the king was so drawn to them. Every noble in the kingdom knew what to get him for his birthday, but if any dared to be so presumptuous as to get him a real bird, the poor man was immediately sent from the king's presence, never to return. Their monarch's sanity was often discussed behind many a closed door, but no one could come up with any arguable reason why collecting empty birdhouses should point to an empty head, and so the matter was finally laid to rest.

Now this king was not married, a fact that his advisor, and closest friend, was quite troubled by. Perhaps because he was close to the king, he had guessed the reason for the empty birdhouses. So every day the advisor somehow managed to bring marriage or "suitable" girls into the conversation. But the king grew tired of his advisor's constant fussing, and therefore one day he determined to put an end to it.

"I will make a deal with you," he said to his advisor. "I will try for a hundred days to find a bride. Bring to me as many girls and women as you like, and I will look them over as honestly and without prejudice as I can. If, during that time, I meet a women I could spend the rest of my life with, then the problem is solved. If, by the end of the hundred days, however, I cannot find such a one, then you will never again speak to me on the subject.

The advisor agreed, and at once set about finding the most beautiful, most educated, most capable women in the kingdom. He sent letters to every corner of the land, declaring that the king was searching for a wife. Every day he brought a new girl for the king to speak with. And every day, the king sent her away, declaring that she was not sufficient. Ninety-nine days past in feasting and revelry, and still the advisor could not

find someone worthy to be queen. The poor man was frantic, this was his last chance to help his friend and king find happiness, and so far he was quite unsuccessful.

As the hundredth day dawned, he rose, and prepared to stand before the king and offer a last plea. As he walked with heavy heart toward the king's chambers, he saw something so surprising, so wonderful, that for a moment, he completely forgot his sorrow and stood still. By the fountain sat the king, and by his side was the most beautiful woman that he had ever seen. Her eyes were like emeralds, and when she smiled it was as though the sun had come from behind a cloud. But the most remarkable thing about her was her size. She was about half as big as the king, who was not a large man. Collecting himself, the advisor hurried over and congratulated the king on his find.

The king smiled. "Thank you," he replied. "She heard of your letters and decided to come meet me. You see, she too has been searching for a mate without any luck. I suppose I must thank you for finding me someone after all.

The next day the bells rang joyfully and king and his tiny queen were wed on the green. For a wedding gift, the queen gave the king hundred birds. The advisor was happy, for he had understood from the beginning that the birdhouses did not point to an empty head, as some had thought, but rather to an empty heart. Finally the birdhouses were full.