

Fairies

Tantche debated two approaches. First was to revert the time, dress in Rada's wedding outfits and pretend. But the house was not proof – there were lights, computers, television, stoves, fridge, vacuum cleaner, mixers, blenders, cars outside. And then when he would go back it would be a shock again. It was not an American movie, she insisted. Better choose the second – lossif would accept that he is in a fairytale much easier and would not question the magic objects. It would be easier for him if he told someone after that that a fairy had taken him although the adult lossif had claimed that he had not remembered anything of that period. However his card playing skills and the language abilities were showing that there were some cognitive functions that had remained active subconsciously. At the end that was the course they decided to follow. There were two rules Tantche insisted upon – girls wear dresses, at least he would have his gender differentiation intact and the terms be kept to a minimum. The fridge was an ice box, the television if he got a whiff of it, was a magic window, the computer was like a magic mirror that showed stuff that was far away if you knew how to ask.

Rada insisted that the sitting room remained as it was for a day or two until they were sure that the danger had passed. Konstantin carried lossif to the second floor in the room next to Mitzi's and put him on the orthopedic mattress. The child murmured something in his sleep but did not wake up. Mitzi sat next to him on the big rocker and lit a candle. It was late in the afternoon and despite the storm there were still clouds and it was almost dark. She looked at the familiar features and for the first time since Elka's funeral started sobbing.

'Why are you crying?' a little voice asked in Turkish. A pair of familiar clear gray eyes was looking at her. Mitzi swallowed the mountain in her throat and smiled. 'Because you finally came and I have been waiting for you for so long and was not sure you are coming.'

'Where am I?'

'In a fairytale! This is your home while it lasts. You were injured. Few fairies patched you up and now you have to heal. While you are getting better, you will be here.'

'Are you a fairy also?'

'You may say so. I am Mitzi and you are lossif, right?'

'How do you know my name?'

'It is a long fairytale and I may tell it to you one day. Now you have to sleep and if you are in pain tell me to make it better.'

'What is this?' lossif was looking at the IV next to the bed.

'Life water. You know...'

'The same that raven brought? He brought it for me, yes?'

'That is it. Now sleep!'

'Will you tell me a fairytale before I go to sleep?'

'Mitzi had to bite her lip savagely to keep the tears from flowing again. 'I will, which one you like most?'

'The one about the boy that went to the wind to ask for his flour. His mom was going to bake bread and they did not have much flour...'

'And he went to his uncle and he gave him some but when he almost reached home the wind blew it away and there was not flour for the bread and the boy...'

Soon the boy's eyelids closed and the even breathing told Mitzi that it would be another day when lossif would hear how the boy got his magic presents. She pressed her handkerchief to her face and wept again. He did not know or did not remember but the brave little boy had no mother to show them to.

Rada had imposed a strict quarantine for the first few days and the only people allowed around lossif were the three doctors and Konstantin. The real problem was to get Mitzi to get some rest and pry her from the small patient. She was there when he was waking up and she read him his bedtime stories and played with him backgammon and silly board games. He called her "the Chief Fairy" and their mutual attraction was amusing. The odd thing was that despite he had told them that Vantche looked like his mom and he had been nice to Rada, lossif had taken like a fire to oil with Tantche. The first time she had sauntered in his room dressed in a fairy attire. The young woman had brought an absolutely stunning full skirt velvet dress in

red with millions of sequins sewn on it, probably a discarded old prom dress from the seventies, with a tiara and a sparkling magic wand that the adults had recognized as thermometer. Tantche had told the boy that it was a special wand with a red tongue that could tell how hot he was and he had agreed to carry it for a while to see that the tongue moved. There was no fever which was great. The red-clad fairy had told Iossif that his bandage was like a knight's armor. It needed to be changed to keep him protected from an army of invisible bad warriors that were gathering there. He had laughed and let her disinfect the wound and put the new bandage without fuss. She had given him magic sweet pills to see better and run better when he would be allowed to do that. Tantche had brought him a snowy mountain of goat yogurt the first day and had told him there was a treasure buried under. Iossif had dug in and cracked up at the big strawberry that he found at the bottom. The second morning the petite blondie had brought him a tower of small round pancakes and claimed that they had been fried on the head of the Sun and brought by his bride specially for him and that the bees had brought the honey and he had to be nice to their gifts and eat all. He had done it listening to her fairytale while Mitzi had wailed her heart in the kitchen. Tantche was there when he did his first cautious tour around the house and introduced him to the big iron ice box where sweet snow was stored for him – and Iossif had eaten a virtual iceberg of sorbet with fruits. Tantche had shown him her car and told him that the Green Fairy was special carriage as there were invisible horses under the hood which disappeared if you open it but one could hear them rumble when asked. The young woman had told him that the horses did not eat hay but were drinking fiery water that could burn and he clapped excitedly as he knew the fairytale about the burning water. He implored her to show him so Tantche had sucked a spoonful of fuel from the tank and lit it to his amazement. Iossif had begged her to bring him to the river of fiery water to see. The boy was disappointed to learn that the river was in a faraway land and that big ships brought the precious water and then it was brought to the chariots in small vessels carefully to catch no fire. No, he wanted to see the river or at least the spring, so Tantche brought him to the magic window and showed him an oil well on fire. Iossif had pulled her protectively and cautioned to not fall through that window and the psychologist had nodded in agreement because she knew a lot of people who had done that with disastrous consequences.

On the seventh day the consilium agreed that the sutures could go as the wound was healing remarkably well. There was no sign of inflammation and the seams had closed beautifully. Vantche was reluctant to put

the child under a general anesthesia. Tantche sat down with Iossif and explained that it would sting like bees but he would feel better and it was a way to prove that he was a worthy knight not afraid of anything. He said that he would do it if Mitzi would hold his hand and she did although it was her who needed sedative after that. But she kept reading the fairytale about the hero who had found the body of his dead friend in a barrel at sea and had stitched it before sending the raven for dead and life waters. From there on it was a daily routine to check the scar and every six hours to rub it with creams to prevent inflammation and minimize scarring. Iossif was going to bear his cross for life but at least it would not be uncomfortable.

The boy had asked for books. His mom had promised him that they would go to a place where there would be a lot to read and it was his idea of a good life. Father Ivan had come to save the day and brought one of the church books while Mitzi called Lily to pack a selection she dictated and to deliver them with the overnight train to Bourgas. Iossif was delighted – he could read to his heart content. He was insatiable reader and was going through books like a wildfire. Lily had to pack a second batch in days, including some rare prints from the adult Iossif collection. Riste was playing cards with him, Konstantin and Vera. She was talking to Iossif in Russian and he loved her as he knew who the best cook was without hesitation. A cream puff and a rastegay went a long way no matter whether the hungry man was seven or seventy-seven, same for the borsht, she joked.

The three weeks of Tantche and Vantche's vacation were over and even squeezing another half a day in lieu of sleep they had to go. The blondie hugged Iossif and promised that she would be back but she had to see other people who needed her. He looked seriously at her and unexpectedly blessed her asking God to take care of her. The boy did not cry but went to bed early and for the first time his sleep was not easy.