

The Man with Three Minds and Other Meaningful Tales

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Like Salt In My Food





There was once an emperor who had three daughters. Having lost his wife, he gave all his love to his three little girls. As they grew, the lasses understood how hard their father worked to raise them, teach them and keep them from harm. And so, for their part, the damsels did all they could to make their father forget his sorrow.

One day, out of a clear blue sky, the emperor turned to his oldest daughter and said, "How do you love me, my girl?"

"How should I love you, Father? I love you like honey," the eldest replied, after which she thought to herself, "What else in the world could be sweeter?"

"Long life to you, my daughter! God grant me time with you!" the emperor exclaimed. Then, turning to his middle daughter, he asked, "But how much do *you* love me, my girl?"

"Like sugar, Father."

"May God grant you all the best, my child, and may I have joy of you!"

These maidens weren't strangers to the art of flattery, and they knew how to boast of more love than they felt. Still, the emperor rejoiced when he heard how much his children loved him. He believed that love could only be sweet as honey or sugar. So, looking at his youngest, who stood shyly apart, he asked her as well,

"How do you love me, my girl?"

Beaming with natural love, the youngest daughter replied, "Like salt in my food, Father," and she wore a cheerful face.

Seeing how much attention her father was paying her, the poor thing felt ashamed. When her sisters heard her answer, they broke out laughing and turned their faces away while their father scowled and said angrily, "Come over here so we can understand each other! Didn't you hear your older sisters say what kind of love they adore me with? Why didn't you follow their example and tell me how much sweet love you have for your father? Get out of my sight!"

When the emperor's youngest daughter heard her father's anger and understood her father's ill-will and the misfortune that had befallen her, it was as if she





had melted into the earth from sorrow, but she took her heart in her mouth and said, "Forgive me, Father, for I didn't mean to anger you! I believed my love wasn't superior to my sisters' but that it wasn't lower than honey and sugar either."

"Do you still have the cheek to talk about your sisters? Get away from me, you shameless girl," the emperor went on, and left his daughter in tears.

When she understood how things stood, the youngest daughter put her faith in God and decided to go where the Lord's pity might take her. She took a suit of old clothes from her childhood home and set out from village to village until she came to the court of a great emperor, and there she sat by the gate.

The gate keeper, who was also the key-bearer, saw the girl and asked her what she wanted. The emperor's youngest daughter explained that she was a poor, parentless girl and that she would like to be a serving maid if some place might be found for her. As the key-bearer's assistant had just gone her own way, the woman at the gate naturally wanted to hire another helper, so she took the girl into her service.

The emperor's daughter sought no pay. All she wanted was to work for some time, and if her service were found worthy of reward, then let her be paid what her labour was worth. The steward's wife was delighted the girl had answered so sensibly, and she took her as her helper. She told her what she would have to do and gave her a bunch of keys from the many that she had. The girl was good and intelligent. She set to tidying the rooms and cupboards to which she had keys, and she put every little thing where it belonged.

As she knew how to knead dough, boil jams and make other good things, the court's pantries fell under her care. No one had a nary a word to say, for the lass honourably treated each to his due. She didn't chat too much with the other servants, and when she found some free time, she'd read a book.

Word of the key-bearer's helper's industry and diligence reached even the empress's ear. This lady wanted to see the girl, and it happened that the emperor's daughter knew how to appear and speak purely from the heart, without pretending. The empress grew fond of the lass, for she suspected that the key-bearer's helper

could not come of bad stock, for the cream always rises to the top.

And in this way the empress kept the girl close to her. Wherever the empress went, the girl went too. When the empress sat to work at embroidery, the young woman plied her needle. Then, too, the work of her hands was of great value. The wise words that flowed from the girl's mouth pleased the empress above all. Why not make a long story short? The young woman became inseparable from the empress. The empress loved her like her own child. She loved her so much that even the emperor wondered at the empress's attachment to the girl.

Now, the emperor had a single son, who was as dear to his parents as the sun in the sky. Going off to a war, however, the emperor had taken his son with him so that the boy might get used to battle, but the boy had been laid low with a wound.

The empress's weeping was a sight to behold. At her wit's end, she didn't know what else to do for her son to make him heal faster. She stayed at his bedside night and day. And if she got so tired she could no longer stand, the empress set her trusted maiden to care for her son, so that either one or the other always attended the wounded heir's bed.

The girl's kind, wise words, her sweet, sincere caresses, and her kindness stirred a feeling in the sick man's heart, which he'd never known till then. The emperor's son grew attached to the young woman like a sister, for it

seemed to him she eased his pains when she put her hand on his wounds.

One afternoon after he had gotten better, the young man said to his mother, "You know what, Mother, I'd like to get married."

"Very well, sweet one, very well. Better to marry young than to get mixed up in the world. I will find you a good girl, an emperor's daughter, of good stock and kind."

"I have found her, Mother!"

"And who is she? Do I know her?"

"Don't get angry, Mother, if I tell you. Your house-girl has remained in my heart. I love her, Mother, like my own soul. Of all the daughters of emperors and lords I've seen, not one of them has pleased me the way she does."

The empress put up a bit of opposition, but it was impossible to withstand her son's desire.

When she saw that nothing else would do and that the girl her son desired was sensible, kind, of sound judgment and, above all, honest and capable, she took heart, and so did the emperor.

The emperor and empress betrothed their son to the empress's hired gal and settled the date. When they began to send invitations to the wedding feast, the emperor's son's wife-to-be asked that Emperor So and So—her father—be invited, but she avoided telling anyone she was his daughter.

The in-laws agreed to grant her wish and invited that certain emperor to the wedding. All the guests arrived on the wedding day. The festivities began and they kept it up all day, the way emperors do. In the evening a lordly feast was spread, with all kinds of meat and drink, pies, and other treats.

