

LESSONS OF THE FOREIGN LAND

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THERE WAS ONCE A WOMAN who lived in a small village in the smallest enclave of the countryside. There was nothing in this village except horses and flowers and houses and people. All of her life she had waited until she was old enough so she could leave the village and see the world. She knew in her heart there was more to life than horses and flowers and houses and people. For many years she saved her money, coin by coin, until she had enough to make her first journey to a foreign land.

All of the villagers gathered to bid her farewell. The village elder gave her his good wishes and asked that she return to the village safely and in good health.

The woman went to the first foreign land and was met with a circus of wonderful things she had never seen before. There were so many new and unusual animals and foods and sounds and faces that the woman was overwhelmed. She wandered through the land and tried to understand and remember many things.

One day she came upon a stable. The stable master was in the yard grooming his horses. They were the finest horses the woman had ever seen.

"Good afternoon," the woman said.

"Good afternoon," said the stable master.

"You have very lovely horses," said the woman.

"Thank you. You're a stranger here, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Do they have fine horses where you come from?"

"I had always thought that our horses were finest horses in the world. But now that I see yours, I think that yours are finer."

"No easy task to breed fine horses," said the stable master. "Come here and I'll show you what I mean."

The stable master took the woman around his grounds and showed her the different kinds of horses he kept. There were so many different shapes and colors and sizes of horse that the woman was truly amazed.

"I never knew there were so many kinds of horse."

"That's only the outside. They are all different on the inside, too. You have to know how to look at a horse," said the stable master. "The spirit of them is in the eyes."

The woman looked into the eyes of many horses and saw that they were truly as varied on the inside as on the outside. She learned much about horses from the stable master and thanked him when she left.

When she returned to her village, the first thing she no-



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ticed was the horses. She had always thought they were fine horses. But the woman had never paid much attention to them before because she had seen them every day of her life. She looked into their eyes. These were the horses she had grown up with, and they recognized her. The woman saw their spirits for the first time. She smiled.

The villagers gathered around her, watching her curiously. The village elder asked her what she had learned on her travels.

She told them, "I learned how to look at horses."

The villagers glanced at each other, shrugging their shoulders.

"We have very fine horses in this village," the woman said.

She took a job in the stables, training and grooming the horses. She saved her money, coin by coin, for her next journey abroad.

WHEN SHE HAD SAVED ENOUGH all of the villagers gathered to bid her farewell. The village elder gave her his good wishes and asked that she return to the village safely and in good health.

The woman went to the second foreign land and was met with another circus of wonderful things she had never seen before. There were so many new and unusual animals and foods and sounds and faces that she was still overwhelmed, but less so than the first time. She wandered through the land and tried to understand and remember many things.

One day she came upon a garden full of the sweetest smelling flowers she had ever smelled.

"Good afternoon," said the woman.

"Good afternoon," said the gardener.

"Those are sweet smelling flowers."

"Thank you," said the gardener, "Where are you from?"

"I'm from a small village, in a distant country."

"Do you have flowers in your village?"

"Yes, but your flowers smell far sweeter."

"It's not the flowers that smell sweet," said the gardener, leaning on her hoe. "It's how you smell them. Come here."

The woman walked through the garden and saw so many flowers she could not believe they were all real.

"You have to smell them with your mouth open, like this."

The gardener leaned over the flower beds with her mouth open and took a deep breath. The woman did the same, and inhaled the most beautiful scent she could imagine. She walked throughout the garden smelling all the flowers and was lost in amazement at the differences in their aromas, each splendid in its own way.

She learned much from the gardener and thanked her when she left.



When she returned to her little village in its little enclave in the countryside, the first thing she noticed was the flowers. She had always thought that they were nice-smelling flowers, but had never really paid much attention to them because she had smelled them every day of her life. She leaned over them and took a deep breath with her mouth open. The flowers smelled better than she ever remembered. And because the scent was a familiar one, it was the better than all the flowers in the gardener's garden.

The villagers gathered and the village elder asked her what she had learned while she was gone.

"I learned how to smell flowers," she said.

The villagers looked at each other and shrugged.

"We have very good flowers in this village."

She began to work in the gardens, planting flowers and pulling weeds, saving her money, coin by coin, until she had enough to go on her next journey.

ALL OF THE VILLAGERS GATHERED to bid her farewell. The village elder gave her his good wishes, and asked that she return to the village safely and in good health.

The woman went to the third foreign land and was met with a circus of wonderful things, some things she had already seen and some things she had never seen before. The new and unusual animals and foods and sounds and faces pleased her, but no longer overwhelmed her. She wandered through the land and tried to understand and remember many things.

One day she found herself in front of a great monument that was being erected. Its structure was so tall that the top of it was lost in the clouds.

"Good afternoon," said the woman.

"Good afternoon," said the architect supervising the site.

"What a magnificent building that will be."

"Thank you," said the architect. "You're a stranger in this land, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Are there monuments like this in your land?"

"No. There are only houses. There is nothing as beautiful as this. I've never seen anything so big."

"Would you like to see the plans?" said the architect.

The woman nodded her head and followed the architect into a little trailer. The architect unrolled several large sheets of paper across a table.

"The beauty of any building is not in its size or design," he said. "The important thing is suitability to its environment. If a land has much rain and snow, the buildings will have great spiraling or sloped roofs so it can run off. If a land has little rain, they can build things with flat roofs. If a land has many

trees, they will build with wood. If they have mountains, they will build with stone. There are lands where houses are made of mud. A house is beautiful because it was built to belong to its surroundings."

The architect opened a book and showed the woman pictures of many types of buildings in different lands. He explained how each one was supported to hold up against the weather conditions predominant in its region. The woman learned much from the architect, and thanked him when she left.

When she returned to her village, the first thing she saw was the houses. She had always thought they were sturdy houses, but as she had lived in one every day of her life, she never really noticed them. She studied how the slightly sloped roofs were supported by wooden crossbeams, and how the drainpipes could carry the water down to the earth. She studied the unique shingling on the roofs and the space-saving sliding doors. The houses were made of wood and were unpainted to match the nature around them. The woman nodded to herself.

The villagers gathered, and the village elder asked the woman what she had learned.

"I learned to build beautiful houses."

The villagers nodded their heads, for by now they were used to her strange ways.

"There are very good houses in this village."

She remembered one of the designs in the book the architect had shown her, and began to build a house like none the villagers had ever seen before. They watched her with curiosity, wondering if she intended to stay. She worked silently and alone every day, nailing each board carefully with her bruised and dirtied hands. When she finished building the house, the villagers gathered. It was very strange looking but they had to admit that it was beautiful because it seemed to spring right from the very earth, as if the woman had pulled it up ready-made from the ground.

She asked if anyone would like to buy the house. The villagers were confused at first. They already had houses. Then the village elder stepped forward. He had a son old enough to have a house of his own and offered to buy the house as a present for his boy. He gave the woman the money for the house, and a little extra because he loved her well.

THE VILLAGERS WERE SAD when she told them she was leaving again. They were losing hope. She would never be one of them, they said. She could never settle down and have children and enjoy her life in such a small village when she had seen and done so much.

All of the villagers gathered to bid her farewell. The village

elder gave her his good wishes, and asked that she return to the village safely and in good health.

The woman went to the fourth foreign land and saw many things she had seen before, although there were still many new things. She enjoyed experiencing the new animals and foods and sounds and faces, but found that they were not that much different than the ones she had seen before. She wandered through the land and found she understood and remembered many things.

One day she sat down on a sidewalk to rest. She was tired and sat for many hours watching the people walk past. An old man sat beside her.

"You're not from here, are you?"

"No," said the woman, "I come from a very small village, far away in another country."

"What are you doing here then?"

The old man's eyes were watery and kind.

"I'm..." The woman hesitated, "I don't know."

The old man sighed.

"Do you think all these people are happy with the wonderful things they have?" She asked.

"People happy with things? No, no," the old man said. "Only people make people happy. You just have to know how to love people. People aren't things; people think, they feel. You have to tell them you love them. You have to show them. You have to say nice things. You have to mean them. You have to appreciate people for what they are. You can't expect more

than they can do or give. But most important, you have to let them love you. People are funny creatures, and everyone is different from everybody else in thousands of different ways. But we all have one thing in common. We all need love." The old man stared across the street, lost in thought for a moment. "That's all you need to know."

The woman nodded her head.

"I have learned much from you, old man. Thank you."

"Find the people that love you," he said.

When the woman returned to her village, all of the villagers gathered to welcome her. They looked at her and smiled at her and for the first time she noticed how friendly and kind their faces were. Since she had seen them every day of her life, she had never truly noticed them before. She saw that they all loved her well.

The village elder asked her what she had learned.

"I learned to love people," she said with tears of happiness in her eyes.

The villagers nodded.

"There are very good people here."

The village elder went to the woman and put his arms around her.

"Have you seen all the things you wanted to see?"

The woman nodded. She took a deep breath and rolled up her sleeves. She would have to find somebody to help her make more people.

She would have many things to teach them. ■

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