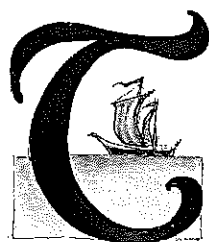
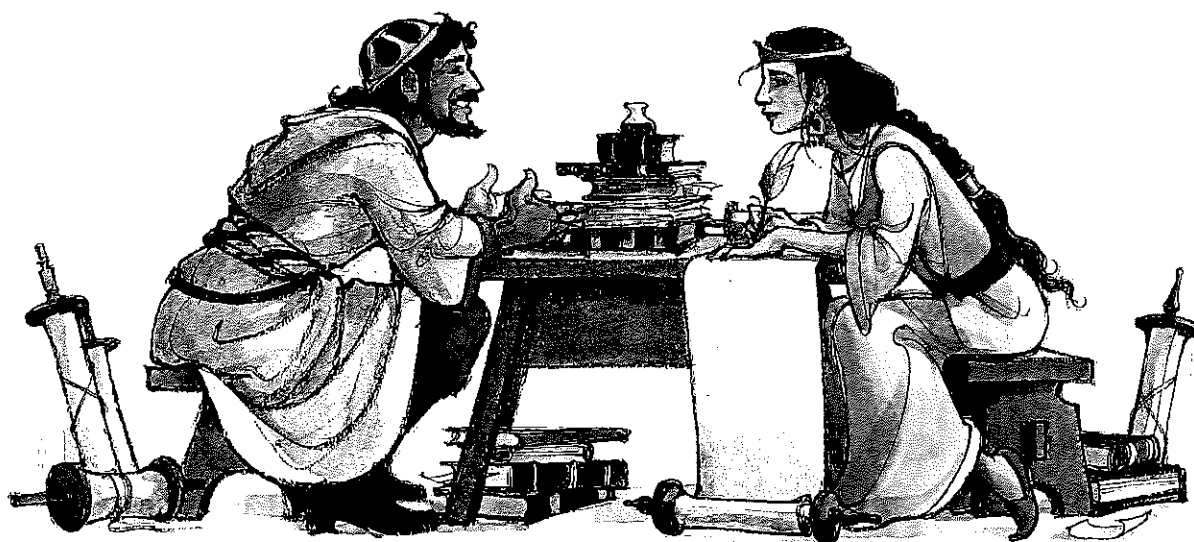


# THE REBEL PRINCESS



here was once a great emperor who did not have any children. There was also a king who was childless. Both the king and the emperor wandered the world over, seeking a remedy.

After months of traveling, they happened to arrive on the same day in a large city, where they spent the night at the same inn. Recognizing each other as men of royal bearing, they decided to dine together that evening. After sharing several bottles of wine, and discussing at great length the business of kingship, they discovered that they were both traveling for the same reason. And they vowed that if, after they returned home, their wives gave birth to children, and one child should be a girl and the other a boy, they would arrange a marriage between the two.

Soon the emperor and the king returned to their wives, and within the year they had both become fathers. The king's wife gave birth to a son, called Zev. The emperor's wife had a daughter, named Judith. But as so often happens, now that the emperor had what he'd wanted, he forgot the promise he'd made to the king and never once considered betrothing his daughter to the king's son.

The children grew to be fine young people, as clever and kind and courageous as any parent could hope for. When they were old enough, their parents sent them abroad to study, and it happened that both came under the guidance of a famous scholar.

Judith and Zev were by far the most brilliant students among all those who studied with the sage, and they soon became fast friends. They spent countless hours poring over ancient manuscripts, discussing the meaning of life, and sharing their hopes and dreams for the future.

The prince and princess studied with their teacher for three years, and the days passed quickly. When at last it came time for them to return to their separate kingdoms, Judith and Zev realized that they loved each other and could not bear the thought of separation.

"Here is a plan," Judith told Zev. "You are a prince and I'm a princess and we must marry someone. Let us pledge to marry each other. When we return home we will tell our parents of our engagement. Then they can arrange the rest."

The prince and princess parted tearfully, but were confident that it would not be long before they were reunited.

When Judith arrived at her father's palace, she was welcomed with great joy. But when she told her father about the prince, and asked him to arrange their wedding, he became troubled and fell silent. While she had been gone, her father had promised her to the son of a rich and powerful lord.

Knowing what a determined young woman his daughter could be, the emperor was afraid to tell her what he had done. Instead, he decided to wait, hoping his daughter would forget her infatuation with the faraway prince once she had settled back into life at home.

Meanwhile, Zev's father sent many letters to Judith's father, reminding him of their pact to each other and inquiring about plans for the wedding. But the emperor let the letters go unanswered. He even hid the ones that the prince sent to Judith. As the months went by, Zev began to fear somehow that his letters were not reaching their destination. He knew he must visit the emperor in person.

When Prince Zev arrived at the palace, the emperor greeted him politely. But he also gave secret orders that the prince was not to be allowed to see the princess, and that she was not to be told of his visit. The prince was introduced to dignitaries, taken out on hunting parties, and shown all the interesting sights of the kingdom. But every time he asked to see Judith, or tried to make plans for their engagement, the emperor would change the subject or admonish him to have patience.

Then one day, as the prince was walking through the palace gardens, he found the princess reading a book under an apple tree. The young lovers were overjoyed to see each other again.

"But what has taken you so long?" Judith cried. "I've been waiting for months without any word from you!"

When Zev explained that he had been writing to her faithfully and had already been in the palace for several weeks, Judith instantly understood the situation.

"It must be that my father has betrothed me to some other prince and is trying to discourage you without actually refusing you," she said. "We have no time to waste — we must run away together. Once we are actually married, there is nothing my father can do."

## *The Rebel Princess*

The lovers met at the palace gates before dawn and ran down to the harbor. They set sail on the prince's ship before anyone knew they were gone.

They sailed together for many days, then docked the ship at a deserted island to search for fresh supplies. Zev decided to hunt for wild animals in the forest, while Judith chose to stay on the beach to collect coconuts.

Soon Judith had gathered all the coconuts they needed, but Zev did not return. The princess grew worried and decided to go look for him. After wandering for many hours without finding any trace of her prince, she circled back to the beach and climbed a tall coconut tree, hoping that she would be able to catch sight of him from its height.

It so happened that at that very moment the son of a wealthy merchant was sailing by the island in a ship filled with valuable goods. Looking through his telescope, he was astonished to see a beautiful woman sitting at the top of a coconut tree. He ordered his sailors to dock the ship, and he and his men set out to capture the lovely girl.

When the merchant's son came to the coconut tree, the princess refused to come down, or even to speak to him. But when he ordered his men to chop down the tree, Judith agreed to go to his ship, but only if he promised not to marry her until they reached his home port.

The merchant's son was smitten by the beautiful princess and happily agreed to her request. They left the island and sailed straight to his father's city.

Upon their arrival, Judith told the merchant's son that he must first go announce her to his family so they could come to the harbor and welcome her as his future bride. The lovesick young man immediately obeyed and hurried home to speak to his parents.

After the merchant's son had gone, the princess gave all of the sailors wine to drink, insisting that they celebrate the forthcoming wedding. Before long, they were all drunk, and they left the ship to go into the city. As soon as Judith was alone, she hauled up the ship's anchor, unfurled the sails, and set out to sea.

When the wealthy merchant's family went to the harbor to meet the bride-to-be, the ship was gone, along with all its cargo. The merchant was furious with his foolish son and banished him from his household. The unfortunate young man was forced to become a beggar.

Judith sailed the ship toward the island where she'd last seen Zev. But a terrible storm blew her far off course, and the ship washed up on the shores of a distant land. The king of this country came to the harbor to investigate the fine ship, sailed single-handedly by a mysterious young woman.

As soon as the king laid eyes on the princess, he fell madly in love and insisted that she marry him. Judith agreed, on the condition that the ship's cargo remain in its hold, so that on the day of the wedding she could unload it and show the people the great riches she was bringing to their country.

The king, dazzled by Judith's beauty, charm, and independence, agreed to everything she asked. He also sent the daughters of the eleven most powerful lords in the kingdom to be her ladies-in-waiting. The women passed the time playing music, writing poems, and telling stories. The ladies-in-waiting loved to hear about Judith's adventures on the high seas, and how she had sailed her ship alone through the terrible storm.

On the day before the wedding, the princess took all the ladies on board the ship so they might see it for themselves. Then she confessed that although she was to be married to the king, she was already in love with another. She told them how she had lost her beloved Zev, and the eleven ladies-in-waiting all agreed that they would like nothing better than to help Judith find her true love. As soon as night had fallen, they untied the moorings and set sail.

By the time the king discovered the ship was missing, and with it his bride-to-be, not to mention eleven daughters of the most powerful lords in his kingdom, there was nothing to be done. In anger, the fathers of the ladies-in-waiting dethroned the king and banished him from the kingdom.

Meanwhile, Judith and the eleven ladies sailed in search of Zev until they ran out of food and came to an island. They landed, only to find it was ruled by a band of blood-thirsty pirates. The pirates seized the ship and took the women as prisoners.

Before they could be killed, Judith, thinking quickly, said to the chieftain, "We, too, are pirates, but you are pirates of strength, while we are pirates of cleverness. Why doesn't each of you take one of us for a wife? Then we can use our cleverness to help you increase your wealth."

The pirates agreed this was an excellent idea and prepared a great feast to celebrate the weddings. The princess and her ladies brought out many casks of wine from their ship, and the pirates drank and drank until they fell asleep. While the pirates were sleeping, Judith and her ladies threw them overboard and they drowned. Then the women explored the island, and found a cave full of treasure, with more gold and jewels than any of them had ever seen. They loaded the treasure onto their ship, and once more set sail.

Now the ladies disguised themselves as pirates, and sailed the open sea for many weeks until they spied another ship on the horizon. Hoping that the other sailors could help her find Zev, the princess turned her ship in that direction.

On the other ship was a young king, out for a day's excursion. When the young king saw the princess's ship approaching, he decided to climb the tall mast to get a better look. But the sun's glare off the water blinded him, and he lost his grasp and fell overboard. Judith saw what happened and immediately dove into the water, hoping to rescue the drowning king. But she was too late, and the best she could do was bring his body back to his ship. The distraught crew insisted that Judith and her sailors, still disguised as men, return with them to their city.

When the counselors and noblemen of the city met the ship's captain, they were deeply impressed by his wisdom and courage, as well as the great wealth he carried on his ship. After the young king's funeral, they asked Judith to become the new king. Of course they didn't suspect that the brave captain was really an emperor's daughter disguised as a man!

So the princess became king of that country, and she appointed her ladies-in-waiting as ministers. As king, she ordered that the finest sculptor in the land create a statue of her, which was placed at the gates of the city. She then instructed soldiers to stand by the statue day and night and arrest anyone who wept upon seeing the statue's face.

It happened that three people were arrested and brought before the new king. The first was Prince Zev, who had been searching for Judith ever since the merchant's son had seized her from the deserted island. The second was the merchant's son himself, and the third was the king who had been banished from his country when the princess escaped with the eleven ladies. All three men had been roaming the world, living from hand to mouth. When they had seen the statue of the new king, they had instantly recognized the features of the princess and were unable to conceal their distress.

When the princess had heard their stories, she turned first to the deposed king.

"Your countrymen banished you because of the eleven ladies who pledged themselves to my cause. If they choose, they may now return with you to their families. Your people will be delighted, and they will reinstate you."

The ladies, who were happy to return to their own country, agreed to leave with the king. The princess then turned to the merchant's son. "Your father banished you because you had lost your ship and its goods," she said. "Go to the harbor. Your ship is waiting for you there, filled with cargo a hundred times more valuable than what you lost."

Finally, the princess turned to the prince. "While you have been searching for me, I, too, have been searching for you. Come, my love, let us go home."

Then she revealed to the court that she was actually a woman, and told them the story of how she had come to be sailing the seas so close to their kingdom.

Judith and Zev returned to her father the emperor, who welcomed them with open arms. They were married at last, in a great celebration, and lived happily together for the rest of their days.