

The Voice of Love

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THE VOICE

OF LOVE

by Jean Schweikert

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a kingdom where, not once, but twice, there was a royal ceremony that caused all clocks to stop! Not literally, perhaps, but time seemed to stand still. These occasions were beautiful beyond belief and so monumental that the history of the land was actually changed!

Brosia was a small, but thriving kingdom in the distant past. The Brosians were, by and large, a good and gentle people. Their rulers were genuinely concerned about their welfare, so complaints were rare. Extraordinary as it may seem, King Marcus and Queen Julianne were not resented at all; quite the contrary, they were greatly admired.

The king and queen had only one child: a sweet, petite girl named Melinda. She was adored by all, as she was a delightful child with big, brown eyes and little dimples that appeared magically when she laughed. She was quite knowledgeable for her age because she had many tutors and the greatest of learning opportunities. Yet, in addition to all her training, she had time to play and simply be a little girl. And perhaps most important, she was always welcomed on the laps of the good queen and king. They were never too busy for her and she received ample love and affection from them. They taught her also. They taught her about life and love and duty. And they taught her that privilege brings responsibility.

CHAPTER ONE

THE AFFLICTION

Life seemed to be nearly perfect until one dreadful day when Melinda became ill. Initially it appeared to be nothing more than a cold. Oh, but sad to say, by the time the moon glowed in a dark sky, the child had chills and a very high fever. Everyone was alarmed by the unrelenting, elevated fever. Melinda looked like a wilted waif of a girl. After many tortured hours, the fever finally left and she sank into an exhausted, motionless sleep. Surely now there was no need for worry. Yet when she woke up the next morning, something was different and dreadful. She saw the birds outside her window, but she could not hear their songs. Frantically, she ran to her mother and father. She spoke to them, but she could not hear her own voice. Their lips were moving, but nothing except silence filled her head. She began to cry and her mother and father began to cry. It was such a sad sight: the three of them holding on to one another and crying their eyes out. At last, they dried their tears. Julianne located a piece of parchment and wrote to her daughter. "Fear not, my precious child, if there is anyone on this earth that can help you, we are going to find that person. If there is any treatment that will heal you, we will find that treatment." Melinda was comforted by the love and determination of her parents.

Immediately, Imperial Notices were posted throughout the land advising that any treatment for hearing loss must be brought to the king. Straight away, people began showing up at the palace. Various herbs to swallow and concoctions of ear drops and even exercises were suggested. If they could do no harm, they were given a try. Many of the ideas seemed to have real merit, but sadly, nothing worked.

Meanwhile, Melinda was adjusting to her situation. She was learning to enjoy life on these different terms. Yet each time she finished a treatment and it didn't work, she seemed to lose a little more heart. The king and queen were concerned about the pattern: her hopes were raised by each new effort and then crushed when there was no sign of improvement. What could they do? They had to try anything that might help her, but they could see that it was taking a terrible toll on their precious daughter. This had been going on for nearly four years.

Finally King Marcus said, "Enough! People mean well, but they are bringing us every notion under the sun. I will send out a new proclamation. Bring a treatment only if you are willing to bet your life on it! Maybe then, we will find a real cure..."

Queen Julianne broke in, "You wouldn't really harm someone if their cure didn't work!"

"I would not," King Marcus assured her, "but you are not to reveal that to a soul. My notice will

not state that anyone would actually die, but people must believe it is that serious. And I have decided to publish this proclamation outside our kingdom. I will have it delivered far and wide, with a generous reward to anyone who has the real cure. If there were an answer within our kingdom, we would have found it by now."

Eyes wide in alarm, Queen Julianne said, "I want a cure for Melinda as much as you do, but we've never gone outside the kingdom for anything. 'Separate and Safe' has always been our motto. Are you very sure about this?"

"Yes!" said the king emphatically, "I have been thinking about it for a long time. I will put extra safeguards in place, but we have no choice. Remember, you told Melinda that if there was anyone on earth who could help, we would find that person – and I was in total agreement. We will not let our daughter down. I will exercise every measure of safety, but we will open our kingdom to anyone who claims to have a cure and is willing to stake their own life on it." Julianne smiled at her husband, her eyes beaming with admiration.

The proclamation was published and carried to the far corners of the earth; at least, the farthest corners known at that time. (A Royal Proclamation was more serious than an Imperial Notice.) Within the kingdom, the home remedies ceased immediately. It was understood that the royal couple would no longer welcome anything short of a guaranteed, certain cure. Although many good-hearted people had brought forth ideas they believed would have benefit, there were just as many trying to conjure up something that might make them rich. Even though a reward had not been mentioned originally, most folks assumed there would be a reward and, in fact, anyone solving such a dilemma would likely become famous, as well as prosperous. This new proclamation, however, stopped nearly all talk of the matter. Since no one could leave the kingdom, there was no way to obtain any new information or find out about any possibilities. So occasionally, people would engage in wishful thinking, as people are prone to do, wishing they could go and find a cure for the princess and be richly rewarded. Then they would sigh and go about their business.

However, there was considerable speculation about outsiders being allowed in. Most people were very leery of the idea, to say the least. Although they understood the king's reason, and certainly couldn't hold it against him, they were fearful and distrusting of outsiders. It had been at least a hundred years since any outsider had set foot within Brosia. If the secure borders that framed their peaceful lives were opened, who knew what might happen? Would the extra security measures that the king implemented be sufficient? What if spies slipped in? What if an evil army came against them while they were more vulnerable? These were the questions being disputed at all levels of kingdom life.

Nothing much happened for several months, however, so the Brosians began to calm down and think that their fears had not been warranted. There were a few minor incidents, but nothing alarming. One time some tradesmen had come to the gate and tried to bargain their way in, saying they had goods that everyone would love. They tried to coax the gate guards to take some

of their wares to the king, but the guards were undeterred. They stated that they had strict orders not to accept anything for any reason and not to let anyone in unless their business was to cure the king's daughter. When the tradesmen continued to persist, the guards gave them a stiff warning and they went away. Another time, a man with a long, gray beard came to the gate claiming that he did have a cure for the king's daughter, but he would not enter because it might be a trick to capture him or to do him harm. One of the guards told him that King Marcus was always honorable in his dealings and if he couldn't trust that to be the case, then he needed to move on. Oddly, the old man became indignant. He scowled as though his own honor had been questioned and then he stormed away.

Finally, there was a husband and wife who swore they could heal the girl. They were a kindly couple, perhaps in their sixties. Both were short and thin, and their clothes were baggy and worn out. Two of the guards escorted them to the palace. There was much excitement as people watched them go by... excitement because they were outsiders and excitement because maybe, at long last, a cure had arrived. They were taken inside the palace and led down a long, wide hall to a very large room called The Greeting Room. It was less formal than The Throne Room. The king had been summoned and both he and the queen walked in. The outsiders bowed and the king welcomed them. He asked their names, and was told, "Morticus and Elsie."

"What makes you certain that your cure will work?" questioned King Marcus.

Morticus, missing a front tooth, responded with high-pitched excitement, "We have a tonic with a secret ingredient and it healed our nephew! He would tell you himself, but he's away on a trip. This tonic is absolutely, monumentally amazing!"

"That's right," squealed Elsie, gesturing dramatically, "it is a miracle tonic! That it is!" Her wiry curls bounced with her movements and seemed to have a life of their own. "And not only that," she continued more loudly, "it will cure just about anything! I do declare it!"

After questioning them for about ten minutes, the king and queen knew that the only tonic this couple had was the spirited type they enjoyed too much. No doubt they figured the royal parents to be desperate enough to treat them as royal guests for awhile. Then when their "cure" didn't work, they reckoned that no one would do harm to a nice, old couple and they would simply be escorted out. What they didn't figure on was the wisdom of the king.

As much as King Marcus wanted to believe them, he knew a racket when he saw it, even by rather likable characters who preferred drink to food. He was not overly angry, but he did despise their deceitful scheming and had to make an example of them.

“You came here on false pretenses. You dared to raise our hopes knowing full well that you have no cure. You have been heartless and selfish. For that, you shall suffer....” He paused long enough to let their fear rise. Then he continued, “You will be held in our prison for 90 days. Then you will be escorted out of this kingdom and never welcomed back. Leave my sight immediately!”

Morticus and Elsie, looking genuinely ashamed, hung their heads and followed the guards without protest.

The story of “the old outsiders” spread throughout the kingdom. Brosians realized that the king had been lenient in this case, but the point was not lost. There would be retribution for anyone bringing forth a false promise of cure.

CHAPTER 2

THE PRINCESS PRESENTATION

A decade had passed since Melinda first became deaf. As life never stands still for circumstance, so Melinda’s life had continued throughout all of the searching, hoping years. She was now a lovely young woman, and it was time for her Princess Presentation. At this grand occasion, she would be officially recognized as a grown princess, eligible for suitors. Preparations had been ongoing for months. It seemed to be therapeutic for everyone to immerse themselves in creating the finest ball ever. They wanted Melinda to have the time of her life. Since no one had been able to erase the negative strike of deafness, they wanted to compensate as much as they could. Oh, they realized that deafness was not the worst thing that could happen, not by far, but it just wasn’t fitting for a princess. No, it wasn’t right at all.

So it was with great elation that the Princess Presentation commenced in grand fashion. The king and queen were magnificent in their finest royal robes and jewelry. The queen, who was aging well, still had thick, brown hair and a pleasing figure. She was quite lovely in her burgundy attire. The king was a striking figure also, though a little heavier than in bygone days. His royal blue robe complimented his deep-set blue eyes and his gray beard.

As they surveyed the Grand Guestroom, they looked especially pleased with all of the pageantry around them because their Brosian subjects had put exceptional care into every detail. The decorations were superbly rich in color and original design. Why, just the flowers alone were a breath-taking sight! They seemed to grow out of every nook and cranny in a vast array of vivid

color. It was undoubtedly the most impressive occasion ever seen at the palace, which is saying quite a lot!

The Brosians really looked forward to seeing Melinda as most of them had only seen her in brief glimpses at one occasion or another. Their expectations were not disappointed! Melinda was beautiful in that breath-taking way that befits a royal princess as naturally as her crown. Her reddish-brown hair was pulled up loosely, with ringlets before her ears and the rest of her hair spilling down from behind her crown and jeweled hairpins. Her delicate face was princess-perfect with soft, brown eyes and a slightly upturned nose. Gracefully well-proportioned, she did justice to whatever she wore, but on this occasion, she was stunning! Her emerald green gown, trimmed in pearls, draped from one shoulder, leaving the other shoulder beautifully bare.

Melinda was not arrogant, but she carried herself with the grace and poise that royals learn at a very young age. She could disarm with her charm, but she was genial and genuine also. Even though all her interactions were done on parchment, she handled them so well that it seemed to be no impediment at all. Her dancing was divine. Watching her glide across the floor, one would never suspect that she could not hear the music.

When it was time for the final toast of the evening, the traditional time for the king to pronounce a blessing on his daughter, a guard entered hastily and sought out the king. After he spoke urgently with King Marcus, the king then turned and spoke quietly with the queen. Then everyone was called to attention. The king had a solemn look, but no one knew if it was related to the guard's message or to his own recognition of this ceremony as a farewell of sorts to the daughter no longer a little girl. As he began to speak, he was not at all steady. He seemed to be groping for words. Then he came to the point, "I have a speech prepared, but I am not going to give it at this time." There was a faint murmur of surprise throughout the ranks. "I have been informed that someone has just arrived with the claim of a cure for Princess Melinda, but he contends that he must speak to this gathering. I do not know what this is about, but we are going to hear him out, lest there is any chance of a cure. If not, I will have him escorted out and I will deal with him later. So at this time, the guards will bring in the outsider."

Everyone turned toward the back of the room and watched anxiously as two guards led a young man down the center aisle to the front area before the king and queen. Melinda was standing off to the side near the front. The young man had an average build, perhaps a little tall. He was dressed from top to bottom in dark, royal purple and had a white turban with a matching purple band. His face was appealing, though not exceptional, but he had a very serious demeanor. His eyes were dark brown, almost black.

Looking intently at the king, he spoke in a strong, clear voice, "I have come to bring healing to your daughter. However, the healing is dependent upon certain actions that I shall explain."

Eyebrows were raised, but King Marcus said, "Continue."

The mysterious man said, "King Marcus, my requirements are few; they may seem extreme, but they are essential. First of all, your daughter would have to make a commitment to marry me in the future."

There was a loud gasp from people throughout the room. The king and queen looked stricken. Melinda appeared to be in shock when she read the words. (Her attendant wrote everything for her as soon as it was spoken.) Looking pale and shaken, she dropped into the chair behind her.

The king said, "Before you continue, I want to know about you. What is your name and where are you from?"

The man smiled slightly and spoke in a kind tone. "My name is Jordan. I am from a kingdom called Tranquillon. My father is the king there. His kingdom is immense and incredible. No offense intended, your majesty, but your kingdom to his is like an anthill to a mountain. When the time was right, my father sent me to heal your daughter. He sent me because he is very good and caring."

King Marcus demanded, "If he is good and caring, why do you not give us this cure without conditions?"

Jordan continued, "My father understands many things that are beyond most people. Again, I do not mean to offend you, but in our kingdom, people have learned to trust him as his judgment and wisdom are exceptional. I cannot be more specific on this point, so I will lay out the rest of my proposal." The king was visibly annoyed, but nodded his head in agreement, so Prince Jordan continued. "Once your daughter agrees, I will speak to her at our Engagement Ceremony and she will hear me."

This sensational statement brought a loud gasp from everyone at once. People were turning to one another in disbelief, shaking their heads and murmuring, "What kind of nonsense is this!"

The prince continued calmly. "Then, I will give her a gift to show honor to her as my future wife. After that, I will soon depart and return to my kingdom. I will be gone for an indefinite amount of time, but I will return when my father tells me the time is right. Until then, your daughter must talk to me each day. All she has to do is call my name and talk to me. Then she will hear my voice inside her heart. She can talk to me any time, but it is important that she seek me at the start of

her day. And of course, she must be true to me as her future husband. If she does these things, her sense of hearing will remain strong.”

The queen spoke up, with obvious concern, “How long do we have to decide?”

Prince Jordan said, “I can stay for up to seven days, but then I must return.” *

Intrigue and mystery are quietly stirring in a kingdom where the proposal of a foreign prince is quite unconventional! The response of Princess Melinda will affect her future in very unexpected ways! Not only that, her choices during an interim time will be critical. Will she recognize the voice of love?

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