

THE BLUE BIRD

ILLUSTRATED & TRANSLATED



A blue bird

or

Kók qus

Illustrated & translated by



A long time ago, long ago, so long ago when the rams were still without horns and sheep without tails, there lived a young hunter.

He lived simply and in comfort. Each day he would disappear for hours, hunting - he would shoot a quail; a hare, and sometimes he would carry a red fox in his hands which would soon turn into a hat to warm him in the harsh winters.

He lived without grief. The day had passed - so be it.





With greatest care, he fed and watered the bird, until the very moment the feathers had grown back and the bird spread its wings with newfound strength. He freed the bird right after, but it was not so quick to leave.

"Thank you, dear hunter. You saved me from the imminent death!" the bird said in a clear human voice, "I shall grant you one wish, young hunter. So tell me, what does your heart desire?"

The hunter thinks for a moment. The moment stretches.

"Do you wish to become the richest man on earth?" the bird offers. It flaps its wing and the ground falls out from underneath the hunter's feet and a hoard of riches appears before the hunter's eyes: gold, silver, jewels and trinkets of all kinds.

But it's not the wealth than hunter desires. He simply shakes his head and says:

"I'm a simple hunter. I don't wish for infinite riches you offer. Why would I want to waste my life trying to guard it?"

The blue bird chuckles:

"Indeed. If it's not the infinite wealth you desire, I shall offer you infinite power. Tell me, young hunter, do you wish to be a Khan? Do you wish to live in the palace, wear expensive dresses, have delicious food and drinks galore? Do you wish for others to tremble before you?"



The answer is immediate.

"I don't wish for infinite power. Why would I wish to live in palace walls when I have the vastness of the land before me: endless steppes, high mountains with snowy peaks, swift rivers? Why would I wish for expensive dresses if they would wear down like any other piece of cloth I already own? I hold no interest in foods and drinks, and even more I wouldn't wish for other's fear of me, as fear leads to hatred alone."

The blue bird agrees, and offer the last gift to the young hunter:

"Well then, perhaps you wish for the fairest maiden in the land to be your wife?"

The blue bird flaps its other wing, and in a instant, a flawless beauty appears before the hunter's eyes, and words cannot begin to describe her beauty. But the young hunter declines nonetheless:

"Why would I wish for her even with her beauty?" objected hunter, "Beauty is like a flower - it withers with time. I would choose a partner who is kind and loyal and resilient, who's beauty lays within their heart, rather than their face - for it remains intact even as the years pass."

"I suppose you're right on that one either, hunter!" exclaimed the blue bird, "But what shall I gift you then? How can I thank you for your kindness?"

"I don't need anything from you, blue bird" replied young hunter "You may fly away in peace and simply remember me as a good friend"

The blue bird ponders upon the hunter's request for a moment, and answers:

"And still I wouldn't want to stay in your debt. Your decision to refuse my gifts was wise, of course: riches, power, pleasures and entertainment - all worldly goods are transient," the bird pauses, "I know what I shall gift you. My magical casket! But mustn't you open it right now. Only when in the time of greatest need, only when you'll feel low and dreary like you've never felt before in your life - only then you must open it"

And with these words, the bird flaps its majestic wings and a small wooden casket appears in the hunter's hands. The blue bird flies back, upwards into the sky, and the hunter goes about his life, the birds' gift remaining by his side everywhere he goes.

One day, the hunter decides to take a rest on the way home. His thoughts wander. He couldn't help but think of the strange bird and its gift hidden deep in his bags. At last, curiosity takes over him - he digs out the casket and opens the lid just a crack to take a little glimpse.

And it was just enough. Two snow-white doves fly out from the casket, startling the hunter. One lands on the hunter's shoulder, while the other flies slightly to the side.

But all of the sudden, out of nowhere a dark ominous figure jumps out and catches the dove in midair.

A wolf!

"Let go of the dove," the hunter cries, "Take my horse if you will, but you let go of the dove. It holds great value to me, a memory of a good friend of mine - the blue bird."

The wolf barks out a laugh.

"I have no need in your horse," - the wolf growls out, baring his long razor sharp canines - "I will release the dove only under one condition: once the year ends, I'll come back and will eat you instead."

The hunter thinks - after all, a lot of things can happen in a year. He agrees.

The hunter goes about his life, again, and now two doves remain by his side, living atop of the shanyrak* of his yurt**.

Two little doves bring peace and prosperity into his home. One hunt more successful than the other, one bounty bigger than the last. The hunter meets a lovely girl, resilient, kind and with the most beautiful heart, marries her, and they have a beautiful son together.

The year passes by quickly. The wolf returns. True to his old promise, the hunter closes his eyes and awaits his death. The wolf, victorious, leaps forward, giant mouth open, ready to swallow the hunter whole, but the pain does not come: a single loud thud and a dying roar. The hunter looks behind and sees his wife with a bow held firmly in her hands and once ominous wolf now still at her feet.

*Shanyrak - an arched cross-shaped top of the Kazakh yurt. Symbolizes home, comfort and well-being.

**Yurt - portable, round tent covered in skins and used as a dwelling by kazakhs and several other nomadic groups in Central Asia.



"I never promised anything to this wolf," said his wife calmly and lowers her bow.

"As did I," a familiar voice of the blue bird resonates from above.

"Needed you to open that casket ahead of time?"

"You could've avoided trouble, hunter, the misfortune of meeting my dear brother..."

The bird looked sorrowful as she looked at the body of the black wolf.

"A brother?" the birds' words surprise the hunter, "What exactly happened here?"

"We're two brothers: a black wolf and a blue bird," the bird begins to explain, "A father of ours, the Khan of the great snow mountains, the same ones you've seen when you first found me, once gifted a casket to me, a magical casket that brings happiness to the home of the bearer. The black wolf, my dear brother have grown jealous and greed overtook him as he tried to take away our fathers' gift. I could not allow that. And it almost cost me my life if not for you."

The bird signs.

"So I gifted the casket to you, sure that the wolf won't ever find it in your hands, but I was wrong and he almost tried to steal your life too. I've seen him jump, eager to kill you, but I flew as fast as I could and lifted you up in the sky, meanwhile your wife, smart and brave, run out of the yurt and shot a swift arrow into the beast's heart. I was not wrong in my choice to give the casket to you"

The young hunter thanks the blue bird, but then returns the magical casket back to the bird:

"Don't think ill of me, my friend, but I do not need your magical casket. You've seen it yourself: I have a home, a brave and loving wife, a son who'll grow into a wonderful man, I have a good horse and a pair of hands. My family will never have to face starvation, will never have to suffer. I have everything a person needs to be happy. Should the need occur - I will do it either with my own hands or with the help of family and friends. Friends like you. Now I know that I can count on you, too."

The bird could not help but to agree with the wise words of the hunter. Even the most wonderful, the most magical casket on earth has no power over the happiness of a person. Even the most magical casket on earth cannot bring piece into one's life, if there's no piece in one's heart...

And so they lived in peace and harmony, happily ever after...

THE END



