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**“TALE OF THE DEAD PRINCESS AND THE SEVEN CHAMPIONS”**

**by Alexander Pushkin**

## TALE OF THE DEAD PRINCESS AND THE SEVEN CHAMPIONS

Once there was a king, who started  
Journeying; from his queen he parted;  
And she watched, a lonely thing,  
At her window for her king.  
Morn and eve she watched and waited;  
Still the plain she contemplated  
Till her eyes were sore, from white  
Daybreak to the fall of night.  
Never a sign of him, her lover!  
All the earth is whitened over,  
And the spinning snowstorms fall  
On the plains; and that is all.  
And her eyes she never raises  
From the plains; nine months, she gazes.  
—God, ere Christmas eve is morn,  
Brings a gift: a girl is born.  
In the morning early, homing  
From afar where he was roaming,  
Long awaited with desire,  
Came at last the king and sire.  
Just a look was his to capture;  
But she could not bear the rapture;  
Deeply, heavily she signed;  
Near the hour of mass, she died.

Inconsolably, in seeming,  
Flew a year of barren dreaming.  
Kings are frail, other men;  
Wedded was the king again.  
Youthful was the queen he newly

Took to wife; I tell you truly,  
She was shapely, white, and tall;  
She was first, in wit and all;  
Yet a captious, wilful spirit,  
Proud, and envious of merit.  
She for dowry of her own  
Brought a looking-glass alone:  
One of strange, peculiar fashion,  
With the gift of conversation.  
She was never kind or gay  
When that mirror was away;  
With it, pleasantly she jested;  
Preened herself, and thus addressed it:  
“Mirror, mirror, let me hear  
Nothing but the truth, my dear!  
Tell me, am I sweetest, fairest?  
Are my red and white the rarest?”  
And the mirror still replies,

“Nay, be sure that none denies  
Thou art sweetest, thou art fairest,  
And the rosiest and rarest.”  
Then the queen in laughter breaks,  
And her shoulders shrugs and shakes,  
Snaps rejoicingly her fingers,  
Winks, and blinks, and proudly lingers  
Gazing, with a sidelong pace,  
In the mirror at her face.

Silently, with none beholding,  
Was the young princess unfolding

All the while; and grew, each hour,  
Till at last the bud was flower.  
Black her brows, and pale her features;  
She was gentlest of all creatures.  
Seeking her a husband, they  
Found a prince, young Elisey.  
Message came; the king consented,  
And for portion he presented  
Seven market-towns; may more,  
Roomy chambers, seven score.

Now the queen has got upon her  
All her finery, in honour  
Of the marriage-eve; and now  
She bespeaks the mirror: "Thou,  
Tell me, am I sweetest, fairest?  
Are my red and white the rarest?"  
But the mirror now replies:  
"Thou art lovely, none denies;  
But the sweetest, rosiest, fairest  
Is the princess, and the rarest."  
How the queen recoils and springs,  
Brandishes her arms, and flings  
Down the mirror, on it tramping.  
With her booted heel, and stamping!  
"Nasty, spiteful glass, I see  
Thou art telling lies to me!  
Would she rival me! I'll wholly  
Soon dispose of such a folly!  
What a creature she is grown!  
Why, her mother, it is known,

When with child, on snow was gazing;  
So—she's white!—Is that amazing?  
Nay, but tell me: how should she  
Overpass, in sweetness, me?  
Journey all our kingdom over,  
Though the whole wide world thou cover,  
I'm the peerless one comfiest;  
I of all am loveliest.  
Tell me!" Still the glass said, "Fairer,  
Rosier is the bride, and rarer."  
So, no help! The lady next,  
With the blackest envy vext,  
Flings the glass beneath the benches,  
Calls, amongst her chamber-wenches,  
One Chernavka; bids her bear  
Into some deep woody lair  
That princess, and tightly bind her  
Where the hungry wolves may find her  
Underneath a pine alive  
And devour her.

Now, to strive  
With an angry dame is idle.  
Not the Devil her can bridle.  
Through the wood Chernavka passed  
With the maid so far at last,  
That the maid, the truth descrying,  
Was for terror all but dying,  
And besought her: "Precious one,  
Say, what evil have I done?  
Do not be my death; and, mind me,

Good and gracious shalt thou find me  
On the day that I am queen.”  
But Chernavka love unseen  
Bore her, neither bound nor slew her;  
Left her free, made answer to her,  
“God be with thee; never grieve”;  
Homeward then she took her leave.  
“So, now tell me where the maid is,  
That most beauteous of ladies,”  
Asks the queen; the wench replies,  
“In the wood alone she lies;  
Beasts will catch and claw her, surely,  
By the elbows lasht securely.  
She will die the easier; less  
Are her sufferings and distress.”

Now the rumours ring and thicken  
Of the lost princess; and stricken,  
Pining for her, sits the king.  
Elisey, petitioning  
God with heart and soul, goes questing  
On the highway, never resting  
Till he finds his promised wife  
Young and fair, his very life.

But that young and lovely lady  
Strayed about the forest shady,  
Until daybreak threading it.  
On a mansion then she lit,  
Where a dog ran forward baying.  
Then it ceased, and fell to playing;

Through the gate her way she found;  
In the court was not a sound;  
And the dog behind her wheeling  
Fawned; and then the princess, stealing  
Gently, mounted up the stair,  
Grasped the door-ring hanging there,  
And the door swung open lightly;  
In a room illumined brightly  
Next the princess found herself.  
On the stove were tiles of delf  
Made to lie on; pictures holy,  
Oaken table, benches lowly  
Laid with rugs, were there; and kind  
Living people she would find,  
Surely? - none to harm a woman.  
Yet she noted nothing human.  
Round the house the princess paced,  
All things in good order placed,  
To the Lord a taper kindled,  
Lit the stove whose warmth had dwindled,  
To an attic upward sped,  
Laid her softly down to bed.

Now the time to eat is coming;  
Footsteps in the court are drumming.  
Seven champions enter then,  
Ruddy, bushy-whiskered men.  
“All is wondrous bright and clean here,”  
Says the eldest; “who hath been here?  
Who hath set the room so straight?  
Someone doth the hosts await.

Ay, but who? come forth and greet us!  
Friendlike, honourably meet us!  
Art thou aged? we will call  
Thee our uncle, once for all.  
If some ruddy lad or other,  
Thou shalt have the name of brother.  
If an ancient dame, then we  
Will as mother honour thee.  
If a comely maid thou prove thee,  
Be our sister; we will love thee.”

And the princess issued thence,  
Did her hosts due reverence,  
Made a low, deep inclination,  
Blushed, and faltered explanation  
How beneath their roof she got  
As a guest, though bidden not.  
As the champions listened to her,  
For a princess straight they knew her.  
In a nook they set her there,

Served her with a pasty fair,  
Poured a brimming cup, to stand  
On a salver at her hand.  
But the lady, with a sign,  
Waved away the emerald wine;  
Broke a corner of the pasty,  
Nibbled at a morsel hasty;  
But was wayworn, made request  
For a bed, to take her rest.  
Then the maiden they invited

To an upper room, well lighted,  
And they left her there alone.  
To her slumbers she is gone.

Like a flash the days go sliding;  
Still the young princess is biding  
In the wood; not wearisome  
Is the seven champions' home.  
Ere the dawn, in friendly rally  
Out the brethren riding sally;  
Take an airing, to let fly  
At the grey-winged duck; or try,  
All for sport, their sinews, dropping  
Mounted Saracens, or lopping  
Some broad-shouldered Tartar's pate;  
Or from woods they extirpate  
Pyatigorsk Circassians straying.  
And the lady, still delaying,  
Tarries in the room alone,  
Keeping house while they are gone;  
Makes all trim, prepares the dishes.  
Never do they cross her wishes,  
Never does she them gainsay.  
Day in this wise follows day.

Now their hearts they all had given  
Unto that dear maid. The seven  
Brothers came one morn to her  
Ere the sun was well astir.  
Said the eldest: "We have told thee  
How we all a sister hold thee,

All the seven; yet we all  
Love thee; each one fine would call  
Thee his wife, but that we may not.  
So, for love of heaven, delay not;  
Somehow set our hearts at rest;  
Be the wife of one—the best,  
To the six a sister loving.  
Why that headshake unapproving?  
Wilt not have us? Is the ware  
Not for purchase—all too rare?”

“Lads of honour! Ye, none others,”  
Said she, “are my own, own brothers.  
If I lie, may God command  
That I perish where I stand;  
Know ye then, that I am plighted;  
What shall serve? I cannot right it.  
Ye are equal in mine eyes;  
All are valiant, all are wise;  
Each one hath my love sincerest;  
But another still is dearest;  
I must his for ever be;  
Elisey, the prince, is he.”

Mute they stood; and as she ended,  
Scratched their necks: “Be not offended!  
Asking, surely, is no sin”;  
And the eldest bowed: “We win  
Pardon? Is it so?—then say not  
In excuse one word.” — “I may not  
Chide you,” soft the answer came;

“For my No I’m not to blame.”  
Then they did meet reverence to her;  
Quietly retired each wooer;  
Lived their old lives, every one,  
All in peace and unison.

But the wicked queen, still fretting,  
Not forgiving or forgetting,  
On the princess thought, and long  
Chafed in anger at the wrong  
Done her by the glass, and pouted.  
But she threw her arms about it  
In the end, and sat her down  
Facing it; forgot to frown,  
And once more began to preen her;  
Said, with smiling day demeanour,  
“Mirror, greetings! Let me hear  
Nothing but the truth, my dear;  
Tell me, am I sweetest, fairest?  
Are my red and white the rarest?”  
And the mirror, it replies,  
“Thou art lovely, none denies.  
Yet in oakwoods green and shady,  
All unnoted lives a lady,  
Housed with seven champions; now,  
She is sweeter far than thou.”  
Then the queen in wrath flew at her;  
“Thou, Chernavka, in this matter  
Durst thou trick me?”—To the rest,  
Point by point, the wench confessed.  
And that evil queen did warn her

That a collar might adorn her  
Set with spikes! "Now die," she saith,  
"Or the princess do to death."

Once the young princess, who waited  
For her brothers dear belated,  
At her window spun; and there  
Suddenly below the stair  
Heard the angry house-dog growling.  
There, within the court, was prowling  
Just a nun who begged for food  
While with crutch the dog she shooed.  
Down the lady called, "Good mother,  
I will scare him; stop the pother,  
Only wait, and thou wilt see  
What I'm bringing down to thee."  
But the nun was heard replying,  
"Ah, my child, I'm near to dying,  
Worried by thy hateful cur;  
Watch him, raising all the stir!  
Come, come out and help me, darling!"  
But the dog, who still was snarling  
When the princess tried to go  
With a loaf, and stept below,  
Pushed between her feet, nor let her  
Reach the crone, who moved and met her.  
At the crone he still would bay,  
And no woodland beast of prey  
Could have flown at her more madly.  
Was it strange? "He's slept so badly!  
Look, and catch!" the princess said,

As she tossed her out the bread.  
And the crone, when she had caught it,  
Cried her thanks to her who brought it:  
“May God bless thee! Now, to match,  
Here is something for thee: catch!”  
And a pippin straight she tosses,  
Juicy, fresh, with golden glosses,  
To the princess. How the hound  
Whimpers, springing from the ground!  
—Clap! With both her hands she snatches  
And the pippin deftly catches.  
“Say your grace, and eat the prime  
Pippin; it will kill the time,  
Dearest!” Thus the beldame crying  
Bows and vanishes. But flying  
With the princess to the stair  
Fiercely howls the dog, and there  
Sadly looks upon her, making  
As his doggish heart were aching  
And as though he would command  
“Drop the thing!” Her gentle hand  
Ruffles, pats him and caresses:  
“Falcon, something thee distresses?  
Down!” Within her room she passed,  
Quietly the door made fast,  
By her yarn at window sitting,  
Waiting for her hosts; but flitting  
Towards her pippin were her eyes.  
Ripe and sappy was the prize,  
Fresh and fragrant as a posy,  
And as golden as a rosy,

As if honey-filled; and she  
Through the rind the pips could see.  
First she thought that eat she would not  
Till the meal; but wait she could not:  
To her crimson lips the fruit,  
Clasped in either hand, she put.  
Nibble upon nibble followed,  
And a morsel next she swallowed...  
Suddenly the snowy hands  
Of our dear one flag; she stands  
Reeling, and her breath is stopping,  
And the ruddy fruit is dropping,  
And she rolls her eyes, and falls  
By the ikons on the walls  
Headlong to the bench, and by it  
Lies, immovable and quiet.

And the brethren, who had made  
Some courageous, cunning raid,  
Now were trooping homeward proudly.  
But the house-dog, yelping loudly,  
Ran to meet them, showed the way  
To the court. "Bad luck to-day!"  
Said the brethren, "some disaster  
Here is certain." Rushing faster,  
Springing in, they looked, and groaned.  
And the dog, he barked and moaned,  
Fiercely at the pippin flying,  
Gulped it down, and tumbled dying,  
And expired. Behold, the bait  
Was with poison saturate.

Then the brethren bow before her,  
In their deepest soul deplore her;  
Lift her from the bench, array her  
For her burial, but survey her  
Wavering—the lady so  
Tranquil lay and fresh, as though  
Sleep's own plumes

were her enwreathing,

And they almost thought

her breathing.

So three days they watched; but she  
Rose not, slumbering peaceably.  
Then the mournful rites they paid her;  
In a crystal coffin laid her,  
And that young princess in state  
All the band conveyed, to wait  
On a mountain, named Deserted.  
Lofty pillars they inserted  
For her coffin, six in all,  
At the midnight hour; withal  
Safe with iron chains they nailed it;  
With a grating round they railed it;  
And before their sister dead  
Earthward bent; the eldest said:  
*Coffined there, may sleep bestrew thee.*  
*Swiftly malice quenched and slew thee;*  
*Earth thy beauty still doth gain;*  
*Heaven thy soul must entertain.*  
*Best beloved we esteemed thee.*  
*Cherished thee, and sweetest deemed thee.*  
*No man had thee for his own;*

*Thou wert for the grave alone.*

But the wicked queen was watching  
For good news that day, and catching  
Secretly her glass, she made  
Question as of old, and said,  
“Tell me, am I sweetest, fairest?  
Are my red and white the rarest?”  
In her ear the glass replies,  
“Such thou art; and none denies  
Thou art sweetest, rosiest, fairest  
Of all women, and the rarest.”

Seeking still his promised bride  
Over all the earth must ride  
Elisey. But nought availing  
Are his bitter tears and wailing.  
He may ask of whom he will,  
None to answer has the skill;  
In his face they laugh and flout him,  
Or they show their backs and scout him.  
Then at last the warrior turned  
To the Sun, who redly burned:  
“Sun, our luminary, pacing  
Yearlong round the skies, and chasing  
With warm spring the winter snow,  
Seeing all men here below,  
In the wide world hast thou ever  
Seen a young princess? ah, never,  
Surely, wilt thou grudge reply:  
Her affianced man am I.”

“None, dear youth, have I beholden,”  
Said the ruddy sun and golden.  
“Is she numbered with the dead?  
Yet my neighbour-Moon,” he said,  
“Somewhere may have met and faced her,  
Or by footprints may have traced her.”

Elisey, whose heart was sick,  
Waited till the night fell thick;  
Saw the Moon new-risen, and hailed her;  
With entreaty thus assailed her:  
“Moon, thou Moon, good friend of mine,  
Horned and gilded, who dost shine  
In the misty deeps upblazing,  
Round of face, and brightly gazing,  
Thou whom all the stars survey  
Loving still thy wonted way,  
In the wide world hast thou ever  
Marked a young princess? ah, never,  
Surely, wilt thou grudge reply!  
Her affianced man am I.”  
“Brother,” said the Moon serenely,  
“I have marked no maiden queenly.  
Only in my turn I dwell  
At my post as sentinel.  
Doubtless, while she past was flying  
I had gone.” And he was crying,  
“Ah, the pity of it!” “Nay”  
Then the clear Moon added, “stay;  
For the Wind will help thee, lover,  
And may give thee tidings of her;

Therefore get thee to him now.  
So, farewell; and fret not thou.”

Then he plucked up heart, and speeding  
To the Wind, began his pleading:  
“Wind, O Wind, so strong and proud,  
Chaser of flocks of cloud,  
Stirrer of the azure ocean,  
Ranging space in airy motion,  
Going in the fear of none  
Saving the Lord God alone,  
In the wide world hast thou ever  
Marked a young princess? ah, never,  
Surely, wilt thou grudge reply;  
Her affianced man am I.”  
Said the Storm-Wind: “Tarry: yonder,  
Past where quiet waters wander,  
Is a lofty mountain, where  
Lies a hole profound; and there  
Swings within that hole abysmal,  
Chained to pillars, in a dismal  
Mirk, a crystal coffin; round  
All that barren place are found  
No man’s tracks; the coffin laden  
Is with her, thy plighted maiden.”

Then the Wind sped on. But he  
Gave one sob, and, fain to see  
Once again his lady plighted  
In her beauty, went, and lighted  
On that barren place. Behold,

Now a craggy mountain bold  
Towers before him, and around it  
Lies a barren land to bound it.  
Swiftly, swiftly doth he go  
To an entry dark below.  
There, in blackness melancholy  
Swings a crystal coffin slowly;  
Crystal-coffined, lies she deep,  
His princess, in endless sleep.  
Then with all his might he battered  
At his dear one's coffin. Shattered  
Suddenly, the coffin broke;  
Suddenly the maid awoke;  
Looked with wandering eyes around her,  
Swayed above the chains that bound her,  
Heaved a mighty sigh, and said  
"See how long I've laid abed!"  
From the coffin she is creeping;  
Ah, for joy they both are weeping!  
Now he lifts the maid away  
Out of darkness into day  
And the two are homeward faring,  
Happy, friendly talk are sharing.  
Quickly round the tidings ring,  
"Saved—the daughter of the king!"

Idly, that same hour, was waiting  
The bad stepdame, and debating  
With her glass at home; so ran  
Converse, as the queen began:  
"Am I not the sweetest, fairest?"

Are my red and white the rarest?"  
In her ear the glass replies,  
"Thou art lovely, none denies,  
But the sweetest, rosiest, fairest  
Is the princess, and the rarest."  
Up the wicked stepdame leapt,  
To the floor the glass she swept  
Broken, and rushed out, and straightway  
Met the princess in the gateway.  
Sick of soul, discomfited  
Was that queen, and there fell dead.  
Scarce to earth had she been carried,  
They made ready to be married.  
Then was wedded Elisey  
To his bride with no delay.  
Never, since the world's creation,  
Saw man such a celebration.  
I drank beer, drank mead, and yet  
Hardly were my whiskers wet.