



MAKA SEPASHVILI

MAIN COLORS


FAIRYTALES

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MAIN COLORS: FAIRY–TALES

eBook Edition:

Produced by 
1827 Walden Office Square Suite 260,
Schaumburg, IL 60173, USA
Enquiries:
info@ebooks2go.net
www.ebooks2go.net

ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5457-4414-7

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication

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The Twin Brothers

Long time ago, when the universe was created, humans were born. They didn't appreciate the immortality gifted by God, so twin brothers Life and Death were born. Both lived separately and served their pursuits and affairs. They hadn't seen each other in a very long time, and one day Life unexpectedly came across Death.

"Hello, how are you doing? We haven't met in so long!" Life said in a jolly voice.

"Oh," sighed Death, "what can I say, I'm lonesome. Nobody loves me. Everybody is afraid of me; they curse my existence. People hate me. However, what can I do? This is why I was born; this is my purpose. Nevertheless, you aren't the same—you are different," he said in jealousy. "No feast table is laid without you. They say toasts, and they praise and bless you. It's true that we are brothers—offspring of one father. But we have different fates and destinies."

"No, that's not true." Life felt pity for him. "You are wrong, brother!"

"You know that I'm telling the truth." Death glanced sadly over Life's variegated pelerine, and then sighed deeply and sat on a big stone.

They were on a field covered with tall green grass and colorful flowers. An azure sky was over them, and not a living soul could be seen.

"Don't know about the fate," Life said wistfully. His deep-blue eyes darkened, and he sat beside his brother. "I am what I am, and I do what I do. Because we both exist, this is the way it must be."

"Look," Death interrupted him. He bent and picked up a tiny violet flower at the bottom of the stone. The flower shook, shivered, and wilted. Death's eyes blazed, and even his face lit. Life stayed numb. Death inhaled and then blew over a little flower; its petals turned gray, dropped, and died.

"This is my job," said Death severely, but his voice was trembling as if he was going to weep. His brother was amazed. When they were young, Life used to cry often, but he had never seen his sibling weep. Death had never tried out

the salty taste of tears. The twins differed from each other not only in temper but also in appearance.

Silent, Life stared at the ground, wanting to console his brother.

“Good,” Life stood up, “let’s go and see the world. We’ll find the people who don’t hate you. Who knows—maybe there will be more than we know. You will find out that humans themselves are creators of their fates. You only meet them at the time of their deaths, but I spent their entire lives with them and know well what it means to carry the pain of human race on my shoulders.”

Death looked sadly at him and then stood.

“Good brother, let’s go. I don’t think you are right, though. We’ll only find those who curse me, and you’ll know how unfortunate and lonesome I am.”

Both set off. They reached the edge of the field and entered the wood. Suddenly a wolf ran over. It stopped and growled. His white teeth flashed, but when he gazed at Death, he felt fear. He slouched, stepped back, and rapidly vanished from sight.

The brothers reached a nearby village. Music was playing, and people were gathering near one big brick house. Long tables were full of viands, and everyone had delightful and happy smiles.

“What’s happening?” Life asked one man.

“Our neighbor has a newborn baby,” the man answered happily. “They couldn’t have children, but at last God blessed them with a child. They are so happy that they’ve invited the whole village to celebrate the birth of a new life.”

Death said nothing and left. Life caught up with him at the end of the village road.

“You saw that,” Death noticed harshly. “If I had come, they wouldn’t have feasted so jubilantly. Only the curse and damnation I have got from them.”

Life walked speechlessly.

They walked down the hill and arrived at a house with a garden out front. Instead of a wooden fence around the yard, a cobweb was stretched around it. The bushes swayed in the light breeze, and many colorful flowers and motley butterflies fluttered about. Graceful, dazzling-white swans drifted on the lake. In the middle of the garden, there was a golden house with an argent roof. Light and aerial silk curtains were heaving gently.

“Who lives here?” Life asked in astonishment.

“Love and his siblings,” answered one butterfly, flying away with ringing laughter.

The brothers went in the direction of a lake. In the water, beautiful golden-haired girls and boys were splashing and laughing.

“Who are you? Who are you looking for?” One white-dressed woman appeared. Her long black hair fell to her knees, and an infant was reposed on her breast. When she looked into Death’s eyes, she embraced the sleeping baby tightly.

Life nodded his head in greeting and asked,

“Do you live here?”

“Yes,” the woman replied. “This is the house of love and dreams. I’m maternal love; they are my junior siblings. Our eldest brother, God’s love, isn’t here. Why have you come?”

“Are you really able to influence all people’s minds?” Life asked.

“No, not everybody,” maternal love answered gloomily. “Some people don’t need love at all. You will be amazed to find out that some are stronger than we are. Often their pain rules their minds. So that’s why even our abilities have limits.”

“But sometimes love for humans turns into torment,” Death said abruptly. “They find it hard to say farewell. For some it would have been better not to love. Losing someone is hard to accept.”

“And when does it happen?” The woman was interested.

“Once they die!”

The woman clasped the baby tighter and fell into her thoughts. Her heart was beating fast, and she was trembling. She glanced at Death. She couldn’t speak; her words were muddled together.

At that very moment, a strange young man approached them. His once beautiful face had become ugly. He was wearing rags, and terrible pain and sorrow could be seen in his eyes. As soon as he appeared, the merriment ceased. A handsome young couple shot out from the lake. They reached the man and asked fiercely,

“Why have you come again?”

“I have no way out! Please, forgive me! Every single day I go to her. I want to stroke and fondle her rough surface. But as soon as I arrive, the thorns begin

to grow, and she doesn't allow me to touch her." The stranger fell to his knees and sobbed bitterly.

"You got what you deserved," the girl replied. Her dark-blue eyes blazed with anger.

"Your fate is solitude because you have betrayed the fidelity oath," said the boy. He took the girl's hand, and they returned to the lake. Sadly, they sat on the bank of the lake. Their white faces become paler, and their gold hair tangled.

The stranger stood up and sadly and woefully shuffled away, rubbing away like water flowing tears.

"Who was that?" Life asked maternal love as the man disappeared from sight.

"A wretched betrayer. He has been punished. This couple is Innocent Love. They don't forgive him. So every day he comes with his woe and tries to convince them. But his efforts are in vain. They don't even listen to him."

The brothers had a great desire to talk to that man. They said goodbye to all in the House of Love and left. They found the man lying on a big stone, watching the sky and murmuring to himself. When he saw twins, he didn't recognize them.

"We have heard your story, and that's why we have come," explained Life.

"I have paid for my transgression." His face darkened. "I go there and ask them to absolve me, but they don't. I live in desperation."

"What did you perpetrate?" asked Death.

"Far from this place, on the other side of the ocean," the man pointed at the outstretched horizon, "I used to live in a small house with my mother. My father was a sailor and perished in a storm. Next to our garden lived another poor family like us. They had many children, and their youngest daughter was a real diamond. Half of the village boys were enamored with her, not only for her outstanding appearance but also for her kind and beautiful soul. Such a girl chose me!" He sighed with anguish, like his soul was parting from his body. "We both swore an oath to love each other until the end. I had decided to find a job, earn some money, and afterwards get married. At that time, my mother died. I traveled around the world, didn't decline hard work, and when the dejection was incurable, I would read my sweetheart's letters millions of times. This would alleviate the grief. Five years passed, and I returned to my village. I had already accumulated some money, built a house, and soon we got married. Our wedding

was the most remarkable event. All village girls envied my fiancée's exquisite clothing. At the altar, we took a vow of eternal love. I was the happiest man in the world." He stopped, looked up at the sky, and then looked down.

"Then? What happened then?" Life showed impatience.

"Once I was strolling along the ocean," the man continued, "thinking about my beloved wife, when suddenly an unexplainable fear possessed me. I didn't know why. I heard a crystal tinkle ringing laughter. Curiosity won, and I went in the direction of the voices. I hid behind the big rock. The most graceful and exquisite nymphs were playing with the ocean waves. Their long golden hair shone brightly, and their perfect naked bodies shimmered in the sunlight. This startling view magnetized me, and I came closer. They were not afraid. On the contrary, one of them approached me with a seductive smile. I sank into her azure eyes and forgot about my devoted wife.

"After this, I would come to the beach to see the nymph. Deep in my heart I knew that it was wrong, that this would break my wife's heart, but the desire was stronger than me. In the fight between the mind and the soul, the flesh won at last. My passion to hold the nymph's body consumed me. Once my wife saw us as we were burning in the fire of lust. Even now I can see clearly her eyes full of reprimand and pain. For some time she stared mutely and then run into forest. I chased her, begging her to stop and to forgive me. I can't recall how long I had pursued her, when suddenly she stopped and looked at me. I didn't dare reach out to her. She stared at me for about two minutes. I could see love and hate struggling in her eyes. Soon smoke covered everything. When the fog cleared, I saw in front of me a large gray stone. The sorrow broke her heart and turned her into stone." The man sat on the ground in lament.

The twins didn't stop him, and when at last he calmed down, he went on narrating.

"When I want to come to her, she doesn't permit me. A prickly hedge grows around her like a fence, and I can't touch her. That's the reason I beseech the House of love to forgive me and to reunite me with my wife forever. I can't live a life with an empty heart."

In the end, he was going to leave, when Death stopped him.

"I can help you—if you are ready for that, of course!

The man looked at Death, imploring him for an explanation.

"Take us to that place," Death said.

When they came to the wood, they saw the big stone. Its grey surface looked darker after sunset. Death reached it. To their amazement, the stone didn't protect itself with thorns and spikes. Death put his hand on her. Everything around them fell silent. Even the leaves stopped rustling. Life and the man stood aloof and waited. Slowly, a heavy fog fell and oppressed their hearts.

Death turned.

"Come to her," Death told the man.

He obeyed. The stone didn't grow thorns and let the man to touch her. The husband knelt and embraced her. Suddenly white smoke covered everything. Not a thing could be seen. When the smoke cleared, the brothers saw that the husband had turned into moss and covered the stone completely. Tiny flowers grew on it.

"They are together again. Love toward the husband broke her abstinence," murmured Death. His cold and fierce voice sounded strangely soft and gentle.

Life said nothing, only sighed.

They set off. After much walking, they came to an emerald-colored sea. This tint showed them not only the plants growing at the bottom but also the green fish that lived in the sea.

The sea dwellers would turn into humans, walk among the people, and gather wise and judicious expressions. They took them into the sea and kept them in trunks. The wisdom preserved there would turn into gold and precious stones.

On the coast stood a wretched, half-demolished log cabin. One man lived there. Every morning he went out and sat by the sea for hours.

When the brothers saw him, he was sitting on wet sand, staring at the tides. They saluted. He said nothing. He just nodded and looked at the sea.

"Do you live here?" Life asked.

"Yes, in that cabin," he answered without looking.

"What is your name?"

"Eh, who cares. I am the most hapless man in the world."

"Why?" Life sat beside him.

"Because I can't die! I was punished in heaven and was sentenced to eternal life. They won't even let me in hell."

"What? I don't understand." Life's forehead wrinkled.

“There are people who are unlucky from birth,” the man combed his long beard with fingers, “and I am one of them. I have never been lucky. My parents died. I don’t have my own family. Some people just lead a plain life. I have always envied them. The only thing I have asked for is an end to this tedious and terrible life.”

“Why?” Life had grown irritated.

“Because I hate my life! I don’t love life. It has never given me any delights or pleasure—only pain and troubles. People say that roses are red and leaves are green, but for me it has always been grey. One day I came here to commit suicide. I flew from that cape into the sea. Before my soul descended into the underworld, I was placed in front of the highest court. They punished me and sentenced me to immortal life. So I can’t die. From that moment, I have been trying to kill myself, but in vain. I think this sea bewitched me. It is a cursed place, and I have no power to leave it.”

“But life is a gift!” Life’s voice trembled.

“No, that’s a lie! We humans are cursed to live. This world is a prison for us, and the convict who tries to run away is severely punished. He will be sent to a jail called hell! I am stuck here and don’t understand why I was executed so fiercely. Why am I to blame? I don’t know where, but humanity’s real place is not the earth. We all try to run from death, what is unavoidable, but isn’t it better to spread your arms and greet it with your heart?”

“When you decided to die, did you think about where you would go?” Death turned his back to him, not wanting to expose his identity.

“No, I just wanted to die—that was all.”

“Everything has its price, and the ticket to paradise is too expensive,” Death continued.

“You seem very clever,” the man interrupted. “Can you explain why I have endured such punishment?”

Death fell deep in thoughts and looked at his brother. Life couldn’t tear his gaze from the green sea. He thought of nothing. Grief settled in his heart made him bitter.

“You think that life is only torment,” Death said to the unhappy man. “So you wasted your entire life. You opposed your reasoning against the universe and God. Meaningless nuisances and selfishness clouded your judgment and took you to treason. You have betrayed God. You darkened your heart and soul.”

Nobody is able to predispose humanity against God, only the immortals can. You say that this world doesn't accept you. You can't smell the scent of flowers, and you can't see their colors. I have met plenty of people, mostly the resentful ones. They put themselves on sacrificial altars. The offended try to defend themselves from the others by building fortresses. In the end, the only mode to flee from the prison is meeting with death. Nevertheless, nobody can get away from him!" Death straightened his shoulders and looked rigorously around. His voice sounded strange—it multiplied and echoed.

The man felt the usual coolness. He deigned to overlook the stranger and looked into his deep dark eyes. The infinity seen in Death's eyes horrified him. He wanted to abandon this place and get somewhere more crowded.

"Your punishment is only the clue, and life is the chance for you to realize that you haven't come here inexplicably," Death said at last and quit.

The human departed alone. Suddenly he began to cry loudly. His voice covered the rustling sound of the tides. Bitter tears removed the dolor from his heart. He began to breathe peacefully and moderately. The waves erupted upwards and moistened his legs.

The brothers set off again.

They reached a nearby city. A big fair was being held. Traders from all over the world arrived and displayed their gods on stalls. People of many nationalities mingled. Their shouts and exclamations seemed as geese quacking as they exchanged goods joyfully. Some spoke in languages other citizens hadn't heard before. The twins walked around. At the end of the fair stalls, one man was standing in solitude. He was wearing long brown clothes, and his black cloak touched the ground. In front of him laid the wristlets of an unusual shape. The bracelets' surface were covered with gems, but inside them were thorns.

"Hey, old man, what are you selling?" asked Life. He took the bracelet and observed it thoroughly.

"I sell conscience," the old man explained, then glanced at Death and at once looked aside. His black and captive eyes concerned him.

"What? You mean this wristlet is a conscience?"

"Yes, it is," The man nodded. "This bracelet is magic. The conscience lives there, and when a human behaves inappropriately, the thorns prick him to indicate his crime, causing him to feel remorse for his deeds."

"Have you sold many of them?" Death questioned ironically.

“Two days I have been standing here and only one.” He frowned. “People don’t need conscience, though I sell them very cheap,” he added in the end.

“Who is that the only one?” Life got interested.

“One man with a dark beard came here. He was wearing a soldier’s uniform. He told me that he lives near the church in a brick house and invited me to come anytime I wish.”

The brothers left the old man and went to search for the human who bought the conscience bracelet. It took them a whole day because the city was quite big. There were two churches, both too far from each other.

Night fell. Sun temporarily dozed, and on a dark-lilac-and-black sky, the milky moon appeared.

At last, brothers found the house. It stood next to the church—a one-story building with a small fence.

Life knocked at the door. After a while, one tall man opened it. The lamp shined brightly on his face. His scar was significant, and bristly hair was cut shortly.

“Yes, can I help you?” He asked his guests.

“We have something to tell you. It won’t take long,” Remarked Death.

“Please, welcome. Guests belong to God,” answered the soldier as he opened the door widely.

Everybody entered the living room. Poverty and indigence were apparent, but the house was clean and orderly.

“Please, have a sit.” The host invited his guests to the table and put the lamp in the middle.

“We have come here to buy something,” explained Death. “At midday we’re to meet a merchant. He sells conscience bracelets, but unfortunately he wasn’t there. We were told that you had bought one from him. That’s why we are here.”

“Yes, that’s true,” remarked the soldier. He shifted his glance from one brother to the other. Life was sitting calmly and didn’t interfere with their talk.

“We will give you twice what you have paid, or you can tell us your price,” Death offered.

“Do you want to buy this?” The man stretched his right arm and showed them his wrist; then he hung his head as if grief and dejection boiled inside his

soul and burned his insides.

“Sorry, but I must refuse. I can’t accept your offer,” he muttered.

The brothers cast a glance at each other. They guessed that they had aroused his bitter memories, but Death didn’t want to concede.

“I am not joking!”

“No, sorry, I can’t do that!” Sorrow pushed into his throat, and he barely said, “Maybe you’ll find that merchant and he’ll definitely sell them. Please don’t ask me!”

“But why?”

The man sighed and began.

“I had a very different life. I endured plenty of difficulties and wars. Everywhere I used to become a winner. I had never thought that my success and victory meant others destroyed felt pain. Their ruined lives were insignificant and empty words to me. The victory was so vertiginous and sweet that I had forgotten everything. I admired life because I wanted to taste victory completely.

“But in turn, if you die, won’t have to withstand the woe of defeat,” said Death morosely.

“Yes, you are right,” the man agreed. “But I wanted to live. Once my military unit was sent to one village to put down the uprising. People fought against invaders for freedom. It was their fair and legal right,” the former soldier said with difficulty. “We caught rebellions and shot them down, but we were warned that some of revolts were scattered among the people and we had to be cautious.

“One day me and some soldiers went to the inn. There were five of us sitting, drinking and laughing loudly. We didn’t notice anyone around us. Suddenly three young men entered the inn. They stared at us insistently, especially one of them. I could see only the hatred in his eyes. You know that kind of hostility—only country-loving patriots experience this kind of hate. I stared at him too. Then the young man turned and went away. We returned to our garrison. I was thrown into unexplainable turmoil. That man’s eyes gave me no peace.

“The next day we went to the village again. We checked everyone and everything. Small shedlike cabins lined the road. On the ropes the washings swirled and intertwined with the wind. Houses had no fences around them. On the outside of the road, a carriage was taken across. Some people were changing the wheels. I didn’t like their disposition; then we approached them. They stopped. I recognized one of them; it was that young man from the inn. I saw

clearly sweet drops welling up on his forehead. I didn't know if it was the scorching heat or the tension. The young man reached behind his back like he intended to take something out of his belt. I thought he had a knife. It took only seconds. I'm not sure what force made me shoot, but I did. The young man didn't even complete his action in time. The bullet hit his heart, and he was killed instantly. Every waking moment I can see his frightened eyes. When I approached his body, I saw he was trying to take out a handkerchief. It was a white piece of fabric." The erstwhile soldier hung his head. "After the shooting, a woman ran out of a nearby cabin. It was his mother. She looked at me with disgust and called out some indistinct words. I guess she was cursing me and damning me." The man swallowed hard.

"Then what happened?" Life asked, frowning.

"Everything changed after that. Every single night I dreamt of that young boy. I had killed so many men in the war, but I couldn't forget his eyes. His untimely death showed me myself from the other side. Who or what I was? I was the senseless and unconditional execution of others' orders. All my victories were so pyrrhic. Really, did I need the death of ones I had ever killed? After that moment, military service had become a real torture and woe for me. I repented for my sins. In the end, I quit the army and settled here.

"Everything has its price." Death smiled, and his eyes gleamed.

"Yes, true," the host agreed, bowing his head. "But there is something that you ever sell it, you will never return. This is the belief—trust in God.

"If a person has true belief, he will never have a desire to sell it," Life interjected. "Trust is not an attire to change on every wind gust, and in any other cases, if you do, you will be lost in the crowd and become unknown to the others. There are four types of people." Life first looked at his brother, then at the soldier. "Yes, four. The first are wolves. They think constantly about how to destroy their victims. Second are the sufferers. The third group tries to avoid running into the wolves. At last we have the fourth group—the smallest one and the most cautious. They always observe and infer. The main point is, who you are among them and what you do depends on you!"

"When I left army, I felt terribly lonely and unhappy." The former soldier twisted a bracelet on his wrist. "I understood that humans are just weapons in the hands of a destiny. I don't want to be what I used to be. I want to change, and this bracelet will help. Ask me anything but not this!"

Death gazed silently. Somehow he felt satisfaction. He always liked such

willful, determined people. He deliberately hid this trait, even from his brother.

The twins walked to a crossroad. They saw an angel with dazzling white wings, sitting on a felled oak, staring absently at the dusty ground.

“Who are you? What are you doing here?” Life asked.

“God sent me,” the angel answered. “See this saddlebag? God gave it to me and told to find a truly happy person and handed it to him or her. It is a gift.”

“And have you found one?” Death asked ironically.

“Not yet.” God’s messenger shook his head sadly. “I have looked almost everywhere, but in vain. First I came to people who are generally known as happy.

“Generally happy? What does it mean?” asked Death with wide eyes.

“Don’t you know the humans have created a formula for happiness? It means having money, health, success, love and physical beauty. However, I see that my troubles are meaningless. Nobody is completely and absolutely happy. I found one beautiful, rich and successful actress. She has a beloved husband and three children. However, when we talked, I found that she isn’t happy at all. On the contrary, she said that a feeling of dissatisfaction often accompanies her. Then I saw some others, and now I’m afraid I won’t be able to fulfill the creator’s order and find absolutely happy person.”

“The feeling of ungratefulness usually follows people. They are never satisfied with what they have,” said Death. His dark-black eyes glanced at the horizon. “Although when they stand in front of danger, they recall that owned something very important and significant.

“Maybe happiness doesn’t mean owning something. Maybe it’s just a feeling?” Life asked gullibly. He turned to his brother. “Our half brother, the Governing God of Senses and Emotions, has such a changeable character. Can’t stay in one place very long. Father often rebukes him for this. His tastes change so often and quickly that it’s too hard to bring him to senses. He loves himself most of all and isn’t able to be affectionate with others, because his selfish love fills his heart entirely. He is greed, envious, arrogant and conceit. That’s why he and the God of Passions are friends. They have much in common.”

“Who are you?” Suddenly the angel interrupted.

“We are seeking a human who loves death as much as life,” explained Life, trying to smile.

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