

The Legend of Bucharest, Romania

Bucharest, the capital of Romania, is located on the banks of the Dambovita River. It is a city of many lakes, parks, gardens and seven hills upon which it is said the city was built. Both names of the city and river bring a legend...

A long time ago, when the lands were mostly covered with forests, there were no cities or villages, only small settlements. The lands were filled with woods almost impassable, full of wild animals. The shrubs, herbs and moss covered the grounds. Whoever tried to pass the lands, the crackling of the vegetation under the footsteps made a noise as announcing a visitor. It was easy to get lost in those woods and hard to find the way out of them.

Such were the times, when a woodcutter lived in one of those forests with his daughter Dambovita. She was a girl of great beauty known for her caring and kindness. Her chestnut color eyes and hair were of those matching the real chestnuts falling from the trees and her rosy cheeks and red lips were of those matching the ripe raspberries. However, her beauty was shining from inside out. Dambovita was a very smart girl. She knew her way around the forest well. When she needed to fetch a bucket of water, she knew the quickest possible way to the stream. When she needed to pick a basket of mushrooms for dinner, she knew where to find the edible mushrooms. She learned from her father, which to pick and which to leave behind. She knew where to find the readiest berries, which sunrays made them ripe sooner than the rest or how to direct those who got lost in the woods.

And on one of those days, while picking the berries and humming familiar notes; her ears caught a noise, "Do I hear snorting of a horse?" While she whispered the words, she turned around and saw a prince on a white horse. Surprised by seeing a prince in those unknown woods, she stood quietly for a moment with her round eyes staring at the prince and her hands clasped behind her back to hide the stained fingers from blueberries.

The prince was so charmed by Dambovita's prettiness and shyness, that he couldn't find words for a moment himself. After recovering, he asked the girl, "Do you know the way out of the woods?" Adding after a pause, "I was hunting with my companions and when I rushed after a bear, I got separated and now I can't find my way out."

"Yes, of course," The girl spoke softly, her words hardly reaching the prince's ears. He smiled at her, which encouraged her to speak up, "I can lead you to the nearest path, which is hidden under the bushes. Some of the trees were cut there by my father. You'll be able to follow the path as you'll see more space between the trees."

Now, the prince was even more enchanted with the smart girl. He helped her up on the horse to lead the way. As they approached the hidden path, the girl pointed in the direction, where more sun was visible through the openings, where the trees were cut. "If you're not sure about the way, then look up for the sun rays to lead you home."

After a moment of hesitation, the charmed prince asked, "Will you marry me?"

"Thank you for your kind offer, but I can't." The girl responded and lowered her head, but after not hearing another word from the prince, she thought it might be rude not to explain why. Therefore, she raised her head up and added, "I'm already promised to a shepherd named Bucur."

"If you can't marry me, then at least accept my gift." He handed her a penknife and a spinning top. "Make a wish before spinning the top. It will make your wish come true."

Dambovita was so captivated by the spinning top that by the time she raised her eyes to say thank you, the prince was already gone. For a moment she wasn't sure if she truly met the prince. Once she looked down at the items in her hands, she knew that it really did happen.

At home, she showed the penknife and spinning top to her fiancé Bucur. The quiet shepherd not understanding why the prince would give a penknife to a girl, without a word he hunched his shoulders and looked down at his grey socks through the holes of his tattered shoes.

Dambovita wanting to prove her love for Bucur shoved the penknife to the ground to show that it meant nothing to her. The knife hit the stone and from there water sprang out. First, the water created a stream. Then with more water, it became a river. A river, which Dambovita later named after herself. With the flow of the river, folks on the boats started passing by the forest, where Dambovita lived with Bucur and her father. Some of the folks upon seeing fertile lands and upon meeting the first settlers, decided to stay there and make it their home. Some continued with the current of the river looking for something more.

With the passing days, which turned into months, then years, the small settlement of three people became a small village and now a big city. The shy shepherd, who married Dambovita, named the settlement after his name calling it Bucuresti, known as Bucharest.