UNKNOWN LINK BETWEEN MEDIEVAL ARMENIA AND STARBUCKS COFFEE

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Category: Opinions

ONCE UPON A TIME…

Raymond de la Foret was born into a noble family in France that had fallen into hard times. The Count of Poitou took pity on Raymond's father and adopted the boy raising him as his son in his castle at Poitiers.

One day the Count invited Raymond to join him on a boar hunt. As they traveled deeper into the dark forest, they realized they had separated from their servants. At sunset they set up camp.

The two men were warming themselves against the blaze when they heard a rustle. Suddenly a boar leapt out and pounced on the Count. Raymond swung his sword at the beast, but his blade struck his master instead. Raymond finally killed the boar. As he wiped the blood from the sword, Raymond realized that he had killed the count. He rode off in a daze.

In time, Raymond entered glade, illuminated by the silvery moonlight, where a stream ran. Next to the fountain were three young women in white dresses. They were indescribably beautiful.

One of the young women rose to her feet and advanced towards Raymond.

"Why are you so frightened?" she asked.

In tears, Raymond told her how he had killed his master. The young woman listened and said, "Return to Poitiers. Act as though you have no knowledge of what has taken place. Then when the body of the Count is discovered, it will be assumed that he died while slaying the boar."

Raymond agreed with the advice. As they fell into conversation, Raymond was overwhelmed by the young woman's beauty and charm. He had fallen in love. He asked her to marry him.

She said, "I will marry you. But in return I ask of you two things. Firstly you should obtain land for me around this fountain, but only so much as can be covered by the hide of a stag. Upon that space I will build a castle. The second requirement is that every Saturday, you must agree to leave me in seclusion. For my name is Melusine and I am a water fairy of great wealth and power."

Raymond agreed and returned to the castle. He obtained the land around the fountain from his stepbrother Bertram. Bertram then cut the stag hide into tiny threads and succeeded in covering a much greater parcel of land than Raymond had expected.

Melusine erected a magnificent castle upon it. And in that castle they wed. Melusine made the castle the most beautiful in all of France. She called it Lusinia, after her own name. The castle eventually became Chateau de Lusignan, the home of the Lusignan dynasty. A member of the Lusignans (Levon VI) was the last king of Armenia.

Melusine and Raymond lived happily together, but every Saturday she would withdraw into her apartments. Raymond respected her privacy. In time, Melusine bore several children.

Time passed, and Raymond's brother came to live with them. One Saturday, Raymond's brother took him aside and told him that Melusine's weekly absences were the subject of gossip. Raymond wondered if Melusine had a lover. He checked each room of her apartment, but all were empty. Only one locked door remained: the entry to her bathroom. Melusine was singing. Raymond peered through the keyhole: below the waist, Melusine was a fish. He was shocked, but not dismayed. He knew he loved her just as much as he always had.

As days passed, Melusine showed no awareness that her true nature had been observed by her husband. Then one evening, as they dined, they received news that their son Geoffrey had attacked a monastery, burning it to the ground, with a hundred monks trapped inside.

Raymond wailed in horror. As Melusine rushed to comfort him, he pushed her away, shouting, "Get away from you, you foul serpent! You contaminator of my honorable race."

Melusine fainted with shock. Raymond, full of sorrow and regret, held her slumped form. When she awoke, she held Raymond's face in her hands. "I leave you with two little ones in their cradles," she said. "Look after them tenderly, for they must now lose their mother."

Then Melusine leapt from the window. Raymond ran to the window and saw that his wife had transformed into a fifteen-foot-long winged serpent. Melusine the dragon circled the castle three times, howling, and then flew off into the night sky.

Raymond's happiness was forever destroyed.

But Melusine had not completely abandoned her children. On many nights, the nurses caught sight of a shimmering figure hovering near the cradles of the two babies. The apparition took the babies into her arms and suckled them until dawn.

Today Melusine can be seen everywhere, emblazoned on coffee cups all over the world, as the corporate logo of the US coffee chain Starbucks. Melusine, once an emblem of unearthly feminine power has become the face of American coffee.

(Excerpted from "Ghost Empire" by Richard Fidler (Pegasus Books, New York, 2017)