

Princess Aubergine

Flora Annie Steel

Indian

Advanced
14 min read

Once upon a time there lived a poor Brahman and his wife, so poor, that often they did not know whither to turn for a meal, and were reduced to wild herbs and roots for their dinner.

Now one day, as the Brahman was gathering such herbs as he could find in the wilderness, he came upon an Aubergine, or egg-plant. Thinking it might prove useful by and by, he dug it up, took it home, and planted it by his cottage door. Every day he watered and tended it, so that it grew wonderfully, and at last bore one large fruit as big as a pear, purple and white and glossy,—such a handsome fruit, that the good couple thought it a pity to pick it, and let it hang on the plant day after day, until one fine morning when there was absolutely nothing to eat in the house. Then the Brahman said to his wife, ‘We must eat the egg-fruit; go and cut it, and prepare it for dinner.’

So the Brahman’s wife took a knife, and cut the beautiful purple and white fruit off the plant, and as she did so she thought she heard a low moan. But when she sat down and began to peel the egg-fruit, she heard a tiny voice say quite distinctly, ‘Take care!—oh, please take care! Peel more gently, or I am sure the knife will run into me!’

The good woman was terribly perplexed, but went on peeling as gently as she could, wondering all the time what had bewitched the egg-fruit, until she had cut quite through the rind, when—what do you think happened? Why, out stepped the most beautiful little maiden imaginable, dressed in purple and white satin!

The poor Brahman and his wife were mightily astonished, but still more delighted; for, having no children of their own, they looked on the tiny maiden as a godsend, and determined to adopt her. So they took the greatest care of her, petting and spoiling her, and always calling her the Princess Aubergine; for, said the worthy couple, if she was not a Princess *really*, she was dainty and delicate enough to be any king's daughter.

Now not far from the Brahman's hut lived a King, who had a beautiful wife, and seven stalwart young sons. One day, a slave-girl from the palace, happening to pass by the Brahman's cottage, went in to ask for a light, and there she saw the beautiful Aubergine. She went straight home to the palace, and told her mistress how in a hovel close by there lived a Princess so lovely and charming, that were the King once to set eyes on her, he would straightway forget, not only his Queen, but every other woman in the world.

Now the Queen, who was of a very jealous disposition, could not bear the idea of any one being more beautiful than she was herself, so she cast about in her mind how she could destroy the lovely Aubergine. If she could only inveigle the girl into the palace, she could easily do the rest, for she was a sorceress, and learned in all sorts of magic. So she sent a message to the Princess Aubergine, to say that the fame of her great beauty had reached the palace, and the Queen would like to see with her own eyes if report said true.

Now lovely Aubergine was vain of her beauty, and fell into the trap. She went to the palace, and the Queen, pretending to be wonderstruck, said, 'You were born to live in kings' houses! From this time you must never leave me; henceforth you are my sister.'

This flattered Princess Aubergine's vanity, so, nothing loath, she remained in the palace, and exchanged veils with the Queen, and drank milk out of the same cup with her, as is the custom when two people say they will be sisters.

But the Queen, from the very first moment she set eyes on her, had seen that Princess Aubergine was no human being, but a fairy, and knew she must be very careful how she set about her magic. Therefore she laid strong spells upon her while she slept, and said—

'Beautiful Aubergine! tell me true—

In what thing does your life lie?’

And the Princess answered—’In the life of your eldest son. Kill him, and I will die also.’

So the very next morning the wicked Queen went to where her eldest son lay sleeping, and killed him with her own hands. Then she sent the slave-girl to the Princess’s apartments, hoping to hear she was dead too, but the girl returned saying the Princess was alive and well.

Then the Queen wept tears of rage, for she knew her spells had not been strong enough, and she had killed her son for naught.

Nevertheless, the next night she laid stronger spells upon the Princess Aubergine, saying—

‘Princess Aubergine! tell me true—

In what thing does your life lie?’

And the sleeping Princess answered—’In the life of your second son.

Kill him, and I too will die.’

So the wicked Queen killed her second son with her own hands, but when she sent the slave-girl to see whether Aubergine was dead also, the girl returned again saying the Princess was alive and well.

Then the sorceress-queen cried with rage and spite, for she had killed her second son for naught. Nevertheless, she would not give up her wicked project, and the next night laid still stronger spells on the sleeping Princess, asking her—

‘Princess Aubergine! tell me true—

In what thing does your life lie?’

And the Princess replied—’In the life of your third son. Kill him, and I must die also!’

But the same thing happened. Though the young Prince was killed by his wicked mother, Aubergine remained alive and well; and so it went on day after day, until all the seven young Princes were slain, and their cruel mother still wept tears of rage and spite, at having killed her seven sons for naught.

Then the sorceress-queen summoned up all her art, and laid such strong spells on the Princess Aubergine that

she could no longer resist them, and was obliged to answer truly; so when the wicked Queen asked—

‘Princess Aubergine! tell me true—

In what thing does your life lie?’

the poor Princess was obliged to answer—‘In a river far away there lives a red and green fish. Inside the fish there is a bumble bee, inside the bee a tiny box, and inside the box is the wonderful nine-lakh necklace. Put it on, and I shall die.’

Then the Queen was satisfied, and set about finding the red and green fish. Therefore, when her husband the King came to see her, she began to sob and to cry, until he asked her what was the matter. Then she told him she had set her heart on procuring the wonderful nine-lakh necklace.

‘But where is it to be found?’ asked the King.

And the Queen answered in the words of the Princess Aubergine,—‘In a river far away there lives a red and green fish. Inside the fish there is a bumble bee, inside the bee a tiny box, and in the box is the nine-lakh necklace.’

Now the King was a very kind man, and had grieved sincerely for the loss of his seven young sons, who, the Queen said, had died suddenly of an infectious disease. Seeing his wife so distressed, and being anxious to comfort her, he gave orders that every fisherman in his kingdom was to fish all day until the red and green fish was found. So all the fishermen set to work, and ere long the Queen’s desire was fulfilled—the red and green fish was caught, and when the wicked sorceress opened it, there was the bumble bee, and inside the bee was the box, and inside the box the wonderful nine-lakh necklace, which the Queen put on at once.

Now no sooner had the Princess Aubergine been forced to tell the secret of her life by the Queen’s magic, than she knew she must die; so she returned sadly to her foster-parents’ hut, and telling them of her approaching death, begged them neither to burn nor bury her body. ‘This is what I wish you to do,’ she said; ‘dress me in my finest clothes, lay me on my bed, scatter flowers over me, and carry me to the wildest wilderness. There you must place the bed on the ground, and build a high mud wall around it, so that no one will be able to see over.’

The poor foster-parents, weeping bitterly, promised to do as she wished; so when the Princess died (which happened at the very moment the wicked Queen put on the nine-lakh necklace), they dressed her in her best clothes, scattered flowers over the bed, and carried her out to the wildest wilderness.

Now when the Queen sent the slave-girl to the Brâhman's hut to inquire if the Princess Aubergine was really dead, the girl returned saying, 'She is dead, but neither burnt nor buried; she lies out in the wilderness to the north, covered with flowers, as beautiful as the moon!'

The Queen was not satisfied with this reply, but as she could do no more, had to be content.

Now the King grieved bitterly for his seven young sons, and to try to forget his grief he went out hunting every day; so the Queen, who feared lest in his wanderings he might find the dead Princess Aubergine, made him promise never to hunt towards the north, for, she said, 'some evil will surely befall you if you do.'

But one day, having hunted to the east, and the south, and the west, without finding game, he forgot his promise, and hunted towards the north. In his wanderings he lost his way, and came upon a high enclosure, with no door; being curious to know what it contained, he climbed over the wall. He could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw a lovely Princess lying on a flower-strewn bed, looking as if she had just fallen asleep. It seemed impossible she could be dead, so, kneeling down beside her, he spent the whole day praying and beseeching her to open her eyes. At nightfall he returned to his palace, but with the dawning he took his bow, and, dismissing all his attendants on the pretext of hunting alone, flew to his beautiful Princess. So he passed day after day, kneeling distractedly beside the lovely Aubergine, beseeching her to rise; but she never stirred.

Now at the end of a year he, one day, found the most beautiful little boy imaginable lying beside the Princess. He was greatly astonished, but taking the child in his arms, cared for it tenderly all day, and at night laid it down beside its dead mother. After some time the child learnt to talk, and when the King asked it if its mother was always dead, it replied, 'No! at night she is alive, and cares for me as you do during the day.'

Hearing this, the King bade the boy ask his mother what made her die, and the next day the boy replied, 'My mother says it is the nine-lakh necklace your Queen wears. At night, when the Queen takes it off, my mother becomes alive again, but every morning, when the Queen puts it on, my mother dies.'

This greatly puzzled the King, who could not imagine what his Queen could have to do with the mysterious Princess, so he told the boy to ask his mother whose son he was.

The next morning the boy replied, 'Mother bade me say I am your son, sent to console you for the loss of the seven fair sons your wicked Queen murdered out of jealousy of my mother, the lovely Princess Aubergine.'

Then the King grew very wroth at the thought of his dead sons, and bade the boy ask his mother how the wicked Queen was to be punished, and by what means the necklace could be recovered.

The next morning the boy replied, 'Mother says I am the only person who can recover the necklace, so to-night, when you return to the palace, you are to take me with you.' So the King carried the boy back to the palace, and told all his ministers and courtiers that the child was his heir. On this, the sorceress-queen, thinking of her own dead sons, became mad with jealousy, and determined to poison the boy. To this end she prepared some tempting sweetmeats, and, caressing the child, gave him a handful, bidding him eat them; but the child refused, saying he would not do so until she gave him the glittering necklace she wore round her throat, to play with.

Determined to poison the boy, and seeing no other way of inducing him to eat the sweetmeats, the sorceress-queen slipped off the nine-lakh necklace, and gave it to the child. No sooner had he touched it than he fled away so fast that none of the servants or guards could stop him, and never drew breath till he reached the place where the beautiful Princess Aubergine lay dead. He threw the necklace over her head, and immediately she rose up lovelier than ever. Then the King came, and besought her to return to the palace as his bride, but she replied, 'I will never be your wife till that wicked sorceress is dead, for she would only murder me and my boy, as she murdered your seven young sons. If you will dig a deep ditch at the threshold of the palace, fill it with scorpions and snakes, throw the wicked Queen into it, and bury her alive, I will walk over her grave to be your wife.'

So the King ordered a deep ditch to be dug, and had it filled with scorpions and snakes. Then he went to the sorceress-queen, and bade her come to see something very wonderful. But she refused, suspecting a trick. Then the guards seized her, bound her, flung her into the ditch amongst the scorpions and snakes, and buried her alive with them. As for the Princess Aubergine, she and her son walked over the grave, and lived happily in

the palace ever after.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com