



The Four Brothers

Hartwell James

Indian

Intermediate

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In the very heart of the jungle there stood a very old tree. It was older than any other tree there and had seen many wonderful things. It was very wise, too, and knew many secrets.

Every spring it put out fresh green leaves and lovely white blossoms, but one year the flowers were more beautiful than ever, and among them, on one of the lower branches, was a bud which hung there like a silver globe among the green leaves.

“I wonder why that bud is so much larger than the others,” said the rose-apple tree, who had a great deal of curiosity.

“It holds a secret,” replied the fig-tree, who was quite a gossip and loved to talk to the other trees.

“But when shall we know the secret?” asked the rose-apple tree.

“In the middle of the night there will be a thunder-storm and then the bud will open. You will see it by the lightning.”

But when the storm came and the thunder roared and the lightning flashed, the rose-apple tree was afraid and dared not look up. But the fig-tree watched the grand old tree stretch its branches out bravely to the tempest,

and in the midst of it saw the white bud burst open as the third bough laid it gently on the ground.

Inside the flower lay the prettiest little baby ever seen, curled up as if asleep, as lovely as a flower himself, and then his eyes opened and he lay smiling at the sky and watching the blue-white lightning flashing across it.

Then when morning came and all around was bright and calm and still once more, the baby put out his tiny hand and played with the flowers.

“He must be a wonderful baby,” said the fig-tree. “See his little white silk shirt; it is just the color of the flower in which he was born, and look, he has a diamond shining in his forehead!”

“Perhaps it is a star and not a diamond,” said the rose-apple tree; but because of its brightness it could not tell which it was.

Then the humming-birds and the parrots and the monkeys and the jackals all came to look at the baby. “He would be better off if he had wings like mine,” said a humming-bird.

“Or if he had plumage like mine,” said a parrot.

“Fur like mine would be much better for him,” added a jackal; but they all agreed that he was a very wonderful baby, or he would not have a star in his forehead.

By and by the child cried just a little bit, for he was hungry, but the fig-tree bent a bough and dropped honey into his mouth, and then he smiled again.

And then when sunset came a tigress stole quietly up to the child.

“I’ll bring my cubs here,” she said to herself. “He will do for their supper.” But the flowers and the grasses covered him up so that she could not find him when she came back again.

“We will not let any harm come to him,” said the flowers and the grasses. “He is our baby.”

“What shall we call him?” asked the trees, and the old tree which had borne the beautiful bud said, “His name is Nazim, and you must all of you take care of him and teach him the secrets of the jungle.”

And so as Nazim grew up, the trees and the wild flowers and all the creatures in the jungle taught him all they

knew. The monkeys taught him how to climb trees, and Dame, the great turtle who lived in the river, taught him how to swim.

The humming-birds showed him where the wild fruits grew and which of the blossoms had honey in their cups; and he learned to know the herbs which would heal bruises, and how to charm the jungle snakes, and many other things which children who live in houses never know.

Early every morning he bathed in the river, hanging his white silk shirt to dry on a tree, and at night he slept in a hammock under the fig-tree, which the flowers made for him of their twining tendrils.

He became a tall and beautiful boy, as good and gentle as he was strong and fearless, and as for clothes, his white silk shirt grew as he grew and never wore out or wanted mending. All the animals in the jungle loved him, even the tigress who had wanted her cubs to eat him when he was a baby.

One day Nazim said to the old tree, "There are a great many parrots and jackals and monkeys. Are there no others like me; is there only one Nazim?"

And the old tree asked, "Why do you want to know?" And Nazim replied wistfully, "I should like to see them."

Then the old tree said, "Climb to my topmost branch, and tell me what you see;" and when Nazim had done this he cried out, "I see a hill with a very sharp point."

"Near the top of that hill, which is the needle-shaped hill, is a tree covered with bright pink blossoms. It is called Kidsadita," said the old tree. "Go up to it and smell the flowers and ask where the Four Brothers are."

So through the jungle Nazim ran to the needle-shaped hill, and there was Kidsadita, the pink-flowering tree. "Where are the Four Brothers?" he asked, as he smelt the blossoms.

"On the other side of the hill," said Kidsadita. "They are preparing their supper."

Then Nazim went on, around the hill, and there were four tall men cutting up a deer which they had killed. As he came near they thought they had never seen so beautiful a boy, and ran to meet him. He was indeed a beautiful boy, dressed all in white, the star shining in his forehead and a look of gentle love on his face.

“We are four brothers; will you be the fifth?” they asked Nazim. “Will you be one of us?”

“I will be your brother,” replied Nazim, “for that is why I came. All the creatures in the jungle had brothers and sisters, and I had none. I wanted to find some brethren.”

Then Chimo, the youngest brother, said there were two things they wanted. One of these was fire to cook their meat, for they were obliged to eat the flesh of the deer raw; and the other was a wife for each of them.

Then one of the other brothers said that the giant Rikal Gouree had a fire burning on his hearth and four daughters who were anxious to get married. They knew that he lived not very far away, but they had never been able to find his house, so they were still without wives and firebrands to light the wood with which to cook the deer they killed.

“If you will give me a bulrush,” said Nazim, “I will show you the way to his house.” So Chimo brought him a bulrush and Nazim fitted it to his bowstring; then he bent the bow, letting the bulrush fly straight to Rikal Gouree’s palace. “Follow my arrow,” cried Nazim. “It has cleared a path for you, and you shall find what you want.”

Then the Four Brothers followed the path Nazim’s arrow had made, but Chimo, who was the swiftest runner, came to the giant’s palace first.

Rikal Gouree was sleeping by the fire in an immense room where the couches were twenty feet long and eight feet high. The fireplace was like a huge, red, glowing cavern in which whole tree-trunks lay burning instead of logs, and the ceiling was so high that Chimo could hardly see it.

Chimo stole a look at the sleeping giant and then snatched up a firebrand and ran for the door. But as he passed the sleeping giant a spark from the brand lighted on Rikal Gouree’s hand.

The giant sprang up with a cry of pain and rushed out of the house after Chimo, but could not catch him. In his flight Chimo dropped the fire-brand and got back to his brothers with nothing to show for his trouble but a bad fright.

“We want to leave Rikal Gouree alone,” he told them. “I would rather eat raw flesh all my life than go near that

monster again.”

Finding he could not catch Chimo, the giant went back to his house and into the room where his wife and four daughters were. He was very cross, for he had lost his nap and the burn on his hand pained him.

As soon as he had thrown himself into his great chair his oldest daughter asked him, “Have you got husbands for us yet?” Every day one of his daughters asked him this question and the sulky old giant would reply, “No! who can get husbands for four daughters all at once?”

Then the youngest daughter asked her father who the young man was that she had seen running away from the house. He told her that while he was asleep a young man had come in and stolen a firebrand.

“I think you did very wrong to send him away,” said the giant’s wife. “He would have been one husband at any rate, and giants’ daughters do not get husbands easily. Here is the arrow which came into the room this morning, which was a sign that men would soon follow it. You have done a very foolish thing and we shall probably suffer for it.”

Some giants’ wives are afraid of their husbands, but this one was not, and she went on to give her husband such a scolding that Rikal Gouree was glad to get away and go to sleep by the fire again.

After a while the giant was awakened by beautiful music which came from a tree which grew close to his palace wall. He lay still enjoying the sweet sounds, but presently they seemed to call him outside, and looking up he saw Nazim sitting on one of the branches of the tree playing on a lute.

Underneath the tree the dogs and cats and all the other animals belonging to him were listening to the music, and the boughs were covered with birds who were listening too. Presently the music grew so merry that Rikal Gouree held up his skirts and began to dance.

“What a silly old man you are!” cried his wife as she came out of the house and saw what he was doing. “You silly old man!” But in a few minutes she was dancing too, holding up her saree with one hand like a young girl, while her bangles and anklets tinkled merrily.

Then the giant called to Nazim, “Here, young man, come down from the tree and I will give you anything you want.”

“Then you must give me your four daughters,” said Nazim. “Each of my four brothers wants a wife, and you must give us, besides, a firebrand from your hearth.”

“I knew the arrow was a true omen,” cried the giant’s wife, and then his daughters came forward and gave Nazim his arrow, which they had kept very carefully. They were so pleased that they said good-bye to their father and mother, and taking as many clothes and jewels as they could carry on their heads, they set out with Nazim.

On they went until they came to the needle-shaped hill where the pink-flowering tree Kidsadita was, and there they married the Four Brothers and lived very happily together.

Nazim did not want to marry, and because he was better and wiser than they, the Four Brothers made him their king. The giant’s daughters made their jewels into a crown for him, but no jewel was as bright as the star in his forehead, which outshone them all.

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