



The Ivory City and Its Fairy Princess

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Indian

Intermediate
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One day a young prince was out practising archery with the son of his father's chief vizier, when one of the arrows accidentally struck the wife of a merchant, who was walking about in an upper room of a house close by. The prince aimed at a bird that was perched on the window-sill of that room, and had not the slightest idea that anybody was at hand, or he would not have shot in that direction. Consequently, not knowing what had happened, he and the vizier's son walked away, the vizier's son chaffing him because he had missed the bird.

Presently the merchant went to ask his wife about something, and found her lying, to all appearance, dead in the middle of the room, and an arrow fixed in the ground within half a yard of her head. Supposing that she was dead, he rushed to the window and shrieked, "Thieves thieves! They have killed my wife." The neighbours quickly gathered, and the servants came running upstairs to see what was the matter. It happened that the woman had fainted, and that there was only a very slight wound in her breast where the arrow had grazed.

As soon as the woman recovered her senses she told them that two young men had passed by the place with their bows and arrows, and that one of them had most deliberately aimed at her as she stood by the window.

On hearing this the merchant went to the king, and told him what had taken place. His Majesty was much enraged at such audacious wickedness, and swore that most terrible punishment should be visited on the offender if he could be discovered. He ordered the merchant to go back and ascertain whether his wife could recognise the young men if she saw them again.

“Oh yes,” replied the woman, “I should know them again among all the people in the city.”

“Then,” said the king, when the merchant brought back this reply, “to- morrow I will cause all the male inhabitants of this city to pass before your house, and your wife will stand at the window and watch for the man who did this wanton deed.”

A royal proclamation was issued to this effect. So the next day all the men and boys of the city, from the age of ten years upwards, assembled and marched by the house of the merchant. By chance (for they both had been excused from obeying this order) the king’s son and the vizier’s son were also in the company, and passed by in the crowd. They came to see the tamasha.

As soon as these two appeared in front of the merchant’s window they were recognised by the merchant’s wife, and at once reported to the king.

“My own son and the son of my chief vizier!” exclaimed the king, who had been present from the commencement. “What examples for the people! Let them both be executed.”

“Not so, your Majesty,” said the vizier, “I beseech you Let the facts of the case be thoroughly investigated. How is it?” he continued, turning to the two young men. “Why have you done this cruel thing?”

“I shot an arrow at a bird that was sitting on the sill of an open window in yonder house, and missed,” answered the prince. “I suppose the arrow struck the merchant’s wife. Had I known that she or anybody had been near I should not have shot in that direction.”

“We will speak of this later on,” said the king, on hearing this answer. “Dismiss the people. Their presence is no longer needed.”

In the evening his Majesty and the vizier had a long and earnest talk about their two sons. The king wished

both of them to be executed; but the vizier suggested that the prince should be banished from the country. This was finally agreed to.

Accordingly, on the following morning, a little company of soldiers escorted the prince out of the city. When they reached the last custom-house the vizier's son overtook them. He had come with all haste, bringing with him four bags of muhrs on four horses. "I am come," he said, throwing his arms round the prince's neck, "because I cannot let you go alone. We have lived together, we will be exiled together, and we will die together. Turn me not back, if you love me."

"Consider," the prince answered, "what you are doing. All kinds of trial may be before me. Why should you leave your home and country to be with me?"

"Because I love you," he said, "and shall never be happy without you."

So the two friends walked along hand in hand as fast as they could to get out of the country, and behind them marched the soldiers and the horses with their valuable burdens. On reaching a place on the borders of the king's dominions the prince gave the soldiers some gold, and ordered them to return. The soldiers took the money and left; they did not, however, go very far, but hid themselves behind rocks and stones, and waited till they were quite sure that the prince did not intend to come back.

On and on the exiles walked, till they arrived at a certain village, where they determined to spend the night under one of the big trees of the place. The prince made preparations for a fire, and arranged the few articles of bedding that they had with them, while the vizier's son went to the baniya and the baker and the butcher to get something for their dinner. For some reason he was delayed; perhaps the tsut was not quite ready, or the baniya had not got all the spices prepared. After waiting half an hour the prince became impatient, and rose up and walked about.

He saw a pretty, clear little brook running along not far from their resting-place, and hearing that its source was not far distant, he started off to find it. The source was a beautiful lake, which at that time was covered with the magnificent lotus flower and other water plants. The prince sat down on the bank, and being thirsty took up some of the water in his hand. Fortunately he looked into his hand before drinking, and there, to his great astonishment, he saw reflected whole and clear the image of a beautiful fairy. He looked round, hoping

to see the reality; but seeing no person, he drank the water, and put out his hand to take some more. Again he saw the reflection in the water which was in his palm. He looked around as before, and this time discovered a fairy sitting by the bank on the opposite side of the lake. On seeing her he fell so madly in love with her that he dropped down in a swoon.

When the vizier's son returned, and found the fire lighted, the horses securely fastened, and the bags of muhrs lying altogether in a heap, but no prince, he did not know what to think. He waited a little while, and then shouted; but not getting any reply, he got up and went to the brook. There he came across the footmarks of his friend. Seeing these, he went back at once for the money and the horses, and bringing them with him, he tracked the prince to the lake, where he found him lying to all appearance dead.

"Alas! alas!" he cried, and lifting up the prince, he poured some water over his head and face. "Alas! my brother, what is this? Oh! do not die and leave me thus. Speak, speak! I cannot bear this!"

In a few minutes the prince, revived by the water, opened his eyes, and looked about wildly.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the vizier's son. "But what is the matter, brother?"

"Go away," replied the prince. "I don't want to say anything to you, or to see you. Go away."

"Come, come; let us leave this place. Look, I have brought some food for you, and horses, and everything. Let us eat and depart."

"Go alone," replied the prince.

"Never," said the vizier's son. "What has happened to suddenly estrange you from me? A little while ago we were brethren, but now you detest the sight of me."

"I have looked upon a fairy," the prince said. "But a moment I saw her face; for when she noticed that I was looking at her she covered her face with lotus petals. Oh, how beautiful she was! And while I gazed she took out of her bosom an ivory box, and held it up to me. Then I fainted. Oh! if you can get me that fairy for my wife, I will go anywhere with you."

"Oh, brother," said the vizier's son, "you have indeed seen a fairy. She is a fairy of the fairies. This is none other

than Gulizar of the Ivory City. I know this from the signs that she gave you. From her covering her face with lotus petals I learn her name, and from her showing you the ivory box I learn where she lives. Be patient, and rest assured that I will arrange your marriage with her.”

When the prince heard these encouraging words he felt much comforted, rose up, and ate, and then went away gladly with his friend.

On the way they met two men. These two men belonged to a family of robbers. There were eleven of them altogether. One, an elder sister, stayed at home and cooked the food, and the other ten—all brothers—went out, two and two, and walked about the four different ways that ran through that part of the country, robbing those travellers who could not resist them, and inviting others, who were too powerful for two of them to manage, to come and rest at their house, where the whole family attacked them and stole their goods. These thieves lived in a kind of tower, which had several strong-rooms in it, and under it was a great pit, wherein they threw the corpses of the poor unfortunates who chanced to fall into their power.

The two men came forward, and, politely accosting them, begged them to come and stay at their house for the night. “It is late,” they said, “and there is not another village within several miles.”

“Shall we accept this good man’s invitation, brother?” asked the prince.

The vizier’s son frowned slightly in token of disapproval; but the prince was tired, and thinking that it was only a whim of his friend’s, he said to the men, “Very well. It is very kind of you to ask us.”

So they all four went to the robbers’ tower.

Seated in a room, with the door fastened on the outside, the two travellers bemoaned their fate.

“It is no good groaning,” said the vizier’s son. “I will climb to the window, and see whether there are any means of escape. Yes! yes!” he whispered, when he had reached the window-hole. “Below there is a ditch surrounded by a high wall. I will jump down and reconnoitre. You stay here, and wait till I return.”

Presently he came back and told the prince that he had seen a most ugly woman, whom he supposed was the robbers’ housekeeper. She had agreed to release them on the promise of her marriage with the prince.

So the woman led the way out of the enclosure by a secret door.

“But where are the horses and the goods?” the vizier’s son inquired.

“You cannot bring them,” the woman said. “To go out by any other way would be to thrust oneself into the grave.”

“All right, then; they also shall go out by this door. I have a charm, whereby I can make them thin or fat.” So the vizier’s son fetched the horses without any person knowing it, and repeating the charm, he made them pass through the narrow doorway like pieces of cloth, and when they were all outside restored them to their former condition. He at once mounted his horse and laid hold of the halter of one of the other horses, and then beckoning to the prince to do likewise, he rode off. The prince saw his opportunity, and in a moment was riding after him, having the woman behind him.

Now the robbers heard the galloping of the horses, and ran out and shot their arrows at the prince and his companions. And one of the arrows killed the woman, so they had to leave her behind.

On, on they rode, until they reached a village where they stayed the night. The following morning they were off again, and asked for Ivory City from every passer-by. At length they came to this famous city, and put up at a little hut that belonged to an old woman, from whom they feared no harm, and with whom, therefore, they could abide in peace and comfort. At first the old woman did not like the idea of these travellers staying in her house, but the sight of a muhr, which the prince dropped in the bottom of a cup in which she had given him water, and a present of another muhr from the vizier’s son, quickly made her change her mind. She agreed to let them stay there for a few days.

As soon as her work was over the old woman came and sat down with her lodgers. The vizier’s son pretended to be utterly ignorant of the place and people. “Has this city a name?” he asked the old woman.

“Of course it has, you stupid. Every little village, much more a city, and such a city as this, has a name.”

“What is the name of this city?”

“Ivory City. Don’t you know that? I thought the name was known all over the world.”

On the mention of the name Ivory City the prince gave a deep sigh. The vizier’s son looked as much as to say “Keep quiet, or you’ll discover the secret.”

“Is there a king of this country?” continued the vizier’s son.

“Of course there is, and a queen, and a princess.”

“What are their names?”

“The name of the princess is Gulizar, and the name of the queen——”

The vizier’s son interrupted the old woman by turning to look at the prince, who was staring like a madman.

“Yes,” he said to him afterwards, “we are in the right country. We shall see the beautiful princess.”

One morning the two travellers noticed the old woman’s most careful toilette: how careful she was in the arrangement of her hair and the set of her kasabah and puts.

“Who is coming?” said the vizier’s son.

“Nobody,” the old woman replied.

“Then where are you going?”

“I am going to see my daughter, who is a servant of the Princess Gulizar. I see her and the princess every day. I should have gone yesterday, if you had not been here and taken up all my time.”

“Ah-h-h! Be careful not to say anything about us in the hearing of the princess.” The vizier’s son asked her not to speak about them at the palace, hoping that, because she had been told not to do so, she would mention their arrival, and thus the princess would be informed of their coming.

On seeing her mother the girl pretended to be very angry. “Why have you not been for two days?” she asked.

“Because, my dear,” the old woman answered, “two young travellers, a prince and the son of some great vizier, have taken up their abode in my hut, and demand so much of my attention. It is nothing but cooking and

cleaning, and cleaning and cooking, all day long. I can't understand the men," she added; "one of them especially appears very stupid. He asked me the name of this country and the name of the king. Now where can these men have come from, that they do not know these things? However, they are very great and very rich. They each give me a muhr every morning and every evening."

After this the old woman went and repeated almost the same words to the princess, on the hearing of which the princess beat her severely; and threatened her with a severer punishment if she ever again spoke of the strangers before her.

In the evening, when the old woman had returned to her hut, she told the vizier's son how sorry she was that she could not help breaking her promise, and how the princess had struck her because she mentioned their coming and all about them.

"Alas! alas!" said the prince, who had eagerly listened to every word.

"What, then, will be her anger at the sight of a man?"

"Anger?" said the vizier's son, with an astonished air. "She would be exceedingly glad to see one man. I know this. In this treatment of the old woman I see her request that you will go and see her during the coming dark fortnight."

"Heaven be praised!" the prince exclaimed.

The next time the old woman went to the palace Gulizar called one of her servants and ordered her to rush into the room while she was conversing with the old woman; and if the old woman asked what was the matter, she was to say that the king's elephants had gone mad, and were rushing about the city and bazaar in every direction, and destroying everything in their way.

The servant obeyed, and the old woman, fearing lest the elephants should go and push down her hut and kill the prince and his friend, begged the princess to let her depart. Now Gulizar had obtained a charmed swing, that landed whoever sat on it at the place wherever they wished to be. "Get the swing," she said to one of the servants standing by. When it was brought she bade the old woman step into it and desire to be at home.

The old woman did so, and was at once carried through the air quickly and safely to her hut, where she found her two lodgers safe and sound. "Oh!" she cried, "I thought that both of you would be killed by this time. The

royal elephants have got loose and are running about wildly. When I heard this I was anxious about you. So the princess gave me this charmed swing to return in. But come, let us get outside before the elephants arrive and batter down the place.”

“Don’t believe this,” said the vizier’s son. “It is a mere hoax. They have been playing tricks with you.”

“You will soon have your heart’s desire,” he whispered aside to the prince. “These things are signs.”

Two days of the dark fortnight had elapsed, when the prince and the vizier’s son seated themselves in the swing, and wished themselves within the grounds of the palace. In a moment they were there, and there too was the object of their search standing by one of the palace gates, and longing to see the prince quite as much as he was longing to see her.

Oh, what a happy meeting it was!

“At last,” said Gulizar, “I have seen my beloved, my husband.”

“A thousand thanks to Heaven for bringing me to you,” said the prince.

Then the prince and Gulizar betrothed themselves to one another and parted, the one for the hut and the other for the palace, both of them feeling happier than they had ever been before.

Henceforth the prince visited Gulizar every day and returned to the hut every night. One morning Gulizar begged him to stay with her always. She was constantly afraid of some evil happening to him—perhaps robbers would slay him, or sickness attack him, and then she would be deprived of him. She could not live without seeing him. The prince showed her that there was no real cause for fear, and said that he felt he ought to return to his friend at night, because he had left his home and country and risked his life for him; and, moreover, if it had not been for his friend’s help he would never have met with her.

Gulizar for the time assented, but she determined in her heart to get rid of the vizier’s son as soon as possible. A few days after this conversation she ordered one of her maids to make a pilaw. She gave special directions that a certain poison was to be mixed into it while cooking, and as soon as it was ready the cover was to be placed on the saucepan, so that the poisonous steam might not escape. When the pilaw was ready she sent it at once by the hand of a servant to the vizier’s son with this message “Gulizar, the princess, sends you an offering

in the name of her dead uncle.”

On receiving the present the vizier’s son thought that the prince had spoken gratefully of him to the princess, and therefore she had thus remembered him. Accordingly he sent back his salam and expressions of thankfulness.

When it was dinner-time he took the saucepan of pilaw and went out to eat it by the stream. Taking off the lid, he threw it aside on the grass and then washed his hands. During the minute or so that he was performing these ablutions, the green grass under the cover of the saucepan turned quite yellow. He was astonished, and suspecting that there was poison in the pilaw, he took a little and threw it to some crows that were hopping about. The moment the crows ate what was thrown to them they fell down dead.

“Heaven be praised,” exclaimed the vizier’s son, “who has preserved me from death at this time!”

On the return of the prince that evening the vizier’s son was very reticent and depressed. The prince noticed this change in him, and asked what was the reason. “Is it because I am away so much at the palace?” The vizier’s son saw that the prince had nothing to do with the sending of the pilaw, and therefore told him everything.

“Look here,” he said, “in this handkerchief is some pilaw that the princess sent me this morning in the name of her deceased uncle. It is saturated with poison. Thank Heaven, I discovered it in time!”

“Oh, brother! who could have done this thing? Who is there that entertains enmity against you?”

“The Princess Gulizar. Listen. The next time you go to see her, I entreat you to take some snow with you; and just before seeing the princess put a little of it into both your eyes. It will provoke tears, and Gulizar will ask you why you are crying. Tell her that you weep for the loss of your friend, who died suddenly this morning. Look! take, too, this wine and this shovel, and when you have feigned intense grief at the death of your friend, bid the princess to drink a little of the wine. It is strong, and will immediately send her into a deep sleep. Then, while she is asleep, heat the shovel and mark her back with it. Remember to bring back the shovel again, and also to take her pearl necklace. This done, return. Now fear not to execute these instructions, because on the fulfilment of them depends your fortune and happiness. I will arrange that your marriage with the princess shall be accepted by the king, her father, and all the court.”

The prince promised that he would do everything as the vizier’s son had advised him; and he kept his promise.

The following night, on the return of the prince from his visit to Gulizar, he and the vizier’s son, taking the horses and bags of muhrs, went to a graveyard about a mile or so distant. It was arranged that the vizier’s son should act the part of a fakir and the prince the part of the fakir’s disciple and servant.

In the morning, when Gulizar had returned to her senses, she felt a smarting pain in her back, and noticed that her pearl necklace was gone. She went at once and informed the king of the loss of her necklace, but said nothing to him about the pain in her back.

The king was very angry when he heard of the theft, and caused proclamation concerning it to be made throughout all the city and surrounding country.

“It is well,” said the vizier’s son, when he heard of this proclamation. “Fear not, my brother, but go and take this necklace, and try to sell it in the bazaar.”

The prince took it to a goldsmith and asked him to buy it.

“How much do you want for it?” asked the man.

“Fifty thousand rupees,” the prince replied.

“All right,” said the man; “wait here while I go and fetch the money.”

The prince waited and waited, till at last the goldsmith returned, and with him the kotwal, who at once took the prince into custody on the charge of stealing the princess’s necklace.

“How did you get the necklace?” the kotwal asked.

“A fakir, whose servant I am, gave it to me to sell in the bazaar,” the prince replied. “Permit me, and I will show you where he is.”

The prince directed the kotwal and the policeman to the place where he had left the vizier’s son, and there they found the fakir with his eyes shut and engaged in prayer. Presently, when he had finished his devotions, the kotwal asked him to explain how he had obtained possession of the princess’s necklace.

“Call the king hither,” he replied, “and then I will tell his Majesty face to face.”

On this some men went to the king and told him what the fakir had said. His Majesty came, and seeing the fakir so solemn and earnest in his devotions, he was afraid to rouse his anger, lest peradventure the displeasure of Heaven should descend on him, and so he placed his hands together in the attitude of a supplicant, and asked, “How did you get my daughter’s necklace?”

“Last night,” replied the fakir, “we were sitting here by this tomb worshipping Khuda, when a ghoul, dressed as a princess, came and exhumed a body that had been buried a few days ago, and began to eat it. On seeing this I was filled with anger, and beat her back with a shovel, which lay on the fire at the time. While running away from me her necklace got loose and dropped. You wonder at these words, but they are not difficult to prove. Examine your daughter, and you will find the marks of the burn on her back. Go, and if it is as I say, send the princess to me, and I will punish her.”

The king went back to the palace, and at once ordered the princess’s back to be examined.

“It is so,” said the maid-servant; “the burn is there.”

“Then let the girl be slain immediately,” the king shouted.

“No, no, your Majesty,” they replied. “Let us send her to the fakir who discovered this thing, that he may do whatever he wishes with her.”

The king agreed, and so the princess was taken to the graveyard.

“Let her be shut up in a cage, and be kept near the grave whence she took out the corpse,” said the fakir.

This was done, and in a little while the fakir and his disciple and the princess were left alone in the graveyard. Night had not long cast its dark mantle over the scene when the fakir and his disciple threw off their disguise, and taking their horses and luggage, appeared before the cage. They released the princess, rubbed some ointment over the scars on her back, and then sat her upon one of their horses behind the prince. Away they rode fast and far, and by the morning were able to rest and talk over their plans in safety. The vizier’s son showed the princess some of the poisoned pilaw that she had sent him, and asked whether she had repented of her ingratitude. The princess wept, and acknowledged that he was her greatest helper and friend.

A letter was sent to the chief vizier telling him of all that had happened to the prince and the vizier’s son since they had left their country. When the vizier read the letter he went and informed the king. The king caused a reply to be sent to the two exiles, in which he ordered them not to return, but to send a letter to Gulizar’s father, and inform him of everything. Accordingly they did this; the prince wrote the letter at the vizier’s son’s dictation.

On reading the letter Gulizar’s father was much enraged with his viziers and other officials for not discovering the presence in his country of these illustrious visitors, as he was especially anxious to ingratiate himself in the favour of the prince and the vizier’s son. He ordered the execution of some of the viziers on a certain date.

“Come,” he wrote back to the vizier’s son, “and stay at the palace. And if the prince desires it, I will arrange for his marriage with Gulizar as soon as possible.”

The prince and the vizier’s son most gladly accepted the invitation, and received a right noble welcome from the king. The marriage soon took place, and then after a few weeks the king gave them presents of horses and elephants, and jewels and rich cloths, and bade them start for their own land; for he was sure that the king would now receive them. The night before they left the viziers and others, whom the king intended to have

executed as soon as his visitors had left, came and besought the vizier's son to plead for them, and promised that they each would give him a daughter in marriage. He agreed to do so, and succeeded in obtaining their pardon.

Then the prince, with his beautiful bride Gulizar, and the vizier's son, attended by a troop of soldiers, and a large number of camels and horses bearing very much treasure, left for their own land. In the midst of the way they passed the tower of the robbers, and with the help of the soldiers they razed it to the ground, slew all its inmates, and seized the treasure which they had been amassing there for several years.

At length they reached their own country, and when the king saw his son's beautiful wife and his magnificent retinue he was at once reconciled, and ordered him to enter the city and take up his abode there.

Henceforth all was sunshine on the path of the prince. He became a great favourite, and in due time succeeded to the throne, and ruled the country for many, many years in peace and happiness.

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