



The King of Crocodiles

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Indian

Advanced
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Once upon a time a farmer went out to look at his fields by the side of the river, and found to his dismay that all his young green wheat had been trodden down, and nearly destroyed, by a number of crocodiles, which were lying lazily amid the crops like great logs of wood. He flew into a great rage, bidding them go back to the water, but they only laughed at him.

Every day the same thing occurred,—every day the farmer found the crocodiles lying in his young wheat, until one morning he completely lost his temper, and, when they refused to budge, began throwing stones at them. At this they rushed on him fiercely, and he, quaking with fear, fell on his knees, begging them not to hurt him.

‘We will hurt neither you nor your young wheat,’ said the biggest crocodile, ‘if you will give us your daughter in marriage; but if not, we will eat you for throwing stones at us.’

The farmer, thinking of nothing but saving his own life, promised what the crocodiles required of him; but when, on his return home, he told his wife what he had done, she was very much vexed, for their daughter was as beautiful as the moon, and her betrothal into a very rich family had already taken place. So his wife persuaded the farmer to disregard the promise made to the crocodiles, and proceed with his daughter’s marriage as if nothing had happened; but when the wedding-day drew near the bridegroom died, and there was an end to that business. The farmer’s daughter, however, was so beautiful that she was very soon asked in

marriage again, but this time her suitor fell sick of a lingering illness; in short, so many misfortunes occurred to all concerned, that at last even the farmer's wife acknowledged the crocodiles must have something to do with the bad luck. By her advice the farmer went down to the river bank to try to induce the crocodiles to release him from his promise, but they would hear of no excuse, threatening fearful punishments if the agreement were not fulfilled at once.

So the farmer returned home to his wife very sorrowful; she, however, was determined to resist to the uttermost, and refused to give up her daughter.

The very next day the poor girl fell down and broke her leg. Then the mother said, 'These demons of crocodiles will certainly kill us all!—better to marry our daughter to a strange house than see her die.'

Accordingly, the farmer went down to the river and informed the crocodiles they might send the bridal procession to fetch the bride as soon as they chose.

The next day a number of female crocodiles came to the bride's house with trays full of beautiful clothes, and *henna* for staining the bride's hands. They behaved with the utmost politeness, and carried out all the proper ceremonies with the greatest precision. Nevertheless the beautiful bride wept, saying, 'Oh, mother! are you marrying me into the river? I shall be drowned!'

In due course the bridal procession arrived, and all the village was wonderstruck at the magnificence of the arrangements. Never was there such a retinue of crocodiles, some playing instruments of music, others bearing trays upon trays full of sweetmeats, garments, and jewels, and all dressed in the richest of stuffs. In the middle, a perfect blaze of gold and gems, sat the King of the Crocodiles.

The sight of so much magnificence somewhat comforted the beautiful bride, nevertheless she wept bitterly when she was put into the gorgeous bride's palanquin and borne off to the river bank. Arrived at the edge of the stream, the crocodiles dragged the poor girl out, and forced her into the water, despite her struggles, for, thinking she was going to be drowned, she screamed with terror; but lo and behold! no sooner had her feet touched the water than it divided before her, and, rising up on either side, showed a path leading to the bottom of the river, down which the bridal party disappeared, leaving the bride's father, who had accompanied her so far, upon the bank, very much astonished at the marvellous sight.

Some months passed by without further news of the crocodiles. The farmer's wife wept because she had lost her daughter, declaring that the girl was really drowned, and her husband's fine story about the stream dividing was a mere invention.

Now when the King of the Crocodiles was on the point of leaving with his bride, he had given a piece of brick to her father, with these words: 'If ever you want to see your daughter, go down to the river, throw this brick as far as you can into the stream, and you will see what you will see!'

Remembering this, the farmer said to his wife, 'Since you are so distressed, I will go myself and see if my daughter be alive or dead.'

Then he went to the river bank, taking the brick, and threw it ever so far into the stream. Immediately the waters rolled back from before his feet, leaving a dry path to the bottom of the river. It looked so inviting, spread with clean sand, and bordered by flowers, that the farmer hastened along it without the least hesitation, until he came to a magnificent palace, with a golden roof, and shining, glittering diamond walls. Lofty trees and gay gardens surrounded it, and a sentry paced up and down before the gateway.

'Whose palace is this?' asked the farmer of the sentry, who replied that it belonged to the King of the Crocodiles.

'My daughter has at least a splendid house to live in!' thought the farmer; 'I only wish her husband were half as handsome!'

Then, turning to the sentry, he asked if his daughter were within.

'Your daughter!' returned the sentry, 'what should she do here?'

'She married the King of the Crocodiles, and I want to see her.'

At this the sentry burst out laughing. 'A likely story, indeed!' he cried; 'what! *my* master married to *your* daughter! Ha! ha! ha!'

Now the farmer's daughter was sitting beside an open window in the palace, waiting for her husband to return from hunting. She was as happy as the day was long, for you must know that in his own river-kingdom the King of the Crocodiles was the handsomest young Prince anybody ever set eyes upon; it was only when he went on shore that he assumed the form of a crocodile. So what with her magnificent palace and splendid young Prince, the farmer's daughter had been too happy even to think of her old home; but now, hearing a strange voice speaking to the sentry, her memory awakened, and she recognised her father's tones. Looking out, she saw him there, standing in his poor clothes, in the glittering court; she longed to run and fling her arms round his neck, but dared not disobey her husband, who had forbidden her to go out of, or to let any one into the palace without his permission. So all she could do was to lean out of the window, and call to him, saying, 'Oh, dearest father! I am here! Only wait till my husband, the King of the Crocodiles, returns, and I will ask him to let you in. I dare not without his leave.'

The father, though overjoyed to find his daughter alive, did not wonder she was afraid of her terrible husband, so he waited patiently.

In a short time a troop of horsemen entered the court. Every man was dressed from head to foot in armour made of glittering silver plates, but in the centre of all rode a Prince clad in gold—bright burnished gold, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet,—the handsomest, most gallant young Prince that ever was seen.

Then the poor farmer fell at the gold-clad horseman's feet, and cried, 'O King! cherish me! for I am a poor man whose daughter was carried off by the dreadful King of the Crocodiles!'

Then the gold-clad horseman smiled, saying, 'I am the King of the Crocodiles! Your daughter is a good, obedient wife, and will be very glad to see you.'

After this there were great rejoicings and merrymakings, but when a few days had passed away in feasting, the

farmer became restless, and begged to be allowed to take his daughter home with him for a short visit, in order to convince his wife the girl was well and happy. But the Crocodile King refused, saying, 'Not so! but if you like I will give you a house and land here; then you can dwell with us.'

The farmer said he must first ask his wife, and returned home, taking several bricks with him, to throw into the river and make the stream divide.

His wife would not at first agree to live in the Crocodile Kingdom, but she consented to go there on a visit, and afterwards became so fond of the beautiful river country that she was constantly going to see her daughter the Queen; till at length the old couple never returned to shore, but lived altogether in Crocodile Kingdom with their son-in-law, the King of the Crocodiles.

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