

The Magic Bed

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Indian

Intermediate

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One very hot day, a young Prince, or Rajah as they are called in India, had been hunting all the morning in the jungle, and by noon had lost sight of his attendants. So he sat down under a tree to rest and to eat some cakes which his mother had given him.

When he broke the first one he found an ant in it. In the second there were two ants, in the third, three, and so on until in the sixth there were six ants and the Ant-King himself.

“I think these cakes belong to you more than they do to me,” said the Prince to the Ant-King. “Take them all, for I am going to sleep.”

After a while the Ant-King crawled up to the Prince’s ear as he lay there dreaming, and said, “We are much obliged for the cakes and have eaten them up. What can we do for you in return?”

“I have everything I need,” replied the Prince in his sleep. “I cannot spend all the money I have, I have more jewels than I can wear, and more servants than I can count, and I am tired of them all.”

“You would never be tired of the Princess Lalun,” replied the Ant-King. “You should seek her, for she is as lovely as the morning.”

When the young Prince awoke, the ants were all gone; and he was very sorry for this, because he remembered what the Ant-King had said about the Princess Lalun.

“The only thing for me to do,” he said to himself, “is to find out in what country this princess lives.”

So he rode on through the jungle until sundown, and there beside a pool a tiger stood roaring.

“Are you hungry?” asked the Prince. “What is the matter?”

“I am not hungry, but I have a thorn in my foot which hurts me very much,” replied the tiger.

Then the Prince jumped off his horse and looked at the tiger’s foot. Then he pulled out the thorn and bound some healing leaves over the wound with a piece of cloth which he tore off his turban.

Just as he was ready to mount his horse again, a tigress came crashing through the jungle.

“How nice!” she cried. “Here is a man and we can eat him.”

“No, indeed,” replied her husband. “He has been very good to me. He has taken a thorn out of my foot and I am grateful to him. If he wants help at any time, we must give it to him.”

“We would much better eat him,” grumbled the tigress, but her husband growled so in reply that she bounded off into the deep jungle.

Then the Prince asked the tiger if he could tell him the shortest way to Princess Lalun’s country, and the tiger told him it was across three ranges of hills and through seven jungles.

“But,” said the tiger, “there is a fakir or holy beggar in the next jungle to this, and he has a magic bed which will carry you anywhere you wish to go. Besides this, he has a bag which will give you whatever you ask for, and a stone bowl which will fill itself with water as often as you ask it. If you can get these things you certainly can find the Princess Lalun.”

Then the Prince was very much pleased and set out to find the fakir. He found him sitting under a tree on the edge of the jungle, his bed on one side of him and the bag and bowl on the other side.

The fakir sat very still for a long time when he heard what the Prince wanted, and then he asked, "Why do you seek the Princess Lalun?"

"Because I want to marry her," replied the Prince very earnestly.

"Look into my eyes while I hold your hands," said the fakir, and as the Prince did so, he saw that he was one who could be trusted.

Then the fakir agreed to lend him the things and to take care of his horse until the Prince came back.

"Now lie down on the bed and wish yourself in the Princess Lalun's country," said the fakir, and, taking the bag and the stone bowl in his hands, the Prince stretched himself on the bed.

Then the Prince said, "Take me to Princess Lalun's country," and no sooner had he spoken, than off he went, over the seven jungles and over the three ranges of hills, and in less than a minute he was set down within the borders of the kingdom where the Princess Lalun lived.

The name of the Princess's father was Afzal, and he was the king or Rajah of that country. So many princes had sought his daughter in marriage that he was tired of saying "No" to them. Then he tried the plan of giving them impossible tasks to do and so getting rid of them in that way, but still they kept coming, and at last Rajah Afzal concluded to keep foreigners out of his kingdom altogether. So he issued an edict that no one was to give a night's lodging to a stranger.

So when the Prince came to an old woman's cottage and asked if he might spend the night there, she told him that the Rajah would not allow it.

"Cannot I bring my bed into your garden and sleep there?" he asked. "And cannot I have supper with you?"

"I have nothing for supper but rice," said the old woman, shaking her head. But the Prince pleaded so hard to let him come in that she consented, and he put his bag on her table.

Then he spoke to the bag. "Bag, I want something to eat!" and all at once the bag opened and there was a fine supper for two people. So the old woman ate with, the Prince. The food was delicious and was served on gold plates with gold spoons.

When they were done eating, the old woman said she would go to the well for some water.

"You need not do that," said the Prince, and then he tapped the bowl with his finger. "Bowl!" he cried, "I want water!" At once the bowl filled with water and the old woman washed the gold plates and spoons.

"If you will let me stay with you a little while," said the Prince, "you may have the plates and spoons for your own." Then he ordered the bowl to fill with water again and washed his hands in it.

Then the Prince said, "My bowl gives me all the water I want, and my bag gives me everything else I ask for. They belong to a holy fakir, and he might be angry if you turned his things out of the house to-night."

The old woman sat very quiet for a long time and then she said, "The anger of a Rajah is something to be dreaded, but that of a fakir might be far worse."

"Did you count them?" asked the Prince. "There are twelve gold plates and twelve gold spoons." The old woman nodded, and put them away under her bed. "You may stay," she said, "but be careful that the Rajah's soldiers do not catch you."

By this time it was night and the Prince and the old woman sat in darkness, for there was no lamp in the house. "The Rajah does not allow lamps to be used," she said. "His daughter, the Princess Lalun, sits on the roof of her palace at night and shines so that she lights up the whole country."

Just then a beautiful silver radiance filled the room, and when the Prince stepped outside he saw that the Princess was sitting on the roof of her palace. Her saree or dress was of silver gauze, and her dark hair floated almost to her feet.

She wore a band of diamonds and pearls across her head, and the light that came from her was as beautiful as that of the sun and the moon and the stars together.

"The Ant-Rajah was right," said the Prince. "Her beauty turns darkness into light, and night into day. I should

never be weary of the Princess Lalun.”

At midnight the Princess came down from her roof and went to her room. Then the Prince sat down on his bed with his bag in his hand. “Bed,” said he, “take me to the Princess’s palace!” So the bed took him where she lay fast asleep. Then he shook the bag. “Bag,” he said, “I want a lovely shawl, embroidered in red and blue and gold!” The bag gave it to him and he spread it gently over the Princess. Then the bed carried him back to the old woman’s cottage.

The bag gave the Prince and the old woman breakfast and dinner and supper the next day, and when night came the Princess again sat on the roof. This time her saree was of white silk covered with diamond butterflies, and she shone more gloriously than before.

At midnight the Princess went to her room again, and then the Prince told his bed to take him again to the palace. He said to his bag, “Bag, I want a very beautiful ring!” The bag gave him a ring set with rubies, which he slipped on the Princess’s hand as she lay asleep, and then when she woke the Prince told her who he was.

When the Princess saw what a noble, handsome young man he was, and heard that he was the son of a great Rajah, and that he was the one who had brought her the magnificent shawl the night before, she fell in love with him and said she would tell her father and mother that she wanted him for her husband. Then the Prince went back to the old woman’s cottage.

The Rajah Afzal, Princess Lalun’s father, sent for the Prince the next day, and told him he might marry the Princess because she wished it.

“But first,” said he, “you must do this for me. Here are eighty pounds of mustard-seed, and you must crush the oil out of them in one day.”

“It is impossible,” said the Prince as he went away from the palace. “How can I do it?” And when the old woman heard of it she said, “It is quite impossible. Only an army of ants could do it.”

Then the Prince thought of the Ant-Rajah, and at the very minute he thought of him, the Ant-Rajah and all his ants crept under the door and into the room.

“If I do not crush all the oil out of this mustard-seed before to-morrow morning, I cannot marry the Princess

Lalun,” the Prince said, showing the bag to the Ant-Rajah.

“We will attend to it for you,” replied the Ant-Rajah. “Go to sleep and leave it to us.” When the Prince awoke in the-morning there was not a drop of oil left in the mustard-seed, and with a light heart he took it to the King.

“That is very good, indeed,” said Rajah Afzal, “but I have something else for you to do. One day when I was out in the hills I caught two demons, and I have them here shut up in a cage. I want them killed, because they may break out some day and harm my people. You may marry the Princess Lalun if you can kill them.”

“How can I fight two demons?” the Prince asked the old woman when he was back in her cottage.

“Only a couple of tigers could do it,” replied the old woman; and as soon as the Prince remembered his tigers they came in at the door.

“Take us to the King,” said the tiger.

When the Prince asked the Rajah if the tigers might fight the two demons, he said they might do so, for he was very anxious to get rid of the demons. So all the court went to see the fight, and the tigers killed the demons.

But when the Prince said, “Now you will give me your daughter,” Rajah Afzal replied, “There is only one thing more. If you can beat my kettledrum you shall marry the Princess Lalun.”

“Where is your drum?” asked the Prince.

“Up there in the sky,” replied the Rajah.

“I don’t know how I can get up into the sky,” sighed the Prince. “This is the hardest task of all.” So he went back to the cottage and said to the old woman, “My ants crushed his oil, my tigers killed his demons, but who is to get up into the sky and beat his kettle-drum?”

“You are rather stupid,” said the old woman. “If your bed carried you across seven jungles and over three ranges of hills, don’t you think it can take you up into the sky?”

“It is very singular I never thought of that,” cried the Prince, and then he sat down upon his little bed. Up into the sky it flew, where he beat the kettle-drum so loudly with the handle of his hunting-knife that the King

heard him.

“The wedding shall take place as soon as you like,” said the Rajah when the Prince came down again; and so the Prince sent the bed and the bowl and the bag back to the fakir.

Then invitations to the wedding were sent to all the kings and queens of the neighboring countries; and after they were married the Prince took the Princess Lalun home to his own country.

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