



The Magic Mirror

Andrew Lang'S Fairy Books

Rhodesian

Intermediate

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A long, long while ago, before ever the White Men were seen in Senna, there lived a man called Gopani-Kufa.

One day, as he was out hunting, he came upon a strange sight. An enormous python had caught an antelope and coiled itself around it; the antelope, striking out in despair with its horns, had pinned the python's neck to a tree, and so deeply had its horns sunk in the soft wood that neither creature could get away.

'Help!' cried the antelope, 'for I was doing no harm, yet I have been caught, and would have been eaten, had I not defended myself.'

'Help me,' said the python, 'for I am Insato, King of all the Reptiles, and will reward you well!'

Gopani-Kufa considered for a moment, then stabbing the antelope with his assegai, he set the python free.

'I thank you,' said the python; 'come back here with the new moon, when I shall have eaten the antelope, and I will reward you as I promised.'

'Yes,' said the dying antelope, 'he will reward you, and lo! your reward shall be your own undoing!'

Gopani-Kufa went back to his kraal, and with the new moon he returned again to the spot where he had saved the python.

Insato was lying upon the ground, still sleepy from the effects of his huge meal, and when he saw the man he thanked him again, and said: 'Come with me now to Pita, which is my own country, and I will give you what you will of all my possessions.'

Gopani-Kufa at first was afraid, thinking of what the antelope had said, but finally he consented and followed Insato into the forest.

For several days they travelled, and at last they came to a hole leading deep into the earth. It was not very wide, but large enough to admit a man. 'Hold on to my tail,' said Insato, 'and I will go down first, drawing you after me.' The man did so, and Insato entered.

Down, down, down they went for days, all the while getting deeper and deeper into the earth, until at last the darkness ended and they dropped into a beautiful country; around them grew short green grass, on which browsed herds of cattle and sheep and goats. In the distance Gopani-Kufa saw a great collection of houses all square, built of stone and very tall, and their roofs were shining with gold and burnished iron.

Gopani-Kufa turned to Insato, but found, in the place of the python, a man, strong and handsome, with the great snake's skin wrapped round him for covering; and on his arms and neck were rings of pure gold.

The man smiled. 'I am Insato,' said he, 'but in my own country I take man's shape—even as you see me—for this is Pita, the land over which I am king.' He then took Gopani-Kufa by the hand and led him towards the town.

On the way they passed rivers in which men and women were bathing and fishing and boating; and farther on they came to gardens covered with heavy crops of rice and maize, and many other grains which Gopani-Kufa did not even know the name of. And as they passed, the people who were singing at their work in the fields, abandoned their labours and saluted Insato with delight, bringing also palm wine and green cocoanuts for refreshment, as to one returned from a long journey.

'These are my children!' said Insato, waving his hand towards the people. Gopani-Kufa was much astonished at all that he saw, but he said nothing. Presently they came to the town; everything here, too, was beautiful, and

everything that a man might desire he could obtain. Even the grains of dust in the streets were of gold and silver.

Insato conducted Gopani-Kufa to the palace, and showing him his rooms, and the maidens who would wait upon him, told him that they would have a great feast that night, and on the morrow he might name his choice of the riches of Pita and it should be given him. Then he was away.

Now Gopani-Kufa had a wasp called Zengi-mizi. Zengi-mizi was not an ordinary wasp, for the spirit of the father of Gopani-Kufa had entered it, so that it was exceedingly wise. In times of doubt Gopani-Kufa always consulted the wasp as to what had better be done, so on this occasion he took it out of the little rush basket in which he carried it, saying: 'Zengi-mizi, what gift shall I ask of Insato to-morrow when he would know the reward he shall bestow on me for saving his life?'

'Biz-z-z,' hummed Zengi-mizi, 'ask him for Sipao the Mirror.' And it flew back into its basket.

Gopani-Kufa was astonished at this answer; but knowing that the words of Zengi-mizi were true words, he determined to make the request. So that night they feasted, and on the morrow Insato came to Gopani-Kufa and, giving him greeting joyfully, he said:

'Now, O my friend, name your choice amongst my possessions and you shall have it!'

'O king!' answered Gopani-Kufa, 'out of all your possessions I will have the Mirror, Sipao.'

The king started. 'O friend, Gopani-Kufa,' he said, 'ask anything but that! I did not think that you would request that which is most precious to me.'

'Let me think over it again then, O king,' said Gopani-Kufa, 'and to-morrow I will let you know if I change my mind.'

But the king was still much troubled, fearing the loss of Sipao, for the mirror had magic powers, so that he who owned it had but to ask and his wish would be fulfilled; to it Insato owed all that he possessed.

As soon as the king left him, Gopani-Kufa again took Zengi-mizi, out of his basket. 'Zengi-mizi,' he said, 'the king seems loth to grant my request for the Mirror—is there not some other thing of equal value for which I

might ask?’

And the wasp answered: ‘There is nothing in the world, O Gopani-Kufa, which is of such value as this Mirror, for it is a Wishing Mirror, and accomplishes the desires of him who owns it. If the king hesitates, go to him the next day, and the day after, and in the end he will bestow the Mirror upon you, for you saved his life.’

And it was even so. For three days Gopani- Kufa returned the same answer to the king, and, at last, with tears in his eyes, Insato gave him the Mirror, which was of polished iron, saying: ‘Take Sipao, then, O Gopani- Kufa, and may thy wishes come true. Go back now to thine own country; Sipao will show you the way.’

Gopani-Kufa was greatly rejoiced, and, taking farewell of the king, said to the Mirror:

‘Sipao, Sipao, I wish to be back upon the Earth again!’

Instantly he found himself standing upon the upper earth; but, not knowing the spot, he said again to the Mirror:

‘Sipao, Sipao, I want the path to my own kraal!’

And behold! right before him lay the path!

When he arrived home he found his wife and daughter mourning for him, for they thought that he had been eaten by lions; but he comforted them, saying that while following a wounded antelope he had missed his way and had wandered for a long time before he had found the path again.

That night he asked Zengi-mizi, in whom sat the spirit of his father, what he had better ask Sipao for next?

‘Biz-z-z,’ said the wasp, ‘would you not like to be as great a chief as Insato?’

And Gopani-Kufa smiled, and took the Mirror and said to it:

‘Sipao, Sipao, I want a town as great as that of Insato, the King of Pita; and I wish to be chief over it!’

Then all along the banks of the Zambesi river, which flowed near by, sprang up streets of stone buildings, and their roofs shone with gold and burnished iron like those in Pita; and in the streets men and women were walking, and young boys were driving out the sheep and cattle to pasture; and from the river came shouts and

laughter from the young men and maidens who had launched their canoes and were fishing. And when the people of the new town beheld Gopani-Kufa they rejoiced greatly and hailed him as chief.

Gopani-Kufa was now as powerful as Insato the King of the Reptiles had been, and he and his family moved into the palace that stood high above the other buildings right in the middle of the town. His wife was too astonished at all these wonders to ask any questions, but his daughter Shasasa kept begging him to tell her how he had suddenly become so great; so at last he revealed the whole secret, and even entrusted Sipao the Mirror to her care, saying:

‘It will be safer with you, my daughter, for you dwell apart; whereas men come to consult me on affairs of state, and the Mirror might be stolen.’

Then Shasasa took the Magic Mirror and hid it beneath her pillow, and after that for many years Gopani-Kufa ruled his people both well and wisely, so that all men loved him, and never once did he need to ask Sipao to grant him a wish.

Now it happened that, after many years, when the hair of Gopani-Kufa was turning grey with age, there came white men to that country. Up the Zambesi they came, and they fought long and fiercely with Gopani-Kufa; but, because of the power of the Magic Mirror, he beat them, and they fled to the sea-coast. Chief among them was one Rei, a man of much cunning, who sought to discover whence sprang Gopani-Kufa’s power. So one day he called to him a trusty servant named Butou, and said: ‘Go you to the town and find out for me what is the secret of its greatness.’

And Butou, dressing himself in rags, set out, and when he came to Gopani-Kufa’s town he asked for the chief; and the people took him into the presence of Gopani-Kufa. When the white man saw him he humbled himself, and said: ‘O Chief! take pity on me, for I have no home! When Rei marched against you I alone stood apart, for I knew that all the strength of the Zambesi lay in your hands, and because I would not fight against you he turned me forth into the forest to starve!’

And Gopani-Kufa believed the white man’s story, and he took him in and feasted him, and gave him a house.

In this way the end came. For the heart of Shasasa, the daughter of Gopani-Kufa, went forth to Butou the traitor, and from her he learnt the secret of the Magic Mirror. One night, when all the town slept, he felt

beneath her pillow and, finding the Mirror, he stole it and fled back with it to Rei, the chief of the white men.

So it befell that, one day, as Gopani-Kufa was gazing up at the river from a window of the palace he again saw the war-canoes of the white men; and at the sight his spirit misgave him.

‘Shasasa! my daughter!’ he cried wildly, ‘go fetch me the mirror, for the white men are at hand.’

‘Woe is me, my father!’ she sobbed. ‘The Mirror is gone! For I loved Butou the traitor, and he has stolen Sipao from me!’

Then Gopani-Kufa calmed himself, and drew out Zengi-mizi from its rush basket.

‘O spirit of my father!’ he said, ‘what now shall I do?’

‘O Gopani-Kufa!’ hummed the wasp, ‘there is nothing now that can be done, for the words of the antelope which you slew are being fulfilled.’

‘Alas! I am an old man—I had forgotten!’ cried the chief. ‘The words of the antelope were true words—my reward shall be my undoing—they are being fulfilled!’

Then the white men fell upon the people of Gopani-Kufa and slew them together with the chief and his daughter Shasasa; and since then all the power of the Earth has rested in the hands of the white men, for they have in their possession Sipao, the Magic Mirror.

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