

The Mother and the Daughter Who Worshipped the Sun

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Indian

*Intermediate
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Once upon a time there lived a mother and a daughter who worshipped the Sun. Though they were very poor they never forgot to honour the Sun, giving everything they earned to it except two meal cakes, one of which the mother ate, while the other was the daughter's share, every day one cake apiece; that was all.

Now it so happened that one day, when the mother was out at work, the daughter grew hungry, and ate her cake before dinner-time. Just as she had finished it a priest came by, and begged for some bread, but there was none in the house save the mother's cake. So the daughter broke off half of it and gave it to the priest in the name of the Sun.

By and by the mother returned, very hungry, to dinner, and, lo and behold! there was only half a cake in the house.

'Where is the remainder of the bread?' she asked.

'I ate my share, because I was hungry,' said the daughter, 'and just as I finished, a priest came a-begging, so I was obliged to give him half your cake.'

‘A pretty story!’ quoth the mother, in a rage. ‘It is easy to be pious with other people’s property! How am I to know you had eaten your cake first? I believe you gave mine in order to save your own!’

In vain the daughter protested that she really had finished her cake before the priest came a-begging,—in vain she promised to give the mother half her share on the morrow,—in vain she pleaded for forgiveness for the sake of the Sun, in whose honour she had given alms. Words were of no avail; the mother sternly bade her go about her business, saying, ‘I will have no gluttons, who grudge their own meal to the great Sun, in my house!’

So the daughter wandered away homeless into the wilds, sobbing bitterly. When she had travelled a long long way, she became so tired that she could walk no longer; therefore she climbed into a big *pîpal* tree, in order to be secure from wild beasts, and rested amongst the branches.

After a time a handsome young prince, who had been chasing deer in the forest, came to the big *pîpal* tree, and, allured by its tempting shade, lay down to sleep away his fatigues. Now, as he lay there, with his face turned to the sky, he looked so beautiful that the daughter could not choose but keep her eyes upon him, and so the tears which flowed from them like a summer shower dropped soft and warm upon the young man’s face, waking him with a start. Thinking it was raining, he rose to look at the sky, and see whence this sudden storm had come; but far and near not a cloud was to be seen. Still, when he returned to his place, the drops fell faster than before, and one of them upon his lip tasted salt as tears. So he swung himself into the tree, to see whence the salt rain came, and, lo and behold! a beauteous maiden sat in the tree, weeping.

‘Whence come you, fair stranger?’ said he; and she, with tears, told him she was homeless, houseless, motherless. Then he fell in love with her sweet face and soft words; so he asked her to be his bride, and she went with him to the palace, her heart full of gratitude to the Sun, who had sent her such good luck.

Everything she could desire was hers; only when the other women talked of their homes and their mothers she held her tongue, for she was ashamed of hers.

Every one thought she must be some great princess, she was so lovely and magnificent, but in her heart of hearts she knew she was nothing of the kind; so every day she prayed to the Sun that her mother might not find her out.

But one day, when she was sitting alone in her beautiful palace, her mother appeared, ragged and poor as ever. She had heard of her daughter's good fortune, and had come to share it.

'And you *shall* share it,' pleaded her daughter; 'I will give you back far more than I ever took from you, if only you will go away and not disgrace me before my prince.'

'Ungrateful creature!' stormed the mother, 'do you forget how it was through my act that your good fortune came to you? If I had not sent you into the world, where would you have found so fine a husband?'

'I might have starved!' wept the daughter; 'and now you come to destroy me again. O great Sun, help me now!'

Just then the prince came to the door, and the poor daughter was ready to die of shame and vexation; but when she turned to where her mother had sat, there was nothing to be seen but a golden stool, the like of which had never been seen on earth before.

'My princess,' asked the prince, astonished, 'whence comes that golden stool?'

'From my mother's house,' replied the daughter, full of gratitude to the great Sun, who had saved her from disgrace.

'Nay! if there are such wondrous things to be seen in your mother's house,' quoth the prince gaily, 'I must needs go and see it. To-morrow we will set out on our journey, and you shall show me all it contains.'

In vain the daughter put forward one pretext and another: the prince's curiosity had been aroused by the sight of the marvellous golden stool, and he was not to be gainsaid.

Then the daughter cried once more to the Sun, in her distress, saying,

'O gracious Sun, help me now!'

But no answer came, and with a heavy heart she set out next day to show the prince her mother's house. A goodly procession they made, with horsemen and footmen clothed in royal liveries surrounding the bride's palanquin, where sat the daughter, her heart sinking at every step.

And when they came within sight of where her mother's hut used to stand, lo! on the horizon showed a shining, flaming golden palace, that glittered and glanced like solid sunshine. Within and without all was gold,—golden servants and a golden mother!

There they stopped, admiring the countless marvels of the Sun palace, for three days, and when the third was completed, the prince, more enamoured of his bride than ever, set his face homewards; but when he came to the spot where he had first seen the glittering golden palace from afar, he thought he would just take one look more at the wondrous sight, and, lo! there was nothing to be seen save a low thatched hovel!

Then he turned to his bride, full of wrath, and said, 'You are a witch, and have deceived me by your detestable arts! Confess, if you would not have me strike you dead!'

But the daughter fell on her knees, saying, 'My gracious prince, I have done nothing! I am but a poor homeless girl. It was the Sun that did it.'

Then she told the whole story from beginning to end, and the prince was so well satisfied that from that day he too worshipped the Sun.

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