



The Golden Conch

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Magic

King Sukumaran of Jayaputra was a just and fair King who was well liked by his subjects. He and Queen Sujatha had two children named Dhannia and Siddarth. Princess Dhannia was a fair maiden who loved music and dance. Young Prince Siddarth was a keen sportsman and an excellent archer. One day while the Prince and Princess were travelling through the forest in a horse driven carriage, the Prince spots a beautiful deer. He immediately instructs the carriage driver to stop and takes out his bow and arrow and takes aim at the deer. Princess Dhannia pleads with him not to shoot the deer but Prince Siddarth had already taken aim and shoots the arrow which strikes the deer in the neck. Princess Dhannia rushes to the fallen deer and finds it struggling for its life. Suddenly from the forest appears a holy man who on seeing the fallen deer rushes to it. "Ramu!, Oh Ramu! Who did this to you? He cries. On seeing this Prince Siddarth quickly moves away and hides among the trees. The holy man appeared furious and demanded to know from Princess Dhannia who was responsible for the killing of his beloved pet deer.

Princess Dhannia remained silent and refused to divulge that her brother was responsible. The holy man was losing patience and accused the poor Princess of being responsible for his pet deer's death.

Princess Dhannia again remained silent. Finally, the holy man cursed that Princess Dhannia will remain bedridden for life at sunset on that day.

Princess Dhannia rushes back to the carriage in tears and was driven away to the Palace.

Prince Siddarth makes his way from the forest on foot and reaches the Palace. He explains to his father of what actually took place in the forest. King Sukumaran rushes to look for his daughter and finds her crying in her room. He consoles her and says that he will seek for this holy man and plead with him to show mercy on her. With his men King Sukumaran rides into the forest to seek the holy man. He finds him at his hut in the forest

and pleads with him to retract his curse and explained what actually took place and of his daughter's innocence. The holy man said that he was unable to do anything as it was too late now. Since King Sukumaran was a fair and just King he would have to seek the golden conch. He said water drunk from the golden conch will cure his daughter. The holy man also explained that the golden conch can only be retrieved by a commoner and he who brings it will have to marry his daughter. To save his daughter King Sukumaran agrees to the condition. King Sukumaran then returns to the Palace and at sunset finds his daughter Princess Dhannia bedridden.

The crestfallen King then informs his aide to announce to everyone in the Kingdom that any commoner who could retrieve the golden conch will have his daughter's hand in marriage.

The next day all the subjects of the Kingdom are informed of the King's announcement. Everyone were talking about it but no one knew exactly where the golden conch was.

Meanwhile Lukesh, a young man in the village who was as usual teasing the village girls and stealing mangoes from the orchards was asked by one of the Village girls named Gayathri "Lukesh aren't going to look for the golden conch." "If you do, you can marry Princess Dhannia and I heard that she is very beautiful." "Why not! Retorts Lukesh "I will find the golden conch and marry the Princess" "Yes! We know you can find it" "You couldn't even find your lost goat last week" said Gayathri laughing loudly. Blushing, Lukesh leaves hurriedly.

The next day while Lukesh was picking firewood in the forest he finds an old woman slumped against a tree. He goes over to the old woman who asks for water. Taking a broad leaf and making it into a cup Lukesh rushes to the river and gets some water in it. He returns and gives the water to the old woman. "Thank you my son" the old woman said "Have you heard about the golden conch my son" "Yes! Everyone is talking about it" replies Lukesh. The old woman points north to the mountain and says "You see that mountain, the golden conch is in a cave there." "Here take this blanket and go there and at the entrance of the cave cover yourself and you will not be seen" "Go right into the cave and retrieve the golden conch which is guarded by a demon." "By wearing this blanket the demon will not be able to see you." "As soon as you retrieve the golden conch, return without looking back" "Go now and do not tell anyone about this." "Good luck and take care my son" said the old woman.

Lukesh left immediately with the blanket in his hand.

He kept walking until he reached the foot of the mountain where he quenched his thirst at a waterfall.

He started to climb the mountain until he saw the entrance of the cave. At the entrance of the cave Lukesh covered himself with the blanket as told by the old woman and walked into the cave. After a while he reached a

mound on top of which was the shining golden conch and below the mound was the demon with red eyes guarding it. Knowing that the demon will not be able to see him as he had covered himself with the blanket, Lukesh crept up the mound and retrieved the golden conch and without turning back hurriedly leaves the cave. At the entrance of the cave he removes the blanket and covers the golden conch with it and rushes back home. As the old woman warned him not to tell anyone Lukesh rushes straight to the Palace and gives the golden conch to King Sukumaran.

King Sukumaran was overjoyed seeing the golden conch. He immediately takes it to his daughter's room where she lay in bed. Taking some water in the conch the King gives his daughter to drink. As soon as Princess Dhannia drinks the water from the conch she gets up as was able to walk.

King Sukumaran asks Lukesh who he was and Lukesh replies that he was the son of Saharan the village Headman and Umadevi. The King's aide interrupts and says "Sire Umadevi is the woman who looks after the Amman temple" "Well done young man" said King Sukumaran. "You are now my would be son-in-law" Princess Dhannia goes over to Lukesh and says "Thank you for saving me and now you are going to be my husband." "Yes your highness" replies a beaming Lukesh. Lukesh takes leave from the King and rushes to inform his father and mother of the good news.

Lukesh's father and mother was overjoyed to hear that their son had found the golden conch and will be marrying Princess Dhannia.

The whole Kingdom was talking about Lukesh having found the golden conch and that he will be a Prince by marrying Princess Dhannia. Gayathri's friend Madhavi rushes to her house to inform her about Lukesh's good fortune. "Yes I heard about it" said Gayathri wiping away tears from her eyes. "Gayathri, so were in love with Lukesh?" asked Madhavi "Yes, guess I am just unlucky" replied Gayathri.

Back home Lukesh tells his father and mother about the old woman and how he retrieved the golden conch. Lukesh's mother Umadevi listened and finally said "Lukesh do you know who that old woman was" she asked "No Amma" he replied. With her eyes opening wide she says "Lukesh, I am sure that she is none other than Goddess Amman herself!" "Yes, I think so too" added Lukesh's father Saharan.

King Sukumaran announces that there will be a week of festivities in Jayaputra culminating in the royal wedding of Princess Dhannia and Lukesh. The Kingdom was filled with joy and everyone was talking about the wedding. In the midst was one person who was extremely unhappy, and that was Gayathri.

Gayathri was madly in love with Lukesh though Lukesh was unaware about this. One day Princess Dhannia comes to the Amman temple to pray.

Gayathri who was there seeks permission to meet the Princess. On meeting her Gayathri said "Oh your

Highness I am Gayathri, daughter of Jayaram, the village tailor” “yes what can I do for you?” asked Princess Dhannia. “I kindly request your Highness to give me a job at the royal household” replied Gayathri. The Princess after pondering for a while said “alright, come to the Palace, and you may start work tomorrow. Gayathri was delighted that she had got a job at the royal household and thanked Princess Dhannia profusely. The next day Gayathri goes to the royal household and starts working. While doing her work she started to talk about Lukesh to Princess Dhannia. The Princess was somewhat surprised and asked her “Do you know Lukesh?” “Yes your highness, we were childhood friends” “I am afraid to tell Your Highness this” said Gayathri. “What? Asked Princess Dhannia”. “Your Highness Lukesh and I are lovers and.....” “Stop!” said the Princess “I do not want to hear anymore, and please leave.” On hearing this the Princess was troubled but remained composed. The Princess requests that she wanted to see Lukesh and a Palace aide was sent to inform him. Lukesh goes to the Palace and requests permission to see the Princess. He is led to the garden where Princess Dhannia awaited him. “Your highness, you requested my presence” said Lukesh. “Please don’t call me your Highness Lukesh. You may call me Dhannia.”

“Alright your Highness er, er,Dhannia” stammered Lukesh . “Lukesh , can I ask you something and are you sure you will not be offended?”

“No, Dhannia ask me anything you want?” replied Lukesh . “Do you know Gayathri?” asked the Princess. “Oh she, the loud mouthed girl from the village” “Yes Dhannia, what about her?” said Lukesh . “She is working in the royal household now as she wanted a job.” And she said that you and she are lovers” “Is that true Lukesh?” asked the Princess.

“No! Dhannia she is lying” “Yes I admit I used to tease the girls in the village and that was all.” “You may ask Madhavi, her friend” said Lukesh . “No, I will not ask anyone, as I trust you Lukesh.” said the Princess. “You brought the golden conch and saved me and I owe my life to you.” “How can I distrust you Lukesh, as you are going to be my husband.” said the Princess. “But, Dhannia when there is doubt in one’s mind it must be cleared and I know the way to do it” said Lukesh.

Saying this Lukesh leaves the Palace. He goes home and tells his mother about what happened in the Palace.

Hearing this, Umadevi gets upset and tells her son

“Lukesh, the only way to prove you are innocent is to do fire walking for Amman.” “Let the world know my son is pure” said Umadevi in tears. “Yes Amma, I felt the same way too”

Preparations for the fire walking ceremony was arranged hastily and Lukesh wanted to prove that there was no truth in Gayathri’s allegation. Meanwhile Gayathri’s parents rebuke her for having told the Princess a lie. They visit Saharan and Umadevi to apologise on behalf of their daughter. “Don’t worry, Amman will be the judge to

my son's innocence" said Umadevi.

The whole Kingdom gathered at the temple that day and present was the King and his family who were seated on a specially erected dais. Princess Dhannia was visibly upset and she took a vow not to eat any food until Lukesh walks unscathed from the fire. Queen Sujatha held her daughter's hand and consoled her. The crowd gathered around the fire pit as priests were conducting ceremonies for the fire in the pit. The fire in the pit had now died down and all that was left was red hot coals. The crowd were moving back due to the heat. Lukesh appears at one end of the pit wearing saffron coloured cloth and carrying a pot of burning coals in his hands. While the drums beat furiously and the priests pour saffron water over him Lukesh prepares to walk across the burning coals. Finally, Lukesh shouts "Om Shakti" and walks briskly across the fire pit into a pool of milk at the other end.

He stood there for a while and then comes out and takes the pot of coals to the temple and places it at the foot of Amman.

The crowd cheers as Lukesh comes away unscathed from the fire walking. Umadevi lies prostrate in front of Amman and thanks her for her blessing.

Gayathri on seeing this rushes to Princess Dhannia and falls at her feet asking for forgiveness. "You are forgiven Gayathri as this is a lesson that not only women need to prove that they are virtuous, men too can."

The celebrations in the Kingdom continued until the day of the wedding when Lukesh is crowned Prince of Jayaputra and marries Princess Dhannia.

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