

The Boy with the Moon on His Forehead

By the Rev. Lal Behari Day

There was a certain king who had six queens, none of whom bore children. Physicians, holy sages, mendicants, were consulted, countless drugs were had recourse to, but all to no purpose. The king was disconsolate. His ministers told him to marry a seventh wife; and he was accordingly on the look out.

In the royal city there lived a poor old woman who used to pick up cow-dung from the fields, make it into cakes, dry them in the sun, and sell them in the market for fuel. This was her only means of subsistence. This old woman had a daughter exquisitely beautiful. Her beauty excited the admiration of every one that saw her; and it was solely in consequence of her surpassing beauty that three young ladies, far above her in rank and station, contracted friendship with her. Those three young ladies were the daughter of the king's minister, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, and the daughter of the royal priest. These three young ladies, together with the daughter of the poor old woman, were one day bathing in a tank not far from the palace. As they were performing their ablutions, each dwelt on her own good qualities. "Look here, sister," said the minister's daughter, addressing the merchant's daughter, "the man that marries me will be a happy man, for he will not have to buy clothes for me. The cloth which I once put on never gets soiled, never gets old, never tears." The merchant's daughter said, "And my husband too will be a happy man, for the fuel which I use in cooking never gets turned into ashes. The same fuel serves from day to day, from year to year." "And my husband will also become a happy man," said the daughter of the royal chaplain, "for the rice which I cook one day never gets finished, and when we have all eaten, the same quantity which was first cooked remains always in the pot." The daughter of the poor old woman said in her turn, "And the man that marries me will also be happy, for I shall give birth to twin children, a son and a daughter. The daughter will be divinely fair, and the son will have the moon on his forehead and stars on the palms of his hands."

The above conversation was overheard by the king, who, as he was on the look out for a seventh queen, used to skulk about in places where women met together. The king thus thought in his mind—"I don't care a straw for the girl whose clothes never tear and never get old; neither do I care for the other girl whose fuel is never consumed; nor for the third girl whose rice never fails in the pot. But the fourth girl is quite charming! She will give birth to twin children, a son and a daughter; the daughter will be divinely fair, and the son will have the moon on his forehead and stars on the palms of his hands. That is the girl I want. I'll make her my wife."

On making inquiries on the same day, the king found that the fourth girl was the daughter of a poor old woman who picked up cow-dung from the fields; but though there was thus an infinite disparity in rank, he determined to marry her. On the very same day he sent for the poor old woman. She, poor thing, was quite frightened when she saw a messenger of the king standing at the door of her hut. She thought that the king had sent for her to punish her, because, perhaps, she had some day unwittingly picked up the dung of the king's cattle. She went to the palace, and was admitted into the king's private chamber. The king asked her whether she had a very fair daughter, and whether that

daughter was the friend of his own minister's and priest's daughters. When the woman answered in the affirmative, he said to her, "I will marry your daughter, and make her my queen. The woman hardly believed her own ears—the thing was so strange. He, however, solemnly declared to her that he had made up his mind, and was determined to marry her daughter. It was soon known in the capital that the king was going to marry the daughter of the old woman who picked up cow-dung in the fields. When the six queens heard the news, they would not believe it, till the king himself told them that the news was true. They thought that the king had somehow got mad. They reasoned with him thus—"What folly, what madness, to marry a girl who is not fit to be our maid-servant! And you expect us to treat her as our equal—a girl whose mother goes about picking up cow-dung in the fields! Surely, my lord, you are beside yourself!" The king's purpose, however, remained unshaken. The royal astrologer was called, and an auspicious day was fixed for the celebration of the king's marriage. On the appointed day the royal priest tied the marital knot, and the daughter of the poor old picker-up of cow-dung in the fields became the seventh and best beloved queen.

Some time after the celebration of the marriage, the king went for six months to another part of his dominions. Before setting out he called to him the seventh queen, and said to her, "I am going away to another part of my dominions for six months. Before the expiration of that period I expect you to be confined. But I should like to be present with you at the time, as your enemies may do mischief. Take this golden bell and hang it in your room. When the pains of childbirth come upon you, ring this bell, and I will be with you in a moment in whatever part of my dominions I may be at the time. Remember, you are to ring the bell only when you feel the pains of childbirth." After saying this the king started on his journey. The six queens, who had overheard the king, went on the next day to the apartments of the seventh queen, and said, "What a nice bell of gold you have got, sister! Where did you get it, and why have you hung it up?" The seventh queen, in her simplicity, said, "The king has given it to me, and if I were to ring it, the king would immediately come to me wherever he might be at the time." "Impossible!" said the six queens, "you must have misunderstood the king. Who can believe that this bell can be heard at the distance of hundreds of miles? Besides, if it could be heard, how would the king be able to travel a great distance in the twinkling of an eye? This must be a hoax. If you ring the bell, you will find that what the king said was pure nonsense." The six queens then told her to make a trial. At first she was unwilling, remembering what the king had told her; but at last she was prevailed upon to ring the bell. The king was at the moment half-way to the capital of his other dominions, but at the ringing of the bell he stopped short in his journey, turned back, and in no time stood in the queen's apartments. Finding the queen going about in her rooms, he asked why she had rung the bell though her hour had not come. She, without informing the king of the entreaty of the six queens, replied that she rang the bell only to see whether what he had said was true. The king was somewhat indignant, told her distinctly not to ring the bell again till the moment of the coming upon her of the pains of childbirth, and then went away. After the lapse of some weeks the six queens again begged of the seventh queen to make a second trial of the bell. They said to her, "The first time when you rang the bell, the king was only at a short distance from you, it was therefore easy for him to hear the bell and to come to you; but now he has long ago settled in his other capital, let us see if he will now hear the bell and come to you." She resisted for a long time, but was at last prevailed upon by them to ring

the bell. When the sound of the bell reached the king he was in court dispensing justice, but when he heard the sound of the bell (and no one else heard it) he closed the court and in no time stood in the queen's apartments. Finding that the queen was not about to be confined, he asked her why she had again rung the bell before her hour. She, without saying anything of the importunities of the six queens, replied that she merely made a second trial of the bell. The king became very angry, and said to her, "Now listen, since you have called me twice for nothing, let it be known to you that when the throes of childbirth do really come upon you, and you ring the bell ever so lustily, I will not come to you. You must be left to your fate." The king then went away.

At last the day of the seventh queen's deliverance arrived. On first feeling the pains she rang the golden bell. She waited, but the king did not make his appearance. She rang again with all her might, still the king did not make his appearance. The king certainly did hear the sound of the bell; but he did not come as he was displeased with the queen. When the six queens saw that the king did not come, they went to the seventh queen and told her that it was not customary with the ladies of the palace to be confined in the king's apartments; she must go to a hut near the stables. They then sent for the midwife of the palace, and heavily bribed her to make away with the infant the moment it should be born into the world. The seventh queen gave birth to a son who had the moon on his forehead and stars on the palms of his hands, and also to an uncommonly beautiful girl. The midwife had come provided with a couple of newly born pups. She put the pups before the mother, saying—"You have given birth to these," and took away the twin-children in an earthen vessel. The queen was quite insensible at the time, and did not notice the twins at the time they were carried away. The king, though he was angry with the seventh queen, yet remembering that she was destined to give birth to the heir of his throne, changed his mind, and came to see her the next morning. The pups were produced before the king as the offspring of the queen. The king's anger and vexation knew no bounds. He ordered that the seventh queen should be expelled from the palace, that she should be clothed in leather, and that she should be employed in the marketplace to drive away crows and to keep off dogs. Though scarcely able to move, she was driven away from the palace, stripped of her fine robes, clothed in leather, and set to drive away the crows of the market-place.

The midwife, when she put the twins in the earthen vessel, bethought herself of the best way to destroy them. She did not think it proper to throw them into a tank, lest they should be discovered the next day. Neither did she think of burying them in the ground, lest they should be dug up by a jackal and exposed to the gaze of people. The best way to make an end of them, she thought, would be to burn them, and reduce them to ashes, that no trace might be left of them. But how could she, at that dead hour of night, burn them without some other person helping her? A happy thought struck her. There was a potter on the outskirts of the city, who used during the day to mould vessels of clay on his wheel, and burn them during the latter part of the night. The midwife thought that the best plan would be to put the vessel with the twins along with the unburnt clay vessels which the potter had arranged in order and gone to sleep expecting to get up late at night and set them on fire; in this way, she thought, the twins would be reduced to ashes. She, accordingly, put the vessel with the twins along with the unburnt clay vessels of the potter, and went away.

Somehow or other, that night the potter and his wife overslept themselves. It was near the break of day when the potter's wife, awaking out of sleep, roused her husband, and said, "Oh, my good man, we have overslept ourselves; it is now near morning and I much fear it is now too late to set the pots on fire." Hastily unbolting the door of her cottage, she rushed out to the place where the pots were ranged in rows. She could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw that all the pots had been baked and were looking bright red, though neither she nor her husband had applied any fire to them. Wondering at her good luck, and not knowing what to make of it, she ran to her husband and said, "Just come and see!" The potter came, saw, and wondered. The pots had never before been so well baked. Who could have done this? This could have proceeded only from some god or goddess. Fumbling about the pots, he accidentally upturned one in which, lo and behold, were seen huddled up together two newly born infants of unearthly beauty. The potter said to his wife, "My dear, you must pretend to have given birth to these beautiful children." Accordingly all arrangements were made, and in due time it was given out that the twins had been born to her. And such lovely twins they were! On the same day many women of the neighbourhood came to see the potter's wife and the twins to which she had given birth, and to offer their congratulations on this unexpected good fortune. As for the potter's wife, she could not be too proud of her pretended children, and said to her admiring friends, "I had hardly hoped to have children at all. But now that the gods have given me these twins, may they receive the blessings of you all, and live for ever!"

The twins grew and were strengthened. The brother and sister, when they played about in the fields and lanes, were the admiration of every one who saw them; and all wondered at the uncommonly good luck of the potter in being blessed with such angelic children. They were about twelve years old when the potter, their reputed father, became dangerously ill. It was evident to all that his sickness would end in death. The potter, perceiving his last end approaching, said to his wife, "My dear, I am going the way of all the earth; but I am leaving to you enough to live upon; live on and take care of these children." The woman said to her husband, "I am not going to survive you. Like all good and faithful wives, I am determined to die along with you. You and I will burn together on the same funeral pyre. As for the children, they are old enough to take care of themselves, and you are leaving them enough money." Her friends tried to dissuade her from her purpose, but in vain. The potter died; and as his remains were being burnt, his wife, now a widow, threw herself on the pyre, and burnt herself to death.

The boy with the moon on his forehead—by the way, he always kept his head covered with a turban lest the halo should attract notice—and his sister, now broke up the potter's establishment, sold the wheel and the pots and pans, and went to the bazaar in the king's city. The moment they—entered, the bazaar was lit up on a sudden. The shopkeepers of the bazaar were greatly surprised. They thought some divine beings must have entered the place. They looked upon the beautiful boy and his sister with wonder. They begged of them to stay in the bazaar. They built a house for them. When they used to ramble about, they were always followed at a distance by the woman clothed in leather, who was appointed by the king to drive away the crows of the bazaar. By some unaccountable impulse she used also to hang about the house in which they lived. The boy in a short time bought a horse, and went a-hunting in the neighbouring forests. One day while he was hunting, the king was also hunting in the same forest, and seeing a brother huntsman the king drew near to him. The king was struck with the beauty of the lad and a yearning

for him the moment he saw him. As a deer went past, the youth shot an arrow, and the reaction of the force necessary to shoot the arrow made the turban of his head fall off, on which a bright light, like that of the moon, was seen shining on his fore-head. The king saw, and immediately thought of the son with the moon on his forehead and stars on the palms of his hands who was to have been born of his seventh queen. The youth on letting fly the arrow galloped off, in spite of the earnest entreaty of the king to wait and speak to him. The king went home a sadder man than he came out of it. He became very moody and melancholy. The six queens asked him why he was looking so sad. He told them that he had seen in the woods a lad with the moon on his forehead, which reminded him of the son who was to be born of the seventh queen. The six queens tried to comfort him in the best way they could; but they wondered who the youth could be. Was it possible that the twins were living? Did not the midwife say that she had burnt both the son and the daughter to ashes? Who, then, could this lad be? The midwife was sent for by the six queens and questioned. She swore that she had seen the twins burnt. As for the lad whom the king had met with, she would soon find out who he was. On making inquiries, the midwife soon found out that two strangers were living in the bazaar in a house which the shopkeepers had built for them. She entered the house and saw the girl only, as the lad had again gone out a-shooting. She pretended to be their aunt, who had gone away to another part of the country shortly after their birth; she had been searching after them for a -long time, and was now glad to find them in the king's city near the palace. She greatly admired the beauty of the girl, and said to her, "My dear child, you are so beautiful, you require the *kataki*' flower properly to set off your beauty. You should tell your brother to plant a row of that flower in this courtyard." "What flower is that, auntie? I never saw it." "How could you have seen it, my child? It is not found here; it grows on the other side of the ocean, guarded by seven hundred Rakshasas." "How, then," said the girl, "will my brother get it?" "He may try to get it, if you speak to him," replied the woman. The woman made this proposal in the hope that the boy with the moon on his forehead would perish in the attempt to get the flower.

When the youth with the moon on his forehead returned from hunting, his sister told him of the visit paid to her by their aunt, and requested him, if possible, to get for her the *kataki* flower. He was sceptical about the existence of any aunt of theirs in the world, but he was resolved that, to please his beloved sister, he would get the flower on which she had set her heart. Next morning, accordingly, he started on his journey, after bidding his sister not to stir out of the house till his return. He rode on his fleet steed, which was of the pakshiraj¹ tribe, and soon reached the outskirts of what seemed to him dense forests of interminable length. He descried some Rakshasas prowling about. He went to some distance, shot with his arrows some deer and rhinoceroses in the neighbouring thickets, and, approaching the place where the Rakshasas were prowling about, called out, "O auntie dear, O auntie dear, your nephew is here." A huge Rakshasi came towards him and said, "O, you are the youth with the moon on your forehead and stars on the palms of your hands. We were all expecting you, but as you have called me aunt, I will not eat you up. What is it you want? Have you brought any eatables for me?" The youth gave her the deer and rhinoceroses which he had killed. Her mouth watered at the sight of the dead animals, and she began eating them. After swallowing down all the carcasses, she said, "Well, what do you want?" The youth said, "I want some *kataki* flowers for my sister."

¹ Literally the *king of birds*, a fabulous species of horse remarkable for their swiftness.

She then told him that it would be difficult for him to get the flower, as it was guarded by seven hundred Rakshasas; however, he might make the attempt, but in the first instance he must go to his uncle on the north side of that forest. While the youth was going to his uncle of the north, on the way he killed some deer and rhinoceroses, and seeing a gigantic Rakshasa at some distance, cried out, "Uncle dear, uncle dear, your nephew is here. Auntie has sent me to you." The Rakshasa came near and said, "You are the youth with the moon on your forehead and stars on the palms of your hands; I would have swallowed you outright, had you not called me uncle, and had you not said that your aunt had sent you to me. Now, what is it you want?" The savoury deer and rhinoceroses were then presented to him; he ate them all, and then listened to the petition of the youth. The youth wanted the *kataki* flower. The Rakshasa said, "You want the *kataki* flower! Very well, try and get it if you can. After passing through this forest, you will come to an impenetrable forest of *kachiri*.² You will say to that forest, 'O mother *kachiri*! please make way for me, or else I die.' On that the forest will open up a passage for you. You will next come to the ocean. You will say to the ocean, 'O mother ocean! please make way for me, or else I die,' and the ocean will make way for you. After crossing the ocean, you enter the gardens where the *kataki* blooms. Good-bye; do as I have told you." The youth thanked his Rakshasa-uncle, and went on his way. After he had passed through the forest, he saw before him an impenetrable forest of *kachiri*. It was so close and thick, and withal so bristling with thorns, that not a mouse could go through it. Remembering the advice of his uncle, he stood before the forest with folded hands, and said, "O mother *kachiri*! please make way for me, or else I die." On a sudden a clean path was opened up in the forest, and the youth gladly passed through it. The ocean now lay before him. He said to the ocean, "O mother ocean! make way for me, or else I die." Forthwith the waters of the ocean stood up on two sides like two walls, leaving an open passage between them, and the youth passed through dryshod.

Now, right before him were the gardens of the *kataki* flower. He entered the inclosure, and found himself in a spacious palace which seemed to be unoccupied. On going from apartment to apartment he found a young lady of more than earthly beauty sleeping on a bedstead of gold. He went near, and noticed two little sticks, one of gold and the other of silver, lying in the bedstead. The silver stick lay near the feet of the sleeping beauty, and the golden one near the head. He took up the sticks in his hands, and as he was examining them, the golden stick accidentally fell upon the feet of the lady. In a moment the lady woke and sat up, and said to the youth, "Stranger, how have you come to this dismal place? I know who you are, and I know your history. You are the youth with the moon on your forehead and stars on the palms of your hands. Flee, flee from this place! This is the residence of seven hundred Rakshasas who guard the gardens of the *kataki* flower. They have all gone a-hunting; they will return by sundown; and if they find you here you will be eaten up. One Rakshasi brought me from the earth where my father is king. She loves me very dearly, and will not let me go away. By means of these gold and silver sticks she kills me when she goes away in the morning, and by means of those sticks she revives me when she returns in the evening. Flee, flee hence, or you die!" The youth told the young lady how his sister wished very much to have the *kataki* flower, how he passed through the forest of *kachiri*, and how he crossed the ocean. He said also that he was determined not to go alone, he must take the young lady along with him. The remaining part of the

² *Arum fornicatum*.

day they spent together in rambling about the gardens. As the time was drawing near when the Rakshasas should return, the youth buried himself amid an enormous heap of *kataki* flower which lay in an adjoining apartment, after killing the young lady by touching her head with the golden stick. Just after sunset the youth heard the sound as of a mighty tempest: it was the return of the seven hundred Rakshasas into the gardens. One of them entered the apartment of the young lady, revived her, and said, "I smell a human being, I smell a human being." The young lady replied, "How can a human being come to this place? I am the only human being here." The Rakshasi then stretched herself on the floor, and told the young lady to shampoo her legs. As she was going on shampooing, she let fall a tear-drop on the Rakshasi's leg. "Why are you weeping, my dear child?" asked the raw-eater; "why are you weeping? Is anything troubling you?" "No, mamma," answered the young lady, "nothing is troubling me. What can trouble me, when you have made me so comfortable? I was only thinking what will become of me when you die." "When I die, child?" said the Rakshasi; "shall I die? Yes, of course all creatures die; but the death of a Rakshasa or Rakshasi will never happen. You know, child, that deep tank in the middle part of these gardens. Well, at the bottom of that tank there is a wooden box, in which there are a male and a female bee. It is ordained by fate that if a human being who has the moon on his forehead and stars on the palms of his hands were to come here and dive into that tank, and get hold of the same wooden box, and crush to death the male and female bees without letting a drop of their blood fall to the ground, then we should die. But the accomplishment of this decree of fate is, I think, impossible. For, in the first place, there can be no such human being who will have the moon on his forehead and stars on the palms of his hands; and, in the second place, if there be such a man, he will find it impossible to come to this place, guarded as it is by seven hundred of us, encompassed by a deep ocean, and barricaded by an impervious forest of *kachiri*—not to speak of the outposts and sentinels that are stationed on the other side of the forest. And then, even if he succeeds in coming here, he will perhaps not know the secret of the wooden box; and even if he knows of the secret of the wooden box, he may not succeed in killing the bees without letting a drop of their blood fall on the ground. And woe be to him if a drop does fall on the ground, for in that case he will be torn up into seven hundred pieces by us. You see then, child, that we are almost immortal—not actually, but virtually so. You may, therefore, dismiss your fears."

On the next morning the Rakshasi got up, killed the young lady by means of the sticks, and went away in search of food along with other Rakshasas and Rakshasis. The lad, who had the moon on his forehead and stars on the palms of his hands, came out of the heap of flowers and revived the young lady. The young lady recited to the young man the whole of the conversation she had had with the Rakshasi. It was a perfect revelation to him. He, however, lost no time in beginning to act. He shut the heavy gates of the gardens. He dived into the tank and brought up the wooden box. He opened the wooden box, and caught hold of the male and female bees as they were about to escape. He crushed them on the palms of his hands, besmearing his body with every drop of their blood. The moment this was done, loud cries and groans were heard around about the inclosure of the gardens. Agreeably to the decree of fate all the Rakshasas approached the gardens and fell down dead. The youth with the moon on his forehead took as many *kataki* flowers as he could, together with their seeds, and left the palace, around which were lying in mountain heaps the carcasses of the mighty dead, in company with the young and

beautiful lady. The waters of the ocean retreated before the youth as before, and the forest of *kachiri* also opened up a passage through it; and the happy couple reached the house in the bazaar, where they were welcomed by the sister of the youth who had the moon on his forehead.

On the following morning the youth, as usual, went to hunt. The king was also there. A deer passed by, and the youth shot an arrow. As he shot, the turban as usual fell off his head, and a bright light issued from it. The king saw and wondered. He told the youth to stop, as he wished to contract friendship with him. The youth told him to come to his house, and gave him his address. The king went to the house of the youth in the middle of the day. Pushpavati—for that was the name of the young lady that had been brought from beyond the ocean—told the king—for she knew the whole history—how his seventh queen had been persuaded by the other six queens to ring the bell twice before her time, how she was delivered of a beautiful boy and girl, how pups were substituted in their room, how the twins were saved in a miraculous manner in the house of the potter, how they were well treated in the bazaar, and how the youth with the moon on his forehead rescued her from the clutches of the Rakshasas. The king, mightily incensed with the six queens, had them, on the following day, buried alive in the ground. The seventh queen was then brought from the market-place and reinstated in her position; and the youth with the moon on his forehead, and the lovely Pushpavati and their sister, lived happily together.

*Here my story endeth,
The Natiya-thorn withereth, etc.*