



IN an Eastern land lived a wood-cutter who was so poor he had not even an axe, and was obliged with his wife and daughter to gather the old wood they found lying about. If they obtained sufficient to purchase food for the day, they rejoiced over their frugal fare; but this did not often happen, and their compulsory fasts became so frequent that they languished with hunger. To Nur-Singh and his wife poverty was doubly bitter on account of their daughter. She was of a marriageable age, but who would wed one so poor?

Tulissa, a beautiful maiden, was not without ambition, and often beguiled the weary hours with dreams of future greatness. She would imagine herself a princess, and, in picturing a luxurious life, forget for a time the misery of her present lot. But these dreams were too often interrupted by the necessity of seeking wood in the forest.

These wanderings brought her one day to a ruined well, overgrown with grass, around which lay a quantity of wood. She had gathered a large bundle, when she heard a voice, apparently from out the well, calling her name. She turned and listened; no one appeared, yet she distinctly heard the words:—

“Will you be my wife?”

Terrified, she seized her bundle and fled, resolved never again to visit that haunted spot. But the good price she received for her wood pleased her, and when their last coin was spent, and no wood could be found in all the country round, she again sought the well. The wood lying in greater quantities than on her former visit induced her to approach close to the dreaded place. She quickly collected the sticks, hoping to depart undisturbed, when again came the words: “Will you be my wife?” and, more terrified than before, she took to flight, never stopping until she reached her home. Here

want soon again pressed heavily ; her parents sought in vain for wood, and urged Tulissa to try her luck : thereupon she told of the voice that had so alarmed her. Her parents did not consider it so terrible ; indeed, they bade her re-visit the well, and, if she again heard the voice, refer the unknown suitor to her father.

Tulissa went unwillingly, and was departing with her bundle, when again came that terrible question : "Will you be my wife ?"

Summoning all her courage, she replied : "That proposal should be addressed to my father."

"Send your father here," sounded the voice.

Glad to escape so easily, Tulissa returned, and told what had occurred. Her father set forth immediately, and to his surprise found the path without trouble. He had not waited long, when from out the depths came the words : "You are poor and wretched : give me your daughter, and you shall be rich and happy ; you shall have the finest clothes and daintiest food ; your shadow shall grow and your riches increase, for I will gratify your every wish."

Blinded by these dazzling promises, Nur-Singh immediately consented, the wedding-day was fixed, and the wood-cutter returned well pleased. The women were disappointed that he came empty-handed ; they were ashamed to appear in ragged garments on a festal occasion.

A few days before the wedding, the family were astonished to see a hundred baskets travelling through the air. They descended before the hut. Some were filled with choice fruits and confectionery, others contained shawls and every requisite for the female toilet, whilst the whole, in true Oriental fashion, was illuminated with coloured lamps. This filled all hearts with joy.

The appointed time found them at the well, but to their surprise there were no

preparations for a wedding. At length the wood-cutter exclaimed : "How can I marry my daughter when no one is here to receive her ?"

"We are all here," cried the voice ; "place the ring on your daughter's finger, and she is mine." The same moment a ring made its appearance.

The wood-cutter obeyed ; then, turning round, he saw a tent in which a rich banquet was spread. The three seated themselves to enjoy the sumptuous repast. As they finished, a beautiful sedan-chair approached them. Now for the first time they felt uneasy, and on seating herself in the chair the bride drew aside the curtains to take one last look at her relatives. Away sped the chair, followed by



"AWAY SPED THE CHAIR."

the anxious parents, and passing through a deep ravine reached an open plain. In the centre stood a magnificent palace, surrounded by a high wall with an iron door, through which the chair disappeared. Satisfied that the bridegroom had fulfilled his promise, they then returned home.

Henceforth they had riches in abundance and no longer needed to work. The neighbours, who before had never troubled about them, now visited them, inquiring eagerly about the change in their fortunes. As Nur-Singh refused to gratify their curiosity they grew envious, went to the King, and entreated him to compel the wood-cutter to reveal the *secret of his wealth*. The King summoned Nur-Singh and questioned him closely. The wood-cutter told how he had married his daughter, and the benefits he had received thereby. But the King, not believing his story, ordered him to be hanged. Now that death stared him in the face the unhappy wood-cutter began to doubt the wisdom of marrying his daughter to a person of whom he knew nothing, and bitterly he lamented his wretched fate.

The evening before the execution a voice said to the King: "Oh, King, harm not the poor wood-cutter. He has not deceived you; I married his daughter, and terribly will I avenge any injury done him."

The King replied: "One day I will spare him to see if you really possess your boasted power, then he must die, for I will not be turned from my purpose by empty threats."

Next morning when the King arose he and the wood-cutter were the only persons living in the town: the inhabitants lay dead, bitten by snakes. The King now saw he had to do with a powerful spirit, so hastening to the prison he entreated Nur-Singh to use his influence with his son-in-law to turn aside his wrath. The wood-cutter willingly agreed, and although uncertain if his prayer would reach the ear of him to whom it was addressed, besought the spirit to restore the inhabitants to life. Immediately a rushing noise was heard, and the voice cried:—

"Snakes, who obeyed my commands, and who alone know how to cure the poison of your bite, recall these men from the shadow of death."

The snakes obeyed, the inhabitants lived again; the King with his own hands struck off the wood-cutter's fetters, and sent him away loaded with presents.

Tulissa meanwhile lived happily with her husband, whom she only saw at night—he

was away all day. He gave her costly presents, and only required that she should never leave the palace nor suffer any stranger to enter. And this beautiful abode contained all the heart could desire: there were gardens full of fruit trees, marble baths inlaid with agate and jasper, and numberless attendants who, to amuse her, played their lutes or related wonderful stories. But Tulissa soon wearied of this luxury, and would willingly have given all her jewels for a wreath of jasmine such as she used to twine in the old days at home.

One morning an old woman came to the palace selling cowries; the porter refused her admittance, but, unfortunately, she espied Tulissa looking out of a turret window. She addressed her in flattering terms, promising wonders if she might only approach, and her listener was soon induced to let down a sheet, up which the stranger rapidly climbed. Seating herself at the edge of the carpet she conversed pleasantly, told Tulissa many things, and asked her many questions. At length she said:—

"Daughter, you say your husband is kind; does he eat with you; does he take food from your plate?"

"No," replied Tulissa, "he never does me that honour."

"You should require it of him," said the stranger; "if he refuses, be sure he does not properly esteem you."

Saying this she departed.

Left alone, Tulissa felt restless and unhappy. She repeated again and again what she should say to her husband, for she had resolved to follow the stranger's advice. So she left her supper untasted, and when he entered flew towards him begging him so earnestly to sup with her that he consented. Yet he did not seem pleased, and on leaving gave yet stricter orders to admit no one to the palace.

Time passed, and Tulissa had almost forgotten the incident, when one day looking from her window she saw an old woman selling antimony. She called her, let down the sheet, and admitted the stranger. After many compliments, the woman asked the same question as the first stranger. Tulissa replied proudly that he had done her that honour. The old woman then asked had he ever chewed betel-nut and given it to her, and on her replying, "Never," persuaded her to demand this token of esteem.

That evening Tulissa asked her husband: "Why do you never give me betel-nut from your mouth, as husbands do who love their wives?"

"Speak not thus," exclaimed the spirit; "ask not what will separate us for ever."

Tulissa tried persuasions, but finding them useless, relinquished her plan for the present. It is probable she would have abandoned it altogether, had not the old woman again visited her, asked had her husband ever told her his name, and persuaded her to require it as proof of his affection.

The same evening Tulissa made her request. In vain her husband strove to show her the foolishness of her wish. At length, losing patience, he said:—

"If I tell you, it will be fatal to your happiness. I shall be compelled to part from you, and you will have to return to your former poverty."

Despite the warning, Tulissa persisted in her desire, until, finding all entreaties vain, her husband said:—

"Well, so be it, but not here," and led her from the palace. Arrived at the banks of a river he stopped, asking, anxiously: "Are you still determined? There is yet time to withdraw your request."

Urged by irresistible curiosity, and regardless of consequences, Tulissa replied: "I will know."

The spirit walked into the water up to his knees, and then repeated his question, entreating her to abandon her wish. Tulissa refused, but even whilst she spoke he sank deeper in the stream, until only his head and shoulders were visible. A third time he repeated his question, assuring her of his love and entreating her tenderly to relinquish a wish which, if granted, she would repent to the last hour of her life. When, however,

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Tulissa again replied, "I will know," he cried, sorrowfully, "My name is Basnak Dan!" The same moment a serpent's head appeared above the water, shot a withering glance at the obstinate wife, and then sank in the stream, in which her husband had already disappeared.

Tulissa was now alone, and wearing the ragged clothes of bygone days. Vainly she sought her beautiful palace. Every path she took led to the old, ruined hut, and how

ruined and squalid did it now appear! Within sat her parents, poor and hungry as of yore. The old life began again, but now it was embittered by her parents' reproaches, and regret for her ingratitude to her husband.

One day as she pursued her weary way a squirrel crossed her path. These little animals were so common she would not have noticed him, had not his white stripes reminded her of a squirrel whose life she had saved in the palace garden. Satisfied at having attracted her attention, the animal bounded before her to a

place where lay abundance of wood. It was a lovely spot, and after collecting her bundle she sat down and fell asleep. A soft whispering awoke her, and looking round she saw two squirrels engaged in earnest conversation.

"Alas," said one, "how is it that our enemy has grown so powerful? I left our tribe free; I return to find them enduring a miserable slavery."

"It is," replied the other, "because Sarkakus has obtained a confederate in the



"TULISSA MADE HER REQUEST."



beautiful plumage resplendent with golden light.

A few days later the wife laid an egg, but not liking to take their only treasure, Tulissa waited until the nest was full; then, taking one, she laid it in her bosom and followed the squirrels to the Queen's palace. Here she knocked and asked leave to enter the Queen's service. The attendants led her to their mistress. Although of rare beauty, there was something terrible in her appearance as she reclined among soft cushions, the green snake around her neck, for her eyes shone like the snake's eyes, and her long tresses fell in snake-like coils.

After gazing at Tulissa, she said:—

"I never engage servants without first proving their capability. If they fear the trial they can depart, but should they decide to try, nothing serves as an excuse for failure; if they fail, a terrible death awaits them."

Without hesitation Tulissa offered herself for trial. A crystal vase was then handed her; she was led into a courtyard surrounded by high walls, and bidden collect the perfume from a thousand flowers. No tree, root, or plant could be seen, and Tulissa would have despaired had she not relied on the squirrels' aid. She was looking for them when a swarm of bees flew over the wall, each carrying a bag of perfume, which they dropped into the vase.

As the delightful perfume filled the air, joyful cries resounded on all sides, the door of the courtyard opened, and Tulissa laid the vase at the feet of the Queen, whose stern glance softened as she inhaled the sweet perfume.

Next day she received a jug of grain, with

the command to prepare therefrom a chaplet of precious stones. Now the squirrels helped her. They came in great numbers: each took a grain from the jug and replaced it by a stone of great price. With these Tulissa soon accomplished her task and presented it to the Queen, whose delight knew no bounds.

Returning to her room she found the little squirrel, who, apparently much distressed, led her to the forest, where the other squirrels awaited her. Here she learned that the terrible Sarkasukis was approaching, that to prevent his entering the palace she must burn certain herbs, but that this would also prevent the squirrels approaching, and, alas! several days must elapse ere the huma's egg would be hatched.

In sorrow Tulissa burned the herbs, and anxiously waited till the huma emerged from its shell. Then, hiding it in her bosom, she sought the Queen's chamber, where the bird flew forth and pecked out the eyes of the terrible green snake, whose magic power had wrought so much evil.

The Queen uttered a piercing cry, the castle rocked, Sarkasukis fell through the ceiling loaded with chains, while legions of genii, squirrels, and serpents led in their rightful monarch, Basnak Dan. Tulissa's garments changed to queenly raiment, the huma placed a glittering crown on her forehead, and she was now a fitting bride for a mighty spirit.

Great was the joy of the good spirits at the fall of Sarkasukis and the wicked Queen, but none rejoiced more than Nur-Singh and his wife, who on Basnak Dan's return to power were raised again from poverty to wealth.