

## The Faithful Prince

Long ago there lived a King who had an only son, by name Prince Bahramgor, who was as splendid as the no onday sun, and as beautiful as the midnight moon. Now one day the Prince went a-hunting, and he hunted to the north, but found no game; he hunted to the south, yet no quarry arose; he hunted to the east, and still found nothing. Then he turned towards the setting sun, when suddenly from a thicket flashed a golden deer. Burnished gold were its hoofs and horns, rich gold its body. Dazzled by the wonderful sight, the astonished Prince bade his retainers form a circle round the beautiful strange creature, and so gradually enclose and secure it.

'Remember,' said the Prince, 'I hold him towards whom the deer may run to be responsible for its escape, or capture.' Closer and closer drew the glittering circle of horsemen, while in the centre stood the golden deer, until, with marvellous speed, it fled straight towards the Prince, But he was swifter still, and caught it by the golden horns. Then the creature found human voice, and cried, 'Let me go, oh! Prince Bahramgor and I will give you countless treasures!'

But the Prince laughed, saying, 'Not so! I have gold and jewels galore, but never a golden deer.' 'Let me go,' pleaded the deer, 'and I will give you more than treasures!' 'And what may that be?' asked the Prince, still laughing. 'I will give you a ride on my back such as never mortal man rode before,' replied the deer. 'Done!' cried the gay Prince, vaulting lightly to the deer's back; and immediately, like a bird from a thicket, the strange glittering creature rose through the air till it was lost to sight. For seven days and seven nights it carried the Prince over all the world, so that he could see everything like a picture passing below, and on the evening of the seventh day it touched the earth once more, and instantly vanished. Prince Bahramgor rubbed his eyes in bewilderment, for he had never been in such a strange country before. Everything seemed new and unfamiliar. He wandered about for some time looking for the trace of a house or a footprint, when suddenly from the ground at his feet popped a wee old man. 'How did you come here? and what are you looking for, my son?' quoth he politely.

So Prince Bahramgor told him how he had ridden thither on a golden deer, which had disappeared, and how he was now quite lost and bewildered in this strange country. 'Do not be alarmed, my son,' returned the wee old man; 'it is true you are in Demonsland, but no one shall hurt you, for I am the demon Jasdrul whose life you saved when I was on the earth in the shape of a golden deer.' Then the demon Jasdrul took Prince Bahramgor to his house, and treated him right royally, giving him a hundred keys, and saying, 'These are the keys of my palaces and gardens. Amuse

yourself by looking at them, and mayhap somewhere you may find a treasure worth having.'

So every day Prince Bahramgor opened a new garden, and examined a new palace, and in one he found rooms full of gold, and in another jewels, and in a third rich stuffs, in fact everything the heart could desire, until he came to the hundredth palace, and that he found was a mere hovel, full of all poisonous things, herbs, stones, snakes, and insects. But the garden in which it stood was by far the most magnificent of all. It was seven miles this way, and seven miles that, full of tall trees and bright flowers, lakes, streams, fountains, and summer-houses. Gay butterflies flitted about, and birds sang in it all day and all night. The Prince, enchanted, wandered seven miles this way, and seven miles that, until he was so tired that he lay down to rest in a marble summer-house, where he found a golden bed, all spread with silken shawls. Now while he slept, the Fairy Princess Shahpasand, who was taking the air, fairy-fashion, in the shape of a pigeon, happened to fly over the garden, and catching sight of the beautiful, splendid, handsome young Prince, she sank to earth in sheer astonishment at beholding such a lovely sight, and, resuming her natural shape--as fairies always do when they touch the ground--she stooped over the young man and gave him a kiss.

He woke up in a hurry, and what was his astonishment on seeing the most beautiful Princess in the world kneeling gracefully beside him! 'Dearest Prince!' cried the maiden, clasping her hands, 'I have been looking for you everywhere! Now the very same thing befell Prince Bahramgor that had happened to the Princess Shahpasand--that is to say, no sooner did he set eyes on her than he fell desperately in love, and so, of course, they agreed to get married without any delay. Nevertheless, the Prince thought it best first to consult his host, the demon Jasdrul, seeing how powerful he was in Demonsland. To the young man's delight, the demon not only gave his consent, but appeared greatly pleased, rubbing his hands and saying, 'Now you will remain with me and be so happy that you will never think of returning to your own country any more.'

So Prince Bahramgor and the Fairy Princess Shahpasand were married, and lived ever so happily, for ever so long a time. At last the thought of the home he had left came back to the Prince, and he began to think longingly of his father the King, his mother the Queen, and of his favourite horse and hound. Then from thinking of them he fell to speaking of them to the Princess, his wife, and then from speaking he took to sighing and sighing and refusing his dinner, until he became quite pale and thin. Now the demon Jasdrul used to sit every night in a little echoing room below the Prince and Princess's chamber, and listen to what they said, so as to be sure they were happy;

and when he heard the Prince talking of his far-away home on the earth, he sighed too, for he was a kindhearted demon, and loved his handsome young Prince.

At last he asked Prince Bahramgor what was the cause of his growing so pale and sighing so often--for so amiable was the young man that he would rather have died of grief than have committed the rudeness of telling his host he was longing to get away; but when he was asked he said piteously, 'Oh, good demon! let me go home and see my father the King, my mother the Queen, my horse and my hound, for I am very weary. Let me and my Princess go, or assuredly I shall die!' At first the demon refused, but at last he took pity on the Prince, and said, 'Be it so; nevertheless you will soon repent and long to be back in Demonsland; for the world has changed since you left it, and you will have trouble. Take this hair with you, and when you need help, burn it, then I will come immediately to your assistance.' Then the demon Jasdrul said a regretful goodbye, and, Hey presto!-- Prince Bahramgor found himself standing outside his native city, with his beautiful bride beside him.

But, alas! as the good-natured demon had foretold, everything was changed. His father and mother were both dead, a usurper sat on the throne, and had put a price on Bahramgor's head should he ever return from his mysterious journey. Luckily no one recognised the young Prince (so much had he changed during his residence in Demonsland) save his old huntsman, who, though overjoyed to see his master once more, said it was as much as his life was worth to give the Prince shelter; still, being a faithful servant, he agreed to let the young couple live in the garret of his house. 'My old mother, who is blind,' he said, 'will never see you coming and going; and as you used to be fond of sport, you can help me to hunt, as I used to help you.'

So the splendid Prince Bahramgor and his lovely Princess hid in the garret of the huntsman's house, and no one knew they were there. Now one fine day, when the Prince had gone out to hunt, as servant to the huntsman, Princess Shahpasand took the opportunity of washing her beautiful golden hair, which hung round her ivory neck and down to her pretty ankles like a shower of sunshine, and when she had washed it she combed it, and set the window ajar so that the breeze might blow in and dry her hair. Just at this moment the Chief Constable of the town happened to pass by, and hearing the window open, looked up and saw the lovely Shahpasand, with her glittering golden hair. He was so overcome at the sight that he fell right off his horse into the gutter. His servants, thinking he had a fit, picked him up and carried him back to his house, where he never ceased raving about a beautiful fairy with golden hair in the huntsman's garret. This set everybody wondering whether he had been bewitched, and the story meeting the King's ear, he sent down some soldiers to make inquiries at the huntsman's house.

'No one lives here!' said the huntsman's cross old mother, 'no beautiful lady, nor ugly one either, nor any person at all, save me and my son. However, go to the garret and look for yourselves.' Hearing these words of the old woman, Princess Shahpasand bolted the door, and, seizing a knife, cut a hole in the wooden roof. Then, taking the form of a pigeon, she flew out, so that when the soldiers burst open the door they found no one in the garret.

The poor Princess was greatly distressed at having to leave her beautiful young Prince in this hurried way, and as she flew past the blind old crone she whispered in her ear, 'I go to my father's house in the Emerald Mountain.' In the evening when Prince Bahramgor returned from hunting, great was his grief at finding the garret empty! Nor could the blind old crone tell him much of what had occurred; still, when he heard of the mysterious voice which whispered, 'I go to my father's house in the Emerald Mountain,' he was at first somewhat comforted. Afterwards, when he reflected that he had not the remotest idea where the Emerald Mountain was to be found, he fell into a very sad state, and casting himself on the ground he sobbed and sighed; he refused his dinner, and never ceased crying, 'Oh, my dearest Princess! my dearest Princess!'

At last he remembered the magic hair, and taking it from its hiding-place threw it into the fire. It had scarcely begun to burn when, Hey presto!--the demon Jasdrul appeared, and asked him what he wanted. 'Show me the way to the Emerald Mountain,' cried the Prince. Then the kind-hearted demon shook his head sorrowfully, saying, 'You would never reach it alive, my son. Be guided by me,--forget all that has passed, and begin a new life.'

'I have but one life,' answered the faithful Prince, 'and that is gone if I lose my dearest Princess! As I must die, let me die seeking her.' Then the demon Jasdrul was touched by the constancy of the splendid young Prince, and promised to aid him as far as possible. So he carried the young man back to Demonsland, and giving him a magic wand, bade him travel over the country until he came to the demon Nanak Chand's house. 'You will meet with many dangers by the way,' said his old friend, 'but keep the magic wand in your hand day and night, and nothing will harm you. That is all I can do for you, but Nanak Chand, who is my elder brother, can help you farther on your way.'

So Prince Bahramgor travelled through Demonsland, and because he held the magic wand in his hand day and night, no harm came to him. At last he arrived at the demon Nanak Chand's house, just as the demon had awakened from sleep, which, according to the habit of demons, had lasted for twelve years. Naturally he was desperately hungry, and on catching sight of the Prince, thought what a dainty morsel he would

be for breakfast; nevertheless, though his mouth watered, the demon restrained his appetite when he saw the wand, and asked the Prince politely what he wanted. But when the demon Nanak Chand had heard the whole story, he shook his head, saying, 'You will never reach the Emerald Mountain, my son. Be guided by me,--forget all that has passed, and begin a new life.'

Then the splendid young Prince answered as before, 'I have but one life, and that is gone if I lose my dearest Princess! If I must die, let me die seeking her.' This answer touched the demon Nanak Chand, and he gave the faithful Prince a box of powdered antimony, and bade him travel on through Demonsland till he came to the house of the great demon Safed. 'For,' said he, 'Safed is my eldest brother, and if anybody can do what you want, he will. If you are in need, rub the powder on your eyes, and whatever you wish near will be near, but whatever you wish far will be far.'

So the constant Prince travelled on through all the dangers and difficulties of Demonsland, till he reached the demon Safed's house, to whom he told his story, showing the powder and the magic wand, which had brought him so far in safety. But the great demon Safed shook his head, saying, 'You will never reach the Emerald Mountain alive, my son. Be guided by me,--forget all that has passed, and begin a new life.'

Still the faithful Prince gave the same answer, 'I have but one life, and that is gone if I lose my dearest Princess! If I must die, let me die seeking her.' Then the great demon nodded his head approvingly, and said, 'You are a brave lad, and I must do my best for you. Take this \_yech\_-cap: whenever you put it on you will become invisible. Journey to the north, and after a while in the far distance you will see the Emerald Mountain. Then put the powder on your eyes and wish the mountain near, for it is an enchanted hill, and the farther you climb the higher it grows. On the summit lies the Emerald City: enter it by means of your invisible cap, and find the Princess--if you can.'

So the Prince journeyed joyfully to the north, until in the far far distance he saw the glittering Emerald Mountain. Then he rubbed the powder on his eyes, and behold! what he desired was near, and the Emerald City lay before him, looking as if it had been cut out of a single jewel. But the Prince thought of nothing save his dearest Princess, and wandered up and down the gleaming city protected by his invisible cap. Still he could not find her. The fact was, the Princess Shahpasand's father had locked her up inside seven prisons, for fear she should fly away again, for he doated on her, and was in terror lest she should escape back to earth and her handsome young Prince, of whom she never ceased talking.

'If your husband comes to you, well and good,' said the old man, 'but you shall never go back to him.' So the poor Princess wept all day long inside her seven prisons, for how could mortal man ever reach the Emerald Mountain?

Now the Prince, whilst roaming disconsolately about the city, noticed a servant woman who every day at a certain hour entered a certain door with a tray of sweet dishes on her head. Being curious, he took advantage of his invisible cap, and when she opened the door he slipped in behind her. Nothing was to be seen but a large door, which, after shutting and locking the outer one, the servant opened. Again Prince Bahramgor slipped in behind her, and again saw nothing but a huge door. And so on he went through all the seven doors, till she came to the seventh prison, and there sat the beautiful Princess Shahpasand, weeping salt tears. At the sight of her he could scarcely refrain from flinging himself at her feet, but remembering that he was invisible, he waited till the servant after putting down the tray retired, locking all the seven prisons one by one. Then he sat down by the Princess and began to eat out of the same dish with her.

She, poor thing, had not the appetite of a sparrow, and scarcely ate anything, so when she saw the contents of the dish disappearing, she thought she must be dreaming. But when the whole had vanished, she became convinced some one was in the room with her, and cried out faintly, 'Who eats in the same dish with me?' Then Prince Bahramgor lifted the \_yech\_-cap from his forehead, so that he was no longer quite invisible, but showed like a figure seen in early dawn. At this the Princess wept bitterly, calling him by name, thinking she had seen his ghost, but as he lifted the \_yech\_-cap more and more, and, growing from a shadow to real flesh and blood, clasped her in his arms, her tears changed to radiant smiles.

Great was the astonishment of the servant next day when she found the handsome young Prince seated beside his dearest Princess. She ran to tell the King, who, on hearing the whole story from his daughter's lips, was very much pleased at the courage and constancy of Prince Bahramgor, and ordered Princess Shahpasand to be released at once; 'For,' he said, 'now her husband has found his way to her, my daughter will not want to go to him.'

Then he appointed the Prince to be his heir, and the faithful Prince Bahramgor and his beautiful bride lived happily ever afterwards in the Emerald kingdom.