

THE DOTTED PRINCESS



BY RUDYARD KIPLING.



from here. They were playing in the veranda, waiting for their mother to come back from her evening drive. The big pink crane, who generally lived by himself at the bottom of the garden because he hated horses and carriages, was with them too, and the nurse, who was called the ayah, was making him dance by throwing pieces

of mud at him. Pink cranes dance very prettily until they grow angry. Then they peck.

This pink crane lost his temper, opened his wings, and clattered his beak, and the ayah had to sing a song which never fails to quiet all the cranes in Bombay. It is a very old song, and it says:

Buggle baita nuddee kinara,
Toom-toom mushia kaye,
Nuddee kinara kanta lugga
Tullaka-tullaka ju jaye.

That means: A crane sat by the river-bank, eating fish *toom-toom*, and a thorn in the river-bank pricked him, and his life went away *tullaka-tullaka*—drop by drop. The ayah and Punch

and Judy always talked Hindustani because they understood it better than English.

"See now," said Punch, clapping his hands. "He knows, and he is ashamed. *Tullaka-tullaka, ju jaye!* Go away!"

"*Tullaka-tullaka!*" said little Judy, who was five; and the pink crane shut up his beak and went down to the bottom of the garden to the cocoa-nut palms and the aloes and the red peppers. Punch followed, shouting "*tullaka-tullaka!*" till the crane hopped over an aloe hedge and Punch got pricked by the spikes. Then he cried, because he was only seven, and because it was so hot that he was wearing very few clothes and the aloes had pricked a great deal of him; and Judy cried too, because Punch was crying, and she knew that that meant something worth crying for.

"Oho!" said Punch, looking at both his fat little legs together, "I am very badly pricked by the very bad aloe. Perhaps I shall die!"

"Punch will die because he has been pricked by the very bad aloe, and then there will be only Judy," said Judy.

"No," said Punch, very quickly, putting his legs down. "Then you will sit up to dinner alone. I will not die; but, ayah, I am very badly pricked. What is good for that?"

The ayah looked down for a minute, just to see that there were two tiny pink scratches on Punch's legs. Then she looked out across the garden to the blue water of Bombay harbor, where the ships are, and said:

"Once upon a time there was a Rajah." "Rajah" means king in Hindustani, just as "ranee" means queen.

"Will Punch die, ayah?" said Judy. She too had seen the pink scratches, and they seemed very dreadful to her.

"No," said Punch. "Ayah is telling a tale. Stop crying, Judy."

"And the Rajah had a daughter," said the ayah.

"It is a new tale," said Punch. "The last Rajah had a son, and he was turned into a monkey. Hssh!"

The ayah put out her soft brown arm, picked Judy off the matting of the veranda, and tucked her into her lap. Punch sat cross-legged close by.

"That Rajah's daughter was very beautiful," the ayah went on.

"How beautiful? More beautiful than mamma? Then I do not believe this tale," said Punch.

"She was a fairy princess, Punch baba, and she was very beautiful indeed; and when she grew up the Rajah her father said that she must marry the best prince in all India."

"Where did all these things happen?" said Punch.

"In a big forest near Delhi. So it was told to me," said the ayah.

"Very good," said Punch. "When I am big I will go to Delhi. Tell the tale, ayah."

"Therefore the King made a talk with his magicians—men with white beards who do *jadoo* (magic), and make snakes come out of baskets, and grow mangos from little stones, such as you, Punch, and you, Judy baba, have seen. But in those days they did much more wonderful things: they turned men into tigers and elephants. And the magicians counted the stars under which the Princess was born."

"I—I do not understand this," said Judy, wriggling on the ayah's lap. Punch did not understand either, but he looked very wise.

The ayah hugged her close. "How should a baby understand?" she said softly. "It is in this way. When the stars are in one position when a child is born, it means well. When they are in another position, it means, perhaps, that the child may be sick or ill-tempered, or she may have to travel very far away."

"Must I travel far away?" said Judy.

"No, no. There were only good little stars in the sky on the night that Judy baba was born,—little home-keeping stars that danced up and down, they were so pleased."

"And I—I—I! What did the stars do when I was born?" said Punch.

"There was a new star that night. I saw it. A great star with a fiery tail all across the sky. Punch will travel far."

"That is true. I have been to Nassik in the railway-train. Never mind the Princess's stars. What did the magic-men do?"

"They consulted the stars, little impatient, and they said that the Princess must be shut up in such a manner that only the very best

of all the princes in India could take her out. So they shut her up, when she was sixteen years old, in a big, deep grain-jar of dried clay, with a cover of plaited grass."

"I have seen them in the Bombay market," said Judy. "Was it one of the *very* big kind?" The ayah nodded, and Judy shivered, for her father had once held her up to look into the mouth of just such a grain-jar, and it was full of empty darkness.

"How did they feed her?" said Punch.

"She was a fairy. Perhaps she did not want food," the ayah began.

"All people want food. This is not a true tale. I shall go and beat the crane." Punch got up on his knees.

"No, no. I have forgotten. There was plenty of food—plantains, red and yellow ones, almond curd, boiled rice and peas, fowl stuffed with raisins and red peppers, and cakes fried in oil with coriander seeds, and sweet-meats of sugar and butter. Is that enough food? So the Princess was shut up in the grain-jar, and the Rajah made a proclamation that whoever could take her out should marry her and should govern ten provinces, sitting upon an elephant with tusks of gold. That proclamation was made through all India."

"We did not hear it, Punch and I," said Judy. "Is this a true tale, ayah?"

"It was before Punch was born. It was before even I was born, but so my mother told it to me. And when the proclamation was made, there came to Delhi hundreds and thousands of princes and rajahs and great men. The grain-jar with the cover of the plaited grass was set in the middle of all, and the Rajah said that he would allow to each man one year in which to make charms and learn great things that would open the grain-jar."

"I do not understand," said Judy again. She had been looking down the garden for her mother's return, and had lost the thread of the tale.

"The jar was a magic one, and it was to be opened by magic," said Punch. "Go on, ayah. I understand."

The ayah laughed a little. "Yes, the Rajah's magicians told all the princes that it was a magic jar, and led them three times round it,

muttering under their beards, and bade them come back in a year. So the Princes, and the Subedars, and the Wazirs, and the Maliks rode away east and west and north and south, and consulted the magicians in their fathers' courts, and holy men in caves."

"Like the holy men I saw at Nassik on the mountain? They were all *nungapunga* (naked), but they showed me their little gods, and I burned stuff that smelt in a pot before them all, and they said I was a Hindu, and—" Punch stopped, out of breath.

"Yes. Those were the men. Old men smeared with ashes and yellow paint did the princes consult, and witches and dwarfs that live in caves, and wise tigers and talking horses and learned parrots. They told all these men and all these beasts of the Princess in the grain-jar, and the holy men and the wise beasts taught them charms and spells that were very strong magic indeed. Some of the princes they advised to go out and kill giants and dragons, and cut off their heads. And some of the princes stayed for a year with the holy men in forests, learning charms that would immediately split open great mountains. There was no charm and no magic that these princes and subedars did not learn, for they knew that the Rajah's magicians were very strong magicians, and therefore they needed very, very strong charms to open the grain-jar. So they did all these things that I have told, and also cut off the tails of the little devils that live on the sand of the great desert in the north; and at last there were very few dragons and giants left, and poor people could plough without being bewitched any more.

"Only there was one prince that did not ride away with the others, for he had neither horse nor saddle, nor any men to follow him. He was a prince of low birth, for his father had married the daughter of a potter, and he was the son of his mother. So he sat down on the ground, and the little boys of the city driving the cattle to pasture threw mud at him."

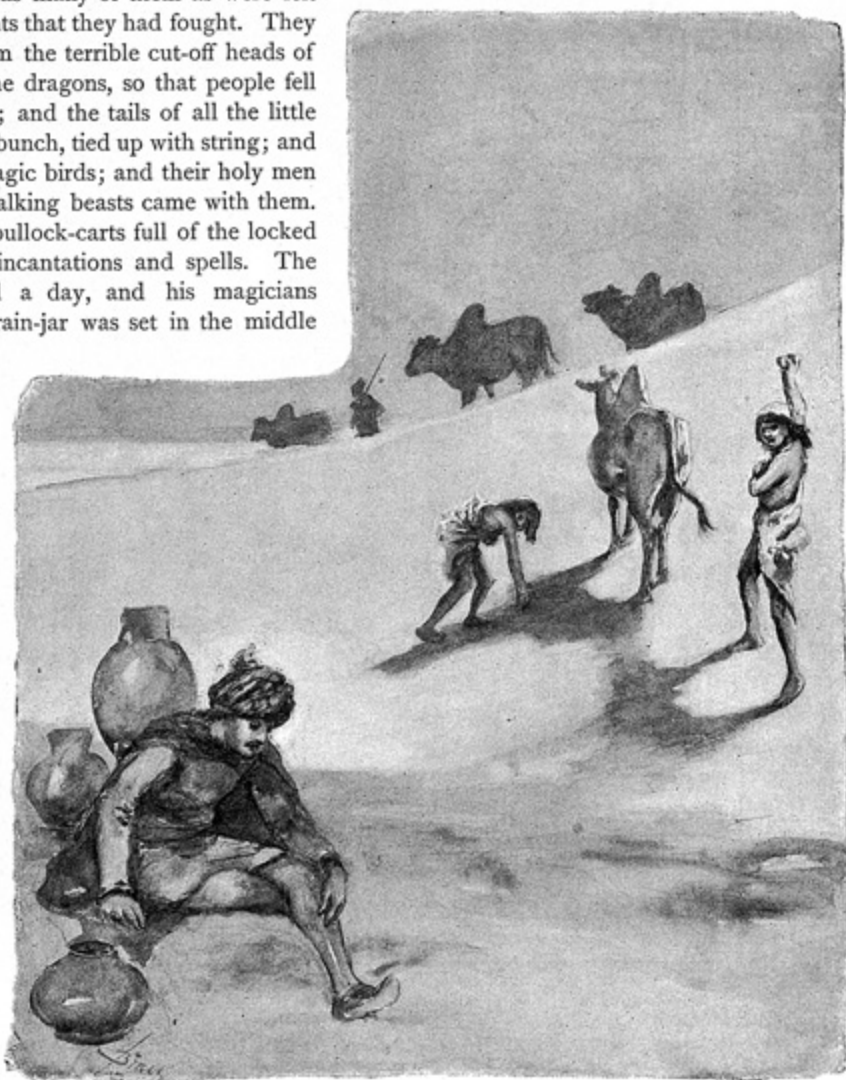
"Ah!" said Punch, "mud is nice. Did they hit him?"

"I am telling the tale of the Princess, and if there are so many questions, how can I finish before bedtime? He sat on the ground, and

presently his mother, the Ranee, came by, gathering sticks to cook bread, and he told her of the Princess and the grain-jar. And she said: 'Remember that a pot is a pot, and thou art the son of a potter.' Then she went away with those dry sticks, and the Potter-prince waited till the end of the year. Then the princes returned, as many of them as were left over from the fights that they had fought. They brought with them the terrible cut-off heads of the giants and the dragons, so that people fell down with fright; and the tails of all the little devils, bunch by bunch, tied up with string; and the feathers of magic birds; and their holy men and dwarfs and talking beasts came with them. And there were bullock-carts full of the locked books of magic incantations and spells. The Rajah appointed a day, and his magicians came, and the grain-jar was set in the middle of all, and the princes began, according to their birth and the age of their families, to open the grain-jar by means of their charm-work. There were very many princes, and the charms were very strong, so that as they performed the ceremonies the lightning ran about the ground as a broken egg runs over the cook-house floor, and it was thick, dark night, and the people heard the voices of devils and djinns and talking ti-

gers, and saw them running to and fro about the grain-jar till the ground shook. But, none the less, the grain-jar did not open. And the next day the ground was split up as a log of

wood is split, and great rivers flowed up and down the plain, and magic armies with banners walked in circles—so great was the strength of the charms. Snakes, too, crawled round the grain-jar and hissed, but none the less the jar did not open. When morning came the holes in the ground had closed up, and the rivers



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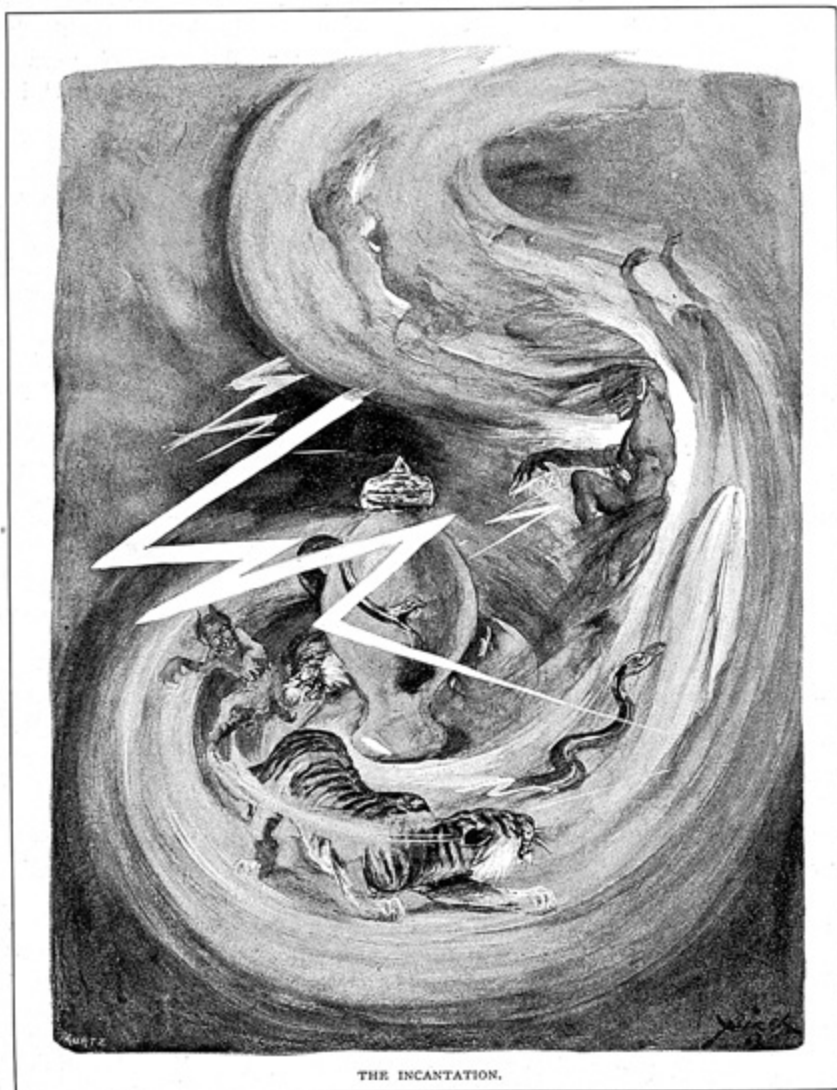
were gone away, and there was only the plain. And that was because it was all magic charm-work which cannot last."

"Aha!" said Punch, drawing a deep breath.

"I am glad of that. It was only magic, Judy. Tell the tale, ayah."

"At the very last, when they were all wearied

grain-jar's cover and he lifted it up, and the Princess came out! Then the people said, 'This is very great magic indeed'; and they



THE INCANTATION.

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out and the holy men began to bite their nails with vexation, and the Rajah's magicians laughed, the Potter-Prince came into the plain alone, without even one little talking beast or wise bird, and all the people made jokes at him. But he walked to the grain-jar and cried, 'A pot is a pot, and I am the son of a potter!' and he put his two hands upon the

began to chase the holy men and the talking beasts up and down, meaning to kill them. But the Rajah's magicians said: 'This is no magic at all, for we did not put any charm upon the jar. It *was* a common grain-jar; and it *is* a common grain-jar such as they buy in the bazar; and a child might have lifted the cover one year ago, or on any day since that day. Ye are

too wise, O Princes and Subedars, who rely on holy men and the heads of dead giants and devils' tails, but do not work with your own hands! Ye are too cunning! There was no magic, and now one man has taken it all away from you because he was not afraid. Go home, princes, or, if ye will, stay to see the wedding. But remember that a pot is a pot."

There was a long silence at the end of the tale.

"But the charms were very strong," said Punch, doubtfully.

"They were only words, and how could they touch the pot. Could words turn you into a tiger, Punch baba?"

"No. I am Punch."

"Even so," said the ayah. "If the pot had been charmed, a charm would have opened it. But it was a common, bazar pot. What did it

know of charms? It opened to a hand on the cover."

"Oh!" said Punch; and then he began to laugh, and Judy followed his example. "Now I quite understand. I will tell it to mama."

When mama came back from her drive, the children told her the tale twice over, while she was dressing for dinner; but as they began in the middle and put the beginning first, and then began at the end and put the middle last, she became a little confused.

"Never mind," said Punch; "I will show." And he reached up to the table for the big eau-de-cologne bottle that he was strictly forbidden to touch, and pulled out the stopper and upset half the scent down the front of his dress, shouting, "A pot is a pot, and I am the son of a potter!"

