

*Folk and Fairy*

*Tales from Bekano*

# The Prince's Heart

Once there was a magic kingdom on the island of Erynne. It was filled with magnificent fowls in spectacular jeweled tones, and large beasts that shook the ground with their thunderous thuds. Lightning bright, the birds flew through the air, and the gamekeepers of the King caught them when they could and brought them to the Chieftan as an offering expecting good favour in return.

And so it was on the birth of the prince Kakimali that one such fowl was caught. The vermilion creature sang out loud in a dulcet tone, and the prince gurgled and giggled as he grew older. How lovely a thing. Prince Kakimali sat at his window and breathed the morning air. He gazed at the bird and hummed along with its song.

But Kakimali was a clever, and a tender child, and it would not do for him, like the other children to throw stones at frogs, or kick down the nests of the doves. He was playful and daring but in him beat a ruby heart that was not yet frozen to the ways of the sky.

And Kakimali would notice how the bird bowed her head to the King but it still stared into the distance with a glint that grew fainter by the day.

Kakimali knew what he must do. He knew it in his ruby heart, but how sad he thought it to lose such a jewel, so he held fast.

The bird grew more fragile, its frame now bent from bowing, its eyes searching a distance but never looking at the sky.

And so in his fifth year, the Prince's clumsy fingers unlocked the latch of the cage. The bird knew not what to do, but as Kakimali coaxed, so the bird flew to the distance.

The Prince had set him free.

The Prince went on to grow into a fine man, and the court respected and loved him, but could not soothe his wails when his true love was taken away.

He went sword in hand, in search of the love, but time grew thin and a shadow speared him with his own sword.

He lay on the ground in the woods, the air perfumed by jasmine and the moon waiting to come.

His great regret was that the love would never know how hard he tried to find her; the love would never know the depth of his own.

And so he dragged himself forward until he could no more, and stared into the heavens.

It was then that the starbright flash alighted on the swell of the perfumed breeze, and sang a song. It was a song he remembered, and so the vermilion bird visited him every night, soothing his soul as he wasted away.

When the prince died, know one knew, and if by sorcery that was so common in that land his body fed violet bell of a flower that sprung to the air, and climbed to the sky, as if calling back his friend, as if trying in death to find his way to his love.

Time passed, and the flowers faded and fruit turned to seed, and so the taste of the bitterness of heartache did not stop the bird who remember his liberator, who could not forget his freedom.

The bird flew through the heat of many days, and the uncertainty of the night until he reached the tower.

The bird dropped the seed which grew to flower, which a saddened princess bent down to pick.

The smell intoxicated her and she hummed a song that her true love the prince had taught her. "It was the freedom song of a childhood friend" he had said.

And in that song the Prince's soul in that seed stirred, and he appeared and lead his love to another realm. The poisoned flower had tasted bitter to her, but now she had met her prince.

They were together again, walking into a new morning in a misty plane.

The people found her body, and lamented over her sad faith, but they did not now that she had joined her Prince in the land whose chest from youth had beat a ruby heart that was filled with kindness and not yet frozen to the ways of the sky.

# Trouble Follows

The old people say if you follow trouble, trouble follow you.

The village potter was a man of narrow frame, with a sharp nose and enormous eyes. He wore a white cloth fastened at his waist, and dragged his feet throughout Bekano, never stopping to listen to anyone but busy looking for a high piece of land where he could stand to tell the people what was wrong with their land, and how he heard tales of how Progress could be bought in other states.

His wife was a happy enough soul. She read books and fed the peacocks that had flown in on an Easterly wind.

Pot-maker was always telling his wife how to arrange her hair so she could be prettier, how to speak better, how to be more quiet, humble and lovely.

She tried her best to obey the rule of the man, but he was never pleased.

He would go out and buy the finest bell for his cow, and the finest cart for his donkey, and take them to the square.

One day while delivering his pots he saw the Sawmill man, with a fine necklace that he had bought for his wife.

Pot-maker said to himself that he must get a fine necklace for his wife, so he set off grumbling to himself, and anyone else who had the ill-sense to listen.

He told his wife of his plan to go into the forest mines in search of such a thing. She warned him against it, saying there was no need, but he lifted his palm like a swami sage and hushed her in a swift shhhh.

She said no more on the matter.

Pot-maker travelled for three days and three nights until he saw a gleaming necklace in the distance. It was golden, with diamonds glinting in the sun, and it was far longer than anything he had ever seen. It was so long in fact that he could not even see the end.

He made up his mind that he had to have the thing, but the faster he chased the golden necklace the further it seemed to be.

The wind warned him that no good could come of his greed, but he continued chasing the thing.

His cow had the finest bell, his donkey the finest cart, and now his wife would have the finest necklace, and he would be the envy of all Bekano.

He was consumed by his lust for the treasure. It was all he could think of- all he wanted, all he loved.

He chased it so, until he felt himself being followed by another soul.

And the wind hissed a warning, but he wanted to be the envy of all Bekano.

And so he chased and he chassed and the hissing wind warned him to go away.

Faster faster still he ran towards the gold and diamond thing, until he grabbed it- so enormous it was he could barely wrap his arms around the treasure.

He exclaimed in glee, until he felt the tingle on his neck of the thing that had been chasing him. "I warned you to leave my tail be," said the glimmering snake head.

And in a swallow the Pot-maker was gone.

And that is why the old people say that if you follow trouble, trouble follow you.

## The Ugly Girl

In the age before the sun, the village at the foot of the Bekano hills had many people whose skin was draped in silk, and whose eyes were beautiful like the Naniki lake at night. They were the Lovely People, and all was well.

Aidni was not a Lovely One. She had skin as rough as the scales of the iguana. Lizard they called her, jeering from the court of the King's palace.

Aidni would run away and hide, shielding herself from their hissing words like the turtle does from the tide.

They children laughed at her, and their mother's looked away in disgust, and shame that one such pariah would live amongst the lovely.

When the Magician Zanouk came back from the Silver War, he waved his way into the playground of the children.

The time of the transformation had come.

The Magician lurked in the corner and observed the child-folk, as they wove their golden cloths, and sang their merry songs, and combed their silken hair.

"Lizard Lizard, look at you," a group jeered taunting the girl.

She cowered in a corner, eyes fixed on the floor.

"Rough face, ugly, you will not be one of the chosen"

"What can you be transformed into but a lizard."

The King entered the court at this very moment to hear Zanouk come forth and say, "You are right, a lizard it shall be."

The king was shocked. "Zanzouk, I had always thought you a wise, caring one."

The Wizard raised a hand and continued amongst the laughter and squeals of the children as they saw Aidni transform into a lizard, and scuttle along the ground.

The Wizard Zanzouk continued, " And you to my left will be fine Stallions, and you to my right strong flaxen oxen."

And so the whole group transformed, to the fair and lovely beasts they had magically dreamed they would grow up to be.

The King was shocked. Every year he had seen the transformations but he had never witness the cruelty that he had just seen in the Wizard.

The next morning the King wandered out of the palace still pondering the injustice, as rough face was merely a lizard while the others who had jeered at her were now majestic beasts.

The King shook is head and walked thorough the grounds.

First he saw the Oxen, fine and beautiful and strong, but there were busy carrying heavy loads. So this was the fate of the first set.

Next see spied the Stallions shimmering in the sun, but all their time was taken as they pulled carriages to and fro.

And he pondered what he had just seen, and deep in thought he wandered into the meadow at the foothill of Bekano.

Here he saw a lizard, sunning himself in the sun.

He saw the rough skinned lizard skipping on the surface of the lake.

He saw the lizard chasing the breeze, and the King saw freedom, and was sure he saw a smile.

“That Wizard Zanouk really is wise” thought the King.