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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Box of Flames

Once upon a time in a far-off country, there lived a poor peddler named Joga and his wife named Damar. They made curious jewelry, which Joga sold in the street of the big city. On his way home one day, after having sold very little of his jewelry and wondering how he and Damar would live if trade did not grow better, he saw a girl standing under a tree by the roadside.

"Oh, good lady," he said, holding up a ring from his tray, "please buy a ring; it will well adorn such a hand as yours."

The girl took the ring from Joga and said, "It is very beautiful. Let me see the other pieces of jewelry." Joga handed them all to her, but she shook her head, saying, "No, I like this curious ring best. I will keep it, but you will have to go to a King who lives at the other side of the country for your pay."

"Suppose he will not pay me," said Joga, looking anxiously at the ring on her finger, for she was walking away.

"Oh, have no fear of that!" said the girl, "he will pay you, but if he should refuse, tell him he will find the exact amount in the box of streaming flames, to which he has the key." The girl went into the forest and seemed to become a part of the trees.



Joga walked away quite dazed by what had occurred, but the thought of what Damar would say when he told her what had happened brought him to his senses. "She will never believe me," he said. "She will think I sold the ring and spent the money," but he resolved to

tell the truth and try to get her to go to the place with him, as the girl had directed.

"You are a foolish old man," said Damar when he told her his story, "you will have a long journey and get nothing for your trouble. You had better try to find the girl and get your ring back." But Joga said he would try to get the money from the King first and finally persuaded Damar to go with him. She scolded him all along the hot, dusty road, and he wished many times he had left her at home.

At last, they reached the end of their journey and found the palace, but when Joga told the King he had come for money for a ring he sold to a girl on the road, the King laughed and said, "I cannot pay for rings you are foolish enough to sell to people you meet on the road."

"The girl also told me," said Joga, "that if you refused to pay me I was to say that when you unlocked the box of streaming flames you would find the exact sum to pay me."

When the King heard this, he ran out of the room, telling Joga and Damar to follow him. He led them through long halls and dark passages until he came to a flight of stairs, which he went down, and when he reached the bottom in the distance, Joga saw what looked to be a small fire, but when they came near to it, he saw it was a box surrounded by little flames. "You will be burnt if you try to open it," said Joga. But before his astonished eyes, the flames vanished as the King touched the box, and when he had unlocked it, there was the exact sum Joga had asked for his ring. But the King did not seem interested in that, for he took a small leather bag from the box and opened it. It contained an emerald of large size and a tiny glass bottle which seemed to contain only one drop of dark-red liquid.

Joga and Damar watched him, wondering what all this could mean. The King put these things back in the bag and ran up the stairs. Joga looked back, and the box had disappeared, as well as the flames. They followed the King, who led them through the long hall again and up many flights of stairs until he came to the top of the castle in the tower, where he opened a door. A serpent coiled on the floor in front of the door raised its head and looked at them. In the middle of the room on a rug lay a beautiful girl. She was very white and did not move. The King held the emerald in front of the serpent, and it fell upon the floor, dead. Then he went to the girl and dropped the red liquid from the bottle between her parted lips. Slowly her eyes opened, and she smiled. The King lifted her in his arms and carried

her out of the room. Then he told Joga and Damar the story of the box of streaming flames.

The girl was his wife and Queen, and when they were married, a witch had thrown a spell over her because of her beauty, which was greater than her daughter's, whom she intended the King should marry. The witch had set the serpent to watch and keep away anyone who tried to rescue her from her power. But the daughter of the witch had told him that at her mother's death, when she should inherit the power of a witch, she would free the Queen.

She sent him a box which was surrounded by flames, telling him that when the time came, she would give him permission to open it, but if he touched it before that time, the flames would consume the box, and the power to free the Queen would be lost forever.

The King gave Joga and Damar a bag of gold, and they set out on their journey for home. Damar was smiling all the way, and Joga was happy. He never passed the place where he met the strange girl who bought his ring without looking about, and sometimes he was sure he saw an arm moving among the trees, and on the finger of the hand, he saw a ring, but he never could get near enough to see it plainly.