



## THE FLYING TRUNK

There once was a merchant who was so rich he could pave the entire street where he lived with silver and he would still have so much left that he would barely notice. But of course, he would never do such a thing. He knew how to invest his money much better. For every coin he gave away, two would return – that’s how good a merchant he was. Until one day when he passed away and was finally laid to rest for some well-deserved peace.

All his money went to his son, who began merrily squandering it away. He would go out every night, enjoying himself at masquerades and throwing the money around with his friends. He even used his silver coins instead of stones to skip them across a nearby lake for fun. Soon, however, his treasury dried up. He was left with nothing but four pennies, a pair of socks and an old dressing gown. Now that he was broke, his friends didn’t want to have anything to do with him. They wouldn’t even say hello to him in the streets, because he looked like a beggar. One of the friends, a real heart of gold, sent him an old trunk with a note, telling him to put all he had left in that trunk so as not to lose it. Sound advice, except the merchant’s son had nothing left. So instead, he climbed inside the trunk himself and wondered what had become of his life. But this was no ordinary trunk. As soon as the young man sat inside, it flew up

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in the air. Whoosh! It swished up the chimney and high above the clouds, flying all the way to Turkey. The boy hid the trunk in the woods under a carpet of fallen leaves and headed towards a nearby city.

On the way, he met a nanny with a baby: “Greetings, nurse,” he approached her. “Who lives in that palace near the city, the one with the windows so high in the sky?”

“A daughter of the sultan lives there,” said the nanny. “She’s as pretty as a flower, but once she was foretold it wouldn’t end well if she fell in love, so nobody’s allowed to see her.”

The merchant’s son thanked her and returned to the woods. He sat inside his trunk and flew up to the highest windows where he entered the princess’s chambers.

The princess was sleeping on a sofa. She was so beautiful the boy couldn’t help himself and gave her a kiss. The princess woke up in a fright. The young man introduced himself as a Turkish god who ascended from the clouds. The princess liked the sound of that and calmed down.

They sat down and the boy immediately started twisting her around his finger. He told her wonderful tales about her eyes – how they were two mesmerising deep lakes with her thoughts swimming inside like mermaids. He told her of her forehead – a beautiful snowy mountain full of magical halls and works of art. And he told her of a stork who brings children, little bundles of joy.

He told her amazing fairy-tales indeed and it put her completely under his spell. When the lad asked her for her hand, she agreed.

“You must return on Saturday,” she said. “That’s when my parents come to me for tea! They’re going to be so proud when they see I’m marrying a god! Prepare a fairy tale for them. My mother loves the noble, enlightening ones, while my father prefers the cheerful ones that make him laugh.”

“Very well then, fairy tales will be my wedding gift,” nodded the merchant’s son and bid her farewell.

Before he left, the princess gave him a sabre inlaid with golden coins, which the young man was very happy with.

He flew away, bought a new dressing gown and a new pair of socks and returned

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to the woods to come up with a fairy tale. Soon however it started raining heavily and the wind blew fiercely, but the young man did not care and thought long and hard until he had the fairy tale ready just in time for the tea with the princess and her parents on Saturday.

When he arrived the sultan and his wife were already expecting him in their daughter's chamber.

"Well, we can't wait to hear the clever and insightful tale you've prepared for us," said the mother after they greeted him politely.

"Yes, the cheerful tale that will make us laugh as well!" added the sultan.

"Well, then listen carefully!" nodded their guest and began his tale.

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Once upon a time, there was a house where all things talked to one another whenever no one was around to hear them. There were the royal matches who were very proud of their noble origin. They came from a tall pine tree, you see, which used to grow in the forest. The matches used to be tiny splinters inside the trunk, but now they were lying on a shelf next to some flint and steel, as well as an old iron pot, casting their minds back to their youth.

'We lived such a noble life up inside that majestic branch when we were still little,' they said. 'Every morning and every evening, we would drink tea from crystal dew. The sun used to shine all day and little birds had to sing us their tales. We knew we were very rich, because the broad-leaved trees only wore clothes in summer, but our family could afford our green attire all year round. One day the woodcutters came and our family scattered all over the world. The trunk became the mast of a magnificent ship sailing the length and breadth of the ocean and the branches travelled to all sorts of places. We are fated to bring light to common people and that's why such a noble stock as us has come to this kitchen.'

'Well, my story's a bit different,' said the iron pot sitting next to them. 'Ever since I had come to the world of men, they keep cooking in me and then scrubbing me in cold water. I'm responsible for the wellbeing of the whole family and the only delight in my life is sitting cleanly on a shelf and talking to my friends. The only one bringing us some news from the world outside is the pail, who sometimes

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ventures to the yard, and the basket. That one has really travelled throughout the land. The last news he brought us about the nation and the government was rather disturbing. The old bowl took such a fright after his last speech she fell and smashed into a million pieces. Let me tell you, he's a freethinker!

'You talk too much!' snapped the flint and hit the steel so hard it sparked. 'Why don't we have a bit of fun tonight?'

'Yes, let's have a contest and see who is of the noblest birth!' rejoiced the matches.

'No, I don't like to talk about my childhood,' said the clay bowl. 'Let's have a little evening entertainment instead. I'll begin – I'll tell you what happened to me once. Pay attention please: On the shores of the Baltic sea under the branches of Danish oak trees...'

'What a wonderful beginning!' chattered the plates. 'We bet we're going to love this tale!'

'Oh, I spent my youth with a nice quiet family living in those parts. They often polished furniture, scrubbed the floor and put on clean curtains!' cut the knife in on them.

'Your storytelling is so gripping,' boomed the broom. 'It's evident you're a woman, since the stories are always so wonderfully tidy, you see.'

'Yes, indeed, indeed,' agreed the pail, jumping up in joy and splashing a bit of water on the floor.

The bowl continued her story and finished just as nicely as she began.

The plates tinkled with joy, and the broom pulled a bit of parsley from the sand and gave it to the bowl as a gift.

'I feel like dancing!' exclaimed the fire poker and right away he began swinging about. Oh, if only you could see how high he was kicking up his leg!

'What a poor wretch,' thought the matches.

Now it was time for the kettle to sing, but she refused, explaining that she had caught a cold. She said she couldn't sing until someone brought her to a boiling point. But she was surely just making excuses – she only wanted to sing on her master's lofty table, you see.

There was also an old quill lying on the window. The housemaid usually wrote

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with it. There was nothing remarkable about it except that it always sunk too deep in the inkpot. It was actually rather proud of that. ‘If the kettle won’t sing,’ said the quill, ‘so be it. There’s a bird in a cage outside who would be quite happy to sing for us.’

‘I think that would be most inappropriate,’ stepped in the old teapot. She was the kitchen’s lead singer and the kettle’s stepsister. ‘We shouldn’t listen to such a strange bird! But I will let the basket be the judge of that!’

‘I’m cross,’ complained the basket, ‘I’m so very cross you can’t even imagine! This is no way to spend the evening! We should be turning this house upside down! Each of you would take a different place and I would arrange the whole thing. Wouldn’t that be great?’

‘Yes, let’s have fun and misbehave!’ they all chanted.

But suddenly, the housemaid opened the door and entered. They all fell silent. Everyone was as quiet as a mouse. The maid picked up the matches and lighted one – oh how it crackled and blazed.

‘Now everyone can see how radiant we are. What a beautiful light we give’ thought the matches to themselves and burnt away.

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“What a wonderful fairy-tale!” clapped the sultana. “It felt as if I were right in the kitchen next to those matches! We will be happy to bless your wedding.”

“Exactly! You will marry our daughter on Monday, son,” said the sultan.

And just like that, they accepted him in the family.

The rumour about the wedding quickly spread across the country and on the eve of the celebration, the entire city was shining with bright colours. Royal servants were giving away buns and pretzels in the streets, throwing them to children who were reaching up to catch them, chanting glory to the sultan and whistling on their fingers.

“I should contribute as well,” thought the merchant’s son.

So he bought fireworks, packed them all in his trunk and took off.

Nobody had ever seen a spectacle as wonderful as when he fired the rockets from the clouds. Oh, how they were bursting and crackling!

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And what amazing colours they turned the sky into!

All the Turks were jumping with joy. Everyone could finally see that the princess was really marrying a god.

When the merchant's son landed back in the forest, he thought to himself: "I'll go take a stroll in the town to see if the firework left a good impression."

He walked among people and listened to their praise. Everyone agreed it was simply marvellous.

"I saw an actual god," said one of them. "His eyes were as bright as stars and his beard was frothy like a rising tide!"

"He was flying in a flaming caftan," said another. "I could see the little angels peeping out of its folds and creases!"

He had heard a great many excited voices, indeed, when he decided to go back to the woods. After all, the next day was his wedding day and he had to arrive on time to that tall tower where he met his bride for the first time.

He returned to the forest to rest in his trunk – but it was nowhere to be found!

The trunk had burnt to ashes. A tiny spark left inside from the fireworks must have grown into a fire and consumed it whole.

The young man realised in terror he couldn't fly anymore and that there was no way he could get to his bride.

The princess stood on the roof all day waiting for him, and maybe she's still there, looking out for him.

And the groom? He walks the world telling fairy-tales, but not as merry as the one about the matches, which almost won him a wife.