

# The Ugly Princess

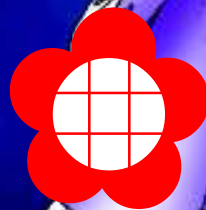


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INNER COVER

# The Ugly Princess

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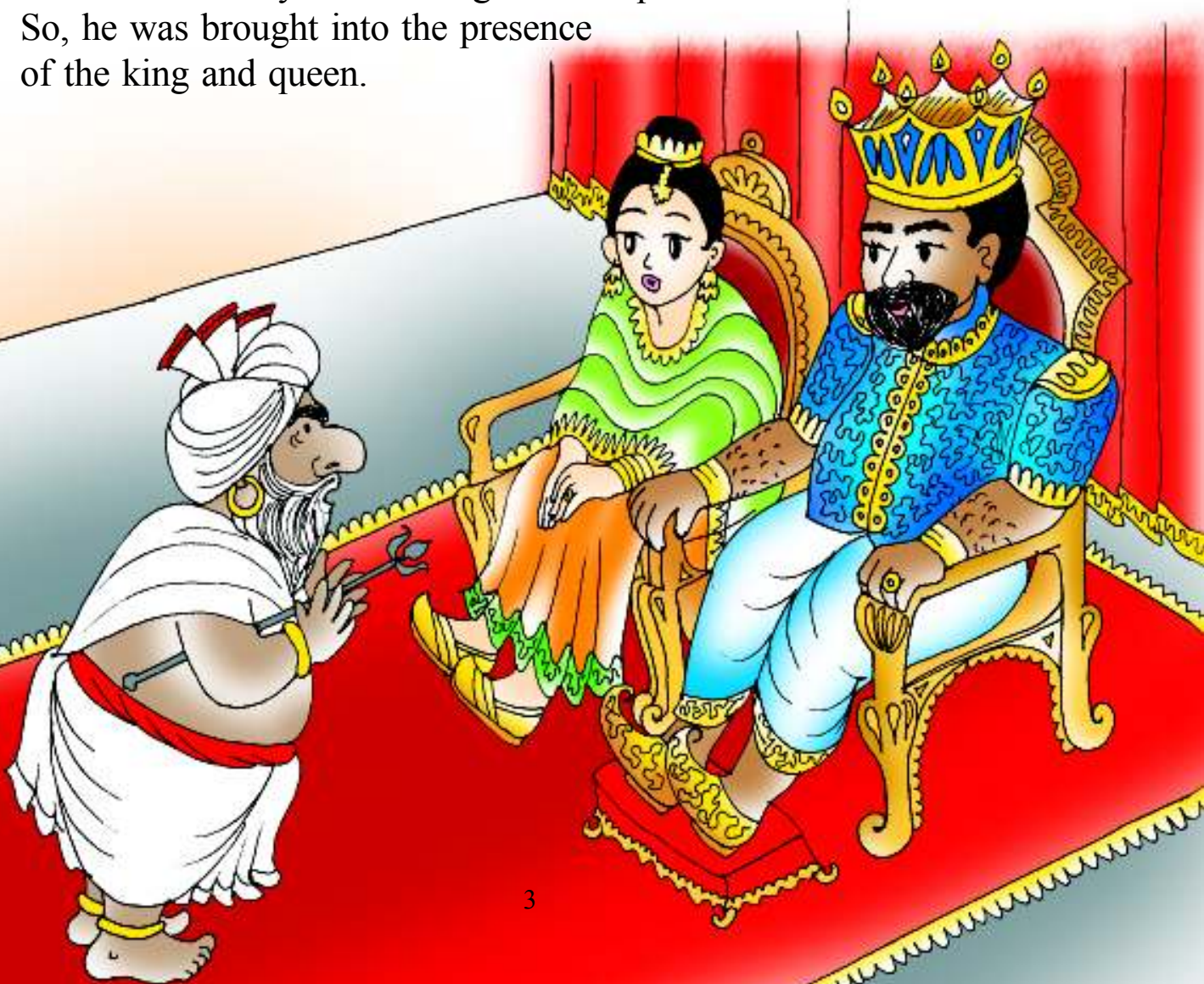
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**This book is dedicated to  
my beloved father**

# The Ugly Princess

Once upon a time, in a far away land, a mighty king ruled over a great, beautiful kingdom. The king and his queen had everything they desired at the tip of their fingers, except for one thing, a child. They longed for a child so much, that they sought solutions from all the doctors, astrologers and magicians in the land. But despite all the potions, spells and predictions, they remained childless.

One day, a magician appeared in the royal court asking permission to see the king and queen. He was strange, short and stout, with small, narrow eyes. The king's minister questioned him as to what he wanted to see the king and the queen about. Then he claimed that he could make their dream of having a child come true. He also said that he would bless them with the most beautiful princess ever seen. However, there was one condition he added, that he could only tell the king and the queen. So, he was brought into the presence of the king and queen.



He repeated his offer to the king and queen,  
and added confidentially, with a most serious expression:

*“You will have a child, your wish shall come true,  
but heed this warning, I now give to you.  
From this moment on, until the baby is born  
only for good deeds must you strive.  
Do anything wrong, hurt anyone’s heart,  
and the blessing I give will then depart,  
turn into a curse, cause nothing but strife  
that you will regret, for the rest of your life!”*



The moment he ended his warning, the magician disappeared.

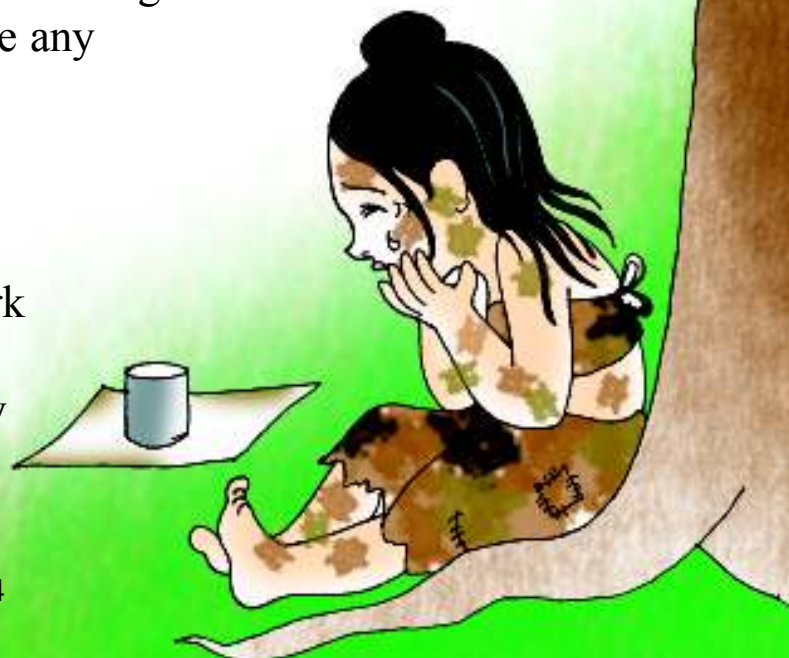
The king and the queen didn’t take him seriously as they had already heard similar things over and over again, from so many other magicians, astrologers and so on. But when a month had passed, they were ecstatic to learn that the queen was finally expecting a baby, after eleven long years. So the king announced the joyous news and the whole country celebrated for eleven days.

The king and the queen were so happy that they soon forgot all about the warning of the disappearing magician.

The queen surrounded herself with only the most beautiful things, as she just knew that she would give birth to the prettiest princess in the land. And the king made very sure that the queen didn’t see any ugly sights or hear any bad news.

After nine months had passed, the king and the queen were walking in the beautiful royal park one lovely evening.

Then they came across a raggedly dressed dirty little girl, who sat crying under a tree.



“Oh, what an ugly girl! I don’t want to see anything so ugly. Take her away,” the queen demanded.

So the king ordered his men to take the sad little girl away at once. However, the king and the queen were not aware that it was really the magician, disguised as a child.



The next morning the queen gave birth to a baby girl. But to the utter dismay of the parents, the baby princess didn't look at all normal. In fact, her face was very, very, ugly.

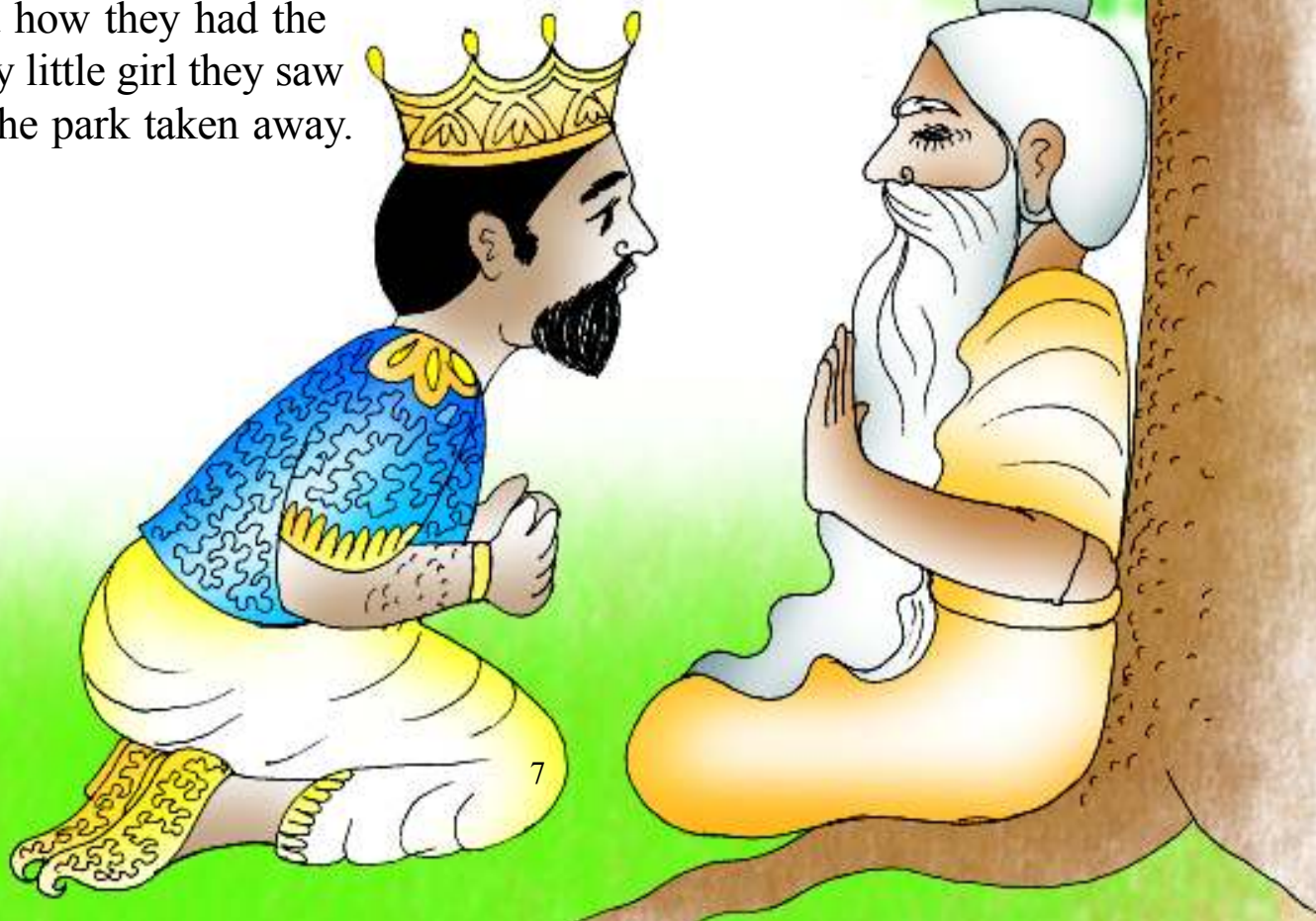
Now, as we all know, "ugly" is not a word to be used for an innocent infant. Unfortunately however, no nicer word would describe how she really looked. Her poor little face resembled a baboon's. She had big, hairy ears and eyes that bulged out, like those of a frog. The king and his queen were so shocked that they consulted all the doctors in the country to see if something could be done. But nothing could make her look any better.



And, even though the parents gave her the loveliest name they could think of, everyone in the kingdom called her “the ugly princess.” Not in public of course, but only when none of the king’s courtiers could hear. All those who came to see the baby were shocked, yet said, “Oh, what a pretty little princess she is!” But as soon as they came out of the palace, you can imagine what they said.

However much anyone tried to flatter the king with compliments about his daughter, he knew that they didn’t mean what they said. He sought solutions from all the medical and magical experts in the world. But despite all their very best efforts, everything they tried failed.

Finally, one old, great astrologer who lived in the Himalayan Mountains told them what had really gone wrong. He said that the king or the queen must have done something wrong, ignored some warning or broken some sacred vow, thus causing a curse to fall upon their child. And he also said that such an act could never be rectified. Only then did the king remember the strange magician’s warning and how they had the ugly little girl they saw in the park taken away.



They finally understood all too well what had befallen them, and that it was too late to undo their evil deed.

The queen, who nevertheless loved her child more than her own life, died soon after, having wasted away with grief and guilt.

The princess' father, who also loved her more than his kingdom, or rather his life, didn't allow even the tiniest chance for her to see how she looked. He ordered his soldiers to find all the mirrors in the entire kingdom and crush them into pieces.



Thus, as she grew up, the princess had no idea what she looked like. When she wandered around the palace, she was amazed to see people run away when they caught sight of her.

When she would hug a child, she couldn't understand why the little one would howl as if having seen a ghost.

The poor little ugly princess was so worried that she questioned her father about it, as she didn't have a mother.

But she never got an answer and she only saw tears in his eyes.



Despite all of this, she was the sweetest person in the whole palace. She was very kindhearted, cheerful, and always ready to help anyone. But the people only talked about how ugly her face looked. No one even bothered to mention what a sweet, kindhearted girl she was. Now, don't be amazed! That is just the nature of humans, to notice the one flaw among a person's ten good qualities.

However, the princess still didn't have the slightest idea about how she looked, since no one had ever told her anything about it.

One day, when she was thirteen years old, she finally learned what everyone else knew.

She accidentally came across an old, forgotten mirror that had been tucked away in an attic corner.



It was an unforgettable day for all in the palace, as she screamed and howled so loudly that it was heard everywhere. Then she ran to her bedroom and howled and howled and howled, until she had no tears left and couldn't cry any more.

Her father, the mighty king, was so helpless that he sobbed right along with his precious daughter, outside her door. He didn't know what to say or what to do. His heart was smashed into pieces yet again. It was agonizing for him to see his dearest child learn the saddest truth which he had tried so hard to keep from her. He knew that it had to be a terrible blow to the princess, to suddenly discover that she looked so "different".

From that day on, she kept the door of her bedroom shut and never came out. She shut herself away from the whole world and only her father was ever allowed in. No matter how much her poor father tried to soothe her mind, it was simply too painful a thing to face, for a young girl. She even started to wear a cloak over her face, with only two holes cut away to see. She remained alone in the bedroom, like a prisoner on her own.



Her father gave her everything she wanted and did everything he could to make her happy. But he couldn't give her the one thing she really needed. Being such a sweet, caring person, however, she felt sorry for her poor father. She knew that he was so worried about her, day and night.

On the day "the ugly princess" turned sixteen, her birthday was celebrated inside her beautiful bedroom, with only her beloved, doting father. The poor princess tried to put on a happy face, to make her father happy. But, her obvious effort only brought more tears to his eyes. His heart ached and the celebration ended with father and daughter weeping together.



From that day on, the king set himself a single most-important task. That was to find a suitable husband for his daughter. It was their kingdom's custom to marry off princesses to young princes of noble birth, when they turned eighteen. So the king sent messages far and wide, saying that he was seeking a suitable prince for his daughter. But all those who came to the kingdom to see the princess, went back without even meeting her, after hearing about her odd looks. None of them heard about her many virtues, for as you know, people hardly ever talk about the "good" in people, and love to talk about the bad only.

No matter how hard the king tried to find a prince for his beloved daughter, it came to nothing. He offered an enormous dowry. But not a single prince turned up to claim it. He added his whole royal treasury to it. But not a single prince turned up. He even offered his royal palace too. But no prince turned up.

So, the princess passed the age of seventeen. Then eighteen, nineteen, and then twenty. Twenty-one was the last year that a princess was supposed to marry, according to tradition. So finally, when she passed her twenty-first year, the king sent off the news that he would give away his whole kingdom and the crown, to any prince who would marry his daughter. Then, as you can well imagine, replies poured in from princes all over the world. So the date was fixed, on which the princess would select a husband from among all the princes. The princes were now impatient to marry the throne ...err...sorry... the princess.

They came from far and wide. The palace was decorated magnificently and the princes gathered in the throne room, all arrayed in their best finery, of course, and each doing his best to outshine the others. Though the princess was supposed to select one, she refused to take part, since she didn't want to show her face. But after much persuasion by her father, she finally summoned up courage, and entered the throne room to welcome the guests.

But when she unveiled her face to greet them, half of the crowd collapsed in shock and the other half ran out of the room. The princess, who had guessed something of this sort would happen, ran straight to her bedroom and locked herself in. As you may well imagine how an innocent young girl would have felt, she cried and cried and cried even more than she did on the day she first saw herself in the broken mirror.

She cried till evening. And so did her father, the mighty king who couldn't give the one thing she wanted more than anything else in the world. He cried bitterly, for the suffering he had caused his daughter, by not heeding the magician's warning. When night fell, everybody went to bed, except for her poor father, who was worried sick about his beloved daughter and spent a sleepless night sitting outside her door.



The princess was tired after crying so hard for so long, but sleep would not come. So she got up and looked out of her bedroom window, The garden looked very beautiful in moonlight. She felt an agonizing loneliness and an unbearable sadness. She wanted to leave her bedroom. She wanted to leave the palace. She wanted to leave everything. But there was one thing she couldn't bear to leave. It was her beloved, doting father.

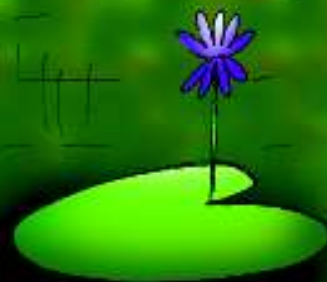


Tears rolled down her cheeks again, remembering his great love for her and all he did to make her happy. She stepped out into the garden, only half-conscious of where she was going. The heavy scent of the night flowers made her feel better right away. It had been many years since she'd last been in the garden. She walked on and on, not knowing where she was heading. She walked all the way down the path, into the forest. She was at last feeling comfortable. She didn't need to cover her face with a cloak. No owl screeched as she came near. No bat flew away as she went by. No other creature fainted when it saw her.

After walking for quite a while, she came to a huge pond. She was feeling very tired by then and she sat down on the grassy bank. She looked around, finally aware of where she was and was fascinated by the beauty of the moonlit wilderness. But then she thought of herself and her ugliness and it made her sad again. So she began to sob again. The very next moment, she heard somebody's voice saying something, but she couldn't make out the words. She looked around, but there was no one there.

She looked around more carefully, fearing that at any moment, someone might be frightened away, upon seeing her face. She heard the voice again. It came from the pond.

She looked closely and then she saw a head of a young man raised from out of the pond. It looked like that of a scarecrow, with weeds, dried leaves and squirmy little water creatures clinging to it. The rest of him was not visible, as it was under the water.





“Why are you crying?” the young man asked.  
The princess was happy that he wasn’t afraid of her,  
but was too shy to speak.

“Why are you crying?” he asked again.

“I...I’m crying because...my face is very ugly. And no one wants to marry me. I...I don’t want to show my face to anyone, because I don’t want to see them running away, as if they had seen a ghost.”  
For some reason she couldn’t explain, she went on telling him all about her.

“My dear princess,” he said, “I wonder why you should be crying. You are a very lucky person,”

“Lucky? How do you call this “lucky”? Oh noooo, I don’t even look like a human,” she said, in dismay.

“Oh, my dear princess, there’s only “one” thing you don’t have. Just tell me how many other things you “do” have. You have a luxurious palace, beautiful clothes, the best food, all of the greatest comforts, and above all, such a loving father. He will give you almost anything you wish. What you don’t have is just one thing. Just “one” thing ! So why should....”

“Oh no, how can I be happy like this no matter what I have? Oh no, I can’t,” the princess murmured, and she broke into tears.

“My dear princess, it’s just one thing. There are so many people who don’t have even a single thing that you have,”  
he said in a friendly, happy tone, trying to make her see.

“Just look at me,” he said. “I don’t have a father or any relatives. I don’t have tasty food or nice clothes. I don’t have a palace or even a roof over my head. Simply, I don’t have anything you have. You may be ugly, but you can at least walk around. I can’t even move my legs. But I’m happy! You know why? I can at least move my head and see what’s around me. Since I have no other option, I’m content with what I have. I gain nothing by worrying...,” he went on smiling.

“Oh what happened to you?”  
she asked with great concern.  
“I thought you were in the pond  
because you liked it there.”

“Like it here? In this cold pool?  
Day and night, in heavy rain and blazing sun,  
with bees and bumble bees stinging,  
unable even to wipe away the bird droppings that fall  
on my nose? And insects itching on my head, unable to scratch?  
And...” he blurted out nonstop.

“Oh, please tell me. What happened to you?”  
the princess pleaded impatiently.

“Well, I’m now an orphan, though born as a prince. I’ve lost everything I ever had and lost all of my family in a terrible battle. I only have myself and myself alone in this world. I was left with nothing. Not even my beloved family. So I came into the forest not knowing where I should go. I starved. I walked miles and miles.

I couldn’t go back to my country, as it was taken over by our enemies. Freedom was the only thing I had. So I thought of crossing the forest and going to another country to find a job and begin my life as an ordinary man. I had my head, I had my hands, I had my legs, so I thought I would be able to do any job....”

The princess listened to him with compassion,  
forgetting about her own sadness.



“So, on my way crossing the forest, I stopped by this pond to drink some water. But the moment I stepped in, the monster who rules this pond caught me. The only wrong thing I did was putting my right hand in before my left. It was supposed to be his rule to put the left hand in first and then the right, which I didn’t know. So he caught me and put a spell on me. How unfair! The spell would be lifted only if he gets another one with royal blood to replace me...

...So I lost the only thing I had left, my freedom. Ever since, I’ve been rooted to the pond like a lotus. My hands and legs are tied down. I can move only my head. Imagine my life...day and night, trapped in this cold pond, up to my chin, unable to move even a limb. All alone with no one to talk to...”

The princess was so sad that she couldn’t bear hearing any more of the sad story. Tears flowed down her cheeks, as she regarded the suffering of her new-found friend.

“Oh no, my dear princess, don’t worry. You know, I’m happy because I can at least move my head. And now I’m happier, that I met some one to talk to, after all these lonely years... We all want what we don’t have. So we don’t see what we already have. That’s why we worry so much.



If you can't do anything about what you "don't" have, the best thing is to be happy with what you "do" have. That's how I'm happy," he said with a grin.

The prince went on talking. He wanted to make her happy. So he told her many stories about heroes, fairies, and court jesters and made her laugh. She listened to him attentively and laughed with him. They talked and talked and soon became very friendly with each other. They talked, until the following morning.

"So... now you must go back to your palace and think of the hundred and one things you have. And then forget about the "one" thing you don't have, and be happy and remember me, the one rooted in a cold pond, in a lonely forest," he said, still trying his best to make her laugh. And then the princess began to think of all that he said, about all that she had, and tried to make up her mind. And then she decided to go back.

The princess got to her feet to go back home. The prince nodded his head to say good bye. He was sad that his new friend was leaving, even though he had told her to go. He tried to smile cheerfully. But he didn't look cheerful at all. She looked at him closely. She saw that he had tears in his eyes.

She knew too well how lonely it was to be locked in a room, even if in a palace. So she could imagine how hard it would be to be trapped in the middle of a cold pond, in a lonely forest.

"Isn't this a greater suffering than mine?" she asked herself.

"Isn't this?"

Being a very compassionate person, she felt very sad for the poor, lonely prince. She wanted to give him his freedom. She wanted to relieve him of his suffering. So, she thought for a moment and then had an idea.

"Though I'm not pretty, I am a princess of royal blood. So, if I give myself to the monster of the pond, your spell will be removed, won't it?" she asked.

“Err...what did you say??” the prince asked, not believing his ears. The princess stood up, ready to throw herself into the cold, dark water.

“Oh, noooo, don’t do that,” the prince cried in dismay. “I’m happy being here. I’m happy that I met you...I’m happy that I could talk to you...please don’t do that, please don’t ...” he yelled, seeing what she was about to do.



But the very next second, she jumped into the pond. When she did, it made a huge splash, and with a thundering sound, the prince flew out of the water onto the ground and was a whole free prince once again. He got to his feet and looked around for the princess. When he saw she wasn't there and saw the waters of the pond still rippling, he jumped back into the pond to save her.

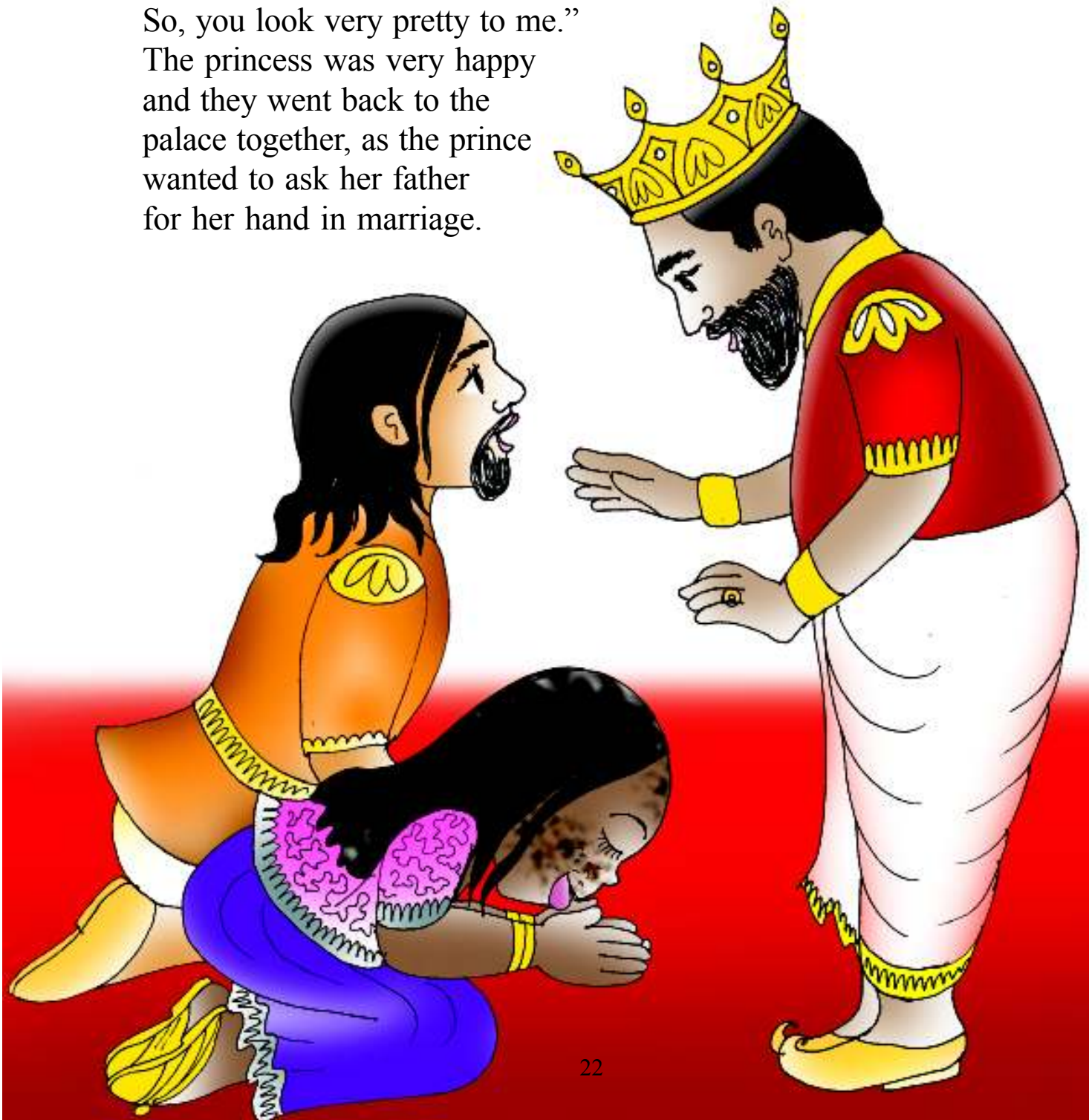
After searching desperately for what seemed like the longest while but was really only a minute or two, he found her before the monster woke up. He carried the princess out and laid her down gently on the grassy bank.



The moment the princess came to her senses and saw the prince, who in his entirety was quite the most handsome young man she had ever seen, she was quite embarrassed. She wanted to hide her face. She feared that he would run away, as all the other handsome princes had.

But instead, sensing her fear, he said, “Dearest princess, looking through your eyes, I can see what a beautiful person you are. You are the nicest, sweetest and most kind-hearted person I’ve ever met. So, you look very pretty to me.”

The princess was very happy and they went back to the palace together, as the prince wanted to ask her father for her hand in marriage.



The king, who was grieving over his missing daughter, was overjoyed to see her return safe and sound and with a handsome young prince, no less. After hearing everything that had happened, the king arranged their wedding, to take place that very day, just a bit afraid that the young man might change his mind. The king offered the prince his treasures, his crown and the kingdom. But the prince refused to accept anything.

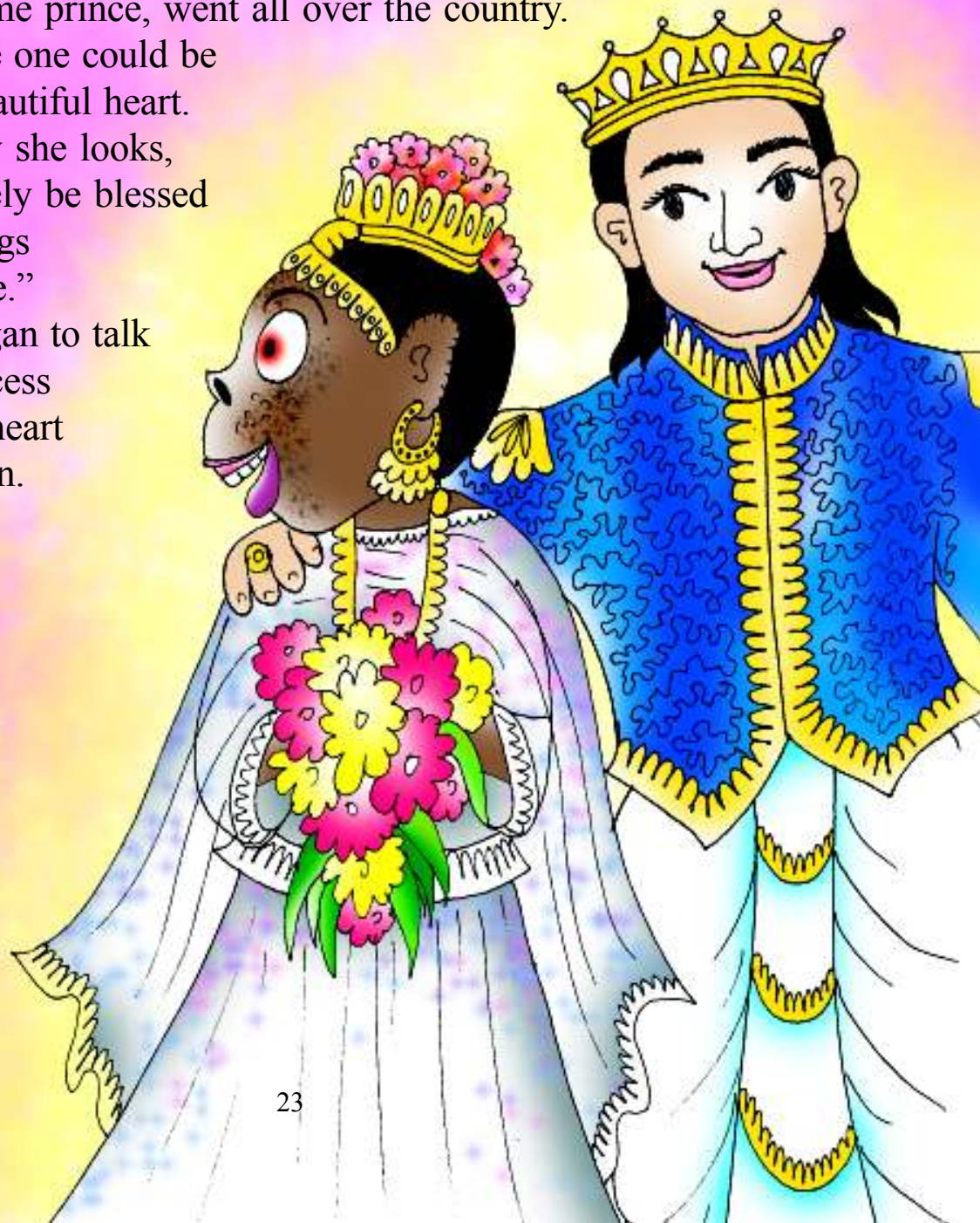
“Sire, I love your daughter very much,” he told the happy king. “I’m marrying her for her kind heart, which is worth more to me than all the wealth and kingdoms in the world.”

The news of the ugly princess getting married to a very handsome prince, went all over the country.

“How adorable one could be if she has a beautiful heart.

No matter how she looks, she would surely be blessed with good things someday in life.”

Everybody began to talk about the princess and her good heart with admiration.



The jubilant, now-wedded couple came out of the castle, to greet the townsfolk, who had gathered to celebrate the event. Everyone was very happy for the sweet, kind hearted princess. Even though she still looked the same as she always had, no one took any notice of it. They thought she was even lovelier. You see, her joyful smile was all that they saw and her sweet nature was all that anyone ever noticed. From that day forward, the two lived happily as happy can be.

Oh, and one of the people watching the goings on with a huge grin on his face looked very much like a certain magician you may remember me telling you about.

