

# The Adventures of the Rich Youth

## Arabic Folktale

“In former times there lived, in a great kingdom, a rich youth, a calculator, a mechanic, a painter, a physician, and a smith, and they all departed from their parents and went forth into a foreign land. When they at length arrived at the mouth of a great river, they planted, every one of them, a tree of life; and each of them, following one of the sources of the river, set forth to seek their fortunes. ‘Here,’ said they to one another,—‘here will we meet again. Should, however, any one of us be missing, and his tree of life be withered, we will search for him in the place whither he went to.’

“Thus they agreed, and separated one from another. And the rich youth found at the source of the stream, which he had followed, a pleasure-garden with a house, in the entrance to which were seated an old man and an old woman. ‘Good youth,’ exclaimed they both, ‘whence comest thou—whither goest thou?’ The youth replied, ‘I come from a distant country, and am going to seek my fortune.’ And the old couple said unto him, ‘It is well thou hast come hither. We have a daughter, slender of shape and pleasant of behaviour. Take her, and be a son unto us!’

“And when they had so spoken, the daughter made her appearance. And when the youth beheld her, he thought unto himself, ‘It is well I left my father and my mother. This maiden is more beauteous than a daughter of the Tângâri (god-like spirits of the male and female sex). I will take the maiden and dwell here.’ And the maiden said, ‘Youth, it is well that thou earnest here.’ Thereupon they conversed together, went together into the house, and lived peacefully and happily.

“Now, over the same country there reigned a mighty Chan. And once in the spring-time, when his servants went forth together to bathe, they found, near the mouth of the river, in the water, a pair of costly earrings, which belonged to the wife of the rich youth. Because, therefore, these jewels were so wondrously beautiful, they carried them to the Chan, who, being greatly surprised thereat, said unto his servants, ‘Dwells there at the source of the river a woman such as these belong to? Go, and bring her unto me.’

“The servants went accordingly, beheld the woman, and were amazed at the sight. ‘This woman,’ said they to one another, ‘one would never tire of beholding.’ But to the woman they said, ‘Arise! and draw nigh with us unto the Chan.’

“Hereupon the rich youth conducted his wife to the presence of the Chan; but the Chan, when he beheld her, exclaimed, ‘This maiden is a Tângâri, compared with her, my wives are but ugly.’

“Thus spake he, and he was so smitten with love of her, that he would not let her depart from his house. But as she remained true and faithful to the rich youth, the Chan said unto his servants, ‘Remove this rich youth instantly out of my sight.’

“At these commands the servants went forth, taking with them the rich youth, whom they led to the water, where they laid him in a pit by the side of the stream, covered him with a huge fragment of the rock, and thus slew him.

“At length it happened that the other wanderers returned from all sides, each to his tree of life; and when the rich youth was missed, and they saw that his tree of life was withered, they sought him up the source of the river which he had followed, but found him not. Hereupon the reckoner discovered, by his calculations, that the rich youth was lying dead under a piece of the rock; but as they could by no means remove the stone, the smith took his hammer, smote the stone, and drew out the body. Then the physician mixed a life-inspiring draught, gave the same to the dead youth, and so restored him to life.

“They now demanded of him whom they had recalled to life, ‘In what manner wert thou slain?’ He accordingly related unto them the circumstances; and they communed one with another, saying, ‘Let us snatch this extraordinary beautiful woman from the Chan!’ Thereupon the mechanic constructed a wooden gerudin, or wonderful bird, which, when moved upwards from within, ascended into the air; when moved downwards, descended into the earth; when moved sideways, flew sideways accordingly. When this was done, they painted it with different colours, so that it was pleasant to behold.

“Then the rich youth seated himself within the wooden bird, flew through the air, and hovered over the roof of the royal mansion; and the Chan and his servants were astonished at the form of the bird, and said, ‘A bird like unto this we never before saw or heard of.’ And to his wife the Chan said, ‘Go ye to the roof of the palace, and offer food of different kinds unto this strange bird.’ When she went up to offer food, the bird descended, and the rich youth opened the door which was in the bird. Then said the wife of the Chan, full of joy, ‘I had never hoped or thought to have seen thee again, yet now have I found thee once more. This has been accomplished by this wonderful bird.’ After the youth had related to her all that had happened, he said unto her, ‘Thou art now the wife of the Chan—but if your heart now yearns unto me, step thou into this wooden gerudin, and we will fly hence through the air, and for the future know care no more.’

“After these words the wife said, ‘To the first husband to whom destiny united me am I inclined more than ever.’ Having thus spoken they entered into the wooden gerudin, and ascended into the sky. The Chan beheld this, and said, ‘Because I sent thee up that thou mightest feed this beautiful bird, thou hast betaken thyself to the skies.’ Thus spake he full of anger, and threw himself weeping on the ground.

“The rich youth now turned the peg in the bird downwards, and descended upon the earth close to his companions. And when he stepped forth out of the bird, his companions asked him, ‘Hast thou thoroughly accomplished all that thou didst desire?’ Thereupon his wife also stepped forth, and all who beheld her became in love with her. ‘You, my companions,’ said the rich youth, ‘have brought help unto me; you have awakened me from death; you have afforded me the means of once more finding my wife. Do not, I beseech you, rob me of my charmer once again.’

“Thus spake he; and the calculator began with these words:—‘Had I not discovered by my calculation where thou wert lying, thou wouldest never have recovered thy wife.’

“‘In vain,’ said the smith, ‘would the calculations have been, had I not drawn thee out of the rock. By means of the shattered rock it was that you obtained your wife. Then your wife belongs to me.’

“‘A body,’ said the physician, ‘was drawn from out of the shattered rock. That this body was restored to life, and recovered his former wife, it was my skill accomplished it. I, therefore, should take the wife.’

“‘But for the wooden bird,’ said the mechanic, ‘no one would ever have reached the wife. A numerous host attend upon the Chan; no one can approach the house wherein he resides. Through my wooden bird alone was the wife recovered. Let me, then, take her.’

“‘The wife,’ said the painter, ‘never would have carried food to a wooden bird; therefore it was only through my skill in painting that she was recovered; I, therefore, claim her.’

“And when they had thus spoken, they drew their knives and slew one another.”

“Alas! poor woman!” exclaimed the son of the Chan; and Ssidi said, “Ruler of Destiny, thou hast spoken words:—Ssarwalamissbrodjakzang!” Thus spake he, and burst from the sack through the air.

Thus Ssidi’s first tale treated of the adventures of the rich youth.