



INSIDE STORIES

Offline Story for Week 3

The Princess of the Wind

(Origin unknown)

Once upon a time in *Wakkanai*, the northernmost kingdom of Japan, there lived a princess who was famed for her beauty and her wit and, too, for her agility, for it was rumoured that she could ride a horse better than any *man*!

Mounted nobly upon their pristine steeds, princes came from far and wide to court her but each one, despite the truth of her beauty, keen intelligence and good humour, rode away as fast as they could, never to speak a word of why. Until, from *Kagoshima*, on the southernmost tip of mainland Japan, there came a prince who, unlike the others, could find no fault in the northern princess: she was indeed a rare beauty with a sharp wit, able to engage in all kinds of conversation. After walking with her for two full hours he felt no further need for deliberation, and that southern prince asked for her hand in marriage.

As was the custom in those days the princess was required to live in the household of her betrothed for three moons before the wedding could take place. So the pair of young lovers rode out together, to much fanfare from the locals, who cast peach blossom petals over them as they rode slowly and happily away from the ancient city - he mounted in manly posture upon his black stallion and she chastely sidesaddle upon her white mare. As soon as they got to open land though, out of view from any villagers, the prince bade them both to stop and turned, asking audaciously if it were true that she could ride a horse better than any man?

Entirely unabashed, the princess smiled naughtily and swung her leg over her horse and, without warning, kicked her beast into a gallop! Weaving between trees, jumping over rocks, splashing through rivers, skidding down steep embankments and sprinting across the open plains, they rode hard as soldiers in pursuit of enemies, the princess and her horse never letting up for a second! Try as he might the prince could simply not catch up. In fact, in the end, he was quite left behind.

When the prince finally found the princess, reclining under the red awning provided by delicate leaves of an ancient *momiji* - a japanese maple - his heart was pounding out a strong rhythm like a horse's hooves: what a woman!

Eventually the prince got his princess back to *Kagoshima* and introduced her to his parents, the king and queen of that southernmost city of Japan which famously overlooks *Mount Fuji*. They found her to be everything a princess should be - humble, beautiful and clever - and a date was promptly set for the wedding to take place three months from that day.

But there was a war on. There was always a war on in Japan in those days and, as usual, the king had to lead his armies and the prince had to accompany him. And, as usual, the queen had to clean up the mess they made. So the princess was left alone in the palace.

There were servants aplenty, of course, and they did their best to make the princess comfortable, but to no avail: day by day she would look less and less comfortable, and then more and more withdrawn, and then just downright ill. The queen was sent for and when she returned all it took was one look for her to know that there was something serious troubling the princess.

“What is the cause of your dis-ease?” asked the queen.

The princess only shook her head and did not seem willing to say anything.

After a little coaxing the princess finally said, “I cannot tell you; it’s too embarrassing.”

“You can tell me anything,” said the queen kindly, “Soon I am to be your mother.”

“Well,” stalled the princess, “There are some things I should not even tell my mother.”

Hearing this and thinking of how the servants had spoken of the princess clutching at her belly and looking ill, the queen’s expression changed to shock, so the princess quickly said, “No, it is not what you think: I am not pregnant.”

“Then what is it, child,” asked the queen, all kindness once more, “Let there be no secrets between us. If you tell me your secrets, I’ll tell you mine.”

“All right,” agreed the princess, “The thing is...since I met your son...and rode across the whole land...and stayed here in your palace...all these nights and days...I...well...you see...the things is...I haven’t...farted.”

“Bwah-hah-hah-haaa!” laughed the queen, full of relief and amusement, “Hah-ha-ho...Hee-hee, ho...Hum. Mmm...Bwah-hah-ha-ha-haaa!” She laughed on and on until the princess was in hysterics too.

When they had finally calmed down and sat, leaning against one another, wiping giggle-teased tears from their eyes, the princess spoke up again, "You need to know, my Queen, that it is worse than you think..." but the queen cut her off.

"Nonsense, young one, I've been known to let a few fowl ones get away myself - one so bad once that the King, my good husband, actually felt the need to leave the room..." but now it was the princess's turn to cut in.

"No, my Lady, I don't think you understand what I am saying: when I fart it is really, really, truly bad. Why do you think all those suitors fled from me?"

"It can't be all that bad," said the queen, brushing away concern with her hand, "It's all a matter of how you present yourself. You see, when I need to *onara* - that's how we say it here - I take each hem of my skirt in hand and curtsy while making a very loud announcement to cover the noise; like this," she said and then, standing and taking the hem of her skirt in each hand she curtsied with flourish, allowing out a pretty decent fart, as she almost shouted, "How lovely it is today!"

"No, no..." protested the princess, but the queen was well into her routine now.

"The Queen of England, I've heard said, never farts. Her dogs do, of course, and that's the way we do it, see? It's all about blame and distraction. But, if I get the sense that it's going to be one of those long, squeaky ones - you know, the ones that go *phweeet!*? - then I press my foot to the floor and twist it earnestly and comment on the floor boards. Oldest trick in the book. You can even do it *after* you've let one out and, at least in my case, it's worked just the same. When it turns out to be a quiet one though, and you know it's going to be a real stinker..."

"Your Majesty!!" shouted the princess, "Stop. Please. You still do not understand how bad it is when I have *kaze*"

"Oh, come on, it's only wind," said the queen, "Why don't you just show me what all the fuss is about. Just remember what I've taught you about presentation - now is a good time to practice, whilst the men are away. In fact," said the queen as she stepped up behind the princess who obediently stood to practice doing a covering curtsy, "I'll stand behind you and smell the wafty freshness of your princessy fart."

When the princess made to protest the queen shushed her in a no nonsense way that said there would be no more talk of it.

So the princess took the hem of her dress in each hand and - with the queen behind her, bending down so that her face was in the best position to sample said gaseous discharge - she

farted. I mean to say she *let rip!* She farted so hard that the queen was blasted right out of the window, over the palace walls and into the hedge beyond!

“It’s...it’s not so bad...” offered the queen when she had returned, picking leaves from her hair and looking dazed, but the princess knew that it was bad, that it didn’t get much worse.

And she was right. The prince was sent for and when the queen explained the problem he said outright that there was no way he could marry this princess.

“I’ll be the laughing stock of the whole land,” he declared, his face flushing in embarrassment, “You know how fast stories travel!”

There was simply no consoling him on the matter. He would not even hear of the princesses’ beauty or brilliance.

“What if, on the day we are getting married,” he flustered, “She sends out a gale that sees our guests rolling out of the temple!? Or she sits to hear the people’s pleas and does a particular rotter and melts the royal throne? I just can’t do it...I will have to take her home.”

Hence the prince and the princess rode side by side once more. Slowly. Sadly. The prince remembering how hard the princess could ride, recalling how much they had laughed on their first journey together, how many interesting things they had talked about and how astute she had been in answering his questions about affairs of state and, he turned and looked at her, how beautiful she was. His heartbeat was as heavy as his horse’s hoof fall. Surely something could be done about her...problem?

Suddenly he looked up from his thoughts to see an army lined in front of them! But it was his army. Standing beside their horses the soldiers were all looking up into a great, solitary *sugi* - a cedar tree. There, in amongst the branches of the ancient tree was a helmet, a sword, a saddle and...a horse!

The captain of the army saw the prince and came to him, bowing low and explaining how a mighty wind had passed that way - at which point the prince looked over at the princess and she hung her head in shame - and had lifted their things into the tree. As the tree was holy, so it could not be cut down, and as the lowest branches were too high to reach, the captain could not see how to get the items from it, and he feared the anger of the *kodama* - the spirit of the tree - should he leave the things where they were.

“All we can do,” he suggested, “Is hope that the gods will smile upon us and send another strong wind to free our belongings.”

Before the prince could say anything the princess had jumped down from her horse, turned her back to the tree. With hands holding the hem of her skirt, she did a dashing curtsy and, as I am sure you will have guessed, let off the most glorious fart!

That wasn't all she did though. As the fart blasted from her between her beautiful buttocks, she began to rotate her rear in a circular fashion, round and round, turning the gas into a *whirlwind!* Then, with deft movements of her hips, she positioned the wind around the tree and, with little lifts of her heels to guide the winds, every item was picked up, one by one, and brought each back to its owner. The helmet landed upon a bowman's head, the sword into the frontman's sheath, the saddle onto the spearman's stead and, finally, the horse landed next to the captain - with a gentle and pleasing pluff as it was deftly placed, unharmed and on all fours.

The prince's face burned with shame. His whole army could see that the princess rode with him and was clearly wearing the garb of betrothal, so it would naturally be assumed that his wife-to-be had just farted a bunch of things out of a tree! And, it could be equally surmised, that she had farted them into the tree in the first place.

Far from showing any dismay or any alarm at all, the captain of the army, instead, drew his sword and held it out on his palms before the princess, bowing his head as he asked, his voice trembling with respect, "Your Highness, you are surely blessed by *Okuninushi no Mikoto*, King of the Fairies himself. Will you, please, do us a very great honour, and lead our armies?"

"But," opposed the prince, "She is a *fujin?*"

"It matters not if she is a woman, my Lord," argued the captain in reply, "Think about it: a whole army lined up to fight us and she, in one go, could blow them all away! And what service she could do for the entire land: tsunami's could be turned in the other direction! Earthquakes could be stilled by her...well...you know?"

Before the prince could remonstrate the idea any further, the princess said, "Yes. It will be my honour to lead your armies."

And so she did.

It is not certain whether or not she married the prince - though it could be said that he would have been a fool to let a little wind get in the way of their love - what I can say for sure though, is that our princess became famous in all the land as an Elemental Princess - one of the four celebrated as statues at the *Grand Mazu Temple* - she being the Princess of the Wind and the others, it goes without saying, being Princess of the Earth, Water and Fire.

What people are unaware of though, is how exactly she wielded her superpower. Did she roll the wind up in a ball and throw it at her enemies? Did she blow great waves of the sea with her mouth? You and I know though, that what she did, was take the hem of her skirt in each hand and...and the rest is history.

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