

PRINCESS RIMJHIM
and
THE BUTTERFLY SQUAD



TREATMENT

“What makes the desert beautiful,”
said the little prince, “is that somewhere it hides
a well...”

Antoine de St Exupéry



Once upon a time, a beautiful young Princess named Rimjhim, daughter of the Sun and a River, appeared one summer day in an oasis in the Thar desert.

Rimjhim had fallen from the sky in the service of life. Her mission was to bring hope back to this land where water was scarce. But the little princess didn't know that. She wasn't aware of her task, she was going to find out about it throughout her adventure.

Each of us know, or should know, that an adventure awaits us, and that it will never go as planned. Rimjhim didn't know much, but she was wise enough not to plan anything and to let her fate unfold.

So, here's the setting: miles of dunes, houses made of yellow stones, some of which look like a honeycomb, plains of golden sand as far as the eye can see, stubborn trees growing in the dust and a few limestone quarries behind the dunes.

In this desert land, there are laughing children, shepherds, snake charmers and dancers, kite flyers, sacred cows, ancient birds, medicinal plants, camels and butterflies that breed on coriander leaves. It was actually as she was watching these butterflies in a spice garden that Rimjhim met its owner, Veda, a rare old bird endowed with the faculty of speech. This wise Bustard knew the secrets of spices and grew magnificent plants in spite of the drought. His property was a living oasis, filled with Tikoma trees.

Veda immediately recognised Rimjhim. "Cool Water of Spring! What a lovely name, it suits you perfectly, Princess," he said in greeting. "I've been waiting for you..." In his dreams, he had seen this shining young avatar, daughter of the sun and a mysterious river, landing at his farm.

He didn't yet know why, but he sensed that her presence would help to balance the region's precarious ecosystem. He instantly embraced the idea of sharing happy days in her company and passing on all his knowledge to her. Veda enthusiastically adopted Rimjhim, and Rimjhim did the same.

The young princess felt at home in her new country. She soon met the Mali sisters, two girls who gardened with Veda, with whom she cared for the Sadabahar flowers and gathered the fruits from the Ber bushes. But her favourite new friend was Sonapari, the daughter of the shepherds who lived in the farm next door, behind the Khejri woods. Sonapari had a strong character. She never let anyone push her around. She enjoyed playing music and she liked to chase shadows. Often, she would climb up to the rocks with Rimjhim on the highest dune just before dawn, and sit facing East. Sonapari would begin to play her flute - she had heard that it could make the sun rise, and it worked every time.

She liked the magic of music, but, more than anything, she loved listening to stories. Armed with the little bow she had carved from a piece of dry wood, she would take Rimjhim chasing imaginary demons in the dunes or in the little forest whose trees blazed with red flowers during Spring. The girls would sit under the shade and Sonapari would ask her friend to tell her the mysterious Tales of Sun and Water that had remained imprinted in her memory. Rimjhim concentrated. "Wait..." she smiled, "there's something... one day, Vishnu heard Shiva playing his flute. The music sounded wonderful and he sat down to listen better... Suddenly, his feet began to melt! Brahmâ collected the water in a pot..."

Sonapari laughed and began to play her flute. In less than two minutes, Rimjhim's feet were soaked. Right away, she sensed that there must have been water immediately underneath her. She dug in and found an old buried well.

Rimjhim had a gift for finding water where there was none. Whether she was stretching nets in the air to catch the morning dew, harvesting water from the bushes with a blowpipe, digging holes in the right places or dancing to summon the rain, the Princess seemed to know all the ways to bring water to this arid land. One day, she even taught the villagers how to create persistent pools by digging their beds before the monsoon season, using an ancient technique that had appeared to her in a dream.

"Maybe one day I'll bring back my mother's river," she confided to Veda one night before falling asleep. "Do you think I'll see her again?" He stroked her silky hair in agreement before wishing her sweet dreams.

One spring afternoon, while they were having a walk in the countryside, the girls met two brothers, Chetan and Marich. They had just arrived to settle on the land newly acquired by their parents.

They were waiting for their caravan outside the gates of a gigantic house decorated with towers and domes that looked like honey lace. The local people had wondered what mysterious stranger had built this Palace, but in fact it wasn't a Palace, because Palaces only belong to royalty.

Chetan and Marich's parents were just very rich gemstone merchants who had spent a lot of time abroad exploiting their precious mines.

And, who, actually, were not there.

Sonapari and Rimjhim were surprised to see the two young boys supervise their servants unloading the family belongings, heaps of furniture, trunks, paintings and plants gathered up in a long caravan.

That moment and that day will remain etched in memories forever, because when Chetan met the Princess's golden eyes, when he saw the spark, even though they were still just children, he saw her as a miracle.

She took his breath away.

They introduced themselves.

“Chetan as in conscience?” asked Rimjhim, addressing the young brother who had attracted her at first sight. He seemed like a dreamer and exuded kindness.

“Marich as in mirage?” continued Sonapari, defiant, to the elder boy, who puffed out his little chest and smiled at the girls with charming confidence. He immediately bragged to the newcomers about the gold, the rubies and all the fabulous objects they were bringing in their caravan. Sonapari replied that she was more interested in snake charmers than in fake charmers and turned on her heels. Rimjhim, radiant as the sun and fresh as her name, made the mistake of smiling at Marich to excuse her friend's arrogance. He was captured by her golden eyes, and, like his brother, instantly fell in love with her.

The years went by and the four children became friends. The boys never confessed their love to the Princess nor confided it to each other.

Chetan and Marich's parents weren't around much. Business kept them away, working with their precious stones, which they extracted from

the ground in faraway continents and had cut in the big city.

The boys were brought up by erudite teachers.

When their parents showed up, always unexpectedly, the father showered his sons with exotic gifts, and the mother, a very beautiful woman ahead of her time, liked to explain to the children the importance of freedom. Although she certainly believed deeply in this idea, perhaps it also helped her to justify their frequent absences. In any case, Chetan and Marich did not interpret these precious words in the same way. Chetan understood that freedom was to listen to his heart, while Marich thought freedom was to have everything he wanted. He decided early on that he should accumulate even more money than his parents, in order to be the freest man in the world.

Let's jump ahead a few years.

The children are now teenagers.

Since Rimjhim's arrival, the monsoon water has become more abundant, Veda the Bustard collects the rain in the tanks that Rimjhim taught them to build and redistributes it in the region. The farmers' activities expanded. They are learning to dig wells and plant new varieties to balance the vitality of their crops. Life is vibrant !

Rimjhim still has a golden gaze that lights up like the sun, and continues to bring forth water in all circumstances. Sonapari is increasingly bold and, realizing the importance of her friend's presence, has made it her mission to protect her no matter what. She even killed a snake in the tall grass of the plateau, stopping him cold with her arrow as he was about to bite the

Princess' foot while she was setting up a water net to catch the morning moisture.

Rimjhim's presence has motivated the local people and awakened their consciences. She started growing trees and explained her techniques to the farmers, "We have to consider each seed that we plant in the ground as a member of our family. They will grow much better if we are attached to them"

She even invented a dance to help the plants blossom. She taught it to Sunhari, the best dancer in the area. Sunhari has become a real alchemist of movement. No desert rose, orchid or bush of jasmine could resist her.

Together they created rituals for each new variety of flower they undertook to cultivate. If you rise at dawn, you can see the two young girls moving and twirling their graceful arms to activate nature.

Chetan has developed a passion for butterflies. It was Veda who showed him how they transform. Fascinated, he asked the old bird to teach him all the secrets he knew about nature. The wise Bustard gladly complied. He even introduced the three friends to Indumati, the magician, his life-long comrade. Veda took them to her cave, up in a hill a few miles in the desert. From there, you could see the village behind the Kherji woods to the west and the property of Chetan and Marich to the east.

The children immediately adored this strange woman, who, although she actually was several hundred years old, looked like a teenager.

They were lucky enough to be able to visit her dwelling, carved out of the rock and set deep in the earth. This mysterious lair was quite cosy : after passing through a kitchen filled with bizarre stone ovens, copper cauldrons and flasks, a curiosity cabinet and a bedroom, they arrived in an area

open to the sky, where a shaft of light fed a remarkable garden. It was filled with special species of plants from which she would prepare magic potions with her assistant Rooh, a little forest spirit - the only person who knew her secrets.

Chetan started a butterfly farm with the goal of spreading life in this arid land. Indumati explained to him that if he raised his butterflies in the right way, they would be able to pollinate plants as well as spirits.

With the help of the dancer Sunhari, Chetan grew special flowers for them to lay their eggs in, and organized various little shelters for his protégés to change into pupas, then into butterflies. Thanks to the heart-leaf indigo bush, he created some very beautiful blue ones.

He wanted to turn them into an army of soldiers of life who would pollinate the area as far as they could reach. “Did you know they can travel 500 miles a day?” he said to Rimjhim, who was fascinated by the golden wings of a butterfly that had just emerged from its chrysalis. “You can’t even imagine what they’re capable of!”

While his little brother was fascinated by nature, Marich was captivated by science and mathematics. He soon specialised in chemistry. After testing his skills on products to create explosions, he concentrated on the chemistry of materials. Cements, plastics and resins appeared on his work table. He had no interest in the nobility of nature. The only purpose of his research was to get rich quickly. His father appreciated his taste for fortune, but would have preferred him to take an interest in precious stones: “Father, I do love jewels, and I’ll be so rich that I’ll be able to travel the world to follow up on your passion. I’ll find the most beautiful ones and give them to my beloved. That way, she’ll never turn me down!”

Marich also had a passion for numbers, and was constantly thinking about the astronomical sums that he would be able to pay to obtain whatever he wanted the day he'd become the boss.

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But as it sometimes happens in life, everything suddenly changed in this lovely oasis in the Thar desert.

One winter evening, Goldi, the treasurer of Chetan and Marich's family, arrived at dawn after travelling all night. He brought terrible news: their parents had just perished in another continent. One of their mines had collapsed on their heads.

The boys cried a lot, as did the whole village.

Chetan and Marich inherited a gigantic fortune.

At the end of the mourning period, Marich shaved his moustache, and set off one morning to Princess Rimjhim's house. His plan was to beat his brother to it and win her heart first.

He found her in Veda's garden. She stopped dancing and greeted him warmly. He got down on one knee and asked her to marry him. She was gobsmacked. He then listed all his possessions and handed her the biggest ruby ring he had found in the vaults.

Rimjhim, completely distraught, replied that it was impossible. She confessed that she had always loved Chetan.

Marich was enraged. He ran home and was consumed by fury, which at lightning speed turned into hatred for his little brother. He built a wall between himself and Chetan, erected a mysterious windowless tower and

holed up there in his anger. He concentrated on building his cement factory, and hired a few demons who were hanging around to find ways of disrupting his brother's life and the balance of the farms.

Chetan tried every trick in the book to reconnect with Marich, but to no avail.

Faced with his deafening silence, he finally climbed his highest tree to see what was happening on the other side of the estate above the new ramparts his brother had built. He saw an army of demons of all sizes working in the courtyard, burning materials in large coal-fired ovens.

Puzzled, he went to Indumati the magician for advice. She thought these scary newcomers could only be there for the wrong reasons. Indumati, Rimjhim, Chetan and Sonapari got together to come up with a strategy to fight back. They painted their faces blue, green and red to summon protective spirits, and began by performing a ritual so that Chetan could reconnect with his brother.

Everyone went home, their faces adorned with the colours of life.

As soon as night fell, Indumati consulted oracles in the stars. She was so frightened by what she saw, that she ran straight to Chetan in the dark, slipped through the window like a cat, and urged him to give up trying to reconnect with his brother.

“Hurry up, go and get Rimjhim, she's in danger.”

In the middle of the night, Chetan arrived at Veda's house and woke up the old Bustard. They went to Rimjhim's room.

She had disappeared.

A firm hand had placed a strangely scented scarf over the Princess's nose in the middle of the night. She didn't have time to realize what was happening and fainted. She woke up a few hours - or days - later lying on a red velvet swing bed, suspended in the middle of a golden cage.

The cage was circular and the walls of the room as well. Tiny windows that barely let in the sky punctuated the wall like a spiral towards a jewel-covered dome that glittered above her head.

On the floor, she saw silks, carpets and cushions under her feet. A smell of amber rose up from the oil lamps burning here and there. She stood up and grabbed the golden bars with her small hands and shook them as hard as she could, but they were very solid and the locks that closed the cage were unbreakable. She cried out for help but no one answered, apart from the birds that cooed outside. They couldn't get in, the opening in the walls were too narrow. She broke down and wept, her tears soaked the carpets and the cushions.

A few hours later, she heard footsteps. She listened carefully: several people were climbing a staircase.

A delegation of servants who looked like demons suddenly unlocked the heavy door and came in, carrying royal dishes on silver platters. One of them had his head on fire, and he was roasting skewers in the flames. The princess looked on, appaled. He might as well have flamed pancakes.

They slid the dishes through a trapdoor into the cage and placed them on the carpet. She turned her back on them.

Marich made his entrance. The servants left. She covered her ears and refused to eat. Marich spoke but she wouldn't listen to him. Eventually he knelt down in front of the cage and again, she turned her back on him. Marich came to see her every day, bringing her increasingly extraordinary dishes - caviar from Russia, snails from Burgundy, yak milk from the Himalayas - which she threw in his face each time. Then she turned her back on him.

As soon as he'd gone, she'd start crying again. She cried so hard that her tears fertilised the carpet and tiny flowers appeared. But that wasn't enough to cheer her up.

One morning, after screaming her rage and shaking the bars, she fell back onto the cushions, exhausted. She was hungry and her vision was beginning to blur. She closed her eyes. Suddenly she heard a rustling sound close to her ear, and a little voice: "Stop crying, Princess, you'd better start eating again or you'll die."

She looked up and recognized one of the butterflies that Chetan had raised on the indigo leaves. Rimjhim realized the butterfly was his envoy.

Crrrrraaac. She heard the latch of the heavy door open and the little messenger flew away. She followed his advice and as soon as she saw the breakfast slipped into the cage by a servant, she pounced on the jugs of fruit juice and the almond cakes.

Marich was informed about her sudden appetite and seized the opportunity to try to talk to her again.

He asked Goldi, the treasurer, to accompany him, carrying a tray

covered with the finest jewels of the collection. When they made their entrance, she couldn't cover her ears because her hands were stuffing the cakes in her mouth.

Goldi knelt down and slipped the treasure through the trapdoor. "Rimjhim, I really love you... will you marry me?" This time she didn't turn her back on him. She raised her chin defiantly, "You have a very strange way of loving people," she replied, her mouth full. Then she buried her head in a cushion so as not to hear his reply.

Every day Marich came back to see her, trying to trigger her interest. He'd tell her stories, but she ignored him so blatantly, he grew more and more frustrated.

Since Rimjhim had been locked up, things had become worse outside. Every time she screamed in rage from behind her golden bars, the heat would rise and the wind dry up. Soon, the oasis pond was no more than three feet wide. It continued to shrink to the size of a puddle

This went on for over a year.

She received messages from Chetan and his friends through the butterflies, which cheered her up. She knew her friends were looking for a way to make her escape. But the little messengers had warned her that the fortress Marich had built for himself was impregnable, and that he had made life so impossible for his brother that Chetan had moved away from the family estate to set up his farm next door to Indumati's.

The butterflies did not tell the Princess, so as not to worry her, that Marich had developed a cement factory in the desert at breakneck speed,

and was importing tons of coal to run it. He had dried up the air and the cement was polluting the atmosphere, damaging gardens and fouling water sources.

Chetan now had an army of butterflies. Some could speak, some sing and some even whistle. The strongest, Madha, a female butterfly he had made captain, had grown to the size of a small falcon.

Sonapari regularly shot demons with her arrow when they approached the village or Veda's land.

The old bird and the farmers had built giant fans which they waved to repel the dust created by Marich and protect the crops as best they could. The village was hungry. The vegetables had stopped growing, the trees were dying, and people were relying on roots that they'd boil with spices.

Chetan was devastated by the destruction Marich had inflicted on nature. But that was nothing compared to the despair of knowing that Rimjhim was locked up in a cage.

The princess had to be freed from her brother's clutches. The demons were guarding her tower with pyres and black smoke.

It was Indumati who came up with the solution to free her. She worked tirelessly for months with Rooh to perfect the magic potion that would achieve her goal. Rooh fiercely guarded the secret. When the magician was ready, she successfully tested her revolutionary formula on a couple of goats from Sonapari's parents farm. It worked so well that no one even noticed what she had done.

Indumati asked Chetan to summon all his butterflies and train them for the mission. They would have to show coordination and strength of wings.

Chetan briefed them for several weeks to get them ready.

The princess would escape by air. Madha, the large female butterfly who is the size of a falcon, would be the captain of the expedition.

“But how is she going to get out of her prison?” asked a puzzled Chetan.

“Do you want her back?” asked Indumati authoritatively, “then trust me and do as I say.”

Rimjhim was distressed but hadn't given up hope, even though she could feel that the heat was increasing and that the little sky she was able to see through her tiny windows was often full of black smoke.

One morning, a messenger butterfly arrived. He whispered in her ear: “You're going to escape soon. Get ready. You'll know we're coming to rescue when you hear Sonapari's flute make the sun rise.” The memory of all those moments she had spent with her friend, at dawn, watching her bring the sun up from the horizon with her music moved her to tears.

The big day arrived.

Just before dawn, Rimjhim heard Sonapari's flute. The light of dawn appeared through the narrow windows. Rimjhim didn't know exactly what was going to happen, but she was ready for anything.

As the music and the sun rose, one of the demons slumbering in the courtyard awoke. He saw a cloud of butterflies heading towards the tower where the princess was locked up. He ran along the ramparts to get a better look at this strange phenomenon and when they reached Rimjhim's jail, he decided to sound the alarm and started screaming.

Rimjhim saw the first squadron of butterflies enter her cage. She jumped for joy when she saw them. She could hear the commotion outside.

“Hurry up!” shouted Captain Madha, who was standing watch outside, “They’re going up the tower, you haven’t got much time!”

The butterflies began to swirl around Rimjhim, flapping their wings loudly. A cloud of blue gold flew out of the swarm, enveloping Rimjhim. When the Princess was completely covered by the shimmering dust, she suddenly shrank to the size of the butterflies. She got frightened and screamed. Her rescuers gathered to form a sort of flying carpet in front of her. “Lie down! Quickly” ordered Captain Madha. Although panicked by her new size, she lay down on the bed of wings without flinching. “Hang on!” Rimjhim grabbed the neck of the largest butterfly, which seemed like the bow of the ship, and the butterflies took off.

Just as the life-saving convoy passed through the tiny window, the demons on duty threw open the door of her prison, but it was too late.

Marich entered the Princess’s empty golden cage and howled like a wolf.

Rimjhim’s flying carriage was already cutting through the air. A second squadron of butterflies surrounded the first for better protection. Captain Madha was issuing orders, whistling loudly to direct the squadron through the fireballs and clouds of smoke that the demons were spewing towards them to scupper the operation. But Chetan had turned them into exceptionally agile pilots and they escaped unharmed.

The butterflies carried her to safety, depositing her in Indumati’s garden in the shadow of the Kaner trees. Indumati asked to be alone with the Princess and took her to her magic cabinet.

Chetan was waiting outside, worried sick. Veda, Sonapari, Sunhari,

all their friends and a small crowd of curious villagers were there, but there was total silence, as if everyone had stopped breathing, on the doorstep of the magician's house.

Suddenly, the leaves of the indigo tree shivered, and butterflies flocked to the entrance of the cave. Indumati came out rubbing her hands together, looking satisfied. She waited for a moment, then spread her arms theatrically towards the door, where the Princess emerged, more beautiful than ever, covered in powdered blue gold. She had regained her normal height.

Chetan and Rimjhim threw themselves into each other's arms. They barely had time to embrace before they heard a furious hubbub below the high dunes. Marich and his army of demons were coming towards them with a roar of fire and smoke.

Rimjhim climbed up all the way up the rocks. She raised her arms to the sky and appealed to her parents. "Suni! Pani! help us!"

The sun shone a ray of light on Marich and his henchmen and blinded them. Suddenly, the rock split open. Water started to flow out of it. The first trickle of spring water went straight to caress Rimjhim's hair, then her cheek. The princess heard the cool water whisper in her ear: "Move over, my darling, I'll take care of this".

And everyone heard the river roar.

In a few seconds, the trickle of water became a torrent, then a furious waterfall that rolled towards the attackers. The demons' strongest flames and dirtiest smoke were wiped out by the powerful river, which raced down to Marich's property and washed away everything in its path.

When calm returned, Chetan went in search of his brother, but couldn't find him.

The water had stripped Marich's property of its layer of darkness like a power hose, and the stone had recovered its honey colour. The demons had disappeared, drowned or vanished into thin air. A few empty skins were flattened on the ground like deflated balloons or snake skins. But no matter how hard Chetan combed the estate and the desert around, he couldn't find the slightest trace of Marich or Goldi in the rubble. The waterfall had raged far down the plains across the dunes. "They must have been swept away," said Veda and Rimjhim sadly.

Indumati closed up like an oyster and preferred not to comment.

Chetan was deeply saddened but finally accepted destiny : his brother had been swept away by the current and disappeared. They held a small ceremony in his memory, in which the whole village took part.

The waterfall had washed away Marich's property, the coal reserves, the cement factory and the demons, but had been careful not to disturb anything else. It had fertilised everything in its path, and even the structure of the cement factory would soon be covered in greenery. Everyone suspected that the gods were behind this master stroke, but no one dared mention it.

One summer night, Chetan saw his brother in a dream. He was cackling, covered in jewels, lying on a bed of precious stones, surrounded by walls of scarlet rock that resembled a cave. He was barking at servants to wave palms at him for fresh air. Goldi entered the picture, bent, more deferential

than ever, to serve Marich a smoky red liqueur in a crystal goblet. “Hello brother! I’m in the mine! Did you think you were going to get rid of me so easily?”

“Marich!” shouted Chetan, waking up in a sweat.

Rimjhim took him in her honey arms. He cried himself to sleep. He missed his brother. The Princess comforted him. They loved each other so much that their presence alone, their joint warmth, made all the shadows melt away, even the most painful ones.

The waterfall that had appeared so suddenly continued to flow gently from the rock, helping to irrigate the desert. It was a long-forgotten underground river that had resurfaced.

The spring was turned into a temple, and the Princess came to worship it every day, convinced that it was her mother.

Chetan, Rimjhim and their friends continued to live happily, replanting trees and flowers and treating each seed as a member of their family, and soon their oasis was the most fertile in the entire Thar desert.



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AND
THE BUTTERFLY SQUAD

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Hélène Guétary with the Citta
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*Hélène embarked for an amazing
human experience in Jaisalmer at
the Rakjumari Ratnavati School,
on the edge of the Thar Desert,
working for three weeks with 16 girl
students.*

*With their collaboration, she
invented an epic tale for the future
based on the world they want to live
in. The girls embodied the central
characters in a giant photographic
fresco, and a series of single
photographs.*

It was the basis for this tale.

