

H.S. Shiva Prakash

THE CROWN PRINCE AT THE DOOR OF AN OLD
WOMAN'S HUT

The Crown Prince:

I'm the prince of the East,
Brave rider of an Arabian steed
Gone ahunting! Hoy, hoy, ahunting!

Crossing forests, shooting beasts,
I galloped through the forest,
right through the forest,

Throwing the speed of the wind to the winds,
Outstripping everyone, I'm galloping on
And on, galloping on and on.

Beyond the forest, in the bushes
—Your broken hut. I see it
And approach, I am approaching.

What eight-hearted courage you have, old woman, to live in such a
place—where when you cry “Ah . . . !” no one answers “Oh . . . !”;
where no human, beast or bird can find a drop of water to drink!

The gates of your good fortune are open wide: imagine! I, prince of
princes, bravest of warriors, stand at the doorstep of your bankrupt
hut. Tell me, what can you offer me?

The Old Woman:

What kind of prince are you, without an army,
General, or retinue? Believe me, you're just
A chump without a throne, treasure, or harem.

No one in this forest would fall for the smooth
Skin of a prince. And no one in this house
Of spirits cares how handsome you are.

You come here like a beggar, stretching out
Your palms. Stop bragging. No one
Can be ruled in a place like this.

Look, you chump with your dreams of royalty: look at this lowly hut that,
if the wind blows *wooooo*, will be blown into the sky above *rooooo*! This
is my kingdom.

Look, look at the firewood blazing in my hearth: this is my capital.

Look, look at the clay pot on the flames: this is my palace.

The *ragi* paste sizzling and dancing in my palace: smell, smell its fragrance,
you fool! This is all my wealth.

I won't part with it, even if you give me twice, three times, a thousand
times the kingdom you just lost in the forest!

Moan, groan like a hungry dog. But if you bark and growl I'll beat you
with this ladle and drive you away. Whine! Cry! Like a starving
whelp! Now! Here!

Then maybe a drop of compassion will ooze out of my heart.

Then maybe you'll get some of my *ragi* ball.