

Diamond Cuts Diamond – Pre-Intermediate Level Story

Once upon a time there was a merchant who lived in a village in Hindustan. Although he got out of bed early, worked hard all day, and rested late, he never seemed to have enough money. One day he decided to travel to a distant country to see if life there was any better.

Twelve years passed. He continued to work hard and was also very lucky. He became very rich and had enough money to be able to live happily for the rest of his days. He thought once more of his home village, and decided to return to spend the rest of his life among his own people.

His village was many miles away, and there were many dangers on the roads that he had to travel. He decided that it would be best to wear the clothes of a poor man who had nothing to lose. In order to carry his riches safely, he sold everything and used the money to buy expensive jewels. He locked these up in a little box which he kept hidden in his clothes.

Dressed like this and carrying only the jewels, he was able to travel quickly and safely. Soon he was only a few days' journey from his village. He did not want to look like a poor man when he returned home. So, thinking that he no longer had to worry about thieves, he stopped at a town to buy better clothes.

As he walked around the town in his new clothes, he came upon a marketplace. There were many shops filled with goods from all over the world. Among these there was one shop that was finer than all the rest. The merchant stopped at this shop and began looking for things to take home to his family. The owner of the shop was named Beeka Mull. As Beeka Mull and the merchant talked, he felt sure that this stranger was richer than he seemed and was trying to hide the fact. After the shopping was done, Beeka Mull asked the stranger to eat with him. In a short time they were talking pleasantly together. Beeka Mull asked the merchant where he was travelling.

"Ah, you had better be careful," said Beeka Mull when he heard the name of the merchant's village. "That road is a very bad place for thieves."

The merchant's face turned white at these words. This rich and pleasantly agreeable Beeka Mull must surely know best. It would be such a terrible thing, he thought, to be robbed of his jewels near the very end of his journey.

"Kind sir," he said. "Could you help me by locking up a small box for me for a short time? When I get to my village I will bring back six strong men to help me take it safely home."

"I can't do it," answered Beeka Mull. "I am sorry, but such things are not my business. I would be scared that I might lose it."

"Please help me!" cried the merchant. "I don't know anyone in this city. You must surely have some place where you keep important things. Do this, I ask you, as a great favour."

Beeka Mull again politely said 'no'. He said it nicely, but in a way that made it sound as if this was his final decision. But the merchant knew that he had now given away the fact that he was richer than he seemed. He did not want more people to know this by asking elsewhere. He continued to ask Beeka Mull until at last he agreed. The merchant produced the little box of jewels, and Beeka Mull locked it up for him in a strong metal box with own riches. So, with many promises and nice things said to each other, they parted.

In an Eastern marketplace, where everything is so close together, a long talk such as that between

Beeka Mull and a stranger is noticed by all. Nearly every shop-keeper in that market was a thief. And the biggest and cleverest of all was Beeka Mull. Although the merchant did not know this, he was still a little nervous about having left his jewels with someone he didn't know. And so, as he went down the street, buying things here and there, he asked in one way and another about Beeka Mull. Each shop-keeper whom he spoke to, hoping to get something in return from Beeka Mull, said that he was good and honest man. This made the merchant feel calmer, and he travelled on to his village with a happy heart.

In a week the merchant returned to the city with six strong young men from his village to help him safely take his box of jewels home. He told these men to wait for him at the great marketplace in the centre of the city. Then he went on to the smaller marketplace where Beeka Mull had his shop.

When he arrived at the shop of Beeka Mull, he walked up and bowed politely to him. "Good morning, kind sir," he said. Beeka Mull acted as if he did not to see him. "Good morning, kind sir," he said again.

"What do you want?" said Beeka Mull angrily. "You've said your 'good morning' twice, why don't you tell me your business?"

"Don't you remember me?" asked the merchant.

"Remember you?" shouted Beeka Mull. "No, why should I? I have enough to do to remember people who come here to buy from me. I don't have time to try to remember every one who comes asking for money."

When he heard this the merchant began to get very worried.

"But Sir!" he cried, "surely you remember me and the little box I gave you to take care of? And you promised... yes, you promised very kindly... that I might return to get it back, and..."

"Are you trying to cheat me!" shouted Beeka Mull. "Get out of my shop! Be off with you, you! Every one knows that I don't keep things for people. I have trouble enough keeping my own money safe! Come, off with you!" With that he began to push the merchant out of the shop. When the poor man would not move, two men standing in the street outside came to help Beeka Mull. They threw the merchant out into the road like a bag of cloth.

The merchant slowly picked himself up off the ground, bruised and bleeding. But he did not feel the pain in his body. All he knew was the terrible feeling that, after all his years of hard work, he was left with nothing. Slowly he pulled himself a little further from where the fat and very angry Beeka Mull stood watching him from the door of his shop. Coming to a friendly wall, he sat down with his back against it and put his head into his hands. He gave himself up to the feeling that everything had gone wrong and he had no hope of getting his jewels back. He sat there without moving, like one turned to stone. Finally, darkness fell around him. The men the merchant had brought from his village had grown tired of waiting. When he did not return by late afternoon, they thought he must have gone home by himself. So they went home also.

About eleven o'clock that night, a bright and pleasant young man named Kooshy Ram passed by with a friend. "Be careful, that man may be a thief," said the friend when he saw the merchant sitting against the wall.

"You are wrong," answered Kooshy Ram. "Thieves don't sit in full view of people like that, even at night." And so the two passed on and thought no more of him. About five o'clock next morning, Kooshy Ram was returning home. To his surprise, he saw the sad merchant still sitting as he had

hours before. He thought that surely something must be the wrong for a man to sit all night in the open street. He decided to see what it was, and went up and shook the merchant gently by the shoulder. "Who are you?" he asked. "And what are you doing here? Are you ill?"

"Ill?" said the merchant in a weak voice. "Yes, ill with a sickness for which there is no medicine."

"Don't be silly!" cried Kooshy Ram. "Come along with me. I have something that will make you feel better, I think." The young man took the merchant by the arm and, pulling him to his feet, led him to his house. There he gave him a large glass of wine. Then, after he had given him food, he asked him tell his adventures.

Whilst still a boy, Kooshy Ram had been left a large amount of money with no one to show him how to take care of it. He threw away his money like water, generally upon the nearest thing or person in his way. And most often that was himself. But he was also kind-hearted and very clever. He had taken it into his head to be a friend to this sad looking man and try to help him if he could.

On his side the merchant was pleased to have someone to talk to. He told Kooshy Ram all that had happened.

When Kooshy Ram heard the story, he laughed loudly at the idea of anyone trusting jewels to Beeka Mull. "Why, he is the greatest cheat in the city," he cried. "Unless of course you believe what some of them say about me! Well, there is nothing to be done for now. You must stay here for a while. I think that at the end of a short time I will be able to find a medicine which will cure your sickness." This made the merchant begin to feel a little better. As he had nowhere else to stay, he happily accepted Kooshy Ram's offer.

A few days later Kooshy Ram sent for some friends to come and see him. He talked with them long into the night. The merchant could not hear what they were saying. But he did hear many shouts of laughter, as though they were talking about something very funny. Sadly, there was no laughter in his heart. The more he thought, the more he lost hope of ever getting his jewels back.

One day, soon after this, Kooshy Ram came to him. "Do you remember the wall where I found you that night," he said. "On the street near Beeka Mull's shop?"

"Yes, I certainly do," answered the merchant.

"Well," continued Kooshy Ram, "this afternoon you must go and stand in that same place and watch. And when someone gives you a signal, you must go up to Beeka Mull. Bow to him and say, 'Oh, kind sir, will you kindly let me have that box which you have been keeping safe for me?'"

"What's the use of that?" asked the merchant. "He won't do it any more now than he would when I asked him before."

"Don't worry!" said Kooshy Ram. "Do what I tell you and say what I told you, word for word, and I will answer for the rest."

So, that afternoon, the merchant went and stood by the wall as he was told. He noticed that Beeka Mull saw him, but again acted as if he did not know him. Soon a large palanquin, like those in which important women are carried about, came up the road. It was carried by four men dressed in fine clothes, and its curtains and everything about it were truly magnificent. One of the friends who had visited Kooshy Ram was walking beside it. He was dressed in very rich clothes. Behind him came a servant carrying a large box on his head covered with a golden cloth.

The palanquin was set down outside Beeka Mull's shop. The fat shop-keeper was on his feet at once. He bowed deeply to Kooshy Ram's friend. "May I ask," he said, "who this is in the palanquin that honors my small shop with a visit? And what may I do for her?"

Kooshy Ram's friend, after talking quietly to someone through the curtain of the palanquin, turned to Beeka Mull. He explained that the woman was a cousin of his who was travelling. However, her husband had business to do and could not go on with her. She wished to leave a box of jewels with him for safe keeping until her return.

Beeka Mull bowed again to the ground. "It was not," he said, "quite in his way of business. But of course, if he could please such an important woman, he would be most happy. He would guard the box with his life."

Kooshy Ram's friend called the servant carrying the box. He took out a key and opened it. Then he held the box out for the delighted Beeka Mull to see the jewels inside. The shop-keeper's mouth watered as he looked at the expensive stones.

The merchant had watched all this from his place by the wall. Then he thought he saw... could he be wrong? No, he clearly saw a hand making a sign through the curtain on the side of the palanquin away from the shop. "The signal! Was this the signal?" he thought. The hand made the sign again, this time as if telling him to come quickly.

The merchant walked over and bowed to Beeka Mull. "Oh, kind sir," he said. "Will you kindly let me have that box which you have been keeping safe for me?"

Beeka Mull was sitting looking at the wonderful jewels in this new box which good luck and some fools were putting into his care. He looked up in surprise. The thought quickly came to him that if the merchant said anything bad he would lose the trust of these new and richer people. He controlled himself, and smiled.

"Dear me, of course, yes!" he said. "I had forgotten all about it." And he went off and brought the little box and put it into the merchant's trembling hands. Quickly the merchant pulled out the key, which hung by a string round his neck, and opened the box. When he saw that his jewels were all there he ran out onto the road. There, with the box under his arm, he began dancing like a mad man with great shouts and cries of laughter. Just then someone came running up, bowed to Kooshy Ram's friend, and said something to him.

"My cousin's husband has returned," Kooshy Ram's friend said to Beeka Mull. He can now travel with her, so that there is no need to leave the jewels." At this he quickly closed and locked the box and handed it back to the waiting servant. Then from the palanquin came a cry of laughter. Out jumped - not a woman - but Kooshy Ram. He ran and joined the merchant on the road and danced as madly as he. For a moment, Beeka Mull stood and looked at them. Then, with a loud cry of laughter, he also ran out onto the road and began dancing wildly.

"Why do you dance, Beeka Mull?" asked Kooshy Ram's friend. "The merchant dances because you have returned his jewels. Kooshy Ram dances because he is a mad man and has tricked you. But why do you dance?"

"Why do I dance?" cried Beeka Mull. "I dance because up until today I knew thirteen different ways of cheating people who trusted me. I didn't know that there were any more. Now I have a fourteenth! That's why I dance!"