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The Master Juggler

The Master Juggler

by

J. M. R. Harrison

His Pride and reputation rested
on a rare set of blown glass balls
imported at great cost and trouble
from a harsh and desert land across the sea.
The glass was as delicate as sea-foam
streaked with all the colors of the world.
When he traveled, he carried the balls
wrapped in silk, buried in goose down,
securely locked in a cedar wood chest.
When he juggled in a sunlit courtyard,
rainbows stained his hands
and scattered in uneven patterns
on the uneven paving stones.
The piercing beauty of his act was rivaled
only by perfect sunsets and other echoes
of the star-spanning play of the mighty angels
when they and creation were newly fledged.
Now witness was indifferent;
no spectator forgot.

He was performing before
a king and two emperors,
their sons and daughters,
friends and servants,
when he was stung by a sullen wasp,
and dropped one priceless glass ball.
With a sound like windchimes,

an exquisite butterfly shook itself free
of the glittering glass shards,
and the juggler beheld
one of the undisclosed longings
of his inmost heart.

When the enchanted insect took flight,
he felt abandoned and ashamed.
Slowly, one by one, he dropped
the other balls, which shattered
and released visions and wonders,
all winged and glorious in the sun.
He wept for the freedom and the loss.
He was transformed.
He was bereft.
He dropped the final ball.
A tiny crystalline dragon emerged,
wings shot with molten gold and
iridescence.
She landed on his hand
and watched the struggle in his eyes.
She spoke words of fire and reassurance:
They will return.
Then, still flaming, she flew into his heart,
which her gentle forge would burnish
and renew.