ICKY, YUCKY, MUCKY!

BY Natasha Sharma

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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young zubaan

For Sidhant, Antara and Sunish...
who are the most incredible audience.

The Kingdom of Ickhtarpur was famous across the land. The great King of Ickhtarpur, Maharaja **Icky** as he was called, was known to have the worst table manners ever seen.

Every meal had the servers at the royal table coughing and sneezing trying to cover up their **disgust**. In fact, some of their faces were now set in a permanent scrunch.

Lunch would start with Maharaja **Icky** lifting the bowl of soup to his mouth to **glug** it down, most of it trickling down his chin.

Then he would **stuff** his face with roti, **squish** up his rice, pick fistfuls of vegetables, and **slurp** over the pickles while **snorting** through the sherbet.

So disgusting was he that even the mirrors in the great durbar hall had **cracked** in horror.

And that was even before he got to dessert.
The Maharaja had a special way of eating
his favourite sweets, **rosogullas.**

He would throw them up in the air like a juggler,
spraying the sticky syrup everywhere and try
to catch them in his mouth. Some, he managed to catch –
GLOMP! – like a sealion catching fish (or something),
but most went **SPLOTT!** onto the floor.

These he would quickly scoop up and gobble down,
for the Maharaja might be **icky**
but he wasn't **wasteful.**

To make matters worse, the Maharaja loved to talk with his mouth full, **spluttering bits** of food across the table. At the end of the meal, he would wipe his hands on his robe and drink up the rose-scented water in his fingerbowl. You could always tell who had been dining with the Maharaja — and exactly what had been on the menu — from the state of their robes as they exited the dining hall.

For a while now, the Maharaja had been on the lookout for a bride. He had met many princesses but had not yet found the right match. In any case, most of the princesses had an annoying habit of fainting within the first five minutes of drinking tea with him. It was all most irritating.

Twiddling his thumbs, sitting on his throne,
with no new visitors and no new proposals for marriage,
the Maharaja began to get mightily bored.
He decided to set out travelling across the country.

At the end of a long day, he stopped at the castle
of King Dukhiman. While he was waiting
for the King in the great hall he heard
a soft "*tik tik tik pthoo*" sound
over and over again.

Curious, he looked around,
and following the rhythmic sound,
he came across a strange mound.
Looking closer, it appeared
to be a pile of small
crescent-shaped,
yellowish slivers of...
of...

... bitten-off FINGERNAILS!

The sound seemed to be coming
from behind the mound. He peered over it
– and jumped back in surprise.
For behind it sat a girl,
dressed in a fine lehenga,
furiously biting her nails
and SPITTING them out.

What a wonderful sight!
He was in love!

Just then King Dukhiman walked in.
"Oh! I see you have met my daughter, Princess Yucky.
She has sat here every day for the last twenty-five
years nibbling her nails. As you can see from the size
of the mound, she is quite dedicated."

What had till now been looked upon as a terrible habit,
especially for a Princess, had Maharaja Icky spellbound!
Here was someone who would truly enjoy his own ickiness.
And to find his true love, his soulmate,
in such an unexpected place
was nothing short of a miracle!

King Dukhiman went on, "She started biting her nails when she was just three years old and has been at it ever since. I blame it on Princess School. All that having to be perfectly dressed and made-up all the time gave her the jitters, you know. We have tried everything to make her stop. The Queen once even had her hands bound up – but NOTHING Works."

Maharaja Icky, barely hearing him, interrupted, "My dear fellow, would you be so kind as to let me marry your daughter?"

The Princess's father was startled but quickly smiled, "Of course! OF COURSE!" before Maharaja Icky might have time to change his mind.

And so it was that the Kingdom of Ickhtarpur now had the wonderful royal pair of Maharaja Icky and Maharani Yucky. They spent the days happily together, each enjoying the other's horrifying habits.

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But while the royal couple lived in bliss of mess, the people of Ickhtarpur were fed up. The Maharaja on his own was disgusting enough, but now with the new Queen, the kingdom was in ruins. The Maharani had added her own decree: not only were all nail cutters banned from the kingdom, she even offered her own services to gnaw off anyone's fingernails or toenails if they wanted.

All the children of the country walked around with curry encrusted on their arms and clothes, their nails all black and chewed, and the skin on their fingers nibbled raw. "Icky and yucky is the way to be!" they shouted, for they had the great Maharaja and Maharani to look up to.

So when the news came that the Maharaja and Maharani were expecting a baby, their subjects were overjoyed. Finally there was hope that some day they would have a new head below the crown! Someone not as icky or yucky as their Royal Highnesses!

"Look how our people rejoice!
Oh, they do love us so,"
said the Maharaja to his Rani.

The fateful day arrived, and into this welcoming world came a

beautiful little baby girl.

Dig dig dig dig DIG

Maharani Yucky
(still nibbling away)
sat with her baby in her lap.
She looked down on her fondly
and exclaimed, "Oh my!
What a nose full of goo,
What a nappy full of p..."
"Ooooh! Let's call her Princess Mucky!"
cried the Maharaja. And as if on cue, the little Princess lifted up
a chubby arm, stuck her finger into her nose and began to dig.

The people were horrified seeing
all their dreams of change shattered.
For there was the next Queen, growing up
with her finger firmly jammed up her nose!
She would happily show off whatever
she had excavated. Her parents looked on proudly
only wishing that the little Princess had a broader
nose for more space to poke around in.

As years passed by, the Kingdom of Ickhtarpur
came to be known as the **ickiest, yuckiest**
and **muckiest** place there ever could be.

And if you ever want to visit, the Royal Family
is always happy to welcome anyone who is
icky or **sticky**,
grimy or **grubby**,
mucky or **yucky**.

Are you?