

"The Four-sectioned Wardrobe" Sudan

Once upon a time there was a great sultan who had many servants, a great retinue, and a lot of money.

His wife had the ability of good management. She provided against a rainy day. She handled her husband's financial affairs carefully and well, and the sultan loved her very much.

The sultan and his wife had one daughter. She was very beautiful, clever, and shrewd. She, like her mother, had the virtues of a good manager.

The days went by, and there came the parting of the ways which comes to all loved ones: the sultan's wife died.

Her daughter, the princess, was at the time about twenty years old.

The sultan was in great sorrow. He mourned and was in deep despair. He resorted to drinking alcohol in order to forget the memories of his wife.

As time passed, drinking and lethargy became habits to which he could not put an end. He squandered any money he could lay his hands on by drinking and other bad habits.

Now this sultan had a large strong-box filled with blocks of gold. After spending all he had, he turned to this strong-box. But whenever a day came that her father opened the strong-box, the clever princess took a block of gold out of it, dug a hole in the ground, and buried the block of gold.

Time passed, and the strong-box was completely emptied. But the clever princess had stored a large quantity of the gold.

The sultan tried every means of getting money, but to no avail. His belly was racked with hunger, so he came to his daughter, the princess, and begged her, "Please give me money so I can get some food."

The princess went to her storage place, took one of the blocks of gold, and went to the market. She went to the biggest merchant of the town, and asked him to weigh and value the gold, and pay her what it was worth. But the merchant was amazed by the princess's loveliness. All of his defenses fell to the magic of her beauty, and he fell in love with her.

"Hearken, beautiful princess," he said to her, "I am willing to pay you double the price of your gold, if you will accept me as your husband -- even just for one day!"

The princess refused, and the merchant formed a grudge against her. When she asked for the return of the gold she had given for him to weigh, he denied receiving any gold from her, and he refused to give anything.

The princess was very sad. She went to another merchant, and told him her story. She asked him to intervene with the first merchant for the return of her gold. But this merchant in turn fell to the magic of her beauty.

"Hearken, enchanting princess," he said to her, "I am willing to give you double the price of your gold, if you will accept me as a husband -- even just for one day!"

The princess refused his offer and left him. Again, she was sad. She went to a third merchant, and told him the story of herself and the previous two merchants. However, she encountered in this third merchant the same desire.

She went to a fourth merchant, and the same thing happened with him.

The princess went to the shade of a nearby tree, and sat down. Now she was very sad. While she was sitting in thought, a wise old woman passed by. This woman felt sorry for the princess, and asked the cause of her distress.

The princess told the old woman the story of herself and the four merchants.

"I am ready to help you, dear princess. However, you must give me half of the gold that we will recover from these merchants."

The princess agreed to this request.

The clever old woman wove her plan, and explained to the princess what she should do.

Then the old woman bade the princess farewell, saying, "I will return when you have recovered your gold."

The next morning, the princess went to a carpenter. She said to him, "Please make a big wardrobe with four doors and four compartments, with each compartment being big enough for a person to stand in."

After some days, the princess went back to the carpenter and found that he had finished the wardrobe. She hired porters, had the wardrobe delivered to her home, and put it in her private room.

The next day, the princess made her way to the market and went to the first merchant. When she was with him in his shop, she said, "My lord, have you decided to give me back my gold? I am a poor girl, and very much in need of it."

The merchant's eyes glinted, and he whispered: "Indeed, as I said, I am ready to give you twice what you gave to me, if you accept me as a husband -- even for a single day."

The princess smiled and said: "I am ready to accept you as a husband for one day."

"When?", he asked. "I beg you to make it soon."

The princess replied. "Come to my private room tomorrow at noon."

She swore to wait for him in her room, and the merchant gave her the payment for her gold, and promised to also bring the same amount the following day. As the princess left him, he was dancing for joy.

The princess went to the next merchant. He welcomed her, and she said to him, "I ask you to return my gold to me. I am very much in need of it, for it is all I possess."

He replied, "You know my conditions: If you marry me even for one day, I would give you double the value of your gold. But if you refuse, you get nothing."

The princess said: "I have decided to marry you for one day. If you come to my private room tomorrow around 12:15pm, you will find me."

The merchant was delighted, and he was on the point of embracing her, but she escaped his hands. He gave her the payment for her gold, and promised to also bring the same amount the following day. The princess bade him farewell, and went away.

Then the princess went to the third merchant, and the same events took place. She asked him to visit her at around 12:30pm the next day.

The princess went to the fourth merchant. She asked him to visit her at around 12:45pm the next day.

When she left the market, the princess had with her the money for the four blocks of gold she had sold. She went to her father, and gave the money to him. He thanked her and promised to try to spend his money more wisely in the future.

The princess asked her father to hide himself the next day in a place near the door of the house. A few minutes after he saw someone enter the house, he was to knock loudly on the door. This was to be done until all four merchants had entered the house.

The next day at noon, the first merchant knocked on the door. The princess opened the door and invited him in with a warm welcome. She led the merchant to two chairs. They sat down and he again gave her money for the value of the gold she had given to him -- so, as agreed, he had paid her double. But he was not thinking about money or gold now. He was entranced by her beauty. He asked himself, "Is this a dream or is it reality?"

At that moment, there came loud knocks on the door. The merchant was taken aback. He was afraid that someone might come in, find him in the princess's chamber, and do violence to him. "Hearken, beautiful princess! Where can I hide? Please hide me in a place where no one will see me!" he said in alarm. The princess went quickly to one of the doors of the wardrobe, opened it, and asked him to get in. The merchant got in, and the princess locked the door and put the key in her bag.

The princess sat and waited. Soon the second merchant arrived. He gave the money. The knocks were heard. The merchant scampered into the second door of the wardrobe.

The same thing happened with the third and fourth merchants. Now all four compartments of the wardrobe were occupied, with the doors locked.

Then the princess had the wardrobe taken to the auction place of a large market.

The sultan of a neighbouring kingdom happened to be visiting the market of this kingdom. He saw the wardrobe, was taken with it, and offered a high price. The princess agreed to sell it, but she made a condition. "Hearken, great sultan," she said, "if you promise not to regret what you find in the wardrobe, then I shall not regret selling it." The sultan made this promise, and bought the wardrobe. The princess received the payment for the wardrobe and went home.

Curiosity took possession of the sultan. He decided to see what was inside his new wardrobe -- even at the market, with people gathered around. He opened the first door, and to everyone's amazement, they saw the first merchant sweating and cramped. He proclaimed his innocence so emphatically that it was immediately clear he had been trying to do something improper. They let him out with laughter and mockery.

The sultan opened the second door, and found the second merchant, and again the crowd laughed mockingly. And the third door, freeing third merchant. And the fourth door, freeing fourth merchant.

The crowd laughed at the four merchants, and wondered how the princess had managed to lock them all in the wardrobe.

The sultan sent someone for the princess and asked her how and why she had managed to get the four merchants into the wardrobe. The princess told him her story. He was taken by her intelligence, her honour, and her beauty. He went to her father and asked for her hand in marriage. Some days later there were universal festivities; the Sultan married the beautiful princess, and her father became rich and happy as he was before.

As for the old woman who gave the plan to the princess -- When the old woman arrived to ask for the payment due to her, the princess gave it happily, and thanked the old woman from the bottom of her heart.