

# The Clever Daughter

## (or The King and the Foal)

A man offended a king whatever the reason was has long been forgotten but some say it went like this...

There was once a poor peasant who had no land, but only a small house, and one daughter. This particular man's wife died leaving himself and his daughter. It seems that she was extremely smart and she was good in every respect.

They lived in total poverty: no house, no land, and no food to eat.

After they had not eaten for a long time, they were desperate. The wise daughter said to her father, "We are poor. We have no land, but the king does. Let's ask the king for land. We can promise to give part to the king."

So they went to the king. The king was generous and he gave them the land. They worked the land. They had food to eat, then they gave part to the king.

When they had dug nearly the whole of the field, they found in the earth a mortar made of pure gold. "Listen," said the father to the girl, "as our lord the King has been so gracious and presented us with the field, we ought to give him this mortar in return for it."

The daughter, however, would not consent to this, and said, "Father, if we have the mortar without having the pestle as well, we shall have to get the pestle. Don't take it to the king. He will ask for the pestle too, which you don't have and then you will get into trouble. He will think you are cheating him. So you had much better say nothing about it." He would, however, not obey her, but took the mortar and carried it to the King, said that he had found it in the cleared land, and asked if he would accept it as a present.

The King took the mortar, and asked if he had found nothing besides that? "No," answered the countryman. Then the King said that he must now bring him the pestle. The peasant said they had not found that, but he might just as well have spoken to the wind.

The king said to him in parting that he had to be back there the next day to tell him what was the most plentiful thing in the world and if he could not tell him that he would be put

to death. The poor man came home and the daughter noticed that he looked extremely sorrowful. She asked him what his trouble was — he looked so cheerless.

“What good will it do me to tell you?” said he.

“Well,” replied the daughter, “perhaps none, except whom else would you tell it to if you didn’t tell me?”

So he told her how things stood.

“And why,” said he, “did you not tell him the answer when you were over at his place?”

“And what could I tell him?”

“Couldn’t you tell him,” said she, “that there was nothing in the world as plentiful as sides?”

“And do you yourself think,” said he, “that sides are the most plentiful things?”

“Oh, don’t you know, dear father,” said she, “that indeed they are? It does not matter at all how plentiful anything is in the world; there are at least two sides to it and there are many things which have more than two sides. There might be, for example, an inside and an outside and a top side and a bottom side and on some things a far side and a near side. You can name sides as being more plentiful than anything else.”

So the following day he went back and he was so happy. “Well,” said the king, “you have come.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” replied the man.

“Do you have an answer to the question?”

“Oh, yes indeed,” he replied.

“Well, then, what is the most plentiful thing in the world?”

“There is nothing in the world as plentiful as sides.”

“Oh, yes there is,” said the king. “I do indeed believe there is.”

“Oh, there is not, by your leave,” said the man, “anything as plentiful as those.”

“And what proof do you have that they are the most plentiful?”

“My proof is,” replied the man, “that there are at least two sides to everything. However plentiful anything is it must have two sides and there are some things which have three sides and others with four sides.”

“I am satisfied,” said the king, “from that answer that you are correct. But you are to be here tomorrow,” he continued, “and you will tell me what is the wealthiest thing in the world.”

The old man went home and he looked just as sad and sorrowful as he had the day before.

“What is troubling you today?” said the daughter. “You look so heavy-hearted.”

“Oh, what use it is to tell anybody or anyone at all what my trouble is? Are they not going to put me to death tomorrow unless I tell the king what is the wealthiest thing in the world?”

“So why didn’t you tell him?”

“What could I tell him?”

“Couldn’t you say to him that there was nothing so wealthy as the sea?”

“So wealthy as the sea! Do you really think so?”

“Oh, I am certain,” said she. “Name anything on earth and the sea is much larger than that and it contains more of everything. And by virtue of that,” said she, “is it not the wealthiest thing in the world?”

So he returned to the king’s palace.

“You have come,” said the king.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” said he. “I have returned.”

“And do you have the solution to the question?”

“Oh, I have,” said he.

“Well then,” said the king, “What is the wealthiest thing in the world?”

“Oh, nothing on earth,” replied the man, “is wealthier than the sea.”

“Oh, yes there is,” said the king. “Am I myself not wealthier than the sea?”

“Oh, no indeed, by your leave, you are not that wealthy. Remember,” he continued, “that the sea is larger than the rest of the world; it is larger than the land and it contains more of everything and for that reason it is wealthiest.”

“I must confess that I am satisfied with that,” said the king. “But you are to be back here tomorrow and if you cannot tell me what is the swiftest thing in the world you shall lose your head.”

The old man returned home and he was very down-hearted when he arrived. “Well,” said the daughter. “What is your trouble now, dear father? You look extremely cheerless.”

“Oh, what difference does it make what is troubling me?” said he. “I will lose my head tomorrow unless I tell the king what is the swiftest thing in the world.”

“And why didn’t you tell him?”

“What could I tell him?” he replied.

“Could you not have told him that there is nothing in the world so swift as thought?”

“And do you yourself think,” asked the old man, “that thought is that swift? Do you really think it is?”

“Oh, don’t I know it is?” she replied. “Couldn’t you yourself think of being in any part of the world at all, far away on the other side of the world? And is there a bird or a horse or any other creature who could go over to the other side of the world as swiftly as your thoughts would travel?”

“That is true,” said the old man.

The next day he went over to the king’s palace. “Well,” said the king, “you have come.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” said the old man. “I have returned once more.”

“Well, then,” said the king. “Do you have a solution to the question?”

“Oh, indeed I have,” said the old man.

“Well, then,” said the king, “What is the swiftest thing on earth?”

“Oh,” said he, “it is thought.”

“Oh, no indeed,” said the king. “I believe I have a horse as swift as that.”

“Indeed no,” said the old man. “There is nothing in the world as swift as thought.”

“And by what means,” said the king, “do you intend to prove that?? What proof do you have that thought is so swift?”

“Oh, by your leave,” he replied, “your thought can be on the other side of the kingdom or the other side of the world and you can be there so swiftly that there is not a horse or a bird nor any other beast who could take you there near as swiftly.”

“Ah,” said the king, “I am satisfied with that answer. Now I am going to ask you another question,” said he, “but this one is easy enough. Who is with you, or are you living alone, or how are you managing?”

“My daughter is keeping house for me,” replied the man, “since she lives with me.”

“Indeed,” said the king. “I am going to ask your daughter’s hand in marriage.”

“Your Majesty, you may go to get her,” said he, “but that is up to her. I will not ask her to marry you nor will I prevent her.”

“That is all right by me,” said the king. “I accept that.”

So the king arrived and he asked her hand in marriage and she was quite willing to marry him. But when the marriage was ready and everything was finished, the king said, “There

will, however, be a condition.”

“Oh very well,” said she. “Let me hear the conditions.”

“There is a condition to be laid down,” said he, “that if anything ever comes between us you must depart and leave the castle.”

“That is all right,” said she, “but I must impose conditions too or I will not be in the least willing to agree to any conditions whatsoever.”

“Well,” replied the king, “that is fitting enough.”

“I wish for conditions to be laid down,” said she, “that if anything comes between us that I leave the castle, but that you permit me to take three loads out of the castle as I am leaving for home.”

“It is fitting enough,” replied the king, “that these conditions be imposed.”

So the conditions were laid down legally enough and they were made binding; they had to be fulfilled if such things should come to pass.

But anyway things were going ahead happily enough and they had a family — a boy was born. And at that time it was the custom to put a child in a cradle and rock him back and forth, so the child was in the cradle; he was perhaps about a year old. But there was a farmer in the region living next to the king who had a mare and the mare had a real and she out ut on the mountain. The king had horses out on the mountain along with a gelding, and, however it occurred, the foal followed one of the horses home to the king’s stable. The king claimed that the foal was his own, that it belonged to him and that he had the right to it since it was with the horse, and the man could not get his foal back. The king was going along with appearances and for this reason the man could not recover the foal, for it seemed that it belonged to the king — that it was his property — having come home with the horse. So the farmer came over to the house one day and the king had gone out hunting — he used to go out hunting with his servants — and complained about this.

“Now,” said she, “come by early in the morning when you think that the king has just arisen, and bring along a bucket of salt and begin sowing it in the field. And the king will come out to see what you are doing and you will say to him that you are shaking salt. And be sure to talk as if you see this as most usual and fitting. And when he asks you whether you believe that the salt you are sprinkling on the field will grow, say to him that it is just as likely that

salt would grow in the ground as it is for a gelding to have a foal. And now,” said she, “I will say no more.”

So the farmer came over early in the morning and he was sprinkling salt on the field — he had a bucket of salt and he was sprinkling it. The king went over to him.

“What are you doing there?”

“Am I not,” replied the farmer, “sprinkling salt?”

“And do you really think that the salt that you sprinkle on the ground will grow?”

“I am not certain that it will,” replied the farmer, “but I think it is just as likely for salt to grow in the ground as it is for a gelding to have a foal.”

“That is certainly true,” said the king.

The king was not happy to part with the foal. It seems that he knew that it was an exceptional foal — the stock was good and it was hard for him to part with it — and he went inside.

“This was your doing,” said he, “giving advice to the farmer.”

“Indeed it was,” replied his wife.

“Well then,” said the king, “I am sure that you remember the conditions.”

“Oh yes,” said she, “I remember them very well. All of them.”

“Then you can get ready and go out of the castle and leave it and go off in whichever direction you please,” said the king.

“Oh, that is all very well,” said she. “But remember that I was to have three loads to take out of the castle when I left. That was the agreement. And if I hold to this agreement then you must hold to your own.”

“Oh, yes indeed,” said he. “That is fitting too. The agreements were set. Take whatever is most precious to you.”

If the king were to go against the agreement that he had made, she could refuse to go from the castle. But he said that that was all right, that she could take the three loads with her.

“But let us have dinner one last time, that we might part as friends,” said the Queen. The King agreed.

Then she secretly ordered a powerful sleeping draught to be brought, to drink farewell to him; the King took a long draught, but she took only a little. He soon fell into a deep sleep, and when she perceived that, she filled a chest of gold and silver and jewels and all sorts of valuables and carried that out and put it outside the castle and then she returned inside. The cradle was in the room and the young lad was in it and I am sure that he was sleeping at the time. She lifted up the cradle, and that was the second load that she was allowed to take out of the castle.

Then she called a servant and took a fair, white, linen cloth and wrapped the King in it, and the servant was forced to carry him into a carriage that stood before the door. She had brought the three loads out of the castle and the castle could be anybody’s then. She drove with him to her own little house.

She laid him in her own little bed, and he slept one day and one night without awakening, and when he awoke he looked round and said, “Good God! where am I?” He called his attendants, but none of them were there. At length his wife came to his bedside and said, “My dear lord and King, you told me I might bring away with me from the palace that which was dearest and most precious in my eyes -- And so I brought with me our child and the means to sustain him well, and yourself.”

Then the King laughed, and laughed again, till the cottage rafters rang. Once again she had outwitted him.

He forgot his pride, climbed out of that bed, got down on his knees, and he begged his beloved wife’s forgiveness. “I have been a fool,” he said, through tears of joy, “please come home with me. You are my treasure.”

And after that, whenever he had to make a difficult decision, he announced to one and all, “We shall consult my wife on this, for she is a most clever woman.”

And he laughed all the way back in the coach. Of course, his Queen sat by him, laughing too.

They never parted any more. And their reign was a long and a merry one.

I should know, I was at their second wedding ceremony and you've never been to such a raucous party more full of laughter. They gave me that mortar as a parting gift but, alas, I was drunk and stumbled my way home through a poor farmer's field and it must have fallen from my bag somewhere in the dark on my way.