

"The Woman who Married a Man Five Times"
Turkey

Once there was young man whose father was a very fine (and wealthy) gentleman. This young man used to look out his window at a feslihanci young woman as she watered the flowers in his family's garden. The young woman wore a pair of golden sandals, and she poured water on the feslihan plants from a silver pitcher.

(A feslihanci young woman tends feslihan, and other, plants and flowers -- she is a gardener.)

One day the son of the gentleman decided to tease the feslihanci young woman. He said, "Every day you water your feslihan flowers. How many leaves does a feslihan plant have?"

"Son of a gentleman, you read and write and therefore you must have great knowledge. Please tell me how many stars are in the sky."

The young man was upset by being asked a question that he could not answer, in reply to his question. The young man said no more and closed the window.

He decided to play a trick on the young woman in order to get his revenge. He did not have to search long for an opportunity to do this, for an illness that befell the young woman's mother shortly after this suggested a suitable trick.

The sick woman craved fish to eat, but fish were not available in their village at that time of year. The young man went to another village and bought some fish. Then he disguised himself as a fisherman and went up and down the streets shouting, "Fish for sale! Fish for sale! Here comes the fisherman!"

When the sick woman heard his cry, she said to her daughter, "My daughter, go out and buy some fish for me."

Opening the door of their house, the feslihanci young woman called out, "Fisherman, come here! I want to buy some of your fish!" When the fisherman came to the door, she asked, "How much do you want for your fish?"

The fisherman responded, "I am not selling these fish for money. I am selling them for a kiss."

When the young woman heard this, she shut the door and reported to her mother what the fisherman had said.

Her mother said, "Well, why don't you let him give you a kiss? After all, he is only a peasant. Who will ever know? Open the door just a bit and let him give you a kiss on the cheek."

The young woman wished to please her mother and serve her the fish that she wanted. She therefore went back to the door, opened it just a crack and allowed herself to be kissed by the fisherman. After kissing her, the fisherman handed her the string of fish and left.

On the following afternoon the young woman again went into the garden to water the feslihan plants. The son of the gentleman began teasing her as he had done before. He said, "Feslihanci young woman, feslihanci young woman, you water the feslihan flowers each day. How many leaves does a feslihan plant have?"

She again replied, "Son of a gentleman, you read and write and therefore you must have great knowledge. Please tell me how many stars are in the sky."

The young man continued, "I may not be able to tell you that, but I can tell you that you bought fish from me for a kiss."

The young woman was shocked and disturbed to discover that he was the man from whom she had bought the fish for a kiss.

The young woman's mother recovered, but soon afterward the son of the gentleman became ill. Doctors were called from many places to attempt a cure. Every day the house was filled with people coming and going.

Late one evening the feslihanci young woman entered the house when most others were leaving. She went unnoticed to the patient's room. She was wearing a fur coat inside of which she had sewed many small bells. Going to the patient's bed, she shook her coat over him. The jingling of the bells awakened him.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"I am Azrail," she said.

[Azrail is the angel of death who comes to collect souls.]

"You may do with me what you will, as long as you do not take my life," said the young man.

"I am Azrail," she said again.

And he repeated, "You may do with me whatever you want, but please do not take my life."

"Uncover your buttocks," said the young woman. She had brought with her a pair of sheep lungs through which were stuck through with many long canvas needles. She now struck the man's buttocks repeatedly with the pair of lungs, inflicting dozens of small cuts. Although he cried loudly in pain, no one else in the house heard him, and the young woman slipped away unnoticed.

The son of the gentleman was confined to his bed for another six months -- recovering from his illness, and from the cuts on his buttocks.

One day during this recovery period, he asked his attendants to place him in his armchair before the window. Looking out upon the garden, he saw the feslihanci young woman again watering the flowers.

He decided to tease her again. He called out through the open window, "Feslihanci young woman, wonderful to see you watering the flowers. How many leaves are there on a feslihan plant?"

The young woman responded as usual, "Son of a gentleman, you read and write and therefore you must have great knowledge. Please tell me how many stars are in the sky."

"I do not know the answer to that question, but I know that you allowed yourself to be kissed for a string of fish," he replied again.

She added, "And I know that you have stayed in bed for months as a result of my paddling your backside with sheep lungs full of needles."

The young man now wondered what he could do to take revenge against the young woman. However, he also realised he had developed a certain affection for her. At the same time, the feslihanci young woman was beginning to feel some affection for him too.

❁❁❁ -- The First Marriage

A few days later the young man asked his mother, "Mother, can you arrange to have me married to the feslihanci young woman?"

His mother was surprised about her son's choice, but in time she gave her blessing and a matchmaker was sent to the young woman's home. It was agreed that the feslihanci young woman would become the bride of the young man.

Before she went to live at his home, the feslihanci young woman put into her chest a hammer, a pair of pliers, an adze, and several other carpentry tools which she imagined might be useful.

Meanwhile, the young man had dug beneath his house a large earth cellar. He had this cellar appointed in a comfortable and even luxurious manner. This was to be his bride's private chamber.

After the wedding ceremonies had been completed, the bride, wearing a veil, was taken to the groom's house and immediately put into the cellar.

She was permitted to leave the underground chamber whenever she wanted, but the underground chamber is where she received food and drink every day, and that is where she slept

❁❁❁ -- The Second Marriage (in Aleppo)

Some time later it became necessary for the young man to go to Aleppo on business.

Speaking through the cellar window, he said, "Feslihanci young woman, I have to go to Aleppo on business, and I may be there for as long as a year. I shall leave you with provisions enough to last that long, and so you should not suffer by my absence."

"I shall never suffer as long as you are alive," the young woman said, flattering her husband. "What kind of horse will you ride, and what color suit will you wear?"

"I shall ride a black horse and wear a black suit," he said.

During the time that she had been living in the earth cellar, the young woman had used her carpentry tools to dig and support a tunnel that led to some nearby woods, where her mother's house was located.

She used this tunnel frequently, and now she took the money which her husband had left her to her mother's house and arranged to have bought for her a black horse and a black suit just like his.

Before the young man departed on his journey, he came to the cellar window again and said, "Feslihanci young woman, I am leaving now."

She said, "May Allah speed you on your way."

As soon as her husband left, the young woman went to her mother's house. She left the food and most of the money there with her mother, and she ordered that a black horse and a suit of black clothes be purchased for her. She made preparations to leave on the journey at about the same time that her husband did.

On the day her husband set out for his journey, she dressed in her black suit, disguised herself as a man, mounted her black horse, and rode off to overtake him. She caught up with him in the outskirts of the city.

When he saw her, he called, "Where are you going, young man?"

"Tell me first where you are going."

"I am going to Aleppo," he said.

"I am going there too," she said.

He said, "Our suits and our horses are alike, and we are both going to Aleppo. We can be friends during this trip."

They went towards Aleppo, eating and drinking together, riding, and sitting together at resting places.

When they arrived at Aleppo, they went to a coffeehouse. There, in her conversation with other customers, the young woman began to search for a witch. In those days there were witches everywhere. She asked those at the coffeehouse to direct her to the home of a witch. "There is the home of a witch over there," they said, pointing down the street.

When the feslihanci young woman went to this house, she said to the old woman who opened the door, "O grandmother, please let me come in to talk with you."

After she had entered the house and changed her garments to those of a woman, she said, "I want you to sell me to a young man who has just arrived at the coffeehouse. Go there and sell me to him as a bride. You could say I am your daughter, and that my husband has recently died. I shall give you a good payment of gold."

The witch went to the coffeehouse and asked the owner, "Where is the young man who just arrived here?"

The owner went to the young man and said, "Young man, you are being asked for by someone."

The young man went to the door, where the witch asked him, "Where are you from, young man? Are you married or single?"

"I am from such and such a place," he said, "and I am single."

"Well, I have a beautiful young daughter. Her husband died some time ago. Would you like to buy her as your bride? How long will you remain here in Aleppo?"

"I shall be staying here for a year," he said.

"After that you could take her with you, or leave her here," said the old woman.

He then paid the old woman the bride price that she asked.

The feslihanci young woman rearranged her hair, changed her make-up, and dressed in local-style clothing -- so that the young man did not recognise her.

And so the young man and the feslihanci young woman were married -- that is, unbeknownst to him -- they were re-married. They lived together during the year he was in Aleppo, and during this time she bore him a son.

When the child was three days old, the young man brought a sword and a belt for his son, and said to his wife, "My time here has ended. I must leave, but I cannot take you with me, for our son is still too young to survive the journey. I am giving you enough money to support the two of you for at least a year. I shall return later to get you and the child. But if I do not come back, he will find me wherever I am."

He still did not know that the child's mother was the feslihanci young woman, for he thought she was the daughter of a witch.

The young man mounted his horse and rode away toward home.

The feslihanci young woman also made preparations to leave Aleppo. Because the baby was very young, she stretched him along a small board and wrapped him in swaddling clothes so that he would not be injured during the trip home. Taking the baby in one arm, she mounted her horse and followed her husband at a great enough distance so that she would not be detected. Whenever her husband stopped, she also stopped in order to keep the distance between them.

When she arrived back home, she went first to her mother's house and left the baby there. Then, using her tunnel, she went alone to the cellar in her husband's family's house.

Soon after young man reached his home, he went to the cellar window and called, "Feslihanci woman!"

"Yes, sir?" she answered.

"How are you? Have you been bored during my absence?"

"No, sir. Thanks to you, I have not been bored. I have gotten along quite well."

"Did you have sufficient money?"

"Of course I did," she said.

The young man went upstairs and did not see his wife again for some time.

❁❁❁ -- The Third Marriage (in India)

After a few months, he found it necessary to leave again for business, this time to India. He went to the cellar window and said, "Feslihanci woman, I must go to India for a year."

"Go, then, sir. I wish you good luck. What kind of horse will you ride, and what color suit will you wear?"

"This time I shall ride a red horse and wear a red suit."

Before he bade her farewell, he left her with enough food and money to support her for a year.

Hastily taking the food and the money to her mother's house, she said to her mother, "Please go as quickly as possible and buy me a red horse and a red suit of clothes!"

After these purchases had been made, the young woman put on the red suit, disguised herself as a man, and rode off on her red horse. Again she overtook the young man at the edge of the city.

When the young man saw her, he thought, "This is strange. Twice now when I have reached this point in my travel I have met a person wearing clothes like mine and riding a horse of the same color."

"Where are you going?" the stranger asked him.

"To India."

"So am I," said the stranger. "Let us ride together."

So they traveled together, eating and drinking together. After a very long journey, they finally reached the city in India where the young man had business to attend to.

There the young man proceeded to a coffeehouse, and his companion went in search of a witch. After the young woman (who was disguised as a man) had asked directions from several people, she was taken to the home of a witch.

All happened here as in the previous city. Once again the young man purchased the witch's daughter as a wife.

Once again -- the young man and young woman were married, although again he did not recognise her because she rearranged her hair, changed her make-up, and dressed in local-style clothing

They lived together as husband and wife in that Indian city for a year. During that time the feslihanci young woman bore her husband another male child.

And once again -- When the child was three days old, the young man brought a sword and a belt for his son, and said to his wife, "My time here has ended. I must leave, but I cannot take you with me, for our son is still too young to survive the journey. I am giving you enough money to support the two of you for at least a year. I shall return later to get you and the child. But if I do not come back, he will find me wherever I am."

The young woman again reached their village before her husband did. Again she first went to her mother's house, and left her second son there -- and then returned to her cellar chamber.

Soon after the young man arrived home, he went to the window of the earth cellar. "Feslihanci woman, Greetings!" he called. "What have you been doing during my absence? Are you well? Have you been bored?"

"Welcome home! No, I have not been bored, thanks to you. I have enjoyed myself."

"Well, I have returned."

"Welcome home!" she said again.

❁❁❁ -- The Fourth Marriage (in Yemen)

After he had been home for only three months, it again became necessary for him to journey to a distant land, this time to Yemen, to attend to business matters there.

Going to the cellar window, he said, "Feslihanci young woman, I shall be gone again for a year to attend to matters of business. This time I must go to Yemen."

She answered, "Well, if you must go, go happily and come back again happily. What kind of horse will you ride this time, and what color suit will you wear?"

"This time I shall ride a white horse and wear a white suit," he answered.

He left enough money and enough provisions to take care of her needs for a year or so.

Now for a 3rd time -- the young woman took the food and money to her mother's house. This time she ordered that a white horse and a suit of white clothes be purchased for her, and she made preparations to leave on this 3rd journey at about the same time that her husband did.

On the day her husband began his journey, the young woman put on the white clothing and again disguised herself as a man. Riding swiftly after her husband, she overtook him just as he was leaving the city.

"O friend, where are you going?" she asked him.

"I am on my way to Yemen."

"That is where I am going too. Shall we be traveling companions on this trip?"

The young man thought to himself, "This is the strangest thing! Every time I reach this point, a fellow comes along riding a horse like my own, wearing clothes of the same color, and going to the same place that I am going. It is indeed very strange!"

All happened as it had happened twice before. For the 3rd time, the young man married a young woman who he thought was a local witch's daughter. This time, the young woman bore him a daughter.

After a year, he told his wife the time had come for him to go home. He gave money for support, and said to his wife, "My time in Yemen has been completed. I must go but we cannot possibly take a three-day-old child on a long journey. I shall leave enough money and food to support the two of you for over a year. If possible, I will come for you within that time."

He also bought a golden bowl for his daughter. Giving it to the girl's mother, he said, "Someday my daughter will find me, wherever I am."

A third time, he went home -- and so did she, stopping at her mother's house first. There she left her daughter, to join her two sons.

Then she rushed back to her cellar chamber, just in time to answer her husband cheerfully when he called out to her, Hello, Feslihanci woman! How are you?"

"I am fine!" she answered.

"Were you bored during my absence?"

"No, sir. Thanks to you, I have never been bored. I have had an excellent time."

"Well, now I have returned."

"Welcome!" she said.

❁❁❁ -- The Fifth Marriage

After two years at home, the son of the gentleman went to his mother and said, "Mother, will you make arrangements to have me married again? I shall keep the feslihanci young woman locked in the cellar, but I want to marry someone else also."

Another young woman was found for him, and a marriage agreement was reached with her parents. When the wedding ceremonies began, he said, "I married a woman in Aleppo and left her there. I married another woman in India and left her there. I also married a woman in Yemen and left her there. And I have a wife who I keep down in the cellar. So this new bride would be the fifth woman I would marry."

On the final day of the wedding, however, the son of the gentleman fell seriously ill and was put to bed. He was so sick that when it was necessary to turn him in his bed, they did so by lifting one side of his sheet and rolling him carefully. Lifting his body caused too much pain.

During the delay in the wedding ceremony, the feslihanci young woman decided to send a message to her husband by means of their children. She taught each one of them what to say when they went to visit him.

The older boy was to say, "O man of Aleppo!"

The younger son was to say, "What is the matter, Indian gentleman?"

And the daughter was to say, "They caught us by the arm and threw us out of our father's house in Yemen!"

As the three children went to the sick man's house, the boys wore the belts and carried the swords that their father had given them, and the girl carried her golden bowl.

When they knocked on the door, an attendant came and said, "Get out of here! There is a sick man here. This is no place for children!"

The oldest child said, "O man of Aleppo!"

The second child said, "What is the matter, Indian gentleman?"

The third child said, "They caught us by the arm and threw us out of our father's house in Yemen!"

In his bed the young man heard the discussion at the door and asked about it. The attendant said, "There are some children here who are talking about Aleppo, India, and Yemen, but I cannot make any sense of what they are saying."

"Let the children come here," said the young man.

When the children were permitted to enter the room, they went and stood before their father in a row. He recognized the belts worn by the boys and the swords that they carried, for he himself had determined the design of these objects. He also recognized the golden bowl in the hands of the little girl.

"What is the matter, children? Speak!" he said.

"O man of Aleppo!" said the older boy.

The young man thought, "He must be my child born in Aleppo!"

"What is the matter, Indian gentleman?" said the younger boy.

The young man thought, "He may be the one born in India!"

"They caught us by the arm and threw us out of our father's house in Yemen," said the little girl.

The young man thought, "The child born in Yemen was a girl, and she would by now be the size of this child!"

The young man then said to two attendants, "Lift me by my armpits to a sitting position." When they had done this, he ordered, "Now put my overcoat over my shoulders."

Then addressing the children he asked, "Where are your mothers?" He supposed that their mothers were three different people and that these women having heard about the wedding, had come there from Aleppo, India, and Yemen.

All three children pointed toward the earth cellar and said, "Our mother is down there."

"Take me to your mother," he said. With his overcoat over his shoulders, he walked very slowly and painfully, holding one son by the hand on the right side and the other on the left. The little girl walked ahead.

When the four of them came before the earth cellar, the children said, "Our mother is here."

"Feslihanci young woman!" cried the son of the gentleman.

"Yes, sir?" she answered.

"Whose children are these?"

"They are half yours and half mine."

"Please open the door!" he said.

She opened the door for them. A chair was brought for the young man. Then the young woman related from beginning to end all that had happened: "We did this, we did that, and these three children are ours."

The young man was astonished by all that he heard. When the feslihanci young woman had finished her account, he sat in silence for some time. Then he looked directly into his wife's eyes and quietly said, "Well done!"

The wedding ceremony with the other woman that was only half-finished remained that way. The rest of the wedding was canceled. To the woman who was to have become his fifth bride he said, "If you like, from now on you could be my sister, and you could live in our home as my sister. Or if you might prefer, the partial ceremony we had could be annulled."

So instead of marrying the new young woman, since all the preparations for a wedding had been made -- the young man re-married the feslihanci young woman once again -- marrying her for the fifth time! She then moved upstairs, and they lived very happily together.