

TURKEY



This story has several classic elements found in many tales. First, there's the powerful ruler who's in search of a suitable husband for his daughter. Then there's the young man who triumphs despite what others think of him. Last but not least, there's a happy-ever-after ending.

The Most Wonderful Gift



ong, long ago there lived a mighty sultan who loved his only daughter dearly. When the time came for her to marry, the sultan began to search for a suitable husband. How would he choose just one from among the many eligible princes of neighboring kingdoms? The sultan thought this over, then decided to send out a proclamation that read, "The prince who brings me the most wonderful gift in the world shall have my daughter's hand in marriage."

You can just imagine the rare and precious gifts the anxious young princes brought before the mighty sultan. There were rainbow-colored pearls from the deepest ocean beds that brought rain when tossed into the air. There were trees that bore pomegranates with seeds of purest gold, and birds in cages whose songs were guaranteed to banish sadness. The sultan thanked the princes for their gifts, but none of the gifts stood out above the rest.

It so happened that in a land far away there lived three princes—

brothers, in fact—who were all of marrying age. When they learned of the sultan's search for a worthy husband, they decided to set out together to find suitable gifts. They walked from their home to the bazaar, or marketplace, each carrying a sack filled with gold.

The eldest brother wasted no time choosing a gift. He was intrigued by a small mirror in which a person could see what was happening anywhere in the world.


"This is truly a special gift," thought the prince, and handed over his sack of gold in exchange for the looking glass.

The second brother, a rather adventurous young man, stopped to admire a beautifully woven carpet. This was no ordinary rug, however. It was a magic carpet on which a person could fly any distance in the twinkling of an eye. "Surely there is no finer gift," declared the second prince, paying for the carpet with his sack of gold.

The youngest brother had a more difficult time making up his mind. Had it not been for the lemon seller singing "Wonderful lemons! Lemons for sale!" the youngest prince might have left the bazaar empty-handed. "What makes these lemons so wonderful?" he asked the merchant.

"Ah, the juice from one of these lemons will cure any illness there is," the merchant replied. The prince considered this for a moment, then bought one of the lemons. The two older brothers scoffed at the youngest prince when they saw he had purchased a mere lemon—and for a whole sack of gold!





They had always suspected their kindhearted brother wasn't that smart. But there wasn't much time to tease him, for at that moment the eldest brother was showing off his mirror, and what should they see in its glass but the sultan's daughter, lying deathly pale in her bed.

"Quickly!" commanded the second brother. "Let us travel there at once!" The three brothers climbed onto the flying carpet, and before they knew it they found themselves at the sultan's palace. They were met by the sultan, who had tears in his eyes. "Please go away," he begged. "My daughter, the princess, is gravely ill."

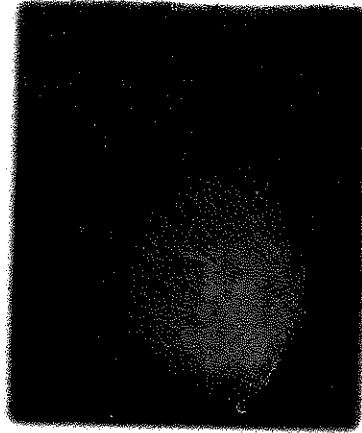
The youngest brother stepped forward and spoke. "Sire," he said, bowing low, "please accept this lemon. Its juice will cure your daughter of whatever ails her."

Well, by now you've probably guessed that indeed the princess was cured by this magical lemon. The sultan was delighted and thanked the brothers. Only then did he ask, "But what brings you three here today?"

The eldest brother spoke first. "We have come to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage. Each of us has brought a gift. May I show you mine?" He handed the mirror to the sultan, explaining, "This is the mirror in which we saw that the princess was ill, your Majesty. Not only that, with this mirror you will be able to keep an eye on your entire kingdom. I think you will agree it is a most worthy gift."

"Ah, yes," admitted the sultan, "your mirror played a most important role in saving my beloved daughter. And it would make my job as ruler a good deal simpler."

"But," interrupted the second brother, "were it not for my gift, the flying carpet, we would not have been able to travel here so swiftly. This same carpet will take you anywhere you choose to go, in less time



than my own."

"True, my daughter was very close to death, and your speedy arrival saved her," said the sultan. "This carpet would prove very useful for traveling about my vast domain." Turning to the youngest prince, he asked, "And what gift have you brought?"

The youngest prince held up what was left of the lemon. "This lemon was my gift," he replied.

The other brothers began to laugh, and the sultan himself could not help from smiling. It was at that moment that the princess spoke. "The mirror and the carpet are certainly fine gifts," she began, "and I am grateful for the roles they played today. But it was the lemon that restored my life, and surely life is the most wonderful gift of all."

"Quite right you are!" exclaimed the sultan, hugging first his daughter and then the youngest prince. "Your gift is the greatest by far, and I am pleased to offer you my daughter's hand in marriage, with my blessing."

And so the youngest prince and the princess were married. Theirs was a truly magnificent wedding, followed by a long and happy marriage. May we all be so lucky!

