

A STUPID HUSBAND AND HIS CLEVER WIFE KASHMIRI FOLK-TALE

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A STUPID HUSBAND AND HIS CLEVER WIFE^[0]

A merchant when dying called his beloved and only son to his bedside and said, “Dear son, I am about to depart, and shall not return. You will be left alone in the world. I charge you to remember five pieces of advice which I now give you. Walk not in the sunshine from your house to the shop. Let *piláv* be your daily food. Take unto yourself a fresh wife every week. On wishing to drink wine go to the vat and drink it. If you want to gamble, then gamble with experienced gamblers.”

Having spoken these words the merchant groaned and gave up the ghost.

Now the son, although good and obedient in all things, was also a very stupid fellow. He did not in the least comprehend his father’s real meaning. He thought that these words were to be understood literally, and therefore immediately set about erecting a covered way from his house to the place of business. It cost him a large sum of money, and seemed most needless and ridiculous. Some of his friends suspected that he was mad, and others that he was proud. However, he minded not their remarks and coldness, but finished the building, and every day walked beneath it in the shade to and fro from his house to the shop.

He also ordered the cook to prepare *piláv* for him every day, and ate nothing else, as his father had directed him.

In the matter of getting a fresh wife every week he experienced very great difficulty. Some of the wives, by reason of their ugliness, or bad tempers, or slovenly manners, or unfaithfulness and other wickednesses, deserved to be turned off. But there were others who were beautiful, and good, and kind, and loving, and clean, and tidy, and these the young merchant found it extremely hard to get rid of. He had to provoke them to

anger or to indifference before he could invent an excuse for sending them away. Many many poor women were thus ruined by him.

At last an exceedingly clever woman heard of the deceased merchant's advice, and having perceived the true meaning, she determined to try and arrange for her marriage with the young merchant. Being both beautiful and clever, she soon succeeded. The young merchant could not detect any fault in her or her work, though he was constantly on the watch for anything wrong. She did everything strictly according to his wishes, and was exceedingly careful about her speech, and dress, and manner, and work. Six days thus passed. On the seventh and last day of the week, his last opportunity, the young merchant ordered her to have some fish *piláv* ready for his evening meal, intending to grumble with it, and to pretend that he wanted a different kind of fish to that prepared. His wife promised that it should be ready for him as soon as he returned.

Soon after he left she went to the *bázár* and purchased two or three kinds of fish. At the proper time she prepared them in different ways, some with spices, and some without spices, some with sugar, some with salt, and so on. On the young merchant's return the dinner was waiting.

"Is dinner ready?" he shouted.

"Yes," replied the wife, and immediately put a dish of steaming sweet *piláv* in front of him.

"Oh!" he cried in a rage, "I want a salt *piláv*."

"Very well," she replied. "I thought perhaps you would, and so got that also ready. Here it is," and she set a big dish of steaming salt *piláv* before him.

"Yes, yes," said he, still in a rage apparently, "but not this kind of fish. It is all bone."

"Very well," she replied; "then have this kind."

"But I don't mean this kind," he shouted; and he looked as if he would like to throw the contents of the dish at her head. "I would sooner eat dung than this."

"Then have it," she replied, "by all means."

Saying this, she kicked aside a small basket and discovered to his astonished gaze the dung of some animal that had been prowling about the place while she was preparing the dinner, but which she had not had time to remove, and therefore had thrown a basket over it, lest her husband should notice it and be offended.

Thoroughly defeated, the young merchant then said no more. After eating a little from two or three of the dishes he went to bed. During the night his wife made him promise to visit her father's house on the morrow, and to spend the day there.

In the morning the young merchant and his wife went together to the house of the latter. On arrival the wife told her parents all that had happened to her and all her secrets, and begged them not to cook anything special on account of their visit, but to prepare simply some *phuhurih*^[1] and give it to her when she should ask for it. They said that they would do so.

When they had been there some hours she took her husband into a little room, and asked him to wait there for the dinner, which would be ready presently. The young merchant waited a long time, until at last he got so hungry that he went and called his wife and entreated her to bring something to eat.

"Yes," she said, "in a few minutes. We are waiting for other guests, who ought to have been here a long time ago. As soon as they arrive the food will be served up."

"But I am too hungry to wait," said the young merchant. "Give me something to eat at once. I do not wish to eat with these people, if your parents will excuse me."

"Very well," she replied; "but there is nothing but *phuhurih*. If you like to have that, I will go and bring it."

"All right," he said. "Bring it."

So she went and fetched some *phuhurih*, and he ate it gladly. When he had finished the plateful he said, "The taste of this *phuhur* is better than *piláv* to me at this time."

Deeming it a good opportunity, she said, "Oh, why, then, do you always eat *piláv* in your house?"

"Because my father ordered me to do this, just before he died," he replied.

"Nonsense," said she, "you have mistaken his meaning."

"No, I have not," he said. "He advised me on several other points also." He then told her all that his father had said to him.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "On this account you built the covered way from the house to the shop, you eat *piláv* every day, and marry a wife every week! Are you really so stupid as to suppose for one moment that your wise and kind father wished you thus to understand him? Why, such a course of

life will very soon bring you to ruin, besides making your life miserable and your name a reproach in the land! Listen! When your father advised you to go and come from your shop in the shade he meant that you should attend to your business, rising up early and retiring late, if you wished to prosper and to become great. When he told you to eat *piláv* every day, he meant that you should be economical in the way of food, and eat only to satisfy hunger. When he said, ‘Marry a new wife every week’ he meant that you should not be too much with your wife. When the wife is away you want her. If you saw your wife only once a week you would return to her as to a new wife and enjoy her society more.”

“Alas! alas!” he cried, “what have I been doing? How foolishly have I acted! O my dear father, that I should have thus misunderstood you! My dear wife, you have spoken wisely. Henceforth I will endeavour to atone for my stupidity. But you have not explained the rest of my father’s words, that I may know what else to do.”

“I will tell you,” she replied. “But let us first go and bid my parents good-bye. I will explain the meaning to you on the way home.”

As they were walking back she turned aside to a gambling-den, and showed her husband the wretchedness and villainy depicted on the countenances of nearly every one of the company.

“Look,” she said, “at their terrible condition and be warned. Your father evidently wished you to see such a sight, that you might shun the path that leads to this state.”

Then she took him to a large wine-shop that was near their house, and pointing to the immense vats of wine, told him to climb one of them and drink to his heart’s content. He went up the ladder and looked over into the vat, but the stench was so great that he did not wish to remain there a moment, much less to drink.

“I will not drink any of the wine to-day,” he said on reaching the bottom of the ladder.

“This is precisely the conclusion your father wished to arrive at,” she said; “and therefore he told you to go and drink the wine from the vat whenever you wished to drink it.”

“I see, I see,” he replied. “Let us go home.”

[0] Narrator’s name, Pandit Makund Báýú, Suthú, Srínagar. ↑

[1] The plural of *phuhur*, burnt rice or bread. ↑

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