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The Princess in the Box

Once there was a padishah who had the most beautiful daughter in the world. During the years when the girl was growing up, she and her father had between them no conflict of any kind. The ruler always wanted the best of everything for his daughter.

When the girl reached the age of eighteen, the padishah thought that it was time for the princess to be married. He decided to have her wed his best friend, a pleasant and kind man of his own age. When the padishah informed his daughter about this decision, the girl was very upset. She said, "I am very young, but your friend is much older than I am. We would not make a well-matched couple. Please do not force me to marry him." But no matter what she said to him, her father refused to change his mind. He was determined to have her marry his best friend.

As the wedding day was approaching, the padishah asked his daughter, "What would you like as a wedding

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gift from me?"

The princess thought for awhile, and then she said to her father, "I should like a box large enough for me to enter, and in that box there should be this and item and some food.

The ruler could not understand why she should like a playhouse. He said, "Perhaps you have not yet grown up enough to be married, for sometimes you act like a little girl. But never mind that now. You have made your choice of a wedding gift, and I shall see to it that the box is constructed." The ruler called designers and carpenters and had them construct a large, beautiful box. After that, he had the box stocked with the items she had requested and then ordered that it be placed in her room.

To the long and very expensive celebration of his daughter's wedding, the padishah had invited members of royal families from all over the world. There were many princes and princesses from other lands who arrived to participate in the festivities. But after all of the guests had arrived and the celebration was about to begin, the bride could not be found. Everyone began searching for the girl, but she seemed to have disappeared completely. The alarmed father finally had no choice but to

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cancel the wedding arrangements. His anguish became so great that he grew ill and had to be confined to his bed. He wondered constantly whether his daughter had run away or perhaps had even committed suicide. He said to himself, "I wish now that I had listened to my daughter's complaint and not insisted that she marry a much older man."

The padishah now felt great sorrow. He said to his attendants, "Many of the things I see throughout the palace will make me grieve even more for my lost daughter. Sell whichever of her possessions people will buy, and give the rest to the poor." While some people were buying a few of the belongings of the princess, a foreign prince observed the beautifully crafted box in her room. He bought that box, ordering several servants to take it to his home and place it in his room. After that, the rest of the princess' possessions were given to poor people, as the padishah had ordered.

The foreign prince who had bought the elegant box was still quite young, and when he returned to his own country, he continued attending school. He woke up the morning after he had returned, ate some of the breakfast that had been brought to his room, and set out for school.

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After he had departed, the girl who had been in the box all this time came forth from her hiding place. She bathed and then ate the food that remained on the prince's breakfast tray. She continued living this way for several days.

After awhile, however, the prince sensed that something strange was going on in his room. Towels which he had not used were becoming soiled. Food left on his breakfast tray disappeared. He decided to find out who had been using those towels and who had eaten the food remaining on his tray. The next day, therefore, he arose as usual, ate some of his breakfast, and then pretended to depart for school. But he did not in fact leave the room. Instead, he hid behind the bed and watched quietly.

Thinking that the young man had departed, the princess came forth from the box. She bathed, as usual, and then ate some of the left-over food. After that, she lay on the prince's comfortable bed to rest. As she was rising to return to her box, however, the prince sprang forth from his concealment and seized her by the arm. Taking one look at the girl, he immediately fell in love with her. He thought, "O Allah, this is the girl for whom I have

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been searching. She is extremely beautiful." Then he asked her, "What are you doing here? Why are you living in this box here in my room? Do you not have a family?"

"I am a princess. My father is the ruler of the land where you bought this box. My father was going to force me to marry a man much older than I am, and so I disappeared by hiding in the box."

The prince and the princess sat on the edge of the bed and talked at great length. Then the prince said, "I know that this is very sudden, but I must admit that I have fallen in love with you. Would you be willing to marry me?"

The princess thought for awhile, and even though she liked him, she said, "Let us first become better acquainted with each other. Then if we feel that we would make a good match, we could be married." After they had spent several pleasant days together, they decided that they should indeed get married.

The princess said, "I know that my father loves me very much, and I am sure that he is holding himself responsible for my disappearance. He must be very upset by my absence from home. Please invite him to your wedding

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without telling him that I am your bride. I want him to understand the mistake that he made."

The prince did as his bride requested, inviting her father to the royal palace where the wedding was to be held. The father of the princess accepted the invitation simply as a courtesy to the royal family of a neighboring land. When he arrived at the palace of that land, however, he was amazed at what he saw. There before him was his daughter dressed in a gorgeous wedding gown. The father and daughter cried as they hugged each other. Then the padishah promised that he would never again try to force her to do anything she did not wish to do.