

ALL FOR A PANSÀ

(from India)

There lived in the valley a very wealthy merchant who was not at all happy with his only son. The boy showed no signs of intelligence or creativity, much less any willingness to work. His mother always thought the best of him, however, and was constantly making excuses for him.

When the lad reached the age to marry, his mother begged the merchant to seek a proper wife for him. The merchant, however, was too much ashamed of his lazy son, and in his own mind had fully decided never to have him married. But the mother had set her heart on this. It was the one thing that she had been looking forward to for years. To have her son remain a bachelor all his life would be unthinkable. She simply would not agree to this for a moment.

And so she urged excuses for her son. She claimed to have now and again noticed extraordinary qualities of wisdom and intelligence in him. Her speaking in this way only annoyed the merchant. "Look here," the merchant said to his wife one day, when she had been praising her son, "I have heard this many times before, but you have never once proved it. I do not believe there is a particle of truth in anything that you say. Mothers are blind. However, to satisfy you, I will give the fool another chance. Send for him, and give him this one small coin, this pànsa. Tell him to go to the bazaar, and with this one pànsa to buy one item. That one item must be something to eat, something to drink, something to chew on, something to plant in the garden, and some food for the cow."

The mother told the boy those instructions, gave him the coin, and the boy left.

When he came to the river, he became alarmed and wondered, "What can be bought for only one pànsa -- to eat and drink and do all the other things my mother asks for? Surely this is an impossible task!"

At that moment the daughter of an ironsmith came up. Seeing the lad's unhappy expression, she asked him what was the matter. He told everything his mother had ordered him to do.

"I know what you can do," she said.

"Go and buy a watermelon with one pànsa," said the girl. "It provides something to eat, something to drink, something to chew upon, something to plant in the garden, and some food for the cow. Give it to your parents, and they will be pleased."

And so this is exactly what the boy did.

When the merchant's wife saw the cleverness of her son she was very glad.

"Look," she said to her husband as soon as he came home, "this is our son's work."

"Actually, mother," said the boy, "the daughter of an ironsmith advised me to do this."

Nevertheless, the father was impressed that the lad had found such a fine solution. And so they invited the family of the ironsmith to their house for dinner. Both parents were pleased to see love bloom between the two young people. And so the daughter of the ironsmith married the merchant's son, and the lad became a hard-working young husband, and they all lived happily ever after.