JUSTICE

One day Suzan was on her way to the king's castle, which was situated by a great lake. Here rush and reed grew and many birds sang. Outside the castle Suzan could see the guards, but they would not let her in.

But Suzan had seen that the king was standing near to a window in the castle. So she asked the guards to look up there, when they saw the king nod his head, they let her in anyway. Suzan had never been here before. But, the king knew her from her school. She had once given him a bouquet of flowers at a celebration. A king remembers such events. And Suzan is good at remembering, too; she wants to ask the king about something very important.

Inside the gateway there was a butler; he showed her the way to the throne room. He bowed for her, as if she were a queen from a foreign country. Then he walked with her through a lot of shining halls to the door of the throne room.

As the door opened, he disappeared so quietly, that you could not hear him leave. In the nearness of a king on his throne you really have to be quiet!

That was why Suzan tiptoed towards the throne.

How wonderful it was! Made from gold and with emeralds and rubies at its sides, and with ivory on its legs.

"I am glad you came," the king said nodding to a man, who was standing by the window writing. His nod meant that the man had to write down every spoken word. "What is your name?"

"Suzan."

"Of course. You gave me flowers at your school, eh?"

"Sure," Suzan said. "Do you really remember?"

"That sort of thing I do remember. But I think you want to tell me something."

"Sure. You are the one in charge in this country, aren't you?"

"They say so."

"Are there problems that you cannot solve?"

The scribe stopped for a moment. He did not know whether to write Suzan's words down. But the king nodded again, so he continued his writing. But frowning.

"Sure. Then I ask my advisers. I do not have many of them. The cleverest of them is now standing by the window. He is able to write and to recall and to figure out different things."

"I want to ask you, why all the old forests of our country are being felled?"

"How do you know that?"

"I've seen it, and my Mums told me. Why do you not leave the forests alone?"

"I will tell you." He got up as if he were going to hold a speech. Then he shook his head and asked the scribe, "Scribe, fetch the thick books in the cupboard!" The scribe fetched the protocols and started to turn over the leaves.

"I don't understand why you cannot recall why you decided to fell the forests," Suzan said.

"Neither do I. But wait a minute and you'll see!"

The scribe fumbled with the protocols, and finally he found the page he looked for. "Here it is Your Majesty--houses are to be built for all citizens in the country, especially for those without a house."

"What has that to do with the forest?" the king asked.

The scribe cleared his throat for a moment. "Perhaps because the houses are expected to be situated on the place where the forests have been."

"Yes, that's it! We have to fell the forests to build all those houses," the king proclaimed.

"How did you find out?" Suzan said. "How do people really find out the value of

things? What has the greatest value, houses or forests?"

The scribe fumbled again, but he could not find the answer in the protocols. So the king said: "I cannot answer your question. Politics is not easy."

But Suzan said: "What if you tore down all the houses and planted trees instead?"

The king scratched his hair. "I never thought of that! What do you say, scribe?"

But he could not answer when it was not in the protocols.

"I want to tell you a story," Suzan said.

"Great," the king said. "I love stories, especially the true ones."

Especially the true ones, the scribe wrote.

And then Suzan began her story: "Once upon a time there was a squire who discovered that one of his grooms stole his corn and sold it in town. He had him caught and he was led into the barn where he was questioned. The groom kept saying that he had not stolen anything. The squire was stubborn, saying, 'I'll come again in an hour, and then you must admit your crime.'

"Then he rode on his horse to the rye-field, which was being cut. With satisfaction he saw the hundreds of women cutting the field. Then one of the women came up to him. She fell down on her knees, weeping, 'Good squire, please spare my son! He is not guilty!'

"'How do you know that I have him in the barn?'

"'They all say so. Good squire--he has not stolen. Please spare his life. I cannot do without his work and money. Please show mercy!'

"The squire looked down upon her, thinking deeply. Then he said, 'You are a good woman. Listen, if you can cut this whole field of rye in one day without help from anyone, I shall spare your son's life. But you have to finish your work before sunset tomorrow. If you have not finished, your son shall hang.'

"The woman knelt at his feet, saying, 'Good squire, thank you so much!'

"By sunrise the next morning she started her work, while all the other workers stood watching her. The squire was there, too. And he thought to himself, 'She will never reach it. Her son cannot be saved.'

"As the first beams of the rising sun reached the rye, she bent down and started the cutting. She worked and worked and her back was in pain. And yet she continued without a pause to save her son. The day was hot and her face was burnt by the sun and her back was in pain.

"At sunset she really had managed to cut the whole field. Happily she fell to the ground whispering, 'My son is saved. He will be spared!'

"'Yes, he is saved,' the squire said.

"Then the woman's body shivered and she was dead."

The king got up. "That was not fair," he said. "It was not fair!"

"No it was not," Suzan said. "But it is not fair to fell the forests either."

"That's something else," the king said.

Something else, the scribe wrote in the protocol.

"Justice is justice," Suzan said. "If you do not water all the flowers in your garden and cut all the roses and cut all the perennials before noon this very day, I shall make the forest grow around your castle, so that you cannot look out and you will have to wander in darkness for the rest of you lifetime!"

"Look in the protocols, scribe," he shouted. "What do they say about justice? Tell me!"

The scribe was in his seat. "There is not a single word about justice in the protocols."

"You cannot find wisdom in books," Suzan said. "Wisdom is in our very minds."

"I give up," the king said. Then he went out of the door. Suzan, a little later went home. She could see the king watering all his flowers, and she thought, "So Justice is alive, anyway." She knew that no more forest would ever be felled in that land.

Per Jespersen