

Story #574 (Tape erased)

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The Family of Fools and the Trickster

Takerleme

Once there was, and once there was not--when God's creatures were many but it was a sin to say so--when my mother was on the threshold and my father was in the cradle, when I was fifteen years old--when the camel was town crier and the crow was muezzin¹--at that time, I went little and I went far; I went over mountains and dales, and I walked for a year. I turned around and looked back, and I discovered that I had gone only the length of a shoe. I let the tortoise fly, and I stuck the minaret in my belt like a flute.

Once in such a time there was a farmer who was also a carpenter. He had a wife and a ^{daughter - beautiful} beautiful daughter. One day while the man was working as carpenter somewhere, one of the oxen did not come home. They searched for the ox but could not find him. When the father returned from work, carrying the tool chest in his hands, his wife said, "Do you know that one of the oxen is missing?"

The father laid down the tool chest he was carrying. He took out an adze and stuck it into a beam in the ceiling. Then he went out in search of the ox.

¹ The muezzin is the person who chants the call to prayer from the minaret of a mosque.

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After he had gone, his daughter entered the room. She said, "Oh! Oh!" and then she fainted--just collapsed.

When her mother saw her unconscious on the floor, she rushed to her aid. She asked, "What is the matter, my daughter?"

she had come to herself, the daughter said, "Oh, Mother, suppose I were married and had a son. Suppose I named him Salman Bey. Suppose that that adze fell on his head and killed him when he was passing through the room. What would I do?"

Clever Elsie
Theme

"If you were his mother, then would I not be his grandmother?" said the girl's mother. Then they both began to cry as loudly as they could.

Hearing this noise, the neighbors rushed to their house. They asked, "What is the matter?"

The mother and the daughter explained the situation to them. "Suppose she were to have a son, and suppose she named him Salman Bey. Suppose Salman Bey should be passing through the room, and suppose that that adze should fall from the ceiling and kill him? Then what could be done?"

us take the adze down," they suggested. "And anyway, no one has yet asked for the hand of your daughter."

But no, it did not help. They kept fainting and reviving and moaning. They finally decided to kill the remaining ox as a sacrifice, and to have a Mevlüt^c performed in memory of the dead son, Salman Bey. The

² Mevlüt is a cantata composed several centuries ago by Süleyman Çelebi. It celebrates the birth and life of Mohammed. It is performed both as a requiem service soon after the death of a person, and as a memorial service in later years. It is not entirely gloomy but, in a way, partly a celebration. Packets of sweetmeats and sherbet are served to all members of the audience.

butcher was called to slaughter the ox.

The father, who was a rich but miserly man, returned home with the missing ox. When he arrived, he saw all the neighbors and the women of the village flocking about in the house, some grinding meat, some picking stones out of rice,³ and some stuffing dolmas.⁴ And there was much weeping going on in the house. He asked what the trouble was, and the daughter explained: "You stuck an adze there in the ceiling. I thought to myself, 'Suppose I were married and had a son. And suppose I named him Salman Bey. And suppose that the adze fell on his head and killed him as he was passing through the room. What would I do?'" As the girl was explaining this to her father, both the mother and daughter started weeping all over again.

The father took down the adze from where it had been stuck and threw it down angrily. Leaving them to cry, he then went out, saying, "I shall not come home again until I have found a greater fool than you are!"

Along the way he came to a fountain where a woman was filling her pitcher. "Take your pitcher away so that I can drink a little water," he said.

The woman asked him, "Where do you come from?"

He answered, "From the bottom of Hell."

Hell -- bottom of

³ In rural Turkey rice is not factory-cleaned. It must be sorted and cleaned by the users.

⁴ Dolmas are made of ground meat and rice stuffed into green peppers or rolls of grape leaves and boiled

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It so happened that this woman had lost a son and a daughter that same year. She asked, "Have you seen my children in Hell?"

"Yes, I have," he said.

She said, "I have clothes of theirs which have never been worn. I have a pearl necklace and bracelets for my daughter. I wonder whether you are going back there?"

"Yes, I am going straight back."

She sat down with a saddlebag in front of a chest where all of their things were stored, and she began to pack them into the saddlebag, crying all of the time. She brought out and packed three suits for her son and his watch. She said, "His horse has not been sold. You can hear him neighing downstairs.⁵ Take his horse to him, too."

I am sorry, but I cannot take his horse."

"Oh, wait, wait! My son was used to having pocket money, too.

Take these gold coins to him also." The man took all of this and left.

This woman's husband was a government official, but she never did anything around the house for him now, for she had been crying for a year --in mourning. She never cooked, never cleaned. She had cried all of the time for a year. But soon after she had sent these things to their children, she felt greatly relieved, and so she tied up her hair⁶ and began to clean the house. She began to cook, and before her husband

⁵ This is meant literally, for in Turkish farm homes, the first storey is often a stable. This is true in other countries of the Middle East and in some countries in Europe.

⁶ That is, she abandoned her unkempt, hair-down appearance of mourning.

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arrived home, she put on her fine clothes and went downstairs. Her husband was surprised to see her so changed. "I am glad to see you so well," he said. "Apparently you have been listening to the good advice of a hoca⁷ today. Well, we did our best for them, but we could not save them."

She said, "You will be pleased when you hear what has happened."

"What?"

"When I was filling my pitcher at the fountain, a peasant came along and asked me to take my pitcher out of the way so that he could drink. He was very thirsty, and sweat was dripping from his nose. I asked him where he came from, and he said, 'From the bottom of Hell.' I asked him if he had seen our children there, and he said that he had seen them at the bottom of Hell in miserable condition. He was a gentleman who had been fed with clean milk [i.e., he was uncorrupted]. I sent with him our daughter's dowry, the three suits of our son, and his watch, and I have felt so relieved today that I have started to clean up."

"Which way did the man go?"

"Toward the country."

The husband mounted his horse and left on a gallop. The first man had traveled quite a way, and he was now approaching a mill. The second man overtook him and caught up with him at the mill. The mill^{er} was a bald fellow who was busy sharpening his mill stones with a chisel.

⁷ A Moslem priest.

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the first man rushed in, the miller asked him, "What is the matter?"

"I am being followed by a man who scrapes patches of hair from bald people. That is why I want to hide myself here."

"Oh, sir, my head is even balder than yours," said the miller.

The first man said, "Well, you could climb that poplar tree."

The miller left the job he was working on and climbed up into the tree. When he had climbed to the top of the tree, the first man covered his clothes with flour and began to chisel away at the mill stones.

Soon after that, the horseman came along and entered the mill.

"Selâmünaleyküm," he said.

"Aleykümselâm."⁸

"A man arrived here just before me. Where is he now?"

"I do not know, but there was a man climbing a tree in the garden a short while ago. Perhaps he is the one you are seeking."

The horseman entered the garden, looked up into the poplar tree, and said to the man up there, "Hey, you--come down from there!"

"By God, I will not come down. I do not want to have my head scraped. I have been bald for four years, and it has caused no one any harm."

"I do not care about your baldness," said the horseman. "You just down!"

⁸ Traditional Moslem greetings: "Peace be unto you," and "Peace be unto you, also."

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"By God, I will not come down! I do not want to have my scraped! I have been bald for four years, and it has caused no one any harm."

The horseman tried very hard, but he could not persuade miller to come down. As a matter of fact, I had a letter from him the other day, and he was still trying to make the miller come down.

Three apples fell from the sky: one for the wife of Ferit Efendi,⁹ one for the daughter of Hafız¹⁰ Ali Efendi, and one for Nuriye Hoca.¹¹

⁹ This was her dead husband, a hoca.

¹⁰ Hafız Ali Efendi was her father. The word Hafız is an honorific indicating that a person so addressed can recite verbatim the entire Koran.

¹¹ This is one of the most popular closing formulas for Turkish folktales. It is comic, for the narrator is each of the three persons mentioned as recipients of the apples that fell from the sky.

Ending -- of tale -- formulaic
Apples -- three -- in formulaic ending
of tale
Three apples -- in formulaic ending of
tale