

Story 2026 (Transcribed from tape
of Atatürk İlkokulu)

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Badi and Her Stepmother

Once there was and once there wasn't, when the sieve was in the straw,¹ there were a husband and a wife who had a daughter named Badi. The three lived happily together for some time, but then the girl's mother died. Time passed and Badi's father married another woman, who became Badi's stepmother. That stepmother had a daughter of her own named Hadi.

Badi was well-behaved and did everything she was told to do, but Hadi was lazy and did nothing. The stepmother was jealous of Badi, and she wished that the girl would die. Every day she gave Badi nothing but bread and

¹This is a line from a popular tekerleme, a nonsense jingle used as the opening device of many Turkish tales. The line is paradoxical. The sieve is never in the straw. While threshing grain, workers pass the detached grain and finely ground straw through a large-mesh sieve. Longer pieces of straw which may still have grains attached to them do not pass through and will need further threshing. So, the straw is in the sieve, not the sieve in the straw.

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onions to eat. After this had gone on for years, Badi became so tired of this mistreatment that she could tolerate it no longer. She went to visit a neighbor's wife, and she told that woman what had happened. The woman said to Badi, "My daughter, do not eat the skins of the onions. Instead of eating them, stick them on a tree." Badi did as she had been directed, and from that time onward Badi began to grow stronger, but her half sister, Hadi, grew weaker.² After a short while, Hadi died

Badi's stepmother was so disturbed by what had happened that she said to her husband, "I can no longer take care of your daughter. Do something to get rid of her." At first he refused to do anything harmful to Badi, but his wife kept arguing with him more and more. Feeling helpless, he finally agreed to do what his wife had demanded

On the following day, the man said to his wife, "Give me a loaf of bread and a dry gourd, and I shall take Badi to the forest." After he had received these two things, he called Badi and said, "Come along with me to the forest

²The narrator gives no rationale for the changed conditions of the two girls.

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where I shall chop some wood."

By the time they reached the forest, Badi was tired. Her father said to her, "Lie down and sleep while I am cutting wood. When you wake up, you will know where I am from the tock-tock sound of my axe." The man chopped wood only until Badi had fallen asleep. [Then he tied the dried gourd to the branch of a tree, where it made a tock-tock sound as the wind blew it back and forth against the tree.³] He then took his axe and returned home.

[When Badi woke up, she went to the place from which the tock-tock sound was coming. When she got there, however, she found not her father but only a gourd being knocked against a tree by the wind.] She walked here and there searching for her father, saying, "Oh, my father who left me alone, where are you?" After awhile she came to a house occupied by forty young people who were all orphans.⁴ None of the orphans was there at the time, but she found many birds in the house. There were so many birds there, in fact, that their fallen feathers lay

³The child narrator did not understand why the father had taken a gourd with him to the forest. This is a motif common to most variants of the tale. We have, therefore, added this element of the story in brackets.

⁴The house to which the heroine of this tale usually goes is occupied by dwarfs or robbers, not orphans.

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knee-deep on the floor. Badi removed the feathers and cleaned the house every day, and then after she had eaten one of the birds, she hid herself in the building before the orphans returned.

After this had been going on for several days, the orphans became curious about it. They asked each other, "Who has been cleaning our house every day?" and "Who has been taking one of our birds each day?" One day several of them remained home and caught Badi when she came out of her hiding place. They invited her to continue living with them, for they liked her. Indeed, they liked her so much that she was soon married to one of the older orphans.

When the wicked stepmother heard about this, she decided to kill Badi. Disguising herself as a working person, she walked back and forth past the orphans' house, shouting, "I can adorn bridal chambers very beautifully!" When the groom heard her shouting this, he invited her into the bridal chamber to decorate it. As soon as the stepmother entered that room, she picked up a large comb and struck Badi's head with it. She struck so viciously that the teeth of that comb stuck in Badi's head. As soon as that happened, Badi turned into a bird and flew away.

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Each day after that the bird returned, settled upon a tree, and called, "Yusuf! Yusuf!"⁵ Every day after the bird had left, the tree upon which it had alighted died.⁶ Badi's husband kept trying to catch that bird but for some time he was unsuccessful. Finally, however, he did manage to capture it. When he looked carefully, he saw teeth of a comb sticking out of its head. By removing those teeth, he changed the bird back into a very beautiful girl, his Badi. They were married again and lived happily after that.⁷

⁵Apparently the name of the groom.

⁶This motif occurs in other ATON tales. See Nos. 233, 1185, and 1333.

⁷In most versions of this tale the villainous step-mother is executed or otherwise punished severely.