

Story #95 (Tape #5)
1961-1962

Narrator: Suzan Koraltürk
Location: Informant a resident
of Trabzon but working as
dressmaker in Ankara
Date: May 1962

Stuck to Some Great Door

Once there was and once there wasn't in the olden days, when the sieve was in the hay, when the camel was an auctioneer, and when I was rocking my father's cradle tingir mingir, there was a keloğlan.

One night Keloğlan saw a saint in his dream, and the saint said, "You, fellow, can't be any good this way, Tomorrow morning as soon as you get up, go and get yourself stuck to some great door¹ and your life's work will be there. You'll earn your living there."

The next morning as soon as he got up he got on his way. He went and went, and looked at many doors. But none of them seemed to please him. Finally he came to the gates of the saray in Istanbul.² "Well," he said, "I've found my door." He got some tar on the back of his clothes and got himself stuck on the door by his robe.

In the morning the gardener of the saray came to the gate. He opened the gate, and when he saw Keloğlan stuck on the gate he became frightened and began to shout. "What is this stuck on the door?" said he.

Keloğlan began to laugh, and he said, "Oh, I have been able to frighten somebody!"

¹ Stuck to a great door means to find a patron or to get a steady job.

² A saray is a palace or a government building. The saray in Istanbul is probably meant to mean the palace of the Sultan. While in some tales the word padişah is the title of any ruler or leader--sometimes even the headman of a village or city--it is here applied to no less a figure than the head of the empire.

The gardener said, "What is this that you do here?"

And Keloğlan said, "Well, I got stuck on the door, and I'll never get away from here."

"You must go away from here," said the gardener.

And Keloğlan said, "No, I won't go anywhere else. This is a saray and I can work here, and you can't make me go away."

All this noise was heard inside the saray, and the padişah said, "What's all this noise? Bring this Keloğlan to me, and let's see what's ailing him."

Keloğlan slipped out of his robe and went to the padişah. The padişah asked, "What's your name?"

Keloğlan answered, "My name is Ahmet, but they don't call me that. They call me Keloğlan."

"Well, then, what do you want, Keloğlan?"

Keloğlan said, "I had a dream, and in it a saint told me what to do: to get myself stuck to some great door, and there I would find my life's work. That's how I came to your door, and this is how I'm going to earn my living."

"All right," said the padişah. "Can you work in the kitchen and help the cook?"

"Certainly I can," said Keloğlan. And Keloğlan went down to the kitchen, and the cook showed him here and there little things to be done. So Keloğlan went to work in the kitchen.

One day the cook said to Keloğlan, "Now, look here. Whatever I tell you to do, you always do the opposite. This time be careful, or else I'll have to chase you out of my kitchen. I am going out to the market for some vegetables. While I am gone, you wash the dishes and arrange them nicely without breaking a single one." And the cook went out to market.

What Keloğlan did was to take the plates one by one and break them.

Then he piled the pieces neatly in the cooking pot.³

When the cook came back, he said, "Have you done what I told you to do?"

Keloğlan said, "Certainly I did, and they are all arranged neatly in the pot."

When the cook looked, he found that all the plates were broken. "What have you done?" he shouted. I won't keep you here any more. Get out!" And he chased Keloğlan out of the kitchen.

When the padişah heard the noise, he said, "What is it all about?"

The cook said, "I have had enough of him. Take him away from me."

"All right," said the padişah. "Bring him to me

The padişah said to Keloğlan, "Now listen to me, son. You are going to stay with me. Only when I go to sleep, you'll make no noise, and you'll see to it that nobody else makes any noise, either."

"All right," said Keloğlan.

"Fine," said the padişah. "Now go and bring me a glass of water."

Keloğlan went and filled a glass with water and ran back. On the way back, he came up the stairs, and right across from the stairs there was a mirror. Keloğlan saw himself in the mirror. When he saw himself in the mirror, he thought it was someone else, and he said, "It was from me the padişah asked for a glass of water. Why do you hurry before me?" When he saw his image repeating his own actions, he began to quarrel with it. He shouted and shouted at his image. Finally he became so angry that he threw the glass at him, and of course the mirror broke.

When the padişah heard the noise, he came out and said, "What's all this noise about?"

³When dummies in folktales are assigned tasks in a household or on a farm, they often wreak havoc of this kind on their employers' property.

Keloğlan said, "I was bringing you the glass of water. Why did he try to do it before I did?"

"Oh," said the padişah. Haven't you ever seen a mirror before?"

"A mirror? What is a mirror?" asked Keloğlan.

The padişah took him to a mirror and showed him his own image. "When you saw him bringing the water, it was only you," he explained.

"Oh," said Keloğlan. "Now I know. I won't do it again."

"Now," said the padişah, "I'll go to sleep. See to it that nobody makes any noise and nobody wakes me up." And the padişah went to sleep

While the padişah slept, everything was quiet except the clock on the wall, which ticked away. Tick-tock-tick-tock, it said. Keloğlan began to give orders to the clock. "Be quiet," he said. "Don't you know the padişah is trying to sleep? Stop that noise! Don't you hear me?" he shouted. "And the more I say, the more you tick-tock!" Finally Keloğlan became so angry that he took the clock down off the wall and smashed it on the floor.

The padişah jumped up in his sleep, frightened by the noise.

"Sir," Keloğlan explained, "you told me to keep everything quiet, but that clock wouldn't listen to me. That's why I gave it what it deserved!"

And the padişah said, "Oh, son, it cannot stop. That's its duty, to show what time it is--to tell the night and day

"All right," said Keloğlan, "I won't do it again."

After a few days, a representative came from a foreign country which intended to declare war on the padişah's country. The representative said to the padişah, "I will ask some questions in signs, and if those questions

are answered correctly, then we won't wage war against you.⁴ The opposite party will answer in signs, too, and we must be apart from each other. I will be on another minaret. Remember, if the answers aren't correct, then we're at war."

The padişah said, "What sort of thing is this? I must think about this before I answer. What shall I do about this? If I ask a clever man, he won't see any sense in this. He'll think it's stupid. If I put a dumb one there, his answers won't be of any use. What should I do?" And finally he thought of Keloğlan. "Well, he'll lay some eggs about it.⁵ Let's see what he'll say about it." The padişah called Keloğlan and told him all about it. "You'll be on one minaret and he'll be on the other. You'll answer him in signs without saying a word."

"All right," said Keloğlan. "What's easier than that?"

The two representatives got up on the minarets. For the first sign, the foreign minister held up one finger. In answer Keloğlan held up two fingers. For the second sign, the minister held his arms out before his waist in a flat circle. In answer, Keloğlan bent his left arm at the elbow and put his right hand under his left elbow, to show one half of his arm. For the third sign, the minister held his right hand out with the fingers and thumb hanging down. Keloğlan answered by holding his right hand out with the fingers and

⁴In real life wars are often waged for ridiculous reasons; in folktales these ridiculous reasons often involve riddle solving. Aarne-Thompson Type 924B (Sign Language Misunderstood) and Eberhard-Boratav Type 312 (Die Zeichensprache) both are based on misunderstood sign language, but Eberhard-Boratav lists as a variant the tale in which war can be averted by the correct responses in sign language. Our own collecting would suggest that in Turkey the basic type involves the threat of war and only an occasional variant does not.

⁵To lay some eggs about it is a slang expression which may be equated with produce some answers right out of the blue, or to come up with something.

thumb pointing up. "Well done," said the minister, and they got down from the minarets

The padişah said to the minister, "Could you tell me, please, what the questions were?"

The minister answered, "First I said, 'There is one God.' And Keloğlan answered, 'Oh, but the Prophet makes two.' And then I said, 'The world is round.' And he answered, 'But half of it is water and half is land.' And last I said, 'The rains come from above.' And he answered, 'But the plants grow from the bottom up.' Keloğlan answered the questions correctly, so there will not be war between your country and mine." The foreign minister left to return to his own land.

Then the padişah asked Keloğlan what the questions and the answers were. "Well, sir," said Keloğlan, "first he said, 'I am the mighty one around here. And I answered, 'Behind me there are two.' He wanted to frighten me, and I showed him there were some to help me. Then he said, 'Here is a tray full of pilav.' I answered, 'We shall provide the meat to go on top.' Then he said, 'We have five generals who will drop down on your land.' And to this I said, 'We have already planted in the ground five sharpened stakes on which to impale them.'"

Whether Keloğlan's answers were right or wrong, the padişah was pleased, for the boy had saved the country from a war. He said to Keloğlan, "You will always stay in this saray, but there must be no fighting, and you must always be good to others."

And Keloğlan replied, "Well, the saint was right, after all. This is what I dreamed, and this is where I shall stay all my life."