

Story 1283

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Beyoğlu and the Girl in the Tree

Once there was and once there was not,¹ when the sieve was in the straw,² there was a man named Beyoğlu.³ This man had many good qualities. He was strong and very handsome, he was also very kindhearted and charitable. He helped others in every way that he could, and because he was rich, he was often able to help them substantially. It was just natural, then, that everyone in that area liked him.

¹Formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales, this is known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run to several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a nonsense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce in English the rhyme scheme.

²The 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.

³Meaning son of the bey, Beyoğlu is more a title than a name. In earlier times, beys were aristocrats. The title roughly equals lord or baron.

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There was an old woman living in the same area named Kara Ana.⁴ One day when Beyoğlu was engaged in his favorite pastime of hunting, he shot an arrow which accidentally broke a water pitcher carried by Kara Ana. She was so annoyed by this that she uttered a (curse) to be put on Beyoğlu. He could not hear what she had said, and so he went and asked her, "What did you say?" But no matter how many times he asked this question, she refused to repeat her words. Instead, she took from her pouch a handful of pumpkin seeds and said, "Here! Take these seeds and plant them on the top of yonder mountain. Tend these as they grow for forty days and forty nights. Then on the fortieth day go back to the mountaintop and you will see what has become of them."

Beyoğlu did as the old woman had directed him. He carefully watered and tended the plants for forty days and forty nights. On the fortieth day he went to the field on the mountaintop, and to his surprise he found there a beautiful girl. Greatly surprised, Beyoğlu asked, "Are you a jinn or some other kind of supernatural being?"⁵ Where did you come from and

⁴Kara Ana means black (or dark) mother.

⁵If a person appears suddenly in an unlikely place, the viewer quite understandably becomes wary of the true nature of the intruder. The formulaic query in Turkish is İnmisin cinmisin?--are you a jinn or other supernatural being? Earlier interpretations of the word in indicated that it referred to a

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where are you going?"

"I am neither jinn nor any kind of supernatural creature. I am a child of Allah, who created both you and me." The girl so beautiful that she seemed to be saying to the moon,

"You do not need to rise tonight because I am going to do so."⁶ She had eyebrows like bows, cheeks like apples, and lips like cherries

The two started walking along together, but Beyoğlu thought, "If I should take this girl down to the village, people there would think that I had kidnaped her."⁷ They came after a short walk to a plane tree beneath which there was a well. There Beyoğlu remained in deep thought. The girl said, "Why are you thinking so deeply? Tell me about it."

"If I should take you to my village, people would think I had gone somewhere and kidnaped you. I am an honorable and one liked by all of the villagers, and such an assumption would be damaging to my reputation and good name. No one

human being: "Are you human being or jinn?" But the answer, "I am neither," both here and in most ATON tales, indicates that in is not intended to mean human being.

⁶In the middle East generally but especially in Turkey the moon is a symbol of supreme beauty. Even to compare the beauty of a woman with that of the moon is to accord the mortal most fulsome praise. The figure of speech used here is even more flattering, for it suggests that the girl's beauty eclipses that of the moon. The claim occurs in several ATON tales.

⁷The reference here has a peculiarly Turkish application.

moon
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would feel that this was appropriate behavior for me, and neither do I."

The girl answered, "I shall climb to the top of this plane tree and wait for your return. You go to your village and bring your people here to ask for statement of consent to marry you."

Looking up into the tree, Beyoğlu found it to be so tall that he could barely see the top. "How can you climb to the top of this tree? That would seem to be an impossible feat."

"I can reach the top, all right. If I do, will you agree to do as I have suggested?" asked the girl.

"If you can climb to the top of that tree and wait for me there, then of course I agree

The girl prepared to climb the tree, but under her breath she kept saying, "Bend down, my plane tree!" She said this three times, and after the third time, the tree slowly bent over until its top touched the earth. After placing herself on a strong branch at the top of the tree, the girl said, "Straighten up, my plane tree! Straighten up, my plane tree!

Bride stealing was once very widespread, especially in the eastern half of Turkey. Sometimes this was a type of elopement with the consent of the bride but without the consent of her parents. Just as often, however, it was a matter of clear-cut abduction. This practice was always disapproved of by a majority of people, and today it is almost universally disapproved of, but even into the last decade of the twentieth century a few instances of such abduction still occur.

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Straighten up, my plane tree!" After her third order to the tree, it slowly rose into an upright position again

Feeling reassured now that he was leaving the girl in a safe place, Beyoğlu decided to return to the village to make arrangements for the wedding and to bring his men there to get the girl. So the girl remained in the tree, and Beyoğlu returned to the village.

There was a wealthy woman with many servants who lived in a mansion not very far from the plane tree. Two or three days after the very beautiful girl had gone into the treetop to hide, the rich woman sent one of her female servants to fetch water from the well beneath the plane tree. That servant was not very intelligent. When she reached the well, she saw reflected from the surface of the water the image of a very beautiful girl. Thinking that the image was a reflection of herself, she said, "Allah, O Allah! If I am so beautiful, why should I be serving other people?" She left the bucket in the well and ran away.

The wealthy woman waited and waited for the servant to return with the water. When she could wait no longer, she sent a second servant. "Go and see what became of that girl, and when you come back, bring some water with you."

The second servant went to the foot of the plane tree and saw the bucket in the well, but nowhere could she see the

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first servant girl. Looking into the water, she saw the image of a very beautiful girl. Now, this second girl was more clever than the first servant girl. Taking from her sash a mirror, she looked into it to see if her own face was as beautiful as the image she saw in the water. Looking back and forth between the surface of the water and her mirror, she realized that the very beautiful image was not her own. Gazing up into the top of the tree, she saw the beautiful girl sitting there on a branch. The servant girl called up to her, "Who are you? Where did you come from and where are you going?" When there was no answer from the treetop, the servant girl asked, "Are you a jinn or some other supernatural being?"⁸

"I am neither a jinn nor any other supernatural being but a creature of Allah like you."

"Well, can you take me up there next to you? How did you get up there?"

"Of course I can bring you up here," said the beautiful girl. Then under her breath she said three times, "Bend down, my plane tree." When the tree bowed its top to the ground, the servant girl sat down on the branch alongside the beautiful girl. Then the beautiful girl repeated under her breath, "Straighten up, my plane tree. Straighten up, my plane tree. Straighten up, my plane tree"

⁸See Footnote 5 above.

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While this was going on, the wealthy lady still had received no water. She now said to a third servant girl, straight to that well and bring me back some water at once Don't waste a moment doing anything else!" That third servant rushed to the well, grabbed the bucket of water, and ran home with it.

In the treetop the second servant girl asked the beautiful girl, "What happened to you? Tell me why you are sitting here in the top of this tall tree." After the beautiful girl had told her about everything that had happened and about Beyoğlu, the servant girl became very envious of her good fortune asked the beautiful girl, "Where is your life talisman?⁹ Is it in your mouth? Is it in your hair? Where is it?"

In the end the beautiful girl was persuaded to reveal this information. She said, "My talisman is in my necklace.

⁹In Turkish folktales there is a wide range of what may be called life tokens. Talismans and amulets are often much more than simple good-luck charms, for they are integrally related to the physical condition or even the life itself of a human being or other creature. Some life tokens are separable souls hidden in some secret place--a box, the stomach of a deer, the stomach of a fish--in order to protect the lives of their owners. If you can find the separable soul and destroy it, you thereby kill its owner. Sometimes, on the other hand, the life token must be kept in the possession of its owner. If it is taken away, the owner may lose consciousness or be transformed into some other form. Sometimes a life token is a gauge of a person's condition and is watched closely by its owner's friend or relative in order to keep posted on the welfare of the owner. It may be a gem which changes color if its owner is in serious trouble; it may be a knife which turns rusty for the same reason.

Life taken

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The servant girl began to think of ways in which she might be able to get that talisman. She said, "You have been sitting out here in this tree so long that you probably lice in your hair. Put your head in my lap and let me pick out all of the lice." But when the beautiful girl put her head in her lap, the servant girl did not pick out lice instead took her necklace. As soon as this happened, the beautiful girl turned into a pigeon and flew away. The servant girl then placed the necklace around her own neck and began to wait for the arrival of Beyoğlu. After waiting there for several days, she saw him approaching with a group of horsemen

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When Beyoğlu came beneath the plane tree and looked up to its top, he recognized at once that the girl in the treetop was not the one he had left there, but, thinking that he would be unable to explain this to the group of people which had come with him, he said nothing about it. He called up to the girl, "Come down! Come down!"

The girl in the treetop said, "Bend down, my plane tree. Bend down, my plane tree. Bend down, my plane tree." But the tree did not move in the slightest way.

The men who came with Beyoğlu brought all of the ladders they could find, but there were not enough to reach to the top of that very tall tree. The girl finally managed to climb down to the level which the highest ladder had reached, and then

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she was carried down the rest of the way. They took her to the village where, after a long wedding ceremony, she was married to Beyoğlu. But Beyoğlu knew very well that this was not the girl that he had met on the mountain.

Beyoğlu had a very large pear orchard, and he had a servant whose only job was to take care of that orchard. One day when the servant was sitting beneath a tree in the orchard, a pigeon came and flew from branch to branch of that tree, saying, "How is Beyoğlu, and how are you? How is Beyoğlu, and how are you? How is Beyoğlu, and how are you?" The servant tried to catch this pigeon but was unable to do so. The next day, the third day, the fourth day this happened again in the same way. Each time the pigeon flew from branch to branch and asked, "How is Beyoğlu, and how are you? How is Beyoğlu, and how are you? How is Beyoğlu, and how are you?" This continued day after day.

One day Beyoğlu went to the orchard and spoke to the servant: "How are you? Do you have any problems, or do you need anything?"

"No, ağa¹⁰--may Allah bless you!--I have no problems at

¹⁰An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for

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However, there is something which happens here that I cannot understand.

"What is it?"

"Well, there is a pigeon which comes here every day at the same time. It flies from branch to branch and asks, 'How is Beyoğlu, and how are you? How is Beyoğlu, and how are you? How is Beyoğlu, and how are you?' I have tried several times to catch this bird, but I have never been able to do so."

Beyoğlu answered, "Tomorrow give me the clothes you are wearing. I shall come here tomorrow and wait in your place so that I can see that bird.

"Ağa, don't tire yourself out in such an effort. I have tried many times to catch that pigeon, but I have always failed

"You do just as I say and don't worry about the rest."

On the following day Beyoğlu came wearing the servant's clothes, and he sat beneath the same pear tree that the servant had on previous days. The bird returned at the same time it had always appeared there and it asked, "How is Beyoğlu,

a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called aga bey by his younger siblings. Aga bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as aga bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him aga bey.

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and how are you? How is Beyoğlu, and how are you? How is Beyoğlu, and how are you?" Beyoğlu was quicker than his servant, and he caught the pigeon before it could fly away.

Beyoğlu felt in his heart that there was something very special about this bird. He had a golden cage built, and he put the bird in that cage. He now began to spend all of his time taking care of that bird, forgetting all about his wife, his house, and his other work. All day long he fed the bird, watered the bird, cleaned its cage, and watched its movements.

As soon as his wife had seen the bird, she knew who it really was. She now grew jealous of all the time that her husband spent upon it. After a while she thought of a way of getting rid of that bird. Going to the village doctor, she said to him, "I am going to pretend to be ill. You are to come and examine me. Then you are to say that the only cure for my illness would be for me to eat the flesh of the pigeon in the golden cage." After receiving a large amount of money from the woman, the doctor agreed to do this.

The woman went home and pretended to be very ill. Beyoğlu brought the doctor to their home to examine her. This doctor pretended to be studying her case very hard, and after some delay, he diagnosed her illness. He said to Beyoğlu, "Your wife has a very unusual disease. It can be cured only by the correct diet, and that diet is pigeon meat

*Illustration
Signed*

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"Oh, what could be more simple than that?" said Beyoğlu
"Tomorrow I shall send some of my men to hunt pigeons, and
she will be able to have as much pigeon meat as she wants."

No, it cannot be the meat of just any pigeon. It must
be the flesh of that pigeon which is kept in that golden cage
over there."

Beyoğlu was shocked by this requirement. He pleaded with
the doctor, saying, "What difference does it make which pigeon
she eats? This pigeon in the cage is just like any other
pigeon. Why can't she eat any other pigeon?"

the doctor insisted that it must be the pigeon from
the golden cage that the woman ate. Accordingly, the pet
pigeon was slaughtered, and its meat was cooked for the diet
of the sick woman. Shortly after she had eaten that meat, the
woman recovered completely from her pretended illness

pigeon had been slaughtered in the yard close to the
house of Beyoğlu, and at the spot where its blood had fallen
on the ground, ~~a cypress tree sprang up~~ overnight. It was a
remarkable cypress tree, for it grew very rapidly, and in a
very short time it had grown as high as the plane tree above
the well.

By now Beyoğlu had a son, but he spent much less time
with the child than he did with the cypress tree. He watered
it and cared for it in every way because he knew that it had

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risen miraculously from the blood of the pigeon.

His wife noticed this, and she grew very jealous of the attention he gave to the tree. She tried to think of some reason for having the tree destroyed. One day she said to her husband, "Our child will not sleep, and he cries all the time. We need a proper cradle for him to sleep in."

"That is easily taken care of," said Beyoğlu. "Tomorrow I shall go to the jeweler and have him make a cradle of gold for the child."

"No, it must not be made of gold," said the wife.

"Well, then, let it be made of silver. I shall talk with the silversmith about it."

"No, it must not be made of silver.

"Then what should it be made of?" asked Beyoğlu

"It should be made of wood.

"I can have as many cradles as you want made out of wood."

"But the wood from which the cradle is made must be the wood of the cypress tree just outside our front door."¹¹

"Oh, no! Please do not touch that cypress tree. I shall

¹¹In some variants of this tale the woman has some further pretext for cutting down the tree. Wind in its boughs may make an ominous noise, or its branches may knock the roof threateningly.

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have the cradle made out of anything else you might wish."

"No, it must be made from the wood of that tree," she persisted. And so the cypress tree was cut down, and a cradle the child was made from its wood

As the tree was being cut up, the old woman named Kara Ana passed by the house. She gathered up a large handful of the chips and twigs that lay scattered about and took them home with her. She put these scraps of wood with the other fuel she had stored in her woodshed.

This Kara Ana used to go to the mosque every day to attend the prayer services there.¹² One day when she returned from the mosque, she discovered that her house had been thoroughly cleaned. It was cleaner than it had ever been before. The floors were so clean that you could lick them. Kara Ana was greatly surprised by this, and as she ate her meal, she kept thinking about it. She could not understand it. When she returned from the mosque on the following day, she found that the house had been thoroughly cleaned again, but she also found her table was set with every kind of food

¹²There are five daily prayer periods (at very precisely prescribed times) in a Moslem's day. These prayers should be performed at a mosque, if at all possible; otherwise, they may be performed wherever the worshiper happens to be at the designated time.

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but bird's milk.¹³ That was the only thing that was missing. Kara Ana sat down and ate the food that had been prepared for her, but she was thinking deeply all of the time she was eating. She decided upon a plan by which she could discover who it was who cleaned her house and prepared her food.

On the third day, Kara Ana went out the door at the same time she usually left for the prayer service, but instead of going to the mosque, she stood outside the door and peeked in through the keyhole to see what would happen inside. In a few minutes she saw a beautiful girl inside sweeping the floor and singing as she swept. Opening the door and entering her house again, the old woman asked, "Who are you? inmisiin cinmisiin?"¹⁴ I am just a poor old woman. Why are you cleaning my house when there are rich people whose houses you might be cleaning?"

"I am neither jinh nor any supernatural being but a creature of Allah like you. I want to live with you from now on. Why shouldn't we be like mother and daughter? But you must not tell anyone that I am here."

"Very well, my girl. Why shouldn't we live together like

¹³ Although twentieth-century science discovered that some birds do produce something similar to milk to feed their young, in folktales bird's milk is equated with the impossible. It is the unattainable ultimate in food.

¹⁴ See Footnote 5 above.

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mother and daughter?" That was exactly what they did, and as day followed day, they grew very fond of each other

After a while, however, the girl grew very bored by having to spend all of her time in that small house. One day she said to Kara Ana, "Mother, don't you ever go anywhere besides the mosque? Don't you have friends and relatives whom you sometimes visit? Take me to some such place with you, for I am becoming very bored."

"But, my girl, if I take you anywhere with me, people will ask who you are. What would I say then?"

"You would tell them that I am a distant relative that I had come to stay with you for a while."

"Very well. There is a mevlüt service today at the home of some people I know. I shall take you there.

Together they went to the mevlüt performance, where the girl became the object of great attention. She was so beautiful that people could not take their eyes off her. After

¹⁵ A cantata rehearsing the birth and life of Mohammed. Written in Bursa by Süleyman Çelebi in 1409, Mevlüt (Mevlit, Mevlid) is said to be the most important piece of sacred music produced during the Ottoman era in Turkey. It involves both singing and instrumental music; it is a Moslem requiem performed 40 days after the death of a person and subsequently at any time one wishes (and can afford) such a memorial service. Assembling all the necessary singers and musicians, plus providing the required sweetmeats for the audience, is rather expensive, and so sponsoring a Mevlüt is not a matter undertaken lightly.

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the mevlüt was completed, the people present asked Kara Ana, "Who is she? Where did she come from?"

"She is the daughter of one of my relatives in İstanbul. She came here to visit me for a while.

There was much conversation carried on by all of the people present after the mevlüt, and the beautiful girl heard many pieces of news about that town. She heard, for example, that Beyoğlu's wife had broken her necklace and that no jeweler in that town had been able to repair it.

When the two arrived back at Kara Ana's house, the girl said, "Mother, can you bring the broken necklace of Beyoğlu's wife to me? I know how to fix it.

"My girl, they have taken that necklace to all of the jewelers in this town and in towns of this whole area, and none of them was able to fix it. How, then, could you repair it?"

"Mother, just ask for it. I am certain that I can repair

"Very well. I shall try to get that necklace," said the old woman. Going to Beyoğlu's house, she said, "I have heard that your wife broke her necklace and that you have been unable to find a jeweler who could fix it. I have an excellent jeweler visiting at my house, and that person can probably repair it if I take it to him.

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Beyoğlu had some misgivings about this, but he handed Kara Ana the necklace and said, "All right, but do not keep it very long. Bring it back as soon as possible."

When Kara Ana got home with the necklace, she handed it to the girl. The girl licked the necklace on one side and then licked it on the other side. When she slipped it on own neck, it was obvious that it had been completely repaired.

Greatly surprised, Kara Ana said, "Excellent, my girl! Today you fixed something that no one else could repair. give it to me so that I can return it to its owners. They told me that I could not keep it for long."

But the girl replied, "No, mother, I shall not give it back. It has cried and laughed by turns, but now it has found its proper place and is happy there."

"My girl, they will come and ask for it any time now. What am I to say to them?"

"Tell them that I shall not give it up. Tell them that I said, 'It has laughed and cried by turns, but now it has found its proper place and is happy there.'"

Shortly after that, some servants of Beyoğlu came for the necklace, and then Kara Ana had no choice but to tell them what the situation was. She said, "The necklace has been repaired, all right, but the girl will not relinquish it. says, 'It has cried and laughed by turns, but now it has

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found its proper place and is happy there.

The servants returned to Beyoğlu and reported to word by word, the strange comments of Kara Ana. But Beyoğlu understood right away what the situation was, and he said, "I must see that girl!" When he went to Kara Ana's house, he was not given permission to enter the building, but insisted on going right on inside anyway. As soon as he saw the girl, he recognized her at once, and he asked her, "What happened to you? Where have you been?"

When the girl had finished her long account of what had happened to her since they had last seen each other, Beyoğlu grew furious with his wife as he heard this account. He said to some of his servants, "Go and tell my wife that I am giving a feast. Tell her that I want her and her child to be dressed in their best clothes for this occasion. Also tell her to wear her best jewelry for this occasion. But when she is ready to go to the feast, take her and her child to river, tie them together, and throw them into the water. The servants went and carried out these instructions exactly.

Beyoğlu married the beautiful girl. They ate and drank and had all of their wishes fulfilled.