

Story 1158 (1989 Tape 11

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Four Boys and the Giant Woman

In former times there was a poor man who had three sons.¹ By scrimping and saving and sacrificing some other things, he was able to raise enough money to pay for a good education for his oldest son. The poor man intended to leave his small shop to his youngest son. But he was so poor that he could not make any provision for the future life of his middle son. In fact, the parents gave so little thought to that middle son that they did not even bother to name him. As a result, everyone called that middle son Keloğlan,¹ even though he was not bald and thus not really a keloğlan. ~~ALL~~

By the time that he was seven years old he was able to work at enough odd jobs to take care of himself. He worked as a porter. He worked as an apprentice in a coffeehouse and in a restaurant. He lived that very difficult kind of life until he reached the age of twelve. At that time he became aware of his poor situation, and he determined to earn more money in order to lead a better kind of life

¹The word keloğlan means bald boy, but the baldness is not that caused by aging. It is caused by ringworm infestation of the scalp. This disease often strikes the younger and perhaps improperly tended younger children of large peasant families. It is encouraged by uncleanness. In folktales the keloğlan is a definite personality type, a winner, and a sympathetic figure. In tales the keloğlan image is often used as a disguise.

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He had been composing poems from time to time in order to express his feelings. One day the following quatrain passed through his heart

Many sorrows, much grief, but a lack of happiness.

I wish that I had a home.

So far my luck has never searched for me,

But I can search for it.²

Every night he repeated to himself his poems about his hardships, about leaving home, about going far, far away. One night he added this poem:

They say that each will get his share--

I have not yet got mine

If it isn't here, it must be there,

And I should go there for it.

One day he placed a few articles of clothing and a small supply of food in his bag and set out from home upon a journey. He met other boys who were also traveling to seek their fortunes. On the first day he met Orhan. On the second day he met Turhan. And on the third day he met Tarhan. So the four of them decided to stay together as they traveled along, not knowing where they were going or what they would do. As they were crossing a Disguisers conceal their hair by covering it either with a sheepskin turned inside out or with the cleaned lining of a sheep's stomach.

²These lines are rimed in Turkish.

desert one day they came to the bank of a river where stood a large castle all made of marble. Its towers were so tall that they seemed to disappear in the clouds. On one side of the castle was a marble palace, and the boys thought that it must have many rooms full of treasure. Keloğlan said to his friends, "Let us go to that castle."

They went to the castle, but as they got closer to it, they saw in the garden a huge giant woman sitting beneath a tree sewing. Because her back was toward the boys, she did not see them approach, but they could see her very clearly. They could see that her head was as large as a cauldron, her chest was as large as a tub, and her whole body reached upward like a tower. While she worked, the giant woman had thrown her left breast over her right shoulder and her right breast over her left breast. Keloğlan said to his friends, "We should all go and each of us should suck on her breasts in order to become her sons. Once we have done that, we can be sure that she will not eat us unless she should be starving to death."

All of the boys went on very quietly, walking on their tiptoes. When they reached the giant's breasts, they all sucked on these until they had drunk some of her milk. (According to the laws of the giants, if anyone drinks milk from a giant woman's breast, that person becomes her milk child. Then she

*with
reluctance*

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will not eat that person or harm him in any other way. ³

When the giant woman saw the boys who were drinking her milk, she said, "Boys, you have now become my sons. I can no longer eat you. Why not, therefore, stay here in my house tonight and be my guests? Then tomorrow you can continue your journey."

right, aunt, we can stay for the night. Actually, I have a special reason for wishing to stay, for when my grandmother was dying, she asked me to visit you some day. Now I shall be carrying out her last wish."⁴

The giant woman was not sincere in her remarks to the boys, for she really intended to break the giants' law of milk relationship and eat the boys. But she wanted to eat them while they slept, and so she decided to wait until later that evening.

Fortunately, Keloğlan sensed the giant's dangerous thoughts, and he planned to be very careful. Cutting his finger slightly, he put salt on the wound, saying to himself, "This will hurt enough to keep me awake.

³This is the concept of milk siblings. It is not just a convention of the folktale but of Turkish real life as well. Nursing mothers sometimes nurse each other's infant briefly in order to establish this milk relationship. This is thought to create a bond not only between the sucklings but also between their families. It is not as strong a bond as a family or clan tie, but it is one more way of gaining a meaningful alliance, a special kind of strong friendship.

⁴The narrator provides no basis for this comment and no real purpose for it. Such whimsical and functionless comments are

*cut in woman
to guarantee
relationship*

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The giant woman cooked the boys what they said was their favorite food, and after they had completed their meal, she showed them their beds. The other boys fell asleep as soon as their heads touched their pillows, but Keloğlan remained awake. Thirty minutes later the giant woman came to the door and asked quietly, "Who is awake and who isn't?"

"I am awake," said Keloğlan. "I can't get to sleep."

"Why can't you sleep, Keloğlan?"

"My mother always used to make me tulumba⁵ and ice cream before I went to bed, and then I could sleep. If I don't have that to eat, I shall not be able to go to sleep."

The giant woman said, "The milk is at the dairy, and it takes an hour to go to the dairy and an hour to come back. If you can wait for two hours, I shall bring this food to you."

"Oh, I can wait for even three hours because I need that food in order to go to sleep. Unless I have it I shall stay awake until morning."

"Wait right here, son, and I shall be right back." She went to the dairy and prepared the ice cream and tulumba and brought them back to Keloğlan. He awakened his friends, and

atypical of the folktale.

⁵Tulumba means water pump, but tulubatatlısı means a syrup-soaked pastry.

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together they ate this food. Then all of the boys except Keloğlan went back to sleep again.

After another thirty minutes had passed, the giant woman returned again and asked quietly, "Who is awake and who isn't?"

"I am awake. I can't sleep," said Keloğlan.

"Why don't you go to sleep, Keloğlan?"

"My mother used to give me a börek⁶ at night. Then I could sleep.

"The sheep are in the sheepfold, which is an hour's walk from here, and so you will have to wait a while,"⁷ said the giant.

"Oh, that is all right, aunt. I can wait."

Two hours later the boys were eating böreks. After they had finished eating, they all went back to sleep again except Keloğlan

After still another thirty minutes the giant returned and asked quietly, "Who is awake and who isn't?"

"I am awake. I can't sleep," said Keloğlan.

"Why don't you go to sleep, Keloğlan?"

⁶A flaky pastry made of many extremely thin layers and filled with cheese, meat, or other tasty food. The börek is cooked in deep fat or fried.

⁷The narrator does not indicate any connection between the börek and the sheep.

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time Keloğlan said that he wanted baklava,⁸ then muhallebi,⁹ then elmasiye,¹⁰ and finally stuffed lamb. By the time the giant set out to prepare the stuffed lamb, Keloğlan knew that she would be gone for some time, for the sheepfold was an hour's walk from there. In the meantime the sun was slowly beginning to rise. Keloğlan awakened the other boys, and together they climbed to the top of the castle tower and locked the tower's iron door behind them.

After a while the giant woman returned from the sheepfold and looked for the boys. When she did not find them in their beds, she at first thought that they must have run away. Then chancing to glance upward, she saw the boys in the top of the tower. She immediately threw herself against the iron door of the tower in order to open it, but the boys had locked it very securely. She became so angry that she grew confused, and she did not know what to do. She shouted up to the tower, "Hey, boys, open the door!"

⁸ A pastry made of many very thin layers of dough. After the pastry is baked, honey is poured in the baking pan. Wicking action of the pastry draws the honey up throughout the pastry. It is baked in a large flat pan and cut into diamond-shaped pieces. It is Turkey's favorite pastry.

⁹ A milk pudding.

¹⁰ A fruited gelatin dessert.

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The boys refused to do that. Instead, they composed and sang a song about their situation:

Oh, milk mother, you're a liar
Who tried to eat us all.
But, clever, we required
You cook us many foods

mother giant, oh, mother giant,

One half the oil was gone
How very sweet the ice cream,
How creamy the milk pudding!
Since you took us into the castle,
We must have made you poor!

mother giant, oh, mother giant,

One half the milk was gone.
How tasty was the börek
And shivering elmasiye.
We gorged ourselves half sick
With endless baklava.

Oh, mother giant, oh, mother giant,

half the honey was gone

When the giant woman heard the words they were singing, she flew into a great ^{anger} rage. She went to the kitchen to get some tool with which she could break down the door. She soon returned with a very large axe. "Oh, aunt, what are you going to do with that large axe?"

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"I will use it to break down the door and get you all!"

"What would you do if I came down willingly?"

"This time I should really love you as my own son," she said

Keloğlan quietly whispered into his friends' ears, "I am going down from the tower and surrender myself, but she will not be able to do me any harm. Don't worry!"

When Keloğlan descended, the giant woman caught him immediately, put him into a sack, and tied it shut very tightly. said, "Keloğlan, let me see you try to play a trick on me now! I am going to the kitchen to get my teeth. Then I shall eat you, kıtır, kıtır!"¹¹

Keloğlan answered, "All right! If you are able to eat me, then 'Hearty appetite!'"¹²

As soon as the giant woman had left to go to the kitchen, Keloğlan took out his pocket knife and cut his way out of the sack. Then he caught in the yard the favorite calf of the giant woman and tied it inside the same sack that he himself had been in. Then he hid behind a bush. When the giant woman returned from the kitchen with her teeth (each of which looked like a

¹¹Onomatopoeia for cutting--here, chewing--anything that is hard or tough. Çatır, çatır sometimes is used to represent the same sound.

¹²The narrator uses here the standard Turkish expression for this: afiyet olsun!

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small, sharp axe), she put the whole sack into her mouth and ate it all. After she had finished eating, she saw that there was something in her hand. Looking at it, she realized that it was the tail of her favorite calf. Her anger at Keloğlan now became so great that she fainted.

Keloğlan called to his friends in the tower, "Come quickly! This is the time for us to escape!" The other boys followed his directions, and all of them fled. They kept running until they could see that the giant woman had regained her senses and was following them. Then they climbed a very tall tree

When the giant woman reached the foot of the tree, she called up, "Hey, Keloğlan, how did you climb this tree?"

"I shall tell you. It is easy," said Keloğlan. "First place a bar of soap on the ground. Then place a knife on top of it. Then put another layer of soap and another knife. Finally put down a third layer of soap and a third knife on it. On top of these stand a ladder. Then all you have to do is to climb the ladder."

The giant woman followed Keloğlan's directions exactly. But when she tried to climb the ladder, the whole pile collapsed. Of course she fell down, and as she fell, she cut her feet badly on the knives. After she was able to stand up again she started home to get her axe.

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As soon as she was gone, Keloğlan said to his friends, "This is the time for us to climb down from this tree and cross the river." They quickly descended, ran to the river, and swam across to the other side.

When the giant woman returned from her castle with her large axe, she discovered that the boys had crossed the river. That river was very deep, and its waters flowed rapidly. She called to the boys, "How is it possible to cross this river?"

Keloğlan answered, "Oh, aunt, get a millstone and place it in the middle of the river. Then use it as a step on which to walk across the river."

The giant woman did not know how to swim, and so she did exactly as Keloğlan had told her to do. Because the river was very deep and its water was flowing very fast, and because her body was very heavy--like a mountain--she could not keep her footing on the millstone. She slipped off it and was quickly drowned.¹³

When Keloğlan was sure that she was dead, he swam to her body and cut off her ears and plucked out her eyes. These they put in a bag and carried them to the padişah of that land. It seems that that giant woman was a very evil creature and had given a great deal of trouble to the people in that area. As a

¹³While her death in this tale seems to be simply a matter of drowning, traditional folktales often contain another factor. Witches and giants are often simply unable to cross running

result the padişah had placed a great bounty upon her head. When the padişah saw the pieces of her body and realized that she had been killed by these boys, he said to them, "O sons, ask from me whatever you wish, and I shall give it to you."

Keloğlan answered, "We should like to have the giant woman's treasure."¹⁴ The padişah gave them forty mules on which to carry the treasure to their country. The boys loaded the giant's gold¹⁵ onto these mules and returned to their own country. There they had castles built for themselves, and that time onward they lived happy and prosperous lives.

water. This is sometimes true of certain other supernatural creatures--in literature as well as in folklore. In several ATON tales giants are fenced in by rivers.

¹⁴Traditionally this is the wrong response. Traditionally the hero demurs three times before revealing what he/she would like as a reward.

¹⁵The child narrator has not prepared for this. Before Keloğlan asks for the giant's treasure, there is no indication whatsoever that such a treasure exists. Giants are not automatically rich.