

Story #572 (Tape erased)

Narrator: Nebiye Birkan, c. 50

Location: Taşköprü, kaza town in
Kastamonu Province

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The Family of Fools and the Trickster

Once there was and once there was not a family of seven fools in a village. The eldest daughter of this family of fools went one evening to get water from the village fountain. By that fountain where she went to fill her pitcher there was a large cypress tree. Beneath that tree there was a large pool of water. Gazing at the cypress tree, the girl spoke as follows: "Suppose I have a son some and suppose his name is Mustafa. Suppose he should climb up into this tree and then fall out of it into the pool and be drowned. What could I do?" She was crying and stamping her feet on the ground.

Shortly after that, the second sister came along and asked, "What is keeping you here?"

"Suppose I have a son some day, and suppose his name is Mustafa. Suppose he should climb up into this tree and then fall out of it into the pool and be drowned. What could I do?"

"If you were his mother, then I would be his aunt." Saying the second sister also began to cry.

The youngest sister, worried about them, came along looking until she found them. When she discovered what they were crying about, she too began to cry, saying, "If you were his mother, and you were his aunt, then I should also be his aunt."

Then the brothers also came to the fountain, and one by one, each of them began to cry too. Finally the parents came, and they also

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cried. The mother said, "If you were his mother, and you were his aunts, and you were his uncles, then I should be his grandmother." And the father said, "If you were his mother, and you were his aunts, and you were his uncles, and you were his grandmother, then I should be his grandfather."

At last one of them had sense enough to say, "Let us stop crying and do something. It cannot be helped now. The child is dead. Let us return to the village and pray for his soul."

After they returned to the village, the father went in search of a lost ox. Soon after that a rider came along the road, and they stopped this rider and asked him, "Where are you going, rider?"

"I am going to the blind spot in your head."¹

"Where are you going?" they asked again.

"I am going to the bottom of Hell," he said.

They said, "Oh, we have a son in Hell, and we wish to send him a gift. Will you stop a while and then take our gift to him?"

The rider was curious about the gift, and so he stopped to get it. They asked him to come inside and sit down for a while. They found a butcher to kill the one remaining ox in their basement. They cooked part of its meat and ate it. The rest they put into the saddlebag of the rider, along with other gifts, and these they asked the rider to take to the child Mustafa in Hell.

When the father came home [with the lost ox], he was greatly surprised. He decided to set out after the rider, who was a keloĝlan.²

¹ This is a retort equivalent to "What is that to you?"

² Literally bald boy. Turkish rural children often become bald from ringworm infections. It seems to be the youngest son in folktales who is most vulnerable to this illness, and so there is a certain sympathy for him. He is a comic type, one thought to be both hapless and shrewd.

*Indicates
other would be
the gift to
soul*

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Keloğlan stopped at a mill along the way. There he was told that an order had been sent out by the padişah to skin all of the bald heads in the country. When he heard this, the keloğlan climbed a poplar tree. His pursuer reached that place soon after that and asked the miller "Is the young man who arrived here a short while ago still here?"

"He is in that poplar tree there," the miller said.

The father went to the foot of the tree and started shouting at him. The rider had also been given 500 liras to take to Mustafa in Hell. The father kept shouting, "Give me those 500!"³

"No, I will not!" came the reply.

³ The punch-line at the end of this tale involves a play on Turkish words. Yüz means both face and 100. The rider thinks that his pursuer is asking him to give up five faces, while the pursuer is asking for the 500 liras back. It would be more effective if the rider had but 100 liras, for then the misunderstanding could very reasonably occur.