

Story #296

Narrator: None. This item was  
taken from Eflâton  
Cem Güney's Nur Tanesi,  
Nar Tanesi.

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Tekerleme

[The tekerleme which follows is a long, rhythmical introduction to a folk tale or a fairy tale. Although there are almost as many different tekerleme's as there are Turkish folk tales, they all have four things in common: they include nonsense words just for their musical sounds; they mention jinns and Turkish baths and--usually--camels and fleas and barbers and cradles and a number of other quite unrelated things; they get the listeners all ready for the story they are going to hear; they are so much a part of the folk tale that the listeners feel cheated if the storyteller leaves out a tekerleme and begins with the story itself. Children especially enjoy the tekerleme for its grand, nonsensical exaggeration and its horseplay, and they can recite one tekerleme after another, very much as American children can recite nursery rhymes.]

Time in time, when the sieve was in the hay,  
And when jinns played polo in the old Turkish bath,  
The hungry hen saw barley in her sleep.  
When you ask, "The sick man?" he saw a pomegranate  
And I, since I am I,

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Every night I see yellow.

yellow of the egg," should I say?

"Canary yellow," should I say?

What should I say?

Did you say yellow? Yellow.

When it sees yellow, the snow of the mountains melts.

See it in work, see it falling, see it in imagination, see it  
in dreams.

It can be, can it not?

Does it happen to few?

Since gold pieces are yellow, suppose the yellow is gold.

Suppose all the cisterns and all the urns are filled to the brim.

Suppose I have a city built with this, together with a village.

Oh, what should I do?

in heart, but not in hand.

Suppose I had four wives, all veiled.

Suppose nothing is of value to any of them.

Suppose I place four palaces on the mountain.

Oh, what should I do?

in heart, but not in hand.

If I had a field produce a thousand barrels of wheat, water  
would flood it.

Tax is right. Who can be vexed at that?

If I had thirty-five herds together with it,

Oh, what should I do?

It's in heart, but not in hand.

If I had four thousand camels on a flat plain,  
If I had twenty thousand birds flying in the air,  
If I melt five or ten hundredweight of butter in a pan,  
Oh, what should I do?

It's in heart, but not in hand.

My fifteen hundred cows with young calves,  
My two hundred slaves with hennaed hands,  
And ninety shepherds with daggers in their belts,  
Oh, what should I do?

It's in heart, but not in hand

Every year I used to give ten loads of donations.  
I wouldn't open hand to the wealthy, to the shepherd.  
If I send twelve thousand horsemen to the arena,  
Oh, what should I do?

It's in heart, but not in hand.

And if supposing and happening could come together  
Suppose the unworldly man had a son, and Blind Mehmet had a  
daughter born,

Come and watch the rumbling that makes!

But a boat made of cheese cannot sail by words,  
Let alone a great big raft.

What moves on is, again, the story.

What's better--let's put the mansions and palaces to one side,  
And imagination and worries to the other side,  
And let's have fun sitting by the side of our own hearth.