

Story 729 (1976 Tape 10)

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Keloğlan and the Girl Who Traveled Nightly to the Other World

Once there was and once there was not a girl who was the only child of a family. This girl wore out a pair of shoes¹ every day, and so her parents would have to buy her a new pair for the following day. Her parents were curious to know why her shoes grew old in only a day's time, but they were unable to discover the reason.

In that same village there lived a keloğlan,² and one day the girl's parents said to him, "Keloğlan, our daughter wears out a pair of shoes every day. We do not understand how she does this. If you can learn the secret of her worn-out shoes, we shall give her to you in marriage."

"Very well," said Keloğlan.

That night Keloğlan went to their house and slept under

¹These shoes were çarık, a kind of sandal made of camel or donkey skin.

²Keloğlan means bald boy literally. The baldness is caused by ringworm infection. The youngest (and often improperly attended) child was thought to be preyed upon most by this disease. Because they are unfortunate, they are the object of sympathy. Over the years the term keloğlan has come to signify any youngest son, and sometimes just any young boy, kel (bald) or not.

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the staircase. He hoped to find out where the girl went during the night. At midnight, the girl awoke, dressed herself, went down the stairs, and left the house, Keloğlan did not hear her go, for he had fallen fast asleep.

In the morning the girl's parents found her shoes completely worn out, and so they went out and bought her another pair. Then they asked Keloğlan, "What did you discover about our daughter's activity during the night?"

"I fell into a deep sleep and did not hear her leave the house."

The next night Keloğlan took a spindle³ and a long piece of string. He tied one end of the string to staircase and the other end he tied to the spindle, the point of which he placed against his nose. If anyone were to step on the staircase, the string would pull the spindle, causing it to prick his nose. Then he fell asleep again beneath the staircase

Again, the girl awoke at midnight. She dressed herself and went quietly down the stairs. As she walked on the stairs, the string pulled the spindle, and the spindle pricked Keloğlan's nose, awakening him. He then followed the girl as she left the house. The girl walked and Keloğlan walked; the girl walked and Keloğlan walked. After a while

³The Turkish word used here for spindle is iğ.

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came to a huge boulder at the foot of a mountain. The girl said, "Open, my boulder; open," and the boulder split apart. The girl quickly entered the boulder, but it had closed again before Keloğlan could enter. There was nothing for Keloğlan to do but return home

On the way home, he came upon three people who were quarreling about the division of three things: a pair of sandals, a hat, and a cane. Which of the three was to get each object? Keloğlan said, "Come, now, let me help you settle this dispute. Each of you will go to one of those

nearby hills, all of them about the same distance from here. At my signal, you will all start back. The one who gets here first will have his choice of these objects. The one who gets here next will have his choice of the two remaining objects. And the last to return will take whatever object is left." All three agreed to this and started out to reach three nearby hills. As soon as they had left, Keloğlan took the three objects and went home with them.⁴

By the time he reached the girl's house, her parents had gone out and bought her a new pair of shoes. They asked

⁴These are all magic objects: flying shoes, cap of invisibility, and self-powered stick for beating people. The narrator does not explain this, and she has her protagonist use only one of them, the cap of invisibility. She thus slurs over or telescopes a major set of episodes in this tale

*Magic
objects*

Trickery

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him, "Well, Keloğlan, what did you learn last night?"

Keloğlan told them what had happened. "I followed your daughter last night when she left this house. She walked a great distance, and I walked a great distance. Finally we came to a huge boulder at the foot of a mountain. She said, 'Open, my boulder; open,' and the boulder split apart. She entered the boulder, but it closed again before I could enter. But I promise you that tonight I shall discover more about where she goes and what she does there."

Again that night Keloğlan placed the sharp spindle against his nose so that he would be awakened by anyone descending the stairs. Once more the girl awoke at midnight and dressed herself, and again she awakened the sleeping Keloğlan as she descended the stairs. Placing upon his head the cap of invisibility, Keloğlan could not be seen, and so this time he walked just ahead of the girl instead of following her. They traveled along the same road as before, and so he knew the way as well as she did

When they reached the huge boulder, the girl again said, "Open, my boulder; open!" When the boulder split apart, Keloğlan preceded the girl through the opening, and so both had entered before the boulder closed again. Inside the mountain now, they went little; they went far. After a while they reached a hill of gold, and as they passed this hill,

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Keloğlan broke off a piece of the gold and put it inside his shirt. The hill was very angry at this and went "Shangır, shangır!"⁵ The girl was surprised at this and could not understand why the hill had become so angry

Some time later they passed a silver hill. As they did so, Keloğlan broke off a piece of the silver and put that, too, in his shirt. Angered by this, the silver hill also went "Shangır, shangır!" Again the girl was confused by the anger of the hill.

They walked and walked still farther, and after a while they arrived at a place where, apparently, the girl had been coming every night. There were three or five other girls of her age there, and they had already prepared the sofra⁶ by the time she arrived. As they were eating, the girl told her companions about her strange experience in getting there that night. "I have always walked past the golden hill without having anything happen, but when I passed it to-night, it said, 'Shangır, shangır.' Why do you suppose it was angry?" When I passed the silver hill, it, too, said 'Shangır, shangır.' Why should it be angry?"

⁵This represents an onomatopoetic sound that is meant to suggest breaking or cracking. It is one of the many standard onomatopoetic sounds used in Turkey.

⁶A sofra is a small and very low table, its surface being about ten inches above the floor. People who eat from it sit upon the floor cross-legged, in tailor fashion

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As they went on talking and eating, one of them set out several tea glasses, one for each girl. After tea had been poured into these glasses, Keloğlan took one, drank the tea, and put the glass into his sash. When the girls saw one of the glasses disappear, they all began to cry at once. The girl who was the only child of her parents said, "I must go now," and again they all burst into tears. She and Keloğlan left, he walking a little ahead of her, but she could not see him, for he was wearing the magic cap. When they reached home, Keloğlan got under the staircase and slept. The girl went to her room, and she, too, slept

In the morning the parents examined their daughter's shoes, and once again they went out to buy her another pair. When they returned, they said, "Keloğlan, what did you do last night?"

In the presence of both the girl and her parents, Keloğlan told them of his experiences of the night. "I arose last night when your daughter did, and I went with her, but she did not see me, for I was wearing my magic cap. I walked just slightly ahead of her this time. When we reached the huge boulder, she said, 'Open, my boulder; open,' and the boulder split apart. We both stepped through the opening, and then the boulder closed again. As we walked along inside the mountain, we came to a hill of gold. I

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broke off a piece of the gold and put it inside my shirt. Here is the piece of gold. As I did this, the hill screamed 'Shangır, shangır!' Later we passed a hill of silver. I also broke off a piece of silver and put it inside my shirt. Here it is. This hill also screamed in anger, 'Shangır, shangır!'

"At last we reached a place where there were three or five other girls awaiting your daughter. The sofra was already spread with food, and after she arrived they made tea. There were exactly as many tea glasses as there were girls. After the tea was poured, I took one of the glasses and drank the tea; then I placed the glass inside my sash. Here is the glass. When the girls noticed that one of the glasses of tea had disappeared, they all began to cry loudly. When your daughter announced that she had to leave, they all cried hard again. After that we both returned here."

The mother and father were satisfied with the information Keloğlan had provided to explain why their daughter had been wearing out a pair of shoes every day. They gave her to him in marriage, and they are still living very happily in that same village