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Location: Iskenderun
Date: February 1962

The Ugly Padişah and the Wise Vezir

childlessness

Once upon a time, there was a padişah with no children. As he was very wealthy, and held extensive territories, he was very unhappy at the thought of dying without an heir. One day he gathered together all the sooth-sayers in his kingdom, and these men prayed for him. Some of them also wrote various kinds of amulets [muska¹]. With the help of the prayers and the charms the queen eventually gave birth to a male child. As it turned out, however, the boy was an ugly child. The padişah, nevertheless, was pleased to have a son, though he was somewhat unhappy at the fact that he was so ugly. He celebrated the event on a large scale, and felt that he would now be succeeded on the throne by a child of his own.

The grand vezir of that realm was a very wise man, and so in order to protect the child, he had removed from the palace all the mirrors. This made it impossible for the boy to see how ugly he really was. When his father died, he became the padişah. He married many beautiful women, and

women all had mirrors. One day, when he was in the library, he found a piece of mirror among the books. When he looked in the mirror, he saw his own face, and he was horrified. He began to cry and sob.

¹The muska is an amulet. It is a piece of paper on which a religious expression or a quotation from the Koran is written. This is blessed, read to from the Koran, or prayed over by a hoca. It is then folded into a small triangle, an inch or two across the base. Wrapped in oilskin, it is then hung around the neck of the person to whom it is supposed to bring good luck.

The grand vezir was informed of the situation and he ran to the library.

"Why are you crying, your majesty? What is bothering you?"

"I didn't know that I was such an ugly man until now. I just saw my face in the mirror today," said the young padişah. "Why am I so ugly? What is my sin?"

When the grand vezir heard this, he began to cry also. The young padişah said to him, "I am crying because I have discovered that I am so ugly. But why are you crying?"

"Yes, your majesty," said the grand vezir, "You saw your face just once in your life, and look how you are crying. But we, your people, have seen your face all our lives. That is why I am crying."