

Troubles in Youth Rather Than in Old Age

Once there was and once there wasn't, when God had so many people, but it was a sin to say so. In that time, when the camel was a barber and the owl was a judge, there was a farmer and his wife. This farmer used to go and plow his fields each day, and one day while he was doing this, he heard someone shout at him from the top of a rocky mound, "Oh, farmer! Something terrible is going to happen to you. Would you rather have it happen in your youth or your old age?"

When he went home that night, he said to his wife, "A strange thing happened to me today. While I was plowing, a voice called from high on the rocks. It said to me, 'Oh, farmer! Something terrible is going to happen to you. Would you rather have it happen in your youth or your old age?' What should I answer if this happens again?"

His wife said, "Better have it in youth. Whatever is to happen to you, let it come while you are still young."

The next day the voice from the rock asked the farmer the same question. This time the farmer shouted back, "O, son of man! Whatever is to happen to me, let it happen in my youth."

That evening when the farmer came home from work, he saw that his house was going up in flames. He was able to save only his wife and his two small sons from the flaming house.

for someone.

On the second day of new employment, while he was away from home with the flocks, he suffered another disaster. A

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bezirgan<sup>1</sup> who had stopped for a while in the area sent someone to his house for some eau de cologne<sup>2</sup> with which to have his back rubbed. The shepherd's wife was a kind woman, and she gave the bezirgan<sup>a</sup> a bottle of eau de colone. The bezirgan concluded that the woman was interested in him, and so he abducted her, locked her up in his chest, and had her carried away.

When the shepherd returned home that night, he found his two small sons crying and his wife gone. All that the boys could tell him was that their mother had been put in a chest and carried away.

Brothers - - two

The shepherd now felt that he could remain in that place no longer. He packed up his few belongings, took his two sons, and departed for still another village. On the way he had to cross a river. He left the one child on the bank and taking the other on his back started to wade across the river. When he was about halfway across, he heard the child on the bank call, and he turned around in time to see a wolf carrying off the child. In his effort to rescue the child, he rushed back toward the bank, but in the process he dropped the first child from his back, and it was swept downstream by the current. Thus he lost both his sons

He continued his walking, and after a while he came to a village. There he saw a large crowd gathered, and he went among the people in

<sup>1</sup> A bezirgan is a traveling trader. He may be a simple pack peddler, or he may have greater resources: beasts of burden, servants, etc. Because Turks did not engage in such menial occupations in the past, businessmen, especially those who traveled, were usually members of minority groups (often Jews, Armenians, or Greeks) and hence objects of prejudice and even abuse. Rarely is a bezirgan treated sympathetically in a Turkish folktale.

<sup>2</sup> Eau de cologne is obviously a substitution for some medicine or other liquid. Possibly the Turkish liquid in earlier versions of the tale also had erotic as well as medical connotations.

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this crowd. The people of the village were busy electing a padişah<sup>3</sup> for themselves, and to do this they kept releasing a tame bird until it landed on someone. That person would be the new padişah.

The first person on whom the bird landed was the shepherd. Many of the people of the village objected. "Leave that Keloğlan<sup>4</sup> out of this. He cannot possibly be our padişah. Try the bird again." But once again the bird landed on the shepherd's head, and so this time he was declared padişah.

Bird Test  
Padişah--selection of

The new padişah ruled for many years. During this time his two sons that he thought had died grew up, and both became gendarmes.<sup>5</sup> They did not recognize each other, but it happened that they were both stationed at a gendarme post near the village. One day a bezirgan came along and left his chest at their post to be guarded while he went to pay <sup>a</sup> visit to the padişah.

<sup>3</sup>Padişahs were not elected by the common people. Here the folk mind is confusing several elements of the past and present. Although padişah means a ruler, it is not really applicable to a village leader. The chief man in a village is a muhtar, and he is, in fact, elected; he is the only elected official in the hierarchy of local government in a province.

<sup>4</sup>The narrator here called the shepherd Keloğlan. The shepherd is nowhere else referred to as a kel or keloğlan, and so what has happened here is a transposition of protagonists. The unpromising youngest son is so often the hero of Turkish folktales, and this son is so often inflicted with a diseased scalp, that any protagonist is likely to be referred to as a keloğlan.

<sup>5</sup>The presence of a gendarme--at least of the word gendarme--is another anachronism in this story. In modern Turkey all young men must serve two years in military service. Some of these draftees are transferred from the regular army to the Department of Interior which is responsible for the internal security of the country. These men provide the bulk of the police force in rural Turkey. A city will have its own police systems; villages and towns will have a few night watchmen, but law and order is maintained by the gendarmes.

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pay a visit to the padisah

One of the gendarmes said to the other "To make the time pass faster tell about your life. What happened

The other gendarme told him and the one who was a farmer. One day when he was plowing a field a voice from a rock addressed him and said "Something terrible is going to happen to you. Would you rather have it happen in your youth or your old age?" My father answered that he would rather have it happen in his youth and then he had many troubles. Our house was burned down. Our mother was carried off in a chest and a wolf carried her away and my brother drowned in a river.

Your brother and I drowned. A woodcutter pulled me out of the river and lived with him until I became a man. As the brother embraced me, other people they heard crying around from inside the bezirgan's chest. When they pried it open they found a woman inside and she said to them "This is your mother who was carried away in this chest."

The two gendarmes were embracing their mother when the bezirgan returned. The bezirgan was furious and went back immediately to the padisah and complained about the behavior of the gendarmes. The padisah ordered that the gendarmes and the woman be brought before him. He then asked them to explain their behavior. Each of the gendarmes told his life story and when they finished he said to them "These are strange stories but they are really stranger than you know for your father and this is

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The padisah had the bezirgan arrested. He had him tied to the tail of a horse, and then he had the horse whipped. The bezirgan was dashed to pieces against the rocks as the horse ran, and so ends our tale.

This is Type 938/938 B in its skeletal form. Usually it is elaborated in greater detail. One variant that we collected from Germencik in Aydin province runs to 5,000 words. [#10 of Summer '64]

The unlikely disintegration of the family, the still less likely reunion, the father chosen padisah by the bird test, the punishment <sup>of</sup> ~~at~~ the mother's abduction--this sequence may constitute the conclusion of any number of tales, as our archive reveals. It is not limited to Type