

Story 1190 (1990 Tape 6)

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Location: Kilis, kaza town of Gaziantep Province

Date:

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JALE
CUMULATIVE

The all Louse and the all Flea

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Once there was and twice there wasn't,¹ a long while ago, when the seive was in the straw,² when the camel was a pimp and the donkey was a town crier, I drew my sword while standing here, but the tip of it came up all the way from Egypt. I ate sixty pans of pilav,³ but my stomach was still not full and my face lacked a smile. Happiness to my son Mustafa! Sellite, you climb into the basket! You get the mother, and I get the daughter. Well, back in those times there were a louse and a

¹Formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales, this is known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run to several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a nonsense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce in English the rhyme scheme.

²The sieve is never in the straw. While threshing grain, workers pass the detached grain and finely ground straw through a large-mesh sieve. Longer pieces of straw which may still have grains attached to them do not pass through and will need further threshing. So, the straw is in the sieve, not the sieve in the straw.

³Pilav (pilaf) is a rice dish containing flecks of meat, sometimes pine nuts, sometimes currants. It is a staple of the Turkish diet.

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One day the louse said to the flea "Our roof is leaking
Let limb up there and repair it While they were working
the roof it llapsed and fell upon the louse killing him.
His blood flew out from beneath the roof in every direction
When the flea saw this he began to cry

A fly heard him crying and he asked, "What is the tter
with you Brothe Flea?

Oh-h-h Once we had Brother Louse with us but while we
were repairing our roof it collapsed upon him His blood flew
out from beneath the roof in every direction When I saw that
I tarted crying

If you are going to continue crying like this then I
shall keep going siz siz siz said the fly

When a bee came along and heard the fly making that noise
he asked "Brother Fly why do you keep making that noise?

The fly answered Oh-h-h We once had Brother Louse with
but while he and Brother Flea were repairing their roof
it collapsed upon Brother Louse killing him. His blood flew
out from beneath the roof in every direction. When Brother
Fle saw thi he began to cry and I began to go 'siz, siz
siz

"Very well then said the bee. I shall keep buzzing

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A crow heard him doing this and asked, "Brother Bee, why do you keep buzzing that way?"

"Oh-h-h! We once had Brother Louse with us, but while he and Brother Flea were repairing their roof, it collapsed upon Brother Louse, killing him. His blood flew out from beneath the roof in every direction. When Brother Flea saw this, he began to cry. Brother Fly began to go 'siz, siz, siz.' And I began buzzing 'viz, viz, viz.'"

"If that is the case," said the crow, "then I shall begin crowing." He flew up into a tree and perching there began to cry "gak, gak, gak."⁴

The tree asked, "Brother Crow, what is the matter with you today? Why do you keep cawing in this way?"

"Oh-h-h! We once had Brother Louse with us, but while he and Brother Flea were repairing their roof, it collapsed upon Brother Louse, killing him. His blood flew out from beneath the roof in every direction. When Brother Flea saw this, he began to cry, and Brother Fly began to go 'siz, siz, siz.' Brother Bee began to buzz 'viz, viz, viz,' and I began crying 'gak, gak, gak."

When the tree heard this, it said, "Then for my part, I

⁴Turkish crows make the same sound as crows elsewhere, but people perceive sounds as well as signs differently. Americans hear crow calls as "caw, caw, caw." Turks hear them as "gak, gak, gak." Similarly, Americans hear dog calls as "bow, wow," while Turks hear the same sounds as "hav, hav."

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shall start dropping my leaves." The dropping leaves fell into a brook, causing its waters to become turbid.

The brook asked, "Brother Tree, what is the matter with
Why are you dropping your leaves into my waters, causing them to become turbid?"

"Oh-h-h! We once had Brother Louse with us, but while he
Brother Flea were repairing their roof, it collapsed upon
Brother Louse, killing him. His blood flew out from beneath
roof in every direction. When Brother Flea saw this, he
began to cry, and Brother Fly began to go 'siz, siz, siz.'
Brother Bee began to buzz 'viz, viz, viz,' and Brother Crow
started crying 'gak, gak, gak.' Then I began to drop my leaves."

"What can I do to show my grief for Brother Louse? I shall overflow my banks," said the brook.

When the turbid waters of the brook overflowed the banks, it poured into a nearby field of squash. The squash asked, "Brother Brook, why are you overflowing your banks in this way? What is the matter with you?"

"Oh-h-h! We once had Brother Louse with us, but while he
and Brother Flea were repairing their roof, it collapsed upon
Brother Louse, killing him. His blood flew out from beneath
the roof in every direction. When Brother Flea saw this, he
began to cry, and Brother Fly began to go 'siz, siz, siz.'
Brother Bee began to buzz 'viz, viz, viz,' and Brother Crow

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started crying 'gak, gak, gak.' Brother Tree began dropping its leaves into my waters, making them turbid, and I then decided to overflow my banks

The squash responded, "If that is so, then I shall bend my neck down and begin to grow crooked instead of remaining straight."

A few days later the owner of the field came along and saw how crooked the squash was becoming. "Brother Squash," he asked, "what is the matter with you? Why are you all bent over in this way?"

"Oh-h-h! We once had Brother Louse with us, but while he and Brother Flea were repairing their roof, it collapsed upon Brother Louse, killing him. His blood flew out from beneath the roof in every direction. When Brother Flea saw this, he began to cry, and Brother Fly started to go 'siz, siz, siz.' Brother Bee began to buzz 'viz, viz, viz,' and Brother Crow started crying 'gak, gak, gak.' Brother Tree began to drop its leaves, which fell into the brook, making its waters turbid. Brother Brook then began to overflow into this field, and I decided to cease growing straight and grow in a crooked shape."

When Brother Farmer heard this, he said, "Alas! I shall show my concern by shoving the handle of this pickaxe up my ass." He did this and fell to the ground like a dead man

At that time the farmer's daughter was bringing his lunch

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to him, calling, "Father! Father! Father!" When she came upon her father lying on the ground like a dead man, she asked, "Father, what has happened to you?"

"Oh-h-h! We once had Brother Louse with us, but while he and Brother Flea were repairing their roof, it collapsed upon Brother Louse, killing him. His blood flew out from beneath the roof in every direction. When Brother Flea saw this, he began to cry, and Brother Fly began to go 'siz, siz, siz. Brother Bee began to buzz 'viz, viz, viz,' and Brother Crow began to cry 'gak, gak, gak.' Brother Tree then began to drop its leaves, which fell into the brook, making its waters turbid. Brother Brook overflowed its banks into the squash field, and Brother Squash decided to grow crooked instead of straight. When I learned of this, I shoved the handle of my pickaxe up my ass and fell here."

Upon hearing this, the girl threw down the meal she was carrying, struck herself in the head with a meat cleaver, and returned home.

Her mother was baking bread when the girl arrived. "My daughter," she asked, "why is the meat cleaver sticking in your head?"

"Oh-h-h! We once had Brother Louse with us, but while he and Brother Flea were repairing their roof, it collapsed on Brother Louse, killing him. His blood flew out from beneath

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the roof in every direction. When Brother Flea saw this, he began to cry, and Brother Fly began to go 'siz, siz, siz. Brother Bee began to buzz 'viz, viz, viz,' and Brother Crow began to cry 'gak, gak, gak.' Brother Tree began to drop leaves, which fell into the brook, making its waters turbid. Brother Brook overflowed its banks into the squash field, and Brother Squash decided to grow crooked instead of straight. When my father learned of this, he shoved the handle of a pickaxe up his ass and fell down like a dead man. When I discovered him in this condition, I struck myself in the head with the meat cleaver."

"You did well!" said her mother. "Give me the cleaver and I shall cut off my breasts and make kebab⁵ from them."

She cut off her breasts and made a large tray of kebab from them. We all sat about eating kebab and enjoying it greatly.

⁵Grilled meat (which may be prepared in a variety of ways) is referred to as kebab. Some pan-cooked meat dishes are also called kebab: tas kebab (pan kebab).