The Padişah's Youngest Son and His Cannibalistic Nephew

Once there was and once there wasn't,¹ when the sieve was in the straw,² there was a padişah who had three sons and a daughter. The daughter was married and lived apart from the rest of the family with her husband and the baby that had been born to them.

The three sons continued to live at the palace with their parents. One morning it was reported to the padişah that one of his horses had disappeared during the night. No one knew what had become of the missing horse. On the following morning it was reported that another horse had disappeared. After this had happened several days in a row, the padişah called his oldest son to him and said, "Son, tonight you will guard the horse stables and discover who it is who is stealing our horses.

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
Story 1192

That evening the oldest son took his weapons and went to the stables to watch for the thief. Before long, however, he fell asleep, and while he slept, a thief took another horse. The thief left very large footprints, like those of a giant.

In the morning the padişah discovered that still another horse had been stolen, and he was angry at his oldest son. "How could you fall asleep while you were on such guard duty? You allowed another of our horses to be taken!"

Calling his middle son to his presence, the ruler said, "Son, I want you to guard the horse stables tonight. I want you to capture or kill the giant who has been stealing our horses!"

In the evening the second son took his weapons and went to the stables to stand guard. But he behaved in the same way that his elder brother had the night before. He soon grew tired and fell asleep. At midnight the giant came and carried off another horse.

The next day when it became known that another horse had been stolen, the youngest prince went to the padişah and said, "Father, let me guard the stables tonight."

The padişah answered, "Your two elder brothers failed to stop the thefts of the giant. How then can you, who are so much 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."
younger than they, succeed in this matter?"

the youngest son was not to be discouraged. That night he strapped on his sword and went to the stables. When he began to grow sleepy, he nicked his finger with his sword so that the pain would keep him awake. Avoiding sleep in this way, the boy continued to watch for the thief. At midnight, he saw a giant approaching the stables, and he immediately attacked this monster. After the giant had received a deep wound in one of his hands, he fled without being able to take a horse.

In the morning the padișah himself came to inspect his pack of horses, and he was very pleased to discover that none had been stolen during the night. After the youngest son had told him what had happened, the boy said, "Father, today I should like to go and visit my sister briefly."

The padișah was so pleased with him that he said, "Very well, son. Go wherever you wish."

The youngest son went to the home of his sister and visited her and her family. As soon as he saw his nephew, he noticed that the child had a long cut on the back of his hand. The little boy said, "Uncle, look!" and showed him the cut on his hand.

the padișah's horses, and in that form he had been wounded on the hand.
Story 1192

Leaving his sister's home at once, the youngest son went directly to the palace. He said to the padişah, "Dear father, I have some bad news for you. The giant who has been stealing your horses is the son of my sister.

"Have you gone completely mad, my son?" asked the padişah. "How could the infant child of your sister also be a giant?"

The youngest son then explained all of the details to his father. "That child has on the back of his hand exactly the same wound that I gave the giant on the back of his hand. The child is a monster and should be destroyed.

"No!" said the padişah. "I shall never allow him to be touched harmfully by anyone. I shall never permit my grandson to be killed!"

"In that case, Father, I shall leave this place, for eventually that monster will devour all of you.

"What a foolish thing to say! But if you wish to leave, then go your own way!"

The youngest son left. He not only went away, but he went far, far away. He went so far that he reached the land of the fairies, and there he married a fairy girl. After several years had passed, he was one day overcome with homesickness. He wondered what had become of his parents, his brothers, and his sister. As he sat brooding about this, his fairy wife knew exactly what his problem was, but she pretended that she did not. She asked him, "You seem very absentminded today. Your
body is here but your mind is somewhere else. Why are you so lost in your thoughts?"

"When I came here," said her husband, "I left behind a mother and a father, two brothers, and a sister, and I cannot help wondering what has happened to them." Then he told her about his monstrous nephew, and about his argument with his father about that monstrous child. "Years have passed since I left home, and I keep wondering if I was right in my judgment of the child or whether my father was right.

"Why do you torture yourself in this way?" asked his wife. "Why don't you return and discover which of you was correct? I shall give you three magic objects. Guard them very carefully, and do not let anyone take them away from you. If you are in any kind of difficulty, help you need."

a comb, she said, \(^3\) and call upon them for help whenever you are beset by trouble."

"Very well," said the youngest prince and started at once toward his native land. When he reached the city where he had grown up, he entered the city gate. He noticed at once, however, that there was now something very strange about the city. There was not a sound to be heard, not even a buzz of a fly. He

\(^3\)Traditional baggy trousers (galvar) usually did not have pockets. Men carried small articles stuck behind their cummerbunds, inside their shirts, or in kerchiefs or sashes.
looked this way and he looked that way, but nowhere could he see a single living creature. He went to the palace and opened the door, but again there was nobody to be found anywhere.

Outside again, he then heard something. It was the sound of distant lute music. The young man was bewildered. "What is going on here?" he asked himself. "There is not a soul to be seen anywhere, and the only sound is that of faraway music."

Following the sound of the music, the youngest son came upon a giant whom he recognized at once as his nephew. The giant nephew held up the back of his hand and showed the wound on it, just as he had done many years ago. "Look, Uncle," he said. After a few minutes the giant continued. "I ate my grandfather and grandmother, my father and mother, and after that I gradually ate everybody else too. My teeth are blunt right now, but as soon as I can sharpen them, I shall eat you too! While I am sharpening them, you can play this lute."

"All right," said his uncle, and he started playing it tin, tin, tin.

While this was going on in his native city, his wife, far away in a distant land, knew exactly what her husband was doing. She was a fairy, and she had a magic mirror in which she could see whatever was happening anywhere. Looking into her mirror,

4 The Turkish word for lute, used here, is ud (ut).
she saw the trouble into which her husband had fallen. She ordered a mouse, "Go at once and replace my husband as lute player so that he can flee!"

Following her order, the mouse went at once, by means of magic, to the youngest son and said, "Give me that lute to play! While I am playing it, you must run away from this place!"

"How can I possibly escape?"

"Go! Go! Go away from here!" said the mouse, and with its very thin tail it began to play a tune on the strings of the lute, tin, tin, tin. It played the lute as long as it could, but it was so small that it soon grew too tired to play any longer.

When the music stopped, the giant shouted, "Uncle!"

Frightened by this loud sound, the mouse began playing again. Every time it became tired and stopped playing, the giant shouted, "Uncle!" causing the exhausted mouse to play again for a brief time. When the giant had finished sharpening his teeth, he returned to the place where he had left his uncle playing the lute. As soon as the mouse saw him coming, it crawled into a hole in the ground, but not before the giant had seen it. "O Allah! My uncle has become a mouse!" said the giant. He began to scrape the ground with his huge hands in an effort to catch the mouse. Then he said to himself, "Allah! Allah! How could my uncle turn into a mouse? He has deceived me!" He looked in every direction, and because he was so tall, he could see a
great distance. When he saw his uncle running off in a certain
direction, he at once began to pursue him.

Running much faster than a human being could run, the giant
quickly overtook his uncle, but as he did so, a barrier was
placed between the two. The youngest son, seeing the giant
approaching rapidly, had thrown his magic comb at him. Each
tooth of the comb became a large tree, and the trees formed a
dense forest blocking the way of the giant.

The youngest son continued to flee, and the giant began
knocking down the trees that separated him from his prey. He
was tearing branches from trees and smashing down the trunks,
çatır, çatır.  

When the youngest son looked around, he saw that the giant
was still chasing him. As the giant drew closer and closer,
his uncle threw the bar of soap at him. Landing in a puddle of
water, this soap began to foam and foam, making a whole mountain
of soapsuds. These soapsuds were almost as slippery as ice,
as the giant tried to run through them, he kept falling down,
sap, sap! He kept rising from the ground and falling again,
sap, sap! But he finally got past the mountain of soapsuds and
continued to chase his uncle.

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5 This is meant as onomatopoeia for the sound of the smashing of trees. It is not the usual representation for the sound of such activity. Çatır, çatır is the sound usually used to represent the cutting, with knife or sword, through bones or other hard objects.

6 Onomatopoeia for the sound of bodies striking the ground.
Story 1192

When the youngest son looked around and saw his nephew still pursuing him, he said to himself, "Allah! Allah! My final destruction is fast approaching!" Having said this, he threw the magic razor at the giant. Where the razor stuck into the ground, hundreds of very large razors sprang up. The giant saw this new obstacle, but he thought that he could run through it just as he had run through the dense forest and the mountain of slippery soapsuds. However, the first large razor that he ran into cut off one of his legs. A second razor cut off his other leg. He fell to the ground twice, sap, sap. Floundering around on the ground, he struck other huge razors which took off his arms and cut the rest of his body into small pieces.

Now that the young man was saved, he continued on homeward at a slower pace. When he arrived there, he said to his wife, "This and that and so on were the things that happened to my family and the people of my city after I left home and first came here. I was right about my nephew, and my father was wrong, but that makes no difference now, because none of my family is left. Will you return there with me and become my sultana?"

"Of course I will!" she said. "I shall come with pleasure.

Together they went to his native land. There he sent messages to the neighboring countries to which his former neighbors had fled in order to avoid being eaten. "I have killed the giant, and I have returned to succeed my father as padişah."
Story 1192

There is no longer anything here to harm you or frighten you. Everyone should return and live again in his former house."

All of the residents of that land who had not been devoured by the giant now returned. The new padişah and his fairy wife were remarried in a celebration that lasted for forty days and forty nights. They had their wishes fulfilled, and let us hope that we can all move up into their seats.

7 This may be a reference to the seating arrangement of guests in a village home. Guests are seated according to their social status—the most important along the center of the wall opposite the entrance, the least important farthest away from that position—all the way around the room near the door. As additional guests arrive and as guests depart, there is much changing of seats upward and downward. Thus a metaphor for success is the movement upward, hopefully to the highest position.