

Story 1590 1987 Tape 3)

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Keloğlan¹ and Köse² Share Bandits' Loot

A keloğlan and a köse arrived at the local gristmill at the same time. As they ground their grain,³ they got along quite well together. When they had finished grinding their grain, they each took some of their flour and with it they made a kömeç.⁴ As they were placing it in the ashes to bake, they agreed, "This kömeç will belong to the one of us who can tell the biggest lie."

¹The word keloğlan means bald boy, but the baldness is not that caused by aging. It is caused by ringworm infestation of the scalp. This disease often strikes the younger and perhaps improperly tended younger children of large peasant families. It is encouraged by uncleanliness. In folktales the keloğlan is a definite personality type, a winner, and a sympathetic figure. In tales the keloğlan image is often used as a disguise. Disguisers hide their hair by covering it either with a sheepskin turned inside out or with the cleaned lining of a sheep's stomach.

²A köse is a special folk type. He is beardless, and he is often said to have a heart-shaped face and bandy legs. He is always considered to be extremely shrewd and cunning in his dealings with others. Usually he is a very unsympathetic figure, so much so that in many tales he seems to replace the ogre or monster, and hence any stratagem against him is considered fair.

³Some gristmills in Turkey are owned by the community and available to all residents. In such a mill one does one's own grinding of grain.

⁴Large ring-shaped loaf of bread, sometimes sweetened--like an oversize çörek. It is often baked in hot ashes. Kömeç is an ancient Turkish word not included in most modern dictionaries.

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The köse was the first to tell a lie. He said, "This mill used to stand on that hill over there. One day, however, a very powerful storm blew through this part of the country it called the mill from the hilltop to its present position."

Then it was the keloğlan's turn to tell a big lie. This is the story he told. "My father and I were once beekeepers We had in one of our hives a lame bee. Once one of our neighbors captured that lame bee. The neighbor put that lame bee in a yoke with an ox, and he plowed all day with that mismatched team.⁵

After we had lost our lame bee, we planted watermelons. One of the watermelons grew so large that it stretched all the way across a river, but not before it had caused the river to change its course. This was during the time of World War I. Turkish soldiers who had to cross that river used the giant watermelon as a bridge. As they were crossing that bridge, each soldier would reach down with his knife and cut off a piece of that watermelon to eat, but the whole army could not consume that watermelon

After the keloğlan had told such a big lie, it was clear

⁵No. 1590 is a badly told tale. Keloğlan's big lie and its aftermath are a mishmash of three distinctly different tall-tale types. Only scraps of each type are used here.

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that he had won the kömeç. He cut slice after slice off the kömeç, and he ate slice after slice. The köse was very hungry, and watching the keloğlan eat made him even hungrier. Finally, when he could not stand it any longer, he said, "Please, Keloğlan, give me some kömeç to eat. I shall pay you five kuruş⁶ for every piece of kömeç I eat." Keloğlan agreed to this, and he cut several slices of kömeç for the köse. But the köse did not have any money with him, and so he said, "Keloğlan, I do not have enough money here to pay you, but I shall go to my house and bring the correct amount of money to you.

Keloğlan answered, "No, no, don't bring the money here I shall go with you to your house to get it

After they had started walking toward Köse's house, Köse pretended that he had to step aside from the path for a minute to urinate. But when he left the path, he quickly ran home leaving Keloğlan waiting on the path for him to return. When he reached home, he said to his wife, "Lady,⁷ Keloğlan will soon arrive here looking for me. I owe him some money. So

⁶The kuruş is no longer used in Turkey. It was a copper coin worth 1/100 of a Turkish lira. But when devaluation of the lira reached the level of 1/1,000 of a U.S. dollar, the kuruş became meaningless and dropped out of circulation. This occurred in the early 1970s.

⁷The Turkish word used here is hanım.

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that we shall not have to pay him that money, you are to tell him that your husband has died."

"All right," said his wife. When Keloğlan arrived at the köse's house, the woman said, "Oh-h-h, Keloğlan, my poor husband has just passed away. He is dead."

Keloğlan did not believe that, but he said, "Oh-h-h. I am very sorry to hear that. Inasmuch as he was my oldest friend, I should like to stay for his funeral." Keloğlan wanted to be sure that he was not being deceived by the köse. The village people washed the body⁸ of the köse and buried him. But after all of the other people had gone home, Keloğlan remained in the cemetery. He climbed a tall tree near the grave of the köse and remained there quietly

After a while two bandits entered the cemetery, where they thought they would not be seen, to divide the money and materials which they had gotten by means of robbery. They could not, however, agree on how their plunder should be divided, and they began to quarrel over this matter. Finally one of them said, "If we do not stop this quarreling, we shall be discovered and arrested. Until we can agree on how to divide

⁸Corpses are always given a ritual ablution before they are buried. This is usually performed by a religious official and not by "the villagers."

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this wealth, let us bury it in a freshly dug grave, which will be easy to open.

The other bandit agreed to this, and they soon discovered the newly dug grave of Köse. They shouted into the grave, "Is there anyone in there alive?" Keloğlan responded to them from the tree above, but the bandits thought that the voice had come from the grave. Confused and frightened by what they thought was a voice from the other world, the bandits dropped everything and fled.

Keloğlan then climbed down from the tree and dug Köse out of the grave. They divided the money and other things that the bandits had left behind.⁹

⁹This is an atypical resolution of such a tale. In Turkish tales the keloğlan and the köse, tricksters of two different kinds, are often pitted against each other. They usually give no quarter in their conflict, and they almost never part amicably at the end of any event. The köse is often vicious or sinister, and the sympathy of the audience is usually given to the younger and often unfortunate keloğlan.