

Story 1825 1970 Tape 16)

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Date: 1970

The Lost and Injured Lame Bee

In an earlier time, when the sieve was in the straw,¹ there was a keloğlan² who worked for an ağa.³ He had been given the responsibility of taking care of forty beehives.

¹The somewhat inept narrator has here given just a fragment of a formulaic opening device used frequently in Turkish folktales, a device known as a tekerleme. A tekerleme is a series of nonsense jingles, filled with absurdities and incongruities, which serves as a comic attention getter for the story that is to follow. When the sieve was in the straw is an absurdity. The type of sieve referred to here is a kalbur, which has very large mesh openings (about 1/2 to 3/4 inch). Into this kalbur are poured the grain that has been threshed plus the short pieces of straw to which some kernels of the grain are still attached; the grain is bagged, but the straw bits are set aside for further threshing. The straw goes into the sieve; it is nonsensical to say that the sieve was in the straw.

²Keloğlan means bald boy. The baldness of children is caused by ringworm infection. Since uncleanliness contributes to the spread of this disease, the younger children in a large family are often its victims, for they may be poorly tended and are unable to keep themselves clean. In Turkish folktales the keloğlan is a sympathetic figure who (through ingenuity and good luck) is often more successful than his older siblings.

³Rural landowner, a man of status and sometimes wealth. Besides designating such a person, the word ağa may also be used as a mild honorific or term of flattery.

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Every evening when he brought the bees home, he would feed and water them,⁴ and then he would close up the hives for the night. One evening as he was tending the bees in this way, Keloğlan noticed that a lame bee was missing from its hive. He waited some time for it to return before closing up its hive, but it did not come back. He went directly to the chicken coop and selected the largest rooster that he could find. He put a bridle over the bird's head and a saddle upon its back. Then, after he had mounted the rooster, he said good-bye and started out in search of the lame bee.⁵

Keloğlan looked in many places for the lame bee. As he rode along, he would say to himself, "It may be here, or "It may be over there." He finally reached the seacoast

⁴Bees are not fed by human hands or watered. Because the keloğlan is a sort of bee herdsman, his charges are treated by the narrator as if they were such larger livestock as sheep, goats, or cows.

⁵Even if it were possible for a human being to ride a rooster, one might ask why anyone would select such a mount. It may be the result of a bit of subconscious narrative syncretism. The lame creature in some variants of this tale is not a bee but a rooster. There is a faint possibility that the narrator knew these variants but at the moment of performance was confused and so (without any forethought) found a way (however illogical) to use both creatures.

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and, looking out across the water, he could see a small offshore island. As he was looking at that island, he saw on one part of the island a group of people threshing wheat. Upon looking more closely, he saw that they had harnessed his lame bee and were forcing it to pull a heavy döğen⁶ back and forth across the threshing floor. It made Keloğlan very sad to see his lame bee compelled to do such hard work.

Keloğlan tried to think of a way to get to the island. Reaching into his pocket, he found a walnut shell, which he placed on the surface of the sea waves. [At this point the narrator commented, "This is just a story, you know!"]⁷ He then rode the rooster aboard the walnut shell and set forth for the island. Sometimes they rowed and sometimes they sailed, and after a while they reached the island.

⁶A flat, rectangular structure (about 2 x 4 meters) of planks (2-3 inches thick). Into the bottom side of this structure are driven 50-60 pieces of flint with their sharp edges protruding 1-2 inches. After sheaves of wheat are spread out on the threshing floor (a circle of packed clay dried in the sun), the döğen is dragged back and forth across the wheat. The sharp flints strip some of the grain free from the stalks of straw. The grain not so freed remains attached to only very short pieces of straw, for in the initial threshing process all of the straw is chopped up. The kernels of wheat and the grain-laden bits of straw are then separated by means of a wide-mesh sieve. See Footnote 1 above. Normally a horse or donkey pulls the döğen.

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Going to the man in charge of the threshing, Keloğlan greeted him, "Selamünaleyküm."

"Aleykümselam,"⁷ answered the man

"What makes you think that you can use my bee to pull this döğen?"

"I found it wandering around near here, and so I claimed it as my bee," answered the man

"All right, but the bee will be yours for just this one occasion, and you must pay for its use by sharing the grain that it has threshed. Half of it will be yours and half of it will be mine." This was agreed upon.

Within a few days the wheat had all been harvested and threshed. Accepting with thanks whatever Allah had given, they placed the grain in sacks and divided the crop evenly.

Keloğlan loaded his sacks on the rooster. Putting the lame bee under his hat, he climbed onto the load of sacks and rode back to the shore of the island. There he again took the walnut shell from his pocket and placed it

⁷The greetings exchanged by Moslems not acquainted or not well acquainted with each other. The expressions mean, respectively, "May peace be unto you," and "May peace be unto you too."

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upon the surface of the water. Loading the rooster the grain into the walnut shell, Keloğlan made the return voyage to the mainland, sometimes sailing, sometimes rowing.⁸

When they landed on the mainland, Keloğlan loaded part of the grain sacks on the lame bee and the rest on the rooster. Then he climbed on the rooster's back they traveled to the home of the ağa. "Selamünaleyküm," called Keloğlan.

"Aleykümselam," responded the ağa.

"I discovered that our lame bee had gone into business, and so I hope that you will pardon me for taking so long to recover him."

"Very well, but what is it that the bee has brought us?"

"It has brought half of a wheat crop, but the bee has been injured. It has a great sore on its neck caused by the rubbing of the yoke it was required to wear in order to pull a döğen."

⁸Although the narrator has forgotten how this very well-known tale ends, he remembers that walnuts are involved. Perhaps it is a vague but confused recognition of this that caused him to invent a walnut-shell ship rather than one made from a chip of wood or--let us say--a clamshell.

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ağa said, "Take some walnut meats and pound them until they have been turned into a fine powder. Rub some of that powder on the bee's neck, and the sore will be healed

"Yes, my ağa, said Keloğlan. Taking some walnut meats from his pocket, he pounded them and rubbed the powder on the lame bee's sore neck. On the following day when Keloğlan went to examine the bee's neck, he was amazed to find growing from it hundreds of small walnut plants covered with walnuts. The plants were growing so thickly that Keloğlan could not get near many of the walnuts. He therefore went to the ağa and said, "My ağa, the situation is such and such. How should I harvest all of those walnuts?"

should take a sickle and cut down all of the walnut plants."

Taking a sickle, Keloğlan began to reap the walnut crop. After he had been doing this for a few minutes, he saw a boar run out of the forest and begin eating the walnuts. The sickle began chasing the boar, but the boar eluded it. The sickle chased the boar in another direction, but the boar avoided it. After this chase had gone on for

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some time, the sickle caught up with the boar and killed it. By then, however, the sickle had run against almost all of the walnut plants, cutting them down as it went. In this way all of the walnut crop was harvested and given to the ağa.

They are still making a good living. They had their wishes fulfilled; may we be fortunate enough to move upward into their position.

Editorial Note: There is never a definitive text for a folktale in the way that there may be for a piece of written literature. A given rendition of a folktale does not have to conform to any preestablished pattern. However, if a particular version is distributed widely both in time and in space, it may shed light on a variant that appears far less frequently--perhaps just once.

"The Lost and Injured Lame Bee" follows the plot line of the traditional form of this tale up through the point where powdered walnuts are rubbed on the sore neck of the lame bee. Here is what happens in the traditional form.

From the sore neck of the bee grows a tall walnut tree. When walnuts ripen on this tree, passersby try to knock them down by throwing stones and clods of mud at them. After a while, all of this dirt and stones form a whole field on which a wheat crop is planted. When harvest time arrives, someone begins cutting the wheat with a sickle, the standard tool for reaping before the machine age arrived. Either a fox or a boar runs onto the field, and the reaper tries to

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drive it off by throwing the sickle at it, but the sickle penetrates the animal's hide only far enough to frighten it. As it runs wildly around the field with part of the sickle blade exposed, it reaps the entire crop. The wheat crop is the reason for introducing a sickle into the tale. One does not reap walnuts with a sickle, and walnuts do not grow at ground level.