Fatma and Her Evil Stepmother

There was once a family consisting of a shepherd, his wife, and their daughter, Fatma. After awhile, Fatma's mother died, and her father married another woman. The stepmother gathered wool from the neighbors to be spun by Fatma. The money earned by Fatma's spinning was used by her stepmother to buy flour. One kilogram of spun wool was worth two kilograms of flour. Besides spinning wool, the girl was forced to do another job at the same time. The family had a red cow. The stepmother ordered Fatma to spin wool while she was guarding the cow as it grazed in the village pasture. The girl did whatever the stepmother ordered.

One day Fatma led the cow to the pasture with one hand while under her other arm she carried a bundle of wool. It was an especially windy day, and it was not long before the wool was blown away. Fatma cried out, "Alas, father wind, bring me back the wool or my stepmother will beat me." The wind heard her request and blew the wool down the chimney of a nearby house.
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The girl went to that house and knocked on the door. When an old woman opened the door, Fatma said, "Oh, grandmother, please give me back my wool. I would gladly sacrifice my head for you if you return it to me. My stepmother will beat me if you don't give it to me."

"Come in, and I shall go and get your wool for you from the chimney." When Fatma entered the old woman's house, she noticed that it was very messy. The old woman asked the girl, "Which house is the neater, your mother's house or mine?"

"Yours is much neater."

The woman then said, "Come closer and look at my head. Which head is the cleaner, your mother's head or mine?"

The old woman's head was very dirty, and it was infested with lice, but Fatma didn't want her to be offended and so she said, "Yours is much cleaner."

"Here is your wool," said the old woman. "As you leave here, you will see a fountain of clear water. Take off your clothes and bathe in that fountain. Continue walking until you come to a spring full of black water. Color your eyelashes and eyebrows with water from that spring. A short distance from there you will come upon a spring of
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red water. Rub your cheeks with that water, and it will brighten them. But do not turn around or look back. Even if you should hear a man laugh or a donkey bray, do not look back."¹

"All right," said Fatma. "I shall do everything just as you have instructed me." Then, taking her bundle of wool, she left. Soon she came to a fountain of clear water. Removing her clothes, she bathed in that water. When she reached the black spring, she painted her eyelashes and eyebrows with its water. Later she rubbed her cheeks with the water of the red spring. Her beauty became so great that it might have said to the moon, "Don't bother to rise tonight, for I shall rise in your place."² With her wool

¹This is an ancient and widely distributed taboo. See Motif C331 in Stith Thompson's Motif Index of Folk Literature.

²Throughout the Moslem Middle East the moon is greatly admired as a symbol of beauty. Both oral and written literature testify to this. To compare any woman's beauty to that of the moon is to flatter the female. Here the girl is not only being compared with the moon but she is even said to excel the celestial orb in beauty. So great is her beauty that it seems to be saying to the moon, "There is no point in your rising tonight, for I am more worthy of that role."
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beneath her arm, Fatma took the cow from the pasture and returned home.

When the stepmother saw Fatma's great beauty, she became very jealous, for she wanted such attractiveness for her own natural daughter. To herself she said, "See how much uglier my own daughter gets all the time. Let me keep Fatma at home and have my own daughter do the work that Fatma has been doing. Perhaps she will grow prettier too. No one knows how beautiful she may become!" On the following day, therefore, she gave her own daughter one hundred grams of wool. "Take this wool to spin while you are guarding the cow as it grazes in the pasture. Then return here when the sun begins to set."

The ugly girl tried and tried to spin the wool, but she was unable to do it correctly. Suddenly a gust of wind blew away her wool, carrying it into the old lady's stable through a chimney. The girl cursed at the wind as she ran after the wool. When she arrived at the house and stable of the old woman, she cursed at them, too. "Give me my wool!" she demanded, cursing at the old woman.

"Why are you cursing so much?" asked the old woman. "Come with me and we shall recover your wool. When the
ugly girl entered the house, the old woman asked her, "Look at the inside of my home. Which is the neater, my home or your mother's home?"

"Well, of course my mother's home is much neater than this one."

"Now look at my hair and tell me whether it is cleaner or dirtier than your mother's hair."

"My mother's hair is far cleaner than yours is."

The old woman then said, "As you are leaving with your wool, you will come to a fountain of clear water. Stay away from that fountain. Farther along you will come to a well of black water. Take off your clothes and bathe in that water. A little later you will see a spring of red water. Be careful to avoid that red water. If you should hear a man laugh or a donkey bray, turn around quickly to determine why such a noise is being made.

The ugly girl set out with the bundle of wool beneath her arm. She passed the clear water fountain and came to the spring of black water. There she removed her clothes and bathed in the black water, which made her skin as black as coal. When she came to the spring of red water, she passed it without even slowing down. She proceeded on home.
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When her mother saw this girl, she started to cry and pull her hair. "What is this? My daughter has become even uglier. What can be doing this to us? Perhaps it is that red cow, which seems to be much more intelligent than most other animals." The stepmother then mixed some dough and rolled it out in very thin sheets. After baking those sheets of dough, she spread them out on a kilim\(^3\) in order to dry them thoroughly. Then she lay down upon them.

When her husband got home from work that day, he was tired and very hungry. He said, "Wife, make some göreks\(^4\) for me. I have not eaten all day, and I am very hungry."

"I cannot do that because I am very ill. In fact, I am dying." She continued to lie on the kilim covered with thin dry bread.

Her husband said, "I worked hard all day, but now it is night, and I am hungry."

"I cannot help it. I am so sick that I am dying." As she said that, she rolled this way and she rolled that way on the kilim, making the dry bread crackle. "You can hear

\(^3\)A flat woven carpet without the pile or nap of an "Oriental" rug.

\(^4\)A bun or small round cake, usually sweetened; a fruit topping is sometimes added.
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my bones breaking as I move my body. Everyone who has seen my condition has said that the only way I can be cured is by eating some of the flesh of our red cow."

Frightened by his wife's condition, the husband said quietly to himself, "It is only a cow and not anything very important. If my wife should die, I could not get another wife even for the price of two cows." Even though he said this very softly, he was overheard by his daughter, Fatma

Fatma went to the stable at once and said, "Alas, dear cow! They are going to slaughter you. What am I going to do without you?"

The cow answered, "Fatma, my meat will taste very bitter to them, but it will taste pleasant when you eat it. They will, therefore, leave it all for you. Roast my meat and store it in an earthenware jar. Then put all of my bones in a bag and hide that bag somewhere here in the stable. Don't tell anyone about it. You will see later what will come forth from my bones."

After Fatma's father had killed the cow, he told his neighbors, "I have just killed my cow. If you wish to buy part of its meat, I shall sell it to you."

The black girl cooked some of the meat, making kabob
of it. When she tasted it, however, she said, "Mother, this meat is so bitter that I cannot eat it!"

Her mother answered, "Perhaps it seems that way to you because you are ill."

When Fatma was given some of that meat, she ate it with pleasure. The woman then said to her own daughter, "See how Fatma is enjoying that meat. If you cannot eat it, then you must be ill." Fatma's father was also unable to eat the meat. The neighbors brought back the portions of meat they had bought, saying that it was inedible. Fatma finished cooking the rest of the meat and stored it in a crock. Then she put all of the red cow's bones in a bag and hid that bag in the stable.

One day drums began beating to announce the beginning of a party in that city. Many people were invited to this party including the family in which Fatma lived. The stepmother and her own daughter attended that party, but Fatma was left at home, where she was given a very difficult task. The stepmother scattered wheat all over the floor and set out two cauldrons. She said to Fatma, "While we are gone you are to pick up all the wheat with your eyelashes and put it in one cauldron. And while you are doing that, you are to fill the other cauldron with your tears."
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After the stepmother and her black daughter had dressed in fancy clothes and gone to the party, Fatma began the work assigned to her. She was at the same time crying and trying to pick up the wheat. Suddenly a dervish appeared and asked her, "Why are you crying, my daughter?"

"Why do you want to know why I am crying?"

"I came here to help you and to share your sorrow. Tell me about it," answered the dervish.

Fatma said, "My stepmother spread all this wheat over the floor and set out the two cauldrons that you see here. She ordered me to pick up all the wheat with my eyelashes and place it in one cauldron. While I was doing that, I was also supposed to fill the other cauldron with my tears. I swear in the name of Allah that this is true. She and her own daughter have gone to the large party now being held in this city."

The dervish asked, "Daughter, do you have any wheat besides what is here on the floor?"

"Yes, we do."

"Do you have any chickens?" he asked

"Yes, we do."
"Well, then, bring the chickens here to eat this wheat, and bring an equal amount of wheat to put in one of the cauldrons. Then pour a bucket of water into the other cauldron and add a handful of salt to it. Your stepmother will have no way of knowing that the contents of that cauldron are not tears."

Fatma did just what she had been advised to do. After the dervish had left, Fatma thought, "Let me go and take a look at the cow bones in the stable." When she opened the bag into which she had put the bones, she found something else. There was a gorgeous dress there, just her size. No other garment could match the beauty of that dress. She filled one pocket of that dress with candies and the other pocket with ashes. After Fatma had put on the bright dress, she found also in the bag a pair of shiny shoes her size. People at the party who saw her expensive clothes thought that she must be a padishah's daughter or a padishah's daughter-in-law. She was at once shown to a comfortable chair, from which she distributed candy to those seated around her.

When the stepmother and her own daughter observed this, they called out, "Why don't you give us some?" Fatma arose
and went to where those two members of her family were sitting. Reaching into her other pocket, she took out a handful of ashes and threw it into their eyes. Fatma then fled, but while she was running home, one of her shoes came off and fell into the sea. When she reached home, Fatma returned her gorgeous dress to the place where it belonged. She put on again her everyday clothes and waited for return of her stepmother and her black daughter.

When those two arrived, the stepmother reported to Fatma, "There was a very beautiful girl at the party. She served candy to all of the other guests, but when we asked for some, she flung ashes into our eyes."

Fatma thought to herself, "That was just what you deserved!"

But something else happened as a result of the party and this was something unknown to Fatma. The son of padishah had been observing Fatma with admiration, and when she rushed away from the party, he followed her on his horse. When Fatma's shoe fell into the sea, the horse plunged into the shallow sea waves to get it. By the time the horse returned to the shore, Fatma had disappeared. On the way back to the palace, the prince stopped at a fountain to
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allow his horse to drink. However, the horse did not drink. It just stood before the fountain and neighed repeatedly. "What is going on here? Why isn't my horse drinking?"
When he dismounted and examined the horse, he found sticking partly out of its mouth a very pretty shoe.

The prince then took that shoe to his mother and said "I shall marry the girl whose foot fits perfectly into this shoe." His mother began to search at once for the girl whose foot would fit perfectly in that shoe. She went everywhere in the city and tried the shoe on the foot of many girls, but the shoe was always a little too large or a little too small. When the padishah's mother and her attendants approached the shepherd's home, the stepmother saw them coming. Quickly, before they arrived, she pushed Fatma into the tandir and placed the cover on it. She then presented her own daughter to the padishah's mother to have the girl's foot measured. But no matter how hard they tried to force the ugly girl's foot into the shoe, it was too small for her.

5A tandir is an outdoor oven, sometimes little more than a hole in the ground. Although most rural homes also have an indoor oven (fıрин), which is usually an extension of the fireplace, many still have a tandır for cooking large quantities of food.
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Then Fatma's rooster began to crow. It said, "Gukguluguluuu Fatma is in the tandır, and her feet are in the vent hole. She is knitting a sock.

The padishah's wife said, "In the name of Allah, let us find out what the rooster is talking about.

The rooster crowed, "Gukguluguluuu! Fatma is in the tandır, and her feet are in the vent hole. She is knitting a sock.

The padishah's wife went to the tandır and released Fatma. When they tried the shoe on Fatma's foot, found that it fitted exactly. "What a pretty girl she is," said the padishah's wife. "I shall have her married to my son." Rushing to the palace, she said to her son, "I have seen an extremely beautiful girl at the home of such and such a shepherd. The shoe which you gave me fitted her foot perfectly."

A group from the palace went to the shepherd's home and asked for the hand of Fatma in marriage to the prince. They brought many presents for the girl, including many pieces of clothing. All these things she placed in a chest. Then Fatma went to the stable and recovered the dress that the red cow had given her, and she wore that dress during the
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wedding celebration. The wedding festivities lasted for seven days and seven nights, and at the end of that Fatma moved permanently into the palace.

After Fatma had gone to the palace to live, her father also departed from home, leaving his second wife and her ugly daughter in his house. One day the stepmother said to her own daughter, "Fatma has never come to visit us since she moved into the palace. Let us go and visit her." When they arrived at the palace, the stepmother said to Fatma, "We have come to help you do your laundry." seashore was close to the palace, and so it took them only a few minutes to gather the dirty clothes and begin laundering them. The women removed their outer garments and set them aside while they were working.

As Fatma stepped into one of the washtubs they were using, the ugly girl pushed it out into the waves. When the tub capsized, Fatma was thrown into the sea, where a large fish swallowed her. The stepmother then clad her own daughter in Fatma's dress and took her into the palace.

6 It is most incongruous to have the padishah's daughter-in-law doing such menial work, but it does not seem so to peasant narrators. They view the whole world from a village perspective.
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But Fatma's rooster knew what had happened, and he sang about it loudly.

Gukguluguluuuu! Gukguluguluuuu!
Alas, my sister, alas, my sweet one!
Seven fountains were once built
Which lasted seven hundred years
Crows are calling for my blood.
The ugly girl would eat my flesh.

From the belly of the great fish came Fatma's answer.
Let my head be sacrificed for you
Oh, have your sister killed instead!
A giant fish has swallowed me
In this cramped space I bore a child,
A boy, like Shah Abbas's son.7

Now let your voice sing out that news

One of the servants heard this conversation between

7There is no obvious or immediate use for a reference to Shah Abbas here. Shah Abbas I of the Safavid dynasty ruled Iran from 1587 to 1629. He was a promoter of the Shi'ite division of Islam, and as such, he carried on harsh persecution of the orthodox Sunnites in his area. On September 9, 1605, his forces completely routed the Ottoman army. Why then should he be referred to in a Turkish folktale? Iğdır Province (until recently part of Kars Province), lies near the Iranian border, and many of its residents are of Iranian extraction. They speak an Azeri dialect of Turkish, as does the very large Turkish minority living in northern Iran.
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Fatma and the rooster. He went immediately to the son of the padishah and said, "Fatma's stepmother ordered that I be caught and killed, but I have escaped at least long enough to give you important news. Such and such has happened to Fatma."

After the prince had gone to the seashore and himself heard some of the further conversation between Fatma and the rooster, he rushed back to the palace to get his chief fisherman. He then ordered that man to dive repeatedly in the offshore waters until he could find and slay the great fish containing Fatma and her newborn son. The fisherman finally found the great fish and, ripping open its belly, recovered Fatma and her child. They were both close to death when they were taken to the palace, but they both survived.

Fatma's stepsister went to the prince's room to sleep that night. He asked her, "What is in your mouth? What are you eating?"

"My mother brought me some roasted wheat," she answered.

"Why didn't you give me some?"

"Because there were small particles of stone in it," she said.
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On the following day, bread was to be baked in the palace tandir. Early that morning the prince said to Fatma, "Today I shall wash my hands and face. The towel I use to dry myself I shall toss on top of the tandir in such a careless way that it will roll into the hot tandir itself. I shall then say, 'Whichever of my wives loves me more will recover my towel from the tandir.' But don't you go near the tandir. Let your stepsister reach in for and as she does so, I shall push her in too. In that way I shall take vengeance for you. Weren't you once placed in a tandir?"

After a few minutes, the prince washed his hands and face. The towel he used to dry himself he threw carelessly on top of the tandir. It rolled off the top of the tandir into the heated part below. He then announced loudly, "Whichever of my wives loves me more will reach into the tandir and recover my towel. When the stepsister rushed to do this, he pushed her into the oven too.

When enough time had passed to cook the stepsister thoroughly, the prince removed her body from the tandir, placed it on a large tray, and covered that tray with a clean towel. He then gave it to a servant to deliver to the stepmother
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When the servant arrived at the shepherd's house, he found the stepmother working with some village girls to press dry cow dung into blocks for future fuel. She said, "Take a look, girls, and see what fine food my daughter must have sent from the palace."

But when a village girl removed the towel from the tray, she stared in disbelief at what she saw. She saw the mass of cooked meat, but only the teeth, which had remained intact, suggested that the flesh was human. "Mother, come and take a look at this," she said.

The stepmother needed only one glance to realize that it was her daughter who lay cooked upon the tray. She began to shriek and pull her hair.

8In many arid lands where wood was scarce and most other fuels were inaccessible, people burned dried animal dung. This was true in the American West in the 19th and early 20th centuries where the dried manure of millions of bison was used for fuel. The name of this fuel was euphemized to buffalo chips. In rural Turkey fresh cow dung is still packed into old pans with approximately a 12-inch diameter. After the dung has dried to hardness, it is removed from the molding pans and stacked in neat square piles.