The Miller and the Fox

Once there were a miller and a fox who lived in the same part of the country. One day when the miller looked for the lunch he had brought to the mill, he discovered that it had been stolen. He looked on the ground outside the mill, and there he saw the footprints of a fox. On the following day the miller brought his lunch again and put it in the same place, and then he hid behind some bags of grain to see what would happen. Soon he saw a fox enter the mill and start eating his lunch. When the miller sprang out with his sword in his hand, the fox said, "Do not kill me! Let us become brothers. I can do many useful things for you." The miller agreed to this, and so they became brothers.

It was summer, and several unattended sheep were grazing near the mill. The fox caught one of those sheep and took it to the miller. He said, "Brother, slaughter this sheep and cook it for our lunch." The miller followed his directions, and the two of them ate lunch together.
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While they were eating, the fox asked, "Brother, do you have any money with you?"

"Yes, but why do you need money?"

The fox answered, "Go and buy different colors of paint for me."¹

The miller went to the marketplace and bought three or five small containers of different colored paints. With these paints he changed the appearance of the fox so that it looked like a human being. When that change had been completed, the fox said, "I shall now go to the palace and ask the padishah to give you his daughter in marriage."

The miller answered, "I don't think that the padishah would give."

"Don't interfere with this," said the fox. "I know what I am doing."

In those days there were many bandits, and some of them, called Tozgonmaz², were so fierce and so powerful that even the padishah feared them. The fox knew this, and he planned to exploit the ruler's fear. The fox went to the palace and sat before the front door in order to draw the padishah.

¹Although the narrator does not say so, these are cosmetic or makeup paints.

²One possible translation of Tozgonmaz is Dust Raiser.
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shah's attention to himself. When the padishah saw him sitting there, he said to one of his servants, "Go and see what that fellow wants. If it is money that he wants, give him a small amount and send him on his way.

But as the servant approached him, the fox said, "I am not a beggar. People call me Tozgonmaz Ağa.³ I have come to ask for the hand of the padishah's daughter for my brother. I am his envoy here."

The servant went back into the palace and told the padishah everything that the fox had said. "Since he is Tozgonmaz Ağa, and since he has come to see us, send him in here," replied the padishah.

When he was shown into the presence of the padishah, fox said, "Selamunaleyküm."

³ An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.
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"Aleykümselam," responded the ruler.

"My padishah, do you have any idea about why I am here?"

"No, but what a pleasant surprise this is! I am glad that you have come."

"Your majesty, with the will of Allah, I have come here to ask for the hand of your daughter in marriage to my brother."

"If it is the will of Allah, what can I say but, 'Yes'?"

After the fox had in this very simple way gotten the princess for a bride for the miller, he returned home. There he said, "Brother, do you have any more money?"

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4 Selamünaleyküm/Aleykümselam—traditional exchange of greetings between Moslems not well acquainted with each other. It means roughly May peace be unto you/And may peace be unto you too. If Selamünaleyküm is not responded to, the speaker should be wary of the one so addressed.

5 In dickering with a girl's parents for her hand in marriage, the traditional Turkish matchmaker would open the discussion by saying, "I have come by the will of Allah and the permission of the Prophet to ask for the hand of your daughter for so and so of the next village." The matchmaker can only hope that this is the will of Allah. He is speaking in the hortatory subjunctive mood.
"I have only one red gold coin left."

"Keep it handy, for we shall soon need it. I shall be back soon," said the fox. He then returned to the castle and said, "O my padishah!"

"What is it?"

"Your future son-in-law went to Istanbul to sell some oxen. He just sent back to me much money from that sale, but I do not have time to count it all piece by piece. Do you have a set of scales I can borrow for a short while to measure it?" When the padishah provided a good set of balances, the fox put them on his back and departed. They kept it at the mill for a short time, and while it was there, they stuck the miller's single gold coin to the bottom of the balance pan. The fox then returned the scales to the palace.

The palace servants examined those scales to try to determine what had been weighed in them. When they found the red gold coin and showed it to the padishah, he exclaimed, "Aha, my lala! You thought that my future son-in-law was poor, but I believed even then that he was rich."

There is a belief among Turkish peasants that the most precious gold is not yellow but red. This is ironic, for there is no red gold. Any gold that has a reddish tinge is probably an alloy of gold and copper.

In earlier times a male servant called a lala was placed in charge of the son of a royal or wealthy family.
Meanwhile the princess had become displeased with the husband her father had selected for her. She said to her mother, "My father has made a mistake. He should have given me in marriage to the son of a vizier. What kind of person is my future husband? His brother looks somewhat like a fox. Why is my father doing this?"

The woman went to her husband and said, "May I ask you about something?"

"Of course," answered the padishah.

"Our daughter would like to see her future husband. When Tozgonmaz Ağa comes to the palace this evening, may we have him bring his brother with him?"

"Yes, do that," answered her husband. "Send a message to Tozgonmaz Ağa about this matter."

When the fox received this message, he said to the miller, "I shall take you to meet your bride this evening. Get ready for that." After the miller had bathed and shaved, the fox said to him, "During our trip to the palace, you must always do exactly what I tell you to do."

As they passed through a village on their way to the

The lala acted partly as tutor, partly as valet. Even after the child had grown to maturity, the lala was sometimes retained to serve as his adviser.
palace, the fox said to the miller, "Take off not only your outer garments, but also remove your shirt and your underwear. Then start shouting as loudly as you can, 'Look here! Robbers have stolen the clothes of the padishah's son-in-law!'"

The miller got undressed and shouted several times, "Hey, look here! Robbers have stolen the clothes of the padishah's son-in-law!"

Some of the people in the street asked, "What is the matter? Why are you so upset?"

The miller answered, "What can I do? Robbers stopped me and took not only my clothes but also the gift which I was taking to the padishah!"

When word of this incident reached the palace, the padishah immediately sent to his future son-in-law both a set of clothes suitable for a prince and a fine horse. The miller thus made a fine appearance as he continued onward to the palace.

As he entered the palace, he was observed closely by the princess, who was hidden from view behind one of the doors. She went to her mother afterwards and said, "Thank you, Mother! Your son-in-law does not look at all like his brother!"
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After the miller had spent several days at the palace he returned to the mill. There the fox said to him, "I shall now make the final arrangements to have you married."

The miller objected, saying, "But I have no place to house a bride, and I have none of the things necessary to care for her in an appropriate way!"

"Don't interfere!" said the fox. "I shall now take you to a cavern. Remain there until I come for you."

then went on to the palace and entered the presence of the padishah. He said, "Your Majesty, we are alone at home, but we are anxious to hold the wedding and then have the bride brought there."

"If that is what you wish, then that is what we shall do. How are you going to arrange for the wedding celebration?"

"Out of respect to you, I am going to leave that matter to you, Your Majesty." The fox knew very well how large and how expensive a royal wedding celebration could be.

The wedding festivities lasted for several days, and when they were completed, a large group of the padishah's relatives and friends prepared to conduct the bride to her
husband's home. The fox said to the lala, "Lala, you should be the one to lead the bridal procession to the home of the bridegroom at Bayday Mansion. When you arrive at that mansion, have members of your group build several small fires around the building to honor the arrival of the bride. (Most people did not know who owned Bayday Mansion, which was set apart by itself, but the fox knew that it was the residence of a wealthy band of thieves. It was richly furnished, and its barns were stocked with supplies.)

Then Tozgonmaz Ağa moved swiftly ahead of the long procession and spoke to people along the way. When he came to a shepherd tending a large flock of sheep, he said, "Selamünaleyküm."

"Aleykümselam," answered the shepherd.

The fox then said, "You can see coming along behind me a large force of the padishah's soldiers who could endanger you and your flock. When they ask, 'Whose sheep are these?' you will remain perfectly safe if you answer, 'They belong to Tozgonmaz Ağa.'" The fox then went on to give

In traditional village weddings, the bride and groom do not slip away privately to a honeymoon. The groom retreats to his own home and waits there for the bride to be delivered to the nuptial chamber.
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the same instructions to a cowherd and a horse groom farther along the route

As the procession came abreast of the large flock of sheep, the lala asked, "Whose sheep are these?"

"They belong to Tozgonmaz Ağa," answered the shepherd

Very much impressed by this information, the procession moved along until it came to a field of grazing cattle

The lala asked, "Whose cows are these?"

"They all belong to Tozgonmaz Ağa," replied the cowherd. Those in the bridal party felt added respect Tozgonmaz Ağa and his brother.

But they were struck with awe when they were told that a large pack of fine Arabian horses was also the property of Tozgonmaz Ağa. The lala said, "Tozgonmaz Ağa and his brother must indeed be very rich!"

The fox then raced ahead to Bayday Mansion and knocked at the door. When someone opened that door, the fox said, "Selamünaleyküm," and as he did so, he observed that thieves had all been drinking heavily.

The thief at the door said, "Aleykümselam--come in!"

"No, no, I can't do that. I have come as a friend to warn you that your mansion is completely surrounded by troops of the padishah."
"What are you talking about?" demanded the thief.

"I swear that that is so. Look for yourself and see!"

Greatly alarmed, the thieves asked, "Brother, do you know any place where we can hide?"

"Yes," said the fox. "I can hide you in the hay and other animal food in one of your barns. Then when the soldiers arrive, I shall tell them that you have gone hunting. Go quickly and hide behind bales of straw and hay."

After the thieves had done this, the fox locked the barn door.

Going then to the cavern, he said to the miller, "Come with me. Bring along the lamp oil that you have here in the cavern." They went quickly to the barn of Bayday Mansion. There they poured the oil in front of the hayloft and lighted it. The whole building soon caught fire and collapsed on the thieves hidden in it.

By this time the entire procession had arrived at Bayday Mansion. They ate and drank for a week before leaving the bride there and returning to the palace.

The miller had acquired almost everything that anyone could want in this world, but this had a bad effect on him. He became very proud, and he rode his horse around arrogantly. The fox observed this, and he thought, "I have done
so many helpful things for this miller. I wonder if he appreciates my efforts? I believe that I shall test him."

One day after the miller had gone out to look at his livestock, the fox pretended to be quite ill. The princess, who was alone with him, became very worried about his condition. She said, "Oh, my ağa brother-in-law, oh, my pasha brother-in-law! I shall spend my days here taking care of you!" But the fox seemed to be dying.

When the miller returned, he saw that his wife was crying and the fox looked as if it were dying. "Why are you crying, lady? What has happened?"

"My brother-in-law ağa became ill and died."

"Why should you cry about that? He is now nothing more than dog food!" Saying that, he grabbed the fox by the tail and threw him outside.

Realizing that he might break some bones from such a fall, the fox controlled his movement so that he landed on his feet. He then said, "Oh, you ungrateful miller! I brought you from being a poor man who ate barley bread⁹ to being a wealthy man who could eat what he wishes. But look what you have done to me!"

⁹Millions of people eat barley bread, but they usually do so because they cannot afford bread made from the finer wheat flour.
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No one but the miller and the daughter of the padishah observed this incident, and so both of them begged and begged the fox for forgiveness.

The fox finally forgave the miller, and the three continued to live together at Bayday Mansion. Then one day the fox appeared to be sick again. Again the princess began to cry. When the miller came home, he asked her, "Alas, my wife, what is the matter?"

She said, "After you left, my brother-in-law again became ill again."

When the miller heard this, he wailed, "Oh, my brother, the light of my eyes! Oh, my brother, my arms and my wings!" He cried loudly for some time because he thought that the fox had again just been pretending to be sick. But when the fox failed to recover and they knew that he really was dead, they took his body and threw it upon the trash pile.