

Story 2073 (Transcribed by Ahmet Ali Arslan from his tape and later used in his unpublished dissertation.)

Narrator: Hanım Büyükdağ, housewife

Location: Hakveyis village, Iğdır, capital of Iğdır Province

Date: March 23, 1978

Grief for the Death of a Flea

One day a flea went up onto the roof of his house to sweep the snow from it. He slipped on the snow and fell to the ground below. He struck the ground so hard that he killed. His body was first discovered by a louse. The louse was grieved by the death of his friend, and to show his grief, he put ashes on his head.

A crow came along and asked the louse, "Why do you have ashes on your head?"

The louse answered, "A bey-like¹ flea has died. Do you think it is too much for me to put some ashes on my head?"

When the crow heard this, he plucked some feathers from the front of his wings and then flew up into a tree. The tree asked, "Brother Crow, why did you pluck some feathers from your wings?"

¹In Republican Turkey there are no beys. The term refers to a Turkish aristocrat of Ottoman, Seljuk, and pre-Seljuk times, and goes back to the 8th- or 9th-century--and perhaps earlier. The bey was a landed nobleman, sometimes wealthy and often politically powerful. In the 10th-century Book of Dede Korkut he was a tribal chief or one of his close associates. The Turkish bey was roughly equivalent to a British lord or baron.

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The crow answered, "A bey-like flea died. In grief for that death, Brother Louse put ashes on his head. Is it too much for me to pluck some feathers from my wings?"

In sorrow the tree began to drop many of its leaves. When a ram came along and saw the leaves falling, it looked up and asked, "Brother Tree, why are you dropping so many of your leaves?"

The tree responded, "A bey-like flea died. To express his grief for that death, a louse put ashes on his head, and a crow plucked some of his feathers. Is it too much for me to drop some of my leaves?"

When the ram heard that, it broke off one of its horns and went to the fountain to drink some water. The fountain asked, "Why is one of your horns broken off?"

The ram answered, "A bey-like flea died. A louse was so sorry about this that it put ashes on its head. The crow plucked some of its feathers, and a tree dropped many of its leaves. Is it too much for me to break off one of my horns in grief?"

When the fountain heard this, it stopped the flowing of its water. When a bride came to the fountain for water, she asked, "Why have your taps dried up?"

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The fountain said, "A bey-like flea died. To show grief about this death, a louse put ashes on its head. A crow plucked some of its feathers, a tree dropped many of its leaves, and a ram broke off a horn in grief. Is it too much for me to stop my waters from flowing?"

the bride heard this, she became so sad that she broke her water jar and left the pieces on the ground. As the pieces fell, one of them cut her breast. Back home her husband looked at the returning bride and asked, "How did you cut your breast?"

The bride answered, "A bey-like flea died. To show his grief about this death, a louse put ashes on his head. A crow plucked some of his feathers, a tree dropped many of its leaves, a ram broke off one of its horns, and a fountain ceased flowing. Was it too much for me to break my water jar, a piece of which cut my breast?"

"No, it was not too much, and I shall cut off one of my testicles."²

²This is the only ATON variant of the traditional "chain tale" that lacks some sort of resolution.