Once there was and twice there was not,¹ time within time,² when the sieve was in the straw,³ there was in a certain country a keloğlan.⁴ He was called Keloğlan, Son of a Herdsman. Although he

¹Formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales, this is known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run to several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a nonsense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce in English the rhyme scheme.

²“Time within Time” refers to the chronology of events in an interior world. A person may dream or fantasize at great length during only a few seconds of ordinary time. One may even seem to spend many years in that other world within; one may take a job, marry, have children, and see them grow to maturity. In Turkish this is called Zaman Zaman İcinde. It is elsewhere sometimes referred to as “Frozen Time” or “Moments of Eternity.”

³The sieve is never in the straw. While threshing grain, workers pass the detached grain and finely ground straw through a large-mesh sieve. Longer pieces of straw which may still have grains attached to them do not pass through and will need further threshing. So the straw is in the sieve, not the sieve in the straw.

⁴The 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
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grew up in poverty, he was a very good boy. As he herded lambs and cows, he used to play the kaval.5 Boys who came from more affluent families used to look down upon Keloğlan, but he did not take offense at this. He did not wish to harm anyone or anything, not even an ant. He kept telling himself, “Someday Allah will reward me too,” and he often dreamed about this.

By the time he had reached the age of eighteen, he was a very handsome young man. One day Keloğlan left his herd on the mountainside and set forth on a journey to seek his fortune. He went little, he went far, he went over hills and through dales.6 After awhile he came to a fountain near which a lion was lying and moaning in

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.

5A fipple flute. Although others play the kaval, it is an instrument usually associated with shepherds. It is similar, in a sense, to a bugle, for its tunes are used to direct the behavior of livestock.

6This is part of a formulaic description of a long journey made by the hero or heroine of a Turkish folktale. The remainder of this description goes this way: “... He traveled six months and a summer, but when he looked back, he discovered that he had gone no farther than the length of a grain of barley.”
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great pain. Keloğlan approached that lion and asked, “What happened to you? Why are you in such pain?”
The lion held up a front paw in which a large thorn had been imbedded. Keloğlan removed that thorn from the lion’s paw. The lion said, “Thank you very much, Keloğlan.” Then it pulled a hair from its body and gave it to the young man, saying, “If you should ever fall into a difficult situation, burn this hair, and I shall come and help you.” Then it left.

The Keloğlan continued on his journey. After awhile he came upon a plain where he saw three boys fighting. He went to these boys and tried to separate them. “Why are you fighting?” he asked.

One of the boys answered, “We have here a sheepskin and a fez which were given to us by a very old woman. We are fighting for them because we cannot find any way of dividing them among ourselves.”

“Very well,” said Keloğlan. “I shall help you make that decision. I am going to throw this stone as far away as I can. Whichever of you finds it and brings it back to me will receive the sheepskin and the fez.” He threw the stone some distance away, and when one of the boys returned with it, he gave that boy the sheepskin and the fez.

The boy then said to Keloğlan, “You may ask me for whatever you wish.”
Keloğlan said, “I should like to ride on this sheepskin.”

The boy answered, “I am still quite young, and there will be many other sheepskins and fezes that I might acquire.” Saying that, he gave both the sheepskin and the fez to Keloğlan.7

Keloğlan sat on the sheepskin and then said to it, “Carry me upward into the sky!” While he was flying through the air, he fell asleep and had a dream. In his dream he saw a palace on the side of Mount Ararat, and through a window of that palace he saw a very beautiful girl. Keloğlan woke up just as he was placing a ring on a finger of that girl. He wondered, “Who was that beauty?” Then he ordered the sheepskin, “Take me to the palace of that beautiful girl.”

When they arrived at that palace, Keloğlan discovered that all of its doors were locked. “Now lift me up to a window so that I can enter the palace that way.” After entering that palace and finding the girl’s room, he put on the fez and said, “Make me invisible.” Keloğlan then entered the room, but the girl could not see him.

The beautiful girl spent all of her time in that room. At mealtimes the servants always brought her food. This time when they

7This is an unusual and illogical treatment of this part of the story. Here the protagonist usually acquires magic objects by seizing them while three combatants race to recover the stone he has thrown. To have the contested objects awarded to one of the combatants is so illogical that the narrator here has to have the winning combatant (most illogically) give the objects to Keloğlan.
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brought her lunch, Keloğlan ate all of the food before she could get any of it. All she saw before her were empty plates. After her meals had disappeared in this way for two whole days, the girl could not stand that situation any longer. She wrote a note to her father and had it delivered to him by one of the servants. In that note she said,

The golden plate on the silver tray is empty.
Though silverware on the silver tray invites me.8

The father called the servants and said to them, “You are not taking care of my daughter’s need for food!”

“But, master, we are taking plenty of good food to her every mealtime, and the food is always eaten.”

For the next meal they prepared an especially fine tray of food and took it to the girl’s room. The girl sat in a chair at the table and began to eat, but Keloğlan, wearing his hat of invisibility, took a spoon and scattered the pilaf all over the floor. Confused by this, the beautiful girl called out, “Who are you? Are you a man or a jinn?”9

8In Turkish this couplet is rhymed:

Gümüş tepsideki altın tabak boş.
Yanındaki kaşıkları da çok hoş.

9When one is suddenly confronted by a strange being in an unlikely place and under unlikely circumstances, one utters in misin, cin misin? (Are you a human being or a jinn?—sometimes more freely rendered are you a jinn or some other supernatural creature?) This is a formulaic expression.
I am not a jinn but Keloglan, Son of a Herdsman. Who are you?"

The beautiful girl answered, "I am the daughter of the padishah of Ararat Mountain." When Keloglan took off his fez and became visible, the girl saw how handsome a young man he was. She fell in love with Keloglan at once, and after awhile she said to him, "Ask my parents to give me to you as your bride."

Keloglan then climbed upon the sheepskin and said, "Take me to my own village." When he arrived there, he greeted his parents. Then he said, "Mother, you must go to the padishah of Ararat Mountain and ask him to give me his daughter as my bride." He then took her to that padishah's palace on his magic sheepskin. When Keloglan's mother was admitted into the presence of the padishah of Ararat Mountain, the ruler looked at her shabby clothes and refused to let her speak a word. Thinking that she was a very poor woman who had come to the palace to beg some food, he said to his servants, "Give this woman a packet of food and let her go her way."

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The word jinn suggests two very different kinds of supernatural creatures. The first is the huge supernatural being who comes forth from a bottle or appears in response to some signal, such as the rubbing of a magic lamp or ring. This creature then proceeds to give the caller supernatural or magic aid to achieve what he wishes. The other kind of jinn is never seen. It is a spiritual force referred to in some Sufi beliefs and in other mystical systems.
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When the woman returned to Keloğlan, his mother told him what had happened at the palace. When Keloğlan heard this, he became upset and annoyed. He said, "Mother, what is a padishah, anyway? Isn't he a man like me? He is no better than I am. I do not want his food. I want his daughter, and I know for certain that his daughter wants me."

This poor woman, Keloğlan's mother, set off again on a journey to the palace of the padishah of Mount Ararat. This time when she was admitted into the presence of the padishah, she spoke out at once and asked for the hand of his daughter for her son.

The padishah laughed and said, "Of course such a thing could be possible, but before I would agree to it, your son would have to solve a riddle that I shall give him, and he would have to meet one condition that I have."

"Very well," said Keloğlan's mother. "We shall accept both your riddle and your condition."

The padishah then stated his riddle:

"Bir kari koca,
Yanlarinda horoz ile pülka
Eşlik eder lâm-elifka,
Birde küttük ile küthə.10

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10Inasmuch as Keloğlan will understand this riddle only later when specific words are deciphered for him, it is necessary to keep this
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Your son must discover the meaning of this quatrains. And my condition is that he should bring me a golden bowl that is not only extraordinary but also unique.”

The mother of Keloğlan said, “Very well, Your Majesty,” and returned to her home. There she said, “Ah, my son, as if there were no girl in this village for you, you want a padishah’s daughter!” Then she told him everything that had taken place at the padishah’s palace. Later Keloğlan’s father came home and he was just as upset about his son’s plans as his mother was.

Keloğlan said to his parents, “One of you is my father and the other is my mother. I understand your feelings, and I love you both very much. But my heart went to the padishah’s daughter.” They answered, “Yes, Son, we know where your heart is. But that girl is part of the family of the padishah, and we are a peasant family. They are rich, and we are poor. A girl from a palace cannot become a peasant wife. Listen to us! Give up wanting that princess!”

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in the original language in the text. All riddles are a challenge, but the inclusion of Arabic words here makes this riddle especially difficult. The reader is invited to improve our translation.

A wife and a husband.
Together a bachelor and single woman
Matched [produce] matrimony.
As well as wise and weary age.
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“No, I cannot do that, but do not worry about this. Things in this world are different from what they used to be.”

His parents said, “All right, Son, if that is the way you think, and if that is what you want to do. We shall always stand behind you.”

“Nothing is impossible,” said Keloğlan. “I shall go and talk to the wise man of our village about the padishah’s riddle.”

When the wise man heard the riddle, he said, “This is not easy to understand. We know that the first line concerns a wife and a husband. We know that the second line concerns a horoz, a bachelor, and a püшка, an unmarried girl. What is called làm-elisba concerns a woman who will bear a child. Kütük refers to one who is old and experienced, and kiıthsa refers to one whom life has exhausted. These words you have come by easily, but the kind of golden bowl demanded by the padishah will be very difficult to acquire.”

Keloğlan then went home to prepare for a journey in search of the golden bowl. On the following morning he kissed the hands of both his parents, took his food bag, and departed. He traveled for a long time. He went over hills and through dales, but when he looked back, he found that the distance he had gone was no longer than the length of a grain of barley. After awhile he grew bored and wished that he had a traveling companion. His wish was soon satisfied, for he became
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acquainted with a köse₁¹ traveling in the same direction. They became acquainted and told stories to each other as they walked along. The köse asked Keloğlan, “How many are there in your family?”

“Just my father, my mother, and I,” said Keloğlan.

“Then your family consists of a husband, a wife, and a bachelor.”

When Keloğlan heard those words used that way, he thought, “I have found it! I have found the meaning of the padishah’s riddle. It describes families—his family and mine!” He was delighted to have made this discovery.

When they reached the köse’s village, the two said goodbye, and Keloğlan continued on alone. He kept wondering how he would ever find the unique golden bowl that the padishah demanded. After walking some distance, he came to a fountain by the roadside. As he drank some of its cold water, he was suddenly reminded of the lion whom he had helped near a very similar fountain. He removed the

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₁¹A 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. Most Turkish folk audiences would consider him misrepresented when pictured here as a friendly and benevolent person.
lion’s hair from his pocket and burned it. A minute later that lion was again standing by his side. Keloğlan said to it, “I need your help.”

“Very well, Keloğlan. What is your difficulty?” After the young man had explained his situation and described the padishah’s condition for giving him his daughter, the lion said, “Do not worry, Keloğlan. You will get the bowl that you need. We must go to see the king of the lions and ask him about such a bowl.”

The two traveled together to the land of the lions. There they were given permission to enter the presence of the king of lions. After Keloğlan had described the kind of gold bowl he needed, the king gave orders to several of his aides. While Keloğlan was still chatting with the lion he had once helped and with the king, the aides returned with the desired bowl. Keloğlan was amazed. He opened his mouth to speak, but the king of lions said, “Do not ask where it came from. Your job is now to take it to the place where it must go. Good luck to you!”

Riding on his magic sheepskin, Keloğlan arrived next morning at the palace of the padishah of Ararat Mountain. After being permitted to enter the ruler’s presence, he said, “O my padishah, your riddle describes the composition of a family. Your condition for giving me

12 There seems quite clearly to be some truncation of the narrative here. Most lions cannot instantly produce unique golden bowls. The narrator lost the opportunity to give the tale one final element of suspense in a quest to secure the required bowl.
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your daughter in marriage was my bringing to you an extraordinary and unique golden bowl. Here is such a bowl.”

After that, the padishah had no doubt about Keloğlan’s being a suitable husband for his daughter. He said, “Keloğlan, you are a remarkable young man. From now on, things will go as you wish them to.” He called the father and mother of Keloğlan to his presence, and he congratulated them too.

The padishah then ordered a great wedding celebration for the marriage of his daughter to Keloğlan. It was a celebration that lasted for forty days and forty nights, and throughout all of that time drums were beaten and kavals were played. Many people participated in these festivities, and even the köse and the lion attended them.

Keloğlan and his bride lived happily together after that. They built a fine house and had trees planted all around it. They had all of their wishes fulfilled. May we move up into their positions.13

13In rural areas of Turkey there is often a set pattern for the seating arrangement at social occasions. The person of greatest status is across the room from the main entrance. People of lesser rank spread out in graduated distances to right and left of this central position all the way to the door, or, in extremely crowded conditions, even out the door. If someone of any degree of status enters a full room, everyone of lesser status must move down a notch. The wise person of lowly status therefore seats himself well toward the door so that he will not be affected by the possibly frequent shuffling for position. The terminal device used to close this tale possibly reflects the peasant preoccupation with social position.