

Bald Boy and the Magic Seal
A Turkish Story
By Meltem Basel & Anonymous

One day, Bald Boy was walking back from the marketplace after selling his crops to the people of the neighbouring village. He had made three gold coins that day and was very pleased with himself because now his mother would be able to buy food and clothing to last through the long winter.

Suddenly Bald Boy came across a group of men who were teasing a cat with a long stick. The cat looked very scared and was unable to escape. Bald Boy walked up to the men and said in a kindly voice: 'Please stop teasing that poor cat. If you stop, I will give you a gold coin.'

The men agreed to put down the stick and Bald Boy handed over a shiny gold coin. The cat was very grateful to the boy and walked by his side. He promised that if ever he was able to repay the boy's kindness, he would surely jump at the chance. Bald Boy could not imagine how a cat might help him in his life, but he agreed that the cat could join him, and so the two friends continued on their journey back to the boy's home in the neighbouring village.

The boy and the cat walked for a few miles until they came across an old man and an old woman who were beating a dog because it had been barking too loudly. Bald Boy approached the old couple and said in a kindly voice: 'Please stop beating that poor dog. If you stop, I will give you a gold coin.'

The old couple stopped beating the dog and took the gold coin from the boy. The dog was very grateful to the boy for saving him from the old couple, and he asked to join the boy and promised that he would always be faithful and help whenever he could. The young boy could not imagine how a dog might help him in his life, but he agreed that the dog could join him, and so the three friends continued on their journey home.

Not long after this, Bald Boy and his new companions stumbled upon two woodcutters in the forest who were trying to kill a snake with their sharp axe. Bald Boy walked up to the angry woodcutters and said in a kindly voice: 'Please do not kill that snake with your axe. If you leave the snake in peace, I will give you a gold coin.'

The woodcutters thought about Bald Boy's proposition for a moment and then agreed to put down the axe. The boy handed over his last gold coin without thinking because he was happy to have saved the snake from certain death.

The snake was very grateful and slithered up to whisper in the boy's ear.

'Thank you, Son of Adam, for saving my life. I am the son of the Snake Emperor and you must come home with me so that my father might thank you in person for your kindness.'

Even though Bald Boy had no more gold coins to buy food, he was happy to have saved his three friends and agreed to go and see the Snake Emperor before returning home to his mother.

When they arrived in the forest, the Snake Emperor was very grateful to Bald Boy for saving his son's life.

'I will give you anything that you ask of me,' said the Snake Emperor to the boy.

It was then that the young snake whispered in the boy's ear once more.

'Ask my father for his magic seal which he keeps under his tongue. With this seal all of your wishes will come true. All you have to do is ask and it will be given.'

And so the boy asked the Snake Emperor for his magic seal, and the Snake Emperor replied: 'You ask me for my most precious possession, but you saved my son's life and I will grant you what you ask.'

The Snake Emperor relinquished his magic seal and Bald Boy stuffed the seal into his pocket and returned home with his faithful cat and faithful dog by his side.

When Bald Boy's mother learned that her son had given away all of their gold coins she was very angry, but the boy promised that he would make up for this loss by marrying the Emperor's daughter and making a new life for his mother.

'And how will you do that, my son? This cat and this dog will not help you do such a thing.'

It was then that Bald Boy told his mother all about the magic seal that would grant his every wish.

The very next day, Bald Boy set off with his faithful cat and dog to the palace to ask for the hand of the Emperor's daughter.

'I cannot allow my daughter to marry such a poor boy,' said the Emperor when Bald Boy asked to marry the beautiful princess. 'If you wish to marry my daughter you must first build a palace next to mine so that I know she will be well looked after. But I know that you will not build such a palace with the help of a cat and a dog.'

That night, Bald Boy held the seal under his tongue and wished that he had a palace of his own. Suddenly there was a blinding light in the night sky. And when the light faded, there at

the edge of the forest stood a magnificent palace gleaming beneath the light of the full moon! The most magnificent palace the boy had ever seen. And it was his!

When the Emperor saw that the young boy had indeed built a beautiful palace, he agreed to the marriage at once. And so it was that Bald Boy and the Princess were wed that very same day.

The mother moved in with her son and daughter and lived like a queen in her new home. And the cat and the dog were also very happy in their new life.

The months passed and Bald Boy wished for nothing else as he was so happy with his new wife whom he loved very much. And so he placed the magic seal in a room all of its own and never told the Princess of its magical powers.

But one day, when Bald Boy was out at the marketplace, a crafty old bead seller knocked on the door of the palace and enticed the beautiful Princess to buy some of his beads.

‘They are very fine beads, my Princess, and you would do well to buy them from me.’

‘But I have no coins with which to buy them,’ the Princess replied.

The crafty old bead seller said that he would be willing to trade his wares for something within the palace. ‘I hear that you have a dusty old seal which you keep in a room in the palace; surely that is no use to you. I will take the seal in exchange for all of my beads.’

Because she did not know any better, the Princess handed over the magic seal to the crafty old bead seller who quickly disappeared across the lake towards his home in the dark forest somewhere on the other side.

As soon as the seal was gone, the palace disappeared into thin air and the Princess and the mother were left standing in the cold.

When the Emperor saw that the palace had disappeared, he reclaimed his daughter and promised that she would not be with her new husband if he could not look after her.

When Bald Boy returned home that day he was very sad to find his mother alone, his palace vanished, and his beautiful wife returned to her father. He did not know how to find the magic seal and was sure that his new life was over forever.

The cat stepped up to the boy and said to him: ‘I can find the seal but I cannot swim across the lake.’

Then the dog stepped forward and said to the cat: ‘I can swim across the lake with you on my back and together we will find the magic seal.’

And so the faithful cat and the faithful dog set off on their journey to recapture the magic seal from the crafty bead seller.

When they reached the river, the cat climbed up onto the dog's back and the dog swam across to the opposite bank. Once they were across, the cat began sniffing at the air and followed the scent of the bead seller through the forest with the dog close behind.

It did not take long to find the cottage where the bead seller lived, and they could see through the window that the old man was fast asleep in his chair before the fire.

'I will catch us a mouse,' said the cat, 'while you find us some peppercorns to grind up with your strong paws.'

And so the cat caught a little mouse and told it to sneak into the cottage and take the seal from under the tongue of the crafty bead seller. The dog sprinkled the ground peppercorns onto the mouse's tail and the little mouse scurried into the cottage and climbed up the bead seller's leg as he slept soundly by the fire.

When the mouse wiggled his tail, the peppercorn dust went straight up the old man's nose and caused him to sneeze. It was then that the magic seal flew out into the air and the mouse caught it in his tiny paws!

The little mouse ran from the cottage and returned the magic seal to the cat and the dog who quickly made their way back through the forest towards the river.

Once again the cat climbed up onto the dog's back and the brave dog swam across the great river.

And so the faithful cat and the faithful dog returned the seal to their master and the palace reappeared in a blinding flash of light.

Upon seeing the palace returned, the Emperor agreed that his daughter might once more live with Bald Boy. After all, the Emperor could tell that his daughter was very much in love.

Bald Boy decided to throw a huge party to celebrate the return of his beautiful wife. The whole village was invited and so began a feast that lasted for forty days and forty nights.

The mother and the Emperor agreed that there was indeed much that a cat and a dog could do if they were faithful to their master.

Bald Boy smiled because he had learned that friends always help each other when they can, and there is magic in such friendship. Perhaps even more so than in the magic seal.