

Story #118 (Tape erased)

Narrator: Gülsüm Yücel, in her 80's

Location: Taşköprü, Kaza town in the Province of Kastamonu

Date: August 1964

The Feslihancı * Girl

Once there was and once there was not, there was a son of a bey. He used to look out of his window and watch the Feslihancı girl watering her flowers. Every day this girl used to wear a pair of golden sandals and a silver pitcher and water the feslihan flowers. One day he made up his mind to joke with her.

"Every day you water these feslihan flowers," he said. "How many leaves does the feslihan have?"

"Son of a bey," she answered, "you are a man who reads and writes. tell me how many stars there are in the sky."

The son of the bey became angry, thinking that she had outwitted him, and he closed the window.

The next afternoon the girl came to water the feslihan flowers again, wearing golden sandals and carrying a silver pitcher. She began to water.

"Feslihancı girl, Feslihancı girl, you water the feslihan flowers every day. How many leaves are there on that flower?" he asked.

"Son of a bey, son of a bey," she answered, "you are a man who reads and writes. How many stars are there in the sky?"

He was again angry at being outsmarted by her and he decided to play a trick on her in revenge. One day the mother of the Feslihancı girl fell ill

*Feslihan is Sweet Basil, cherished for its fragrance, especially among people of Sinop and Kastamonu Provinces. In Istanbul the name is spelled and pronounced fesliyen. See Notes.

and wanted to eat fish [it is the custom for sick people to be given what they crave to eat]. It was difficult to find fish at that time. The son of a bey put on old clothes and went somewhere and found fish, had them strung on a stick, and walked by the door of the house where the Feslihancı girl and her mother lived, crying, "Here goes the fisherman! Here goes the fisherman!"

The patient heard the cry of the fisherman and said, "Girl, you said there were no fish, but there goes a fisherman."

The girl went to the door and opened it and called to the fisherman, "Fisherman, fisherman, come here. I want to buy your fish." The fisherman came to the door and she said, "How much do you want for your fish?"

"I am not selling it for money. I am selling it for a kiss," he answered.

The girl shut the door and came back to her mother and told her what the fisherman had asked for the fish. Her mother said, "After all, he is a peasant. Who will know that you let yourself be kissed? Give him a kiss through the door as you hold it open just a crack."

As the girl did not want to offend her mother, she went to the door, opened it a crack, and let herself be kissed by the fisherman. After the kiss, the fisherman gave the girl the fish and went away.

The next afternoon the girl went into the garden to water the feslihan flowers. The son of a bey began to joke with her. "Feslihancı girl, Feslihancı girl! You water the feslihan every evening. How many leaves does it have?"

"Son of a bey, son of a bey," she answered, "you are a man who reads and writes. Then tell me how many stars there are in the sky."

In answer, he said, "Do you know that you bought fish for a kiss?"

The girl was surprised to know that he was the fisherman from whom she had bought. She decided not to return to the garden, after this incident, to water the feslihan flowers.

One day the son of a bey [Beyoğlu] fell ill, and many doctors were

called to cure him. Every day a doctor came to see him. Those who were waiting at his bed were tired and were about to go to bed. Feslihancı girl found a fur coat and tied little bells inside it. She went one evening to the house of Beyoğlu. While everyone was asleep, she went to the bed of Beyoğlu and shook the fur coat over him. When he heard this, he asked, "Who is it?"

"I am Azrail," she said.

"You can do whatever you want as long as you do not take my life," he said.

"I am Azrail," she said again.

And he repeated, "You can do whatever you want as long as you do not take my life."

"Uncover your buttocks," said the girl. She had a pair of animal lungs in her hand in which many needles were stuck. She hit the man's buttocks with this many times. Although he cried loudly in pain, nobody heard him, and she ran away.

Beyoğlu lay six months in bed after being struck by her in this manner, so serious were his wounds from the needles. When he recovered, he asked his attendants to take him in his armchair to the window. He wanted to joke with the girl again.

The Feslihancı girl came again to the garden. "Feslihancı girl, Feslihancı girl, you are watering the feslihan flowers. How many leaves are there on that flower?"

"Beyoğlu, Beyoğlu, you read and write. How many stars are there in the sky?" she answered.

"Do you know that you let yourself be kissed for a string of fish?" he said

"And do you know that you lay in bed for six months after being paddled by a pair of lungs that cost 50 kurus?" she answered.

"What can I do to take revenge?" the young man asked himself. But at the same time he had a certain affection for the young woman. The girl was

beginning to have a similar affection.

"Mother," he asked, "can you get this Feslihancı girl for me in marriage?"

Matchmakers were sent to the girl one day and she was given to Beyoğlu as his wife. Before the girl came to the home of Beyoğlu, she put a hammer, a pair of pliers, an adze, and several other things* into her chest in order to take revenge against him. And Beyoğlu had an earthen cellar made in his house where he intended to have the Feslihancı girl kept.

The wedding took place. The Feslihancı girl came to the house of Beyoğlu with her face veiled, and she was immediately taken down to the cellar. She was given food and drink there, but not allowed to go out at all. Some time passed in this way. Then Beyoğlu had to go to Aleppo on business. Speaking through the window of the cellar he said, "Feslihancı girl, Feslihancı girl, I have to go to Aleppo on business. I shall be away for a year, but I shall leave enough provisions to last you more than a year. You should not have any difficulties."

"Of course I will not, as long as you are alive," said the Feslihancı girl, flattering her husband. "What kind of a horse will you ride? And what color suit will you wear?"

He answered, "I shall be riding a black horse and wearing a black suit."

The Feslihancı girl had dug herself a tunnel under the wall of the house to the garden of her mother's house where she used to water the feslihan flowers. She used this tunnel frequently. She took the money Beyoğlu gave her to her mother's house and had a black horse and a black suit bought with it.

Before the young man left, he came to the cellar and said, "Feslihancı girl, I am now leaving."

She prayed and said, "God speed you."

*These tools are never used. It is impossible to say whether the narrator simply forgot about them or whether they are vestiges of an earlier form of this tale not wholly understood by the narrator.

Immediately after Beyoğlu left, she dressed in her black suit and mounted her black horse and rode to overtake him. She caught up with him as he was about to leave the city. "Hey, young man, where are you going?" he asked.

"Where are you going?" she answered.

"I am going to Aleppo," he said.

"I am going that way, too."

"Our suits and our horses are alike and we are both going to Aleppo. We can be friends," Beyoğlu said.

They went to Aleppo, eating and drinking together, sitting and riding together. When the Feslihancı girl arrived at Aleppo, she dismounted from her horse and went to a coffee house and began to search for a witch. In those days there were witches everywhere. She asked people to show her the house of an old woman. They said, "That is the house of the witch, over there."

When she reached this house, she said, "O grandmother, here is some money for you. Let me in. Go to the coffee house over there and sell me to the young man, and I shall please you even more. Sell me to him."

The witch went to the coffee house and asked the owner of the place, "Where is the young man who just arrived?"

He called the young man. "Young man, you are being asked for by someone!"

He came to the door of the coffee house, where the witch faced him and asked, "Where are you from, young man? Are you married or single?"

"I am single," he answered.

"I have a beautiful young daughter whom I do not dare to marry to anyone [here]. Would you like to marry her? How long will you be here?" she asked.

"I shall be staying a year," said Beyoğlu.

The girl was given to the young man in marriage. She lived with him a year in Aleppo and had a boy child by him there. When the newly born son was

three days old, the father brought a belt and a sword for him and said to his wife, "My time here is finished. I must go, but I cannot take you with me because my son is too young and cannot stand the journey. I shall return later to take you and the child. But if I should not return, he will find me wherever I am." Of course, he did not know that the woman was the Feslihancı girl. He thought she was the daughter of a witch [although the word cadi is used here, it may just refer to a wise old woman]. Leaving enough money for the maintenance of his wife and child, Beyoğlu said goodbye. But the girl made preparations to leave, and she took the baby and mounted a horse and followed Beyoğlu without being noticed by him. As her son was very young, she stretched him across a board and wrapped him round with swaddling clothes so that he would not be injured on the trip. Wherever her husband stopped, she also stopped. When she arrived home, she went to her mother's house and left the child there and went to the cellar alone. Beyoğlu arrived and he also went to the door of the cellar, where he called, "Feslihancı girl.

"Yes, sir," she answered.

"How are you? Have you been bored?"

"No, sir. Thanks to you, I have not been bored. I have gotten along well."

"Was your money enough?"

"Of course it was."

Beyoğlu went upstairs and did not see her for a few days, but he sent her the necessary food.

Some time later, he had to go to India on business. He came to the cellar door and said, "Feslihancı girl, Feslihancı girl, I must go to India for a year."

"Go, sir. I wish you good luck. What kind of horse will you ride? And what color suit will you wear?"

"This time I shall ride a red horse and wear a red suit."

She bade him farewell and he left her after sending her money and food for a year. She carried the food to her mother's house and gave her the money. "Buy a red horse and a red suit for me with this money," she said.

When Beyoğlu was about to leave the city, she overtook him wearing a red suit and riding a red horse. When Beyoğlu saw a person wearing a red suit riding a red horse, he said, "Whenever I reach this point I always find a companion."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I am going to India."

"So am I."

Beyoğlu said to himself, "This is strange. Whenever I come here I find a companion dressed like me riding a horse like mine and going to the same place."

They rode along together eating and drinking together and they finally reached India. The young man proceeded to a coffee house and his companion in search of a witch. The young woman said to the people of the town, "Will you show me the way to the house of the witch?"

She got her money ready. She was shown the house of the witch, and she knocked on the door. The witch opened it. The girl said, "Grandmother, a young gentleman stopped at such and such a coffee house a short while ago. Will you sell me to him? Tell him that I am your daughter and that my husband died. If you sell me to him, I shall reward you properly with gold."

When the witch heard the word gold she went to the coffee house and said, "Call the young gentleman to me." He was called and came to the door of the coffee house [there were never women in the coffee houses] and she said, "Welcome. Where are you from?"

He answered that he was from such and such a town.

"How long will you stay here?"

"I shall stay a year."

"Are you married or single?"

"I am single."

"Can anyone stay here single for a whole year? I have a beautiful daughter whose husband died all of a sudden. I shall give her to you. I just could not give her to anybody, but to you I would give her because you seem to be a good person," she said.

"But I shall leave this country in a year," said Beyoğlu.

"It does not matter. If you like, you can take my daughter with you. If not, you can leave her behind."

"All right. I accept your offer," he said. "Come with your daughter in the morning and let me know what you wish me to buy for her."

The witch went back to the Feslihancı girl and told her that the young gentleman had accepted the proposal to take her and to bring whatever she wished for her. The young man bought whatever she wanted for her.

The young man and the Feslihancı girl were married and lived together for a year, and a male child was born to them. Beyoğlu had a belt and a sword made for the child when he was three days old. When his wife was still in childbed he came to her and said, "My time here is completed. You cannot take a three-day-old child on a long journey. I shall come for you and the child later. But if I should not return, he will find me wherever I am."

"All right. You come later and get me," said his wife

Beyoğlu left his wife enough food and money to last her a year, but the Feslihancı girl took the food to the house of the witch and gave the food to her and took the money and mounted a horse with the baby and followed Beyoğlu, stopping wherever he stopped. She finally reached her country. She reached the city before Beyoğlu, went to her mother's house and left the

baby there, and went through the tunnel to her cellar room. The young man also reached the house. The servants took his horse and he went to the cellar window and addressed the Feslihancı girl.

"Feslihancı girl, Feslihancı girl. What have you been doing? How are you? Have you been bored?"

"I have not been bored, thanks to you. I have had a good time," said the Feslihancı girl.

"Well, I have come back.

"Welcome!"

The second child whom she had left at her mother's house grew up.

Now Beyoğlu had to go to Müridistan. He came and said to his wife, "I have to go to Müridistan on business and stay a year there."

"Go there happily and come back happily," she said. "What kind of horse will you ride, and what color suit will you wear?"

"This time, I shall ride a white horse and wear a white suit."

He left money and provisions for her to last her for a year or two. She carried the food to her mother's house and bought a white horse and a white suit. She then got ready to leave at the same time as he was to leave. He came to the cellar and said to her, "Feslihancı girl, I am now leaving."

"Good luck to you," she said, and prayed aloud for him. The Feslihancı girl went to her mother's house, put on the white suit, mounted the white horse, and rode after her husband. She caught up with him and asked him, "Where are you going, friend?"

"I am going to Müridistan."

"I am going there, too."

Speaking to himself, Beyoğlu said, "Whenever I come to this spot, a fellow comes along riding a horse of the same color and wearing a suit of the same color and going to the same place as I am. It is very strange indeed!"

They rode along together, eating and drinking together, stopping and staying together. Finally they reached Müridistan. He stopped at a coffee house. The girl took note of it and searched for a witch. Someone directed her to the house of the witch in that country. She went and knocked on the door. The witch opened the door.

"Grandmother, here is some gold for you. A gentleman stopped at such and such a coffee house. I want you to sell me to him. Just say that my husband has died." She convinced the witch to go to the coffee house and see the gentleman. The coffee house waiter came to the door and the witch said to him, "Will you call me that young man who came here a short while ago?"

When he came, the old woman said to him, "Welcome, my son! Are you married or single?"

"I am single," he answered.

"I have a beautiful daughter whom I could not dare give to anyone here. But I shall give her to you if you like

"I shall stay here a year and then go away," said the young man.

"If you wish, you can take her with you. If not, you can leave her behind. You can eat and drink; your clothes can be washed," she said.

Beyoğlu said to himself, "When I got married at another place I had a comfortable life. It is a good idea. I think I shall just marry the daughter of this witch. These girls are all alike, but their mothers are different."

"All right, mother," he said to her. "Come back tomorrow and let me know what you want me to buy your daughter."

The witch went back to the Feslihancı girl and they decided what they wanted Beyoğlu to buy. They went to the coffee house in the morning and told him. He bought generously of what they wanted, and he sent clothing and food.

They were married and lived together for a year. She had a daughter born to her in Müridistan. When the child was three days old, her father came to the mother's bed and said, "Health to you. My time has come, but a

three-day-old child cannot go on a long journey What shall we do?"

"In that case, you can come for us later."

Beyoğlu bought a golden bowl and gave it to his wife for their daughter, saying, "She will find me wherever I am. I shall leave you more than enough money and food." He did as he said, and then he left.

The Feslihancı girl got ready to leave, too, on the same day he departed. She strapped the baby on a board, like the others, and when her husband left her, saying goodbye, she also mounted a horse and set out. She followed her husband as before, without being noticed by him, and reached her country. First she left the baby with her mother and went to her cellar and sat down.

When Beyoğlu arrived, the servants took his horse and he came to the door of the cellar. "Feslihancı girl!" he shouted.

"Yes, sir!"

"Are you well? Have you been bored in my absence?"

"No, sir. Thanks to you, I have never been bored I had an excellent time."

"Well, I have now come back."

"Welcome," she said.

The Feslihancı girl used to go to her mother's house to give suck to her baby but return immediately so that whenever her husband asked for her she could say, "Here I am." The girl grew up to be two or three years old. Some time passed, and Beyoğlu asked his mother, "Mother, will you have me married? I will keep the Feslihancı girl in the cellar forever. I want to marry another girl."

A girl was found for him, and he married her. He said, "I married a girl in Aleppo and left her there I married another girl in India and left her there I married another girl in Müridistan and left her there. And I have a girl down in the cellar, so this is the fifth I have married."

At the wedding, Beyoğlu fell sick and was put to bed. Many doctors came and went, but none could cure him. He was so ill that to turn him over in his bed they turned him in a sheet in order not to hurt him.

It was Wednesday of the wedding. The Feslihancı girl asked her two sons to wear their belts and their swords and her daughter to carry her gold bowl with soup in it. The Feslihancı girl taught her children what to say when going up the stairs. Speaking to her eldest child, she said, "When you are dismissed, you will say, 'Oh, man from Aleppo!'" To the second, she said, "You will say, 'What is the matter, Indian gentleman?'" To her daughter she said, "You will say, 'They caught us by the arm and threw us out of the house of our father in Müridistan'" [in Turkish, this was said in rhyme]. She taught her children in this way and sent them to the house of Beyoğlu. The children were going up the stairs leading to the house. The attendants who saw them coming shouted at them, saying, "Get out of here. There is a sick man here. This is not a place for children."

The eldest child said, "O man from Aleppo!"

The second son said, "What is the matter, Indian gentleman?"

The daughter said, "They caught us by the arm and threw us out of the house of our father in Müridistan."

Beyoğlu heard these arguments in his bed. The attendants went and reported to him, "Some children are saying things about Aleppo, India, and Müridistan, but we do not know what they mean by them."

"Let the children come here," said Beyoğlu.

The three children were permitted to enter. They stood in a row. Beyoğlu recognized the belt and the sword worn by the eldest son because he had had that made himself. He recognized the belt and the sword of the younger son. He also recognized the bowl in the hand of his daughter. "What is the matter, children? Speak!" he said.

"Oh, man from Aleppo!" said the eldest son.

Beyoğlu said to himself, "Ah, yes. He was born in Aleppo."

"What is the matter, Indian gentleman?" said the younger son.

Beyoğlu said to himself, "And he was born in India."

Then the girl said, "They caught us by the arm and threw us out of the house of our father in Müridistan."

Beyoğlu said to himself, "Yes, and she was born in Müridistan."

Then Beyoğlu said to his attendants, "Lift me up by my armpits." helped him to sit up in his bed. "Put my overcoat on my shoulders," he said, and they did this

"Where are your mothers?" he asked the children. He thought that their mothers had heard about the wedding and had come from Aleppo, India, and Müridistan. He thought the mothers of these children were different women.

They all pointed at the cellar and said, "Our mother is over there

"Take me to your mother," said Beyoğlu. He had his overcoat on his shoulders, and holding his two sons by the hand on each side of him and with his daughter walking in front, they started going down. They stopped at the door of the cellar and the children said, "Our mother is here."

"Feslihancı girl, Feslihancı girl!" he cried.

"Yes, sir," she answered.

"Whose children are these?"

"Half are mine and half are yours

"Open the door, Feslihancı girl."

She opened the door. There the Feslihancı girl told him all [that had happened]. "I did this, I did that, and these children are ours."

When Beyoğlu heard this, he said, "Well done!"

To the girl with whom he was to get married, and with whom only the Wednesday ceremony had been completed, he said, "You will be my sister.

will remain in my house as my sister," and he canceled the wedding. Instead, he wedded the Feslihancı girl, and together they went upstairs, and they lived happily thereafter.