

Story 843 (1974 Tape 19)

Narrator: Abdurrahman Küçük

Location: Tercan, kaza town of  
Erzincan Province

Date: August 12,

The Death of an Alkarısı<sup>1</sup>

This is a story that I heard throughout my childhood. Actually, I have heard it told all of my life, for people around here still tell this story. It is about an Alkarısı who used to pester horses. This Alkarısı used to go to stables at night, take a horse out and ride it--who knows where?--and then leave it in the stable with its hair braided. It was that braiding of the hair that revealed to the owners that the nightly rider of their horses was an Alkarısı

Dr. Ahmet Uysal: Excuse me, but tell me again whose hair was braided. Was it the Alkarısı's hair that was braided?

Narrator: No, no! The Alkarısı braided the manes of the horses.

I myself was a witness to this braiding of horses' manes. When I was a child, our family had horses, too. Sometimes

<sup>1</sup> Alkarısı is usually pictured as the red witch of puerperal fever and causer of the death of newly born infants. There is ample support for the role given her here: an abuser of horses. Has she always had this dual role, or is the horse-persecution element something borrowed from some other tradition?

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when we would go into the stables in the morning, we would see that the manes of the horses had been braided. We children would ask, "What has happened? Why are the manes of the horses braided?"

"An Alkarısı did it," we were always told

There was a man here once who decided to catch the Alkarısı who was bothering his horses. To do this, he put some very strong glue on the backs of all his horses. As a result of that glue, the Alkarısı who rode one of his horses that night was unable to dismount when she brought it back to the stable. They found her there in the morning still stuck firmly to the back of the horse. When they inserted a needle into her clothing,<sup>2</sup> she ceased being an Alkarısı and became a human being. The owner of the horse said, "If we leave that needle in her clothing, she will remain a human being, and she will work for us just as well as any human being would."

*İnsan formuna*

<sup>2</sup> Silver and steel are metals with high potency among creatures of the supernatural world. Ordinary bullets cannot harm such creatures, but silver bullets can be fatal. Steel seems to deprive such creatures, especially witches, of all their magical powers. A witch deprived of all supernatural power is simply a mortal--whether male or female. An Alkarısı is a special kind of witch.

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Alkarısı did, in fact, remain with them for some time. One day, however, when she went to the fountain to fetch water, she met there some children from another family. She said to them, "Children, there is a needle in my clothing that bothers me a great deal. Can you find that needle and pull it out?" When the children located the needle and removed it, the Alkarısı disappeared at once

water in the pipes of that fountain became bloody and remained that way for a while. This was the blood of the Alkarısı. When she returned to her own people, they said, "You are no longer one of us after having become a human being." They killed her.