

Story 929 (1977 Tape 22)

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Some Adventures of My Youth

One day we went to Kağızman¹ to get a large quantity of salt. Some of our neighbors went along with us for the same purpose. After we had reached Kağızman and loaded many bags of salt on the backs of our donkeys, we got ready to start

One of our neighbors, however, said, "We have been traveling for a long while. We need something to eat. Let us buy some food and have a lavish meal. What should we buy? What should we cook?"

While they were discussing this, I approached one of them said, "There is a lot of pekmez² made in this town. Let's some, and then I shall make some helva³ for us."

They asked me, "Do you know how to cook?"

I said, "Yes, I know how. I learned that skill from my mother. Go and ask my father if that is not so. If he will

¹ A kaza town in extreme south-central Kars Province

² A heavy syrup made by boiling down grape juice.

³ A confection made with sesame-seed oil, flour, and some liquid sweetener such as honey or pekmez.

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give me permission, I can cook for all of us.

They went to ask my father about this. My father said, "He doesn't know anything about cooking. He doesn't know what he is talking about."

"Oh, no!" they said. "He told us he could cook."

My father said, "Very well, then, but I shall not be responsible for anything he does. Whether he cooks well or badly is something I'll speak to him about later."

The neighbors went to buy the ingredients. They bought some butter, flour, and pekmez. We built a fire, and I melted some of the butter. I poured some flour into the melted butter and started to brown the mixture. I cooked it and stirred it, stirred it and cooked it. I suddenly remembered that I had not put any salt in it. Breaking off a chunk of salt that weighed about a kilogram, I shredded it into tiny pieces and poured it into the mixture. I then made some sherbet⁴ from the pekmez and poured that into the mixture too. But I am afraid, however, that I put in too much salt and that I browned the butter and flour too long.

After they had arranged something to serve as a table,

⁴In the Middle East sherbet is not the frozen dessert that it is in the U.S. It is a cold, sweet fruit drink. Sherbet could be made by diluting pekmez in water, but unless it were diluted just very slightly, it would be too thin and too sour for the sweetening needed for helva. The undiluted pekmez would have been better.

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they sat down to eat. They had bought some lavas bread,⁵ and they were going to spread the helva on this bread. I was sitting by my father when everyone started to eat. Several of them took a small spoonful of the helva just to taste it, and each of those who did so spat it out immediately. My father got a strange expression on his face and asked them, "What is wrong with it?" After he had also tasted it, he understood what was wrong with it. It was very salty and sour. Turning to me, he said, "You did not cook it correctly! You ruined it!" He slapped me so hard that all of my nose and mouth were distorted. Taking off a shoe, he arose and tried to beat me with it, but our friends stopped him.

I ran away from my father's side and went to a wagon where I sat alongside one of the wheels and cried. I said to myself, "When they go to bed tonight, I shall run away from them." That is how ^{angry} angry I was at my father.

After a while, night came. My father came to where I had our blankets. As soon as I saw that he was sleeping deeply, I got up and started walking as fast as I could, though I did not know in what direction I was going. The light of dawn was getting brighter now, and I could see smoke rising a long way ahead of me. As I hastened toward it, I realized that the smoke was rising from a fairly large city,

⁵A thin bread, somewhat like the well-known Turkish pide bread.

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but in those days I really didn't know what a city was.

In the market quarter of that city a gentleman came walking along in my direction. He was driving a cow along before him as he came. When he saw me, he acted rather suspicious about me. He said, "My son, you look like a stranger." I told him that I was indeed a stranger. He then asked me, "Well, why are you walking about in this way?"

I said, "I am trying to find a job as a servant

He said, "Oh-h-h, I just happen to need a servant. Come along and work for me. I shall buy two kilograms of meat from a butcher here. Take it to my wife and tell her to cook it for my lunch. I have some things yet to attend to in this quarter of the city, but I shall be home for lunch

I said, "But, Sir, I do not know where your home is. How shall I know which house is yours?"

"Well, I am known as Ahmet ⁵³⁻⁵⁴ Efendi and anyone you meet can tell you where I live. But if you will take this cow along with you, it will lead you to the correct house. Follow the cow. She will take you there. Whatever house the cow stops in front of will be my house."

⁶ Efendi is a respectful epithet following a man's name. Besides being used in this adjectival way, it can also be used as a noun, just as the the adjective Reverend before the name of a clergyman can be used as a title apart from the name: "Good morning, Reverend." Although once used to honor men of distinction, the term has had so much of its prestige eroded in the twentieth century that it is now applied only to servants and children.

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"All right," I said.

After he had purchased the two kilograms of meat and handed the package to me, I started walking along behind the cow in order to reach Ahmet (Efendi)'s house. The cow turned this corner and that corner, and it was just going around a third corner when it was attacked by some loud-barking wild ⁵⁴⁻⁵⁵ dogs. I set the meat on a rock, grabbed a stick, and went to the defense of the poor cow. I ran as quickly as I could and began striking the dogs with the stick. I finally managed to drive them off, but it was too late, for the cow was already dying. I turned back then to get the meat, but one of the dogs had already carried it off. I caught a glimpse of him as he ran out of sight with it. "Oh, God, what shall I do now?" I asked myself.

Well, I knew that the man's name was Ahmet Efendi. I asked the first person I encountered where Ahmet Efendi's house was, and he showed me where it was located. When I knocked on the door of that house, a woman opened it and asked, "Who are you? Where have you come from? What are you doing here?"

I told her, "Your husband, Ahmet (Efendi) hired me as a servant. He gave me his cow to bring here, and he also bought two kilograms of meat and gave that to me to bring also. He said, 'Tell my wife to cook this meat. I shall come home and

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it for lunch."

The woman said, "That is all very well, but where is the cow? Where is the meat?"

I said, "Ah, ah! Don't ask me that. The cow was killed by wild dogs as we were on the way here. I placed the meat on a rock so that I could go to help the cow, but while I was busy beating off the pack of dogs, one of them went to the and carried off the meat."

The woman shook her head and said, "Oh, son! You have caused us a serious loss, but I cannot really blame you for it. It was not all your fault. The greater blame belongs to my husband." And then she said, "Come in, my son; come inside."

She then took me to the barn and gave me some work to do. She had me clean the animal stalls and then wash off the animals. "Don't worry," she said. "I shall try to conciliate my husband."

After a while the aga got home. He asked his wife, "Where is the boy I sent here? Hasn't he arrived yet?"

His wife said, "Yes, he came."

The aga then asked, "Well, then, where is my lunch? Have you cooked it? I sent you two kilograms of meat."

⁷An aga (English agha) is a rural landowner. The stereotype pictures him as wealthy and powerful, and some are just that. Many rural landowners, however, are small farmers doing little more than making a meagre living.

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She answered, "Such a master as you are gets such a servant as this one is!"

"Why? What happened?" he asked.

"Don't you know that the neighbors' dogs have always harassed our cow? You gave the cow to this boy to bring home without even warning him about that. As a result, the dogs killed the cow. And while he was trying to protect the cow, a dog carried off the package of meat."

"Oh, God, how could such a thing happen?" he asked.

"It is all your fault. The poor boy! How could he know that there would be dogs that would kill the cow?"

Anyway, they cooked something else for the noon meal, and we ate it. We then talked about what salary I was to receive for my work. After some discussion, they decided to pay me fifty liras per month.

After a few days had passed, my master came to me one morning and said, "Our village people will go to the forest tomorrow to cut wood. You go with them and bring home a load of wood for us."

I said, "Yes, my master."

I woke up early the following morning. After feeding all the animals in the barn, I put pack saddles on two horses and prepared to go to the forest with the other villagers. But I then discovered that all of the neighbors had gone to the

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forest without waiting for me. I asked the aga, "Master, what am I to do now? How shall I get to the forest now? Where are all the other people?"

He said to me, "Now listen! You just go straight down this road, and when you come to the end of this road, you should be able to see our neighbors."

I walked and walked, but I never found the neighbors. It seems that I must have turned the wrong way once, and so I never reached the forest. I walked all day. When night arrived and everything was in darkness, there was no way in which I could then return home. I decided, therefore, to stay right there where I was for the night. I tied a rope around the horses' necks to keep them together, and then I turned them loose. "Let them graze here," I said to myself, "while I get some sleep."

After I had slept for a while, I woke up. The moon had come out, and there was a pale glistening light on everything. But where were the horses? I walked all around the place where we had stopped but I could not find them. Walking along the road a little farther, I saw the outline of something as large as a mountain that seemed to be rising and falling slightly. "My God, what is that?" I asked myself. When I got a little closer, I could see that it was a camel ⁵⁷⁻⁵⁸--perhaps just a stray camel or one that a merchant had carelessly

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allowed to separate from some caravan. While the camel was sleeping, my horses had accidentally walked on either side of it as they grazed. The rope holding the horses had rubbed the camel's back and awakened it. When the startled camel had arisen, it had lifted the two horses off their feet by the rope around their necks, and in this way both horses had been strangled. I cut the rope, and the horses fell to the ground dead. Taking the pack saddles off the horses, I put both of them on my own back. Then I walked and walked and walked until I finally reached my master's house.

When the aga's wife opened the door in response to my knocking, I handed her the two heavy pack saddles. She looked at them, and she looked at me, and she then asked, "What happened? Where is the wood? Where are the horses?"

I said to her, "Oh, my lady, the horses were dead, and so I took their saddles and brought them back. I never saw either the forest or our neighbors."

She shook her head again, and then she said very sadly, "Oh, son, this is the second mishap you have had since coming here to us. May God grant that it may all work out well in the end."

After a while the aga returned home and spoke to his wife: "Hey, wife, did the servant boy get home yet? Did he bring us very much wood?"

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"No," she said. Then she added, "Such a master as you are gets such a servant as this one!"

Confused, the ağa asked, "What has happened now?"

She answered, "What could happen? The horses are dead-- they stabbed themselves--and the servant took off their pack saddles and carried them back here."

The ağa was very angry. He asked his wife, "Where is that boy? Where is he? I shall give him a few resounding slaps!"

But his wife said, "No, you do not have any right to do that. Once more it is all your fault. You did not see to it that he went with the neighbors. The poor boy got lost and then he had this accident." Speaking in this way, she was able, after a while, to calm him down

Several days now passed very quietly. Then one morning the ağa said to me, "My boy, come along with me. Today we shall go bird-hunting." And so we went hunting. He had two hunting dogs, both hounds, and a hunting bird, a parrot.⁸ He took the two hounds and he placed the parrot in my hands. He said, "Now, if any animal comes from my side, I'll call to you, and then you should hit the bird to make it take to

⁸In a land long famous for its falconry, there are often references to that ancient sport. There are also spoofs of the sport, such as Nasreddin Hoca's hunting with a crow. Using a parrot for that purpose would also seem to be a spoof, and one quite in keeping with the general absurdity of this tale.

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air.

"All right," I said.

Right at that moment a rabbit came out of the brush right alongside of the aḡa. He yelled to me to release the bird. I hit the bird to make it fly, but instead of flying, it just collapsed in my hands. I tried twice to make it fly, but it was no use.

The aḡa yelled at me again, "Hurry Hit the bird!"

I shouted back, "Oh, Master, he couldn't fly! He didn't fly even a little!"

He said, "Come here, boy. How are you handling the bird? me what you did to make him fly."

I went to him and said, "My Aḡa, the first time you called to me, I hit the bird like this, but he didn't fly. Instead, he just collapsed in my hands."

When the aḡa saw me hit the bird, he became very angry. He said, "My God, how could you ever hit a bird like that-- like a stupid fool? You should hit it by prodding it with a very small force.

"But, my Master, you never told me how hard to hit the bird. You said to hit it, and that is what I did."

He said, "All right. Let us let it go at that. This is the third mishap you have had since coming to work for us This caused a great loss to me. Here I have lost my bird

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before we even started to hunt. Come now, and let us go back home." And so it was that we began our return trip.

After a while we came to a village that had an iron gate.⁶¹⁻⁶² My ağa said to me, "I am going to stop for a while at this village in order to collect some money that is owed to me. You take the hounds and my fur coat⁶¹⁻⁶² home. But be careful and do not, under any circumstances, put my fur coat on the backs of the hounds, for they might tear it to pieces."

said, "All right," and I started at once to walk homeward. After a while the fur coat seemed to grow heavier and heavier upon my arm. I said to myself, "Why should I have to carry this heavy coat when these dogs could just as well carry it? I can watch them carefully to be sure that they do not do it any harm." Saying that, I tied the coat carefully across the backs of the two hounds. They carried it perfectly well, and I walked along behind them. As we came to a hill, the hounds went over its crest just slightly before I did. When I passed over the brink of the hill, I saw two large flocks of sheep lying on the ground, resting. But guarding them there were four or five very large sheepdogs,⁶¹⁻⁶² and they were buffeting the hounds about as if they were playing with a couple of bones. The fur coat was ripped into shreds, and every piece of it went in a different direction. The shepherds put forth a great effort, and I did the same,

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to save the hounds, but it was a useless task, for the sheepdogs had quickly killed the two hounds.⁹ What could I do? I picked up the many small pieces of fur and continued on to the ağa's house. I thought that I might just place the pieces of the fur coat on the threshold of the house and then run away. But I didn't do that. Instead, I knocked on the door tak, tak, tak.

When the ağa's wife saw me, she looked puzzled and asked, "Oh, my God! What has happened to you?"

I said to her, "Oh, please do not ask me. I had another mishap." Then I told her everything that had happened. When she asked me where the ağa was, I said, "He stopped in the village of Iron Gate. He said that he had some business to do there."

The wife said, "All right. Come inside."

But I had decided that I could not stay there any longer. I said, "Here, take these pieces of fur. When the ağa hears about this, he will probably kill me."

She said, "No, no, don't worry. I shall make it up with him."

⁹ For those unacquainted with the Anatolian sheep dog, it should be said that this could be quite realistic. Tall, powerful, and short-haired, this is a truly formidable dog capable of driving off wolves. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s the prowess of the Anatolian sheep dog became known internationally, and it is now exported to and bred in several countries, including the U.S.

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"No, I cannot remain here any longer." I then tossed the pieces of fur to her and left the house. I walked for the rest of the day. When night was approaching but there was still about an hour of light left, I came to a village. There I saw a hoca¹⁰ ⁶³⁻⁶⁵ at a fountain taking ritual ablutions. After he had finished doing this, I greeted him: "Selâmünaleyküm."

He answered, "Aleykümselâm."¹¹ My boy, from where have you come? Who are you?"

"My Hoca, I am a poor man. Could you accept me as a guest in your home for one night?"

He said, "Of course I can, my son." Taking me to his house, he said, "You sit here. I must return to the mosque for prayer service, and my wife is herding our cows."

As I sat waiting, I noticed a large kettle boiling on the fire. Before long the hoca's wife entered the room, took some butter from a jar, and put it into the cooking food. Then she left again to herd the cows. Because I was very hungry, I thought, "This woman puts a small amount of butter into the food, but it should have much more butter than that."

Thinking in that manner, I went to the butter jar, but I could not find the spoon that the woman had used. I put my

¹⁰ A hoca is a Moslem priest.

¹¹ The traditional exchange between strangers in the Moslem world: Peace be unto you / And may peace be unto you too.

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hand into the butter jar, but unfortunately it had a rather small neck, and my hand became stuck inside the jar. I pulled and pulled, and I tried and tried to get my hand out of that jar, but it was impossible. I decided, therefore, to keep that hand hidden inside of my coat.

In a short while the woman returned and set the table for dinner. After everyone had been seated around the table, we started to eat. I also began to eat, but I did so with my left hand, for my right hand was still in the butter jar inside my coat. The hoca took hold of my wrist and said, "My son, I do not know you, and I think that you do not know me. Only an enemy eats his enemy's meal with his left hand.¹² You are not my enemy--are you?"

I said, "I am very sorry, Hoca. Please forgive me. My right hand is deformed, and I can't use it. I am too embarrassed about that even to show my right hand.

"Oh, if that is the case, then it is perfectly all right," said the hoca. "Of course you may eat with your left hand. Please go right ahead and eat, son."

That was just what I wanted to do, but with my left hand I could not manage to eat very much. Most of the time the spoon ate me! After dinner the hoca went out, and

¹²For a variety of reasons the left hand is considered inferior throughout much of the Middle East. To use it in the presence of others is to take a chance of offending them

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I thought, "Now! Now is the time to free my hand from the butter jar." I looked for a rock against which I could strike the butter jar and break it. I saw what looked like a limestone rock. Going quietly to this rock, I struck the jar against it with all my strength. As I did so, someone screamed at the top of his voice, "Oh, my head! My head Someone has broken my head--oh, oh, oh!"

It seems that the white rock was actually the hoca's bald head. I started to run away just as fast as I could. It was very dark, and I could not see exactly where I was going. In running down a bank, I fell into the chimney of a house that had been built into that bank, and I landed on the hearth below. I found myself lying before some cows that were eating corn, but since it was nice and warm there, I decided to spend the remainder of the night there.

After a while a door opened, and a woman entered the stable carrying a covered pan and two loaves of lavaş bread. She set these on a table there and then went out again. I was still very hungry, and so I went immediately to the table and uncovered the pan. Finding helva ⁶⁵⁻⁶⁶ inside, I spread the helva on the bread and began to eat it. It didn't take me long to finish all of it. Then I filled the pan with cow dung and covered it again. After that, I hid myself and waited.

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Soon the woman returned with a man, and I guessed that he must be her ^{secret} lover. The man said, "I asked you to make me some helva. Did you do that?"

"Yes," said the woman, and she handed the pan to the man

The man took a spoonful of what he thought was helva, but he quickly spat it out and began shouting. Poor woman! I really felt sorry for her now. The man said, "Woman, what is this? This is not helva! This is animal manure!" and he threw the pan from him violently. It flew through the air and struck the wall just above my head. I let out a fierce scream that terrified the two, and they fled. As soon as they were gone, I fled too!

It was still very dark, and I kept asking myself, "What can I do?" After a while I came to a hay field where a great amount of hay was piled loosely on the ground. This seemed to be a good place to stay, and so I crawled beneath some of this hay to sleep. But before I could fall asleep a young man and a young woman came along. They must have been newlywed or engaged.

The woman said to the man, "Tell me: When did you first start to like me? And why did you like me?"

The man said, "Remember when you used to go to the fountain to get water? I first saw you there, and you were carrying a water bucket on your shoulder. I liked you very

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much at that moment. Now you tell me: When did you start to like me?"

The woman said, "Remember when you were a policeman? You always kept cracking your whip and saying to people, 'Do this! Do that Why are you moving so slowly? Get in line!' You seemed to be angry at everyone. That was the time when I began to like you. --Come now! Act like that again. Here is your whip.

Taking the whip from her, the man began to act as he apparently had in former times. Cracking his whip this way and that way, he yelled, "What are you doing there? Get in line! Hurry up!" As he was doing this, he continued to move closer and closer to the place where I was lying. I rose up suddenly from nowhere and frightened them both out of their minds. They fled in panic, leaving behind a basket of fruit they had brought there

Light very slowly came into the sky, and when I could see clearly, I left the pasture and started walking in the direction of my own village. It took me several hours to get home. There I discovered that the people of my village had been searching for me, not knowing whether I was dead or alive. They all seemed glad to see me again, and they asked me a great many questions about where I had been and what I had done. I told them my whole story, and now I have told it to you too.