

Story 1028 (1974 Tape 17) Narrator: İsmail Turunç

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Ordeals of the Young Man with the White Beard

Once there were and once there were not two friends who traveled together on a journey. One evening along their way they were accepted as guests in a home where they had two hosts, one a black-bearded man and the other a white-bearded man. When dinnertime arrived, the black-bearded man sat and ate with the guests while the white-bearded man did all of the serving.

At one point in the evening when both hosts were out of the room, the guests discussed their hosts' behavior. One said, "The white-bearded man seems, quite obviously, to be the older of the two, and yet he was the one who did all of the work. How can one account for this?"¹

The second guest said, "I don't know, but ask one or the other of them about this."

When the white-bearded man returned, one of the guests

¹In most cultures it might be assumed that, all other things being equal, the younger rather than the older host would perform the menial chores. In Turkey the imperative for this is very strong, deference to age being mandatory at all social levels, and so it is entirely understandable that the two guests would question the behavior of their hosts.

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said, "O kind host, I should like to ask you a question about yourself, if you will give me permission to do so."

"Go right ahead and ask whatever you wish," responded the host.

"Well, we could not help observing that you, with your white beard, were the one who provided all of the service at dinner. You are not only white-bearded but you also look older than our black-bearded host. Why was it you rather than he who served us?"

He said, "I shall tell you the reason for this, my guests. Now listen. Several years ago twelve of us from this village decided to go to a certain city to find work. Much to our surprise, when we reached that city, we found that it was completely deserted. We could not find a single human being anywhere in that city. This alarmed us somewhat, and so when we retired that night, we agreed that one of our number should stand guard to protect the others. When morning came and we awoke, we discovered that our friend who had served as guard had disappeared. He was nowhere to be found. That night a second guard was posted, and he too disappeared. What had happened to these two guards we could not determine. This continued until all eleven of my friends had disappeared and I was the

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only one left. I was sure that I too would now disappear.

I was thinking about this, I strolled about in the empty city. When I came to a pond, I sat down on the bank and looked at the water. Before long two fairy girls came along, left their clothes on the opposite bank, and entered the pond. I had learned from my father some of

the ways of fairy girls, and so I went carefully around the pond and stole the clothes² of one of these girls.

When the two emerged from the water, only one was able to fly away, for I had taken the fairy clothes of the other. When she saw me, she said, 'O son of man, through the will of God³ I shall marry you. But we must be very wary of an ogre who lives in this place. He has already devoured all of the people in this city. If we do not kill him, then he will devour us too.'

"I said, 'Very well, but how are we to go about killing him?'

"She said, 'In such-and-such a building there are

²The fairy that dips into a pond or pool usually comes in the form of a bird--the swan maiden or pigeon girl. The human who captures her steals her feathers.

³Any wedding offer that is serious in Turkish tradition is made with the will of Allah, and often, additionally, with the approval of the Prophet. The opening remark of every matchmaker trying to arrange a marriage is "I have come with the will of Allah and the consent of the Prophet to ask for the hand of X for Y."

³Swan
Maiden
Two
fairy

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several barrels of gunpowder stored.⁴ We should roll them to the mouth of the cave in which the ogre lives, explode them, and thus kill him. Then the two of us can live here in peace

At this point in his story the white-bearded host asked, "Are you listening, O my guests?" When the guests assured him that they were indeed listening, he continued, "We did just as the fairy girl had suggested and killed the ogre with the gunpowder. The fairy girl and I lived there in that city for some time together, and she bore me two children. Unfortunately, both of these children died, and after we had lost the second child, the fairy girl grieved deeply.

"One day soon after that the fairy girl said, 'Let us stroll through the city and walk along the edges of pond where we met. We did just what she had suggested, but when we came to the pond, she jumped into the water and disappeared.

"I grew so bored living alone in that deserted city that after a while I could not remain there any longer. Leaving that place, I traveled until I reached the sea-

⁴In an ancient tale of ogres and fairies, gunpowder is an obvious anachronism.

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shore. As I was walking along the beach, a very large wave rolled in and, knocking me off my feet, carried me out to sea when it receded from the land. I swam and struggled for a long while in the sea to keep from drown-

and after many hours had passed, I was washed up on some rocks. After I had rested for a while, I realized that I was hungry.

"I arose and began walking again, but I did not know where to go in the strange land to which I had been carried by the sea. After walking a great distance, I came

a flock of sheep. I said to myself, 'If there is a flock of sheep, then there must also be a shepherd, and if there is a shepherd, then I may be able to get some bread from him.' It did not take me long to find the shepherd, but when I found him, I was greatly surprised to discover that he was a tepegöz.⁵ I called out to him,

'Selâmüneleykum,' but he did not accept my greet-

⁵Tepe means hill and göz means eye; hence Tepegöz means Hill Eye or Brow Eye. It was the name given to the cyclops, the one-eyed giant in the Turkish national epic, The Book of Dede Korkut. He had several analogies to Polyphemus, Homer's cyclops: his cannibalism, his being blinded by a human hero, his cave from which the hero escapes in the guise of a sheep. Here there are no further references to either The Odyssey or . . . Dede Korkut than (1) the cyclopean form, (2) the hero's escape in the guise of a sheep, and (3) the rock-blocked door.

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⁶ Instead, he treated me like one of his animals, took me home with him in the evening, and placed me in the sheepfold with his flock. Then he rolled a large rock against the door of the sheepfold. After making a fire in the fireplace, he slaughtered two of the sheep, cooked them, ate them. But these two sheep did not fill him, and he said, 'I am still hungry.' He placed two iron skewers on the fire and lay down to wait for them to heat

"I said to myself, 'He is now going to kill me and cook me on those skewers.' But when the skewers were hot, I grabbed one and plunged it into his eye, blinding the tepegöz completely. He tried to catch me, but I hid in the center of the flock of sheep.

"In the morning when it was time to take the sheep out to graze, Tepegöz stood at the door of the sheepfold and let the sheep pass out only two or three at a time. I covered myself with the skin of one of the sheep he had eaten the night before. Waiting for the last two sheep to leave the fold, I pressed myself closely between them so that he could feel only my sheepskin-covered back, and in this way

⁶ Moslems not well known to each other exchange amicable greetings: Selâmünaleyküm / Aleyküselâm (May peace be unto you / May peace be unto you too). It is a kind of guarantee of safety for each by the other. If the second speaker does not answer Aleyküselâm, it means that he does not accept the mutual nonaggression offer.

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I managed to leave the sheepfold safely. But Tepegöz now began to shout loudly to other one-eyed giants in the area, quickly came to his assistance. They all now began to search for me, but I fled in the direction opposite the one from which the others had come, and in this way I escaped.⁷

"After I had walked some distance, I saw another shep herd along the way. I looked at him very closely and observed that this one was not a tepegöz. I called, 'Selâm-ünaleyküm.'

"'Aleyküselâm,' he answered.

"I asked him for some bread, and he gave me part of the bread he had with him. In the evening he took me back to the village with him. He said, 'There is an ağa⁸ ¹⁰²⁻¹⁰³ in this village. Why don't we go to him and offer him your services, perhaps as a shepherd to pasture his flock. In that way you would have a place to live, and you would earn your daily food and drink

"He helped to make this arrangement, and I became a servant of the ağa. This ağa had a daughter to whom I was soon engaged to be married. As a poor man then, I could

⁷ Although the name Tepegöz strongly suggests the influence of the Dede Korkut legend here, the whole community of cyclops would seem to derive from the Odyssey. Tepegöz was the only cyclops in The Book of Dede Korkut.

⁸ An ağa is a rural landowner, usually wealthy, usually influential.

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not afford to pay the head price⁹ for this girl. I was, therefore, to herd the ağa's flock for seven years to pay for this.¹⁰ Well, I began living there in that way, and I continued to pasture the flock for three or four years. Then, one day when I returned home with the flock, they told me, 'The muhtar¹¹ and the village council wish to see you.

"It seemed that my wife had died during the day. In that village they had a custom of placing a dead body in an underground vault and placing the corpse's spouse there too. They gave the spouse food and light for forty days and locked him or her in the burial dungeon.¹⁶³⁻¹⁶⁴ There was no way in which I could protest effectively against this. They gave me the usual supply of food and light and threw me into a dungeon full of dead bodies, locking the iron door behind me. On the thirty-ninth day the iron door was opened again and another person was thrown into the burial

⁹The Turkish term başlık means head price, the amount paid by a prospective groom to the parents of the bride.

¹⁰Tending sheep for seven years to win a girl is reminiscent of Jacob's similar bargain in the Bible.

¹¹The village head man is called muhtar. He is elected by the villagers and is often the only elected official with whom they have any contact. Other officials in rural areas are appointees of one or another federal ministry. The muhtar selects a number of senior male residents to serve as his advisory council.

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dungeon. This was a woman whose husband had died.

At this point the white-bearded host demanded, "Are you listening, O my guests?"

"Yes, we are listening," the guests responded

The white-bearded host then continued his account "That woman had been given the same supply of food and light that I had been given. The two of us managed to survive on it for several days, but as it was beginning to be used up, I said, 'Let me examine this building more closely. Isn't there any part of it through which we may break out and escape?' Going back and forth along every wall, I finally came to a place where a thin ray of light was shining through a slight crack in the wall like a gleam from a mirror. I called to the woman, 'Come here There is light shining through here!' We dug and dug and bored and bored to widen that crack, and after a while we had opened it enough so that we could crawl through it and escape.

"The two of us traveled and traveled, and after a while we reached a village one evening. We asked each other, 'Is there or is there not a cemetery in this village? If there is not, then let us not stop here.' We looked about for a cemetery, and after we found one, we spent the night there. In the morning we headed for a

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seaport which we had been told about, and there we bought tickets for passage on an outward-bound ship

"Soon after the ship set sail, the captain said of me, 'Where did that pimp ever get such a beautiful woman? Seize him and throw him overboard!' They grabbed me and were about to obey his order when a fierce storm suddenly arose.

"Out of the storm came a loud voice which said, 'Don't you dare to throw him overboard or we shall totally demolish your ship!' The crew was frightened by this loud voice, and as a result they set me free.

"But after the storm had subsided and we had sailed a good distance, the captain said, 'Whoever it was who threatened us must now have been left a long way behind. Seize that man and throw him overboard!' But once again the storm descended upon the ship, and once again the loud voice warned them not to harm me. Again I was released. And in this way I finally crossed over to our side of the sea with the woman.

"After we had reached safety,
to me. She said,
assist you, and for this help I want you to release me of all
obligation to you! (She had been my first wife, and she had
deserted me at the pond where I had first found her.) 'When

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you fell into the turbulent sea, it was I who rescued you and carried you onto the rocks. That was one service. When Tepegöz called all his giant kinsmen to hunt for you, you would have been captured and eaten if I had not blocked their way. That was a second service to you. When you were in the death dungeon, it was I who opened up the hole which you widened in order to escape. That was a third service. Then when you were twice about to be cast overboard from the ship, it was I who frightened the crew into releasing you. That was a fourth service. Now give up your rightful claim against me and make my obligation to you helâl.'¹²

"I said to her, 'I absolve you of all obligation and indebtedness to me. I make it all helâl.'" "

¹²One of the most important concepts in Moslem belief is that related to what is helâl and what is haram. What is haram is that which is forbidden by religious precept, and one can expect some punishment or retribution for doing what is haram. What is helâl is that which is approved and that for which you will not be held accountable on the Day of Judgment. If you owe anyone anything for money, property, assistance, hospitality, this indebtedness will be held against you at the time of Judgment unless your creditors have absolved you of all debt, of all obligation, before they died. This absolution required their making the statement, "I make helâl anything which you may owe me, any obligation which you have to me." Inasmuch as the fairy girl deserted her husband, he had rights against her which he could claim-- if not in a court of law, then certainly before the Lord on the Day of Judgment. Many, many Turkish people still request all kinfolk and friends to make their indebtedness helâl before going on a journey, fearing that their moral creditors may never see them again to absolve them.

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he addressed us more directly and said, "My guests, that is why I am white-bearded at a very early age. The black-bearded man is my older brother