

Story 1059 (1972 Tape 7) Narrator: Esma Koca

Location: Seyran village,
Karacabey kaza,
Bursa Province

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The Son of the Fisherman

Once there was and once there was not a fisherman. ^{58, 60-64}

When this fisherman died, his wife decided that she did not want her infant son to follow his father's trade. She therefore packed up all of the fisherman's nets and other equipment and stored them in the attic. She had a neighbor who had a large and very prosperous farm, and wished to have her son become a farmer.

When the boy grew up, he said one day to his mother, "Mother, what was my father's trade? It is time that I start working now. What work did my father do?"

His mother said to the boy, "Your father was a farmer." To herself she said, "If I tell him that, then he will choose to become a farmer." She then went to visit her prosperous neighbor and said, "Please give my son a job on your farm. Teach him how to farm, for I want him to become a farmer

"All right," said the neighbor. "Tell him to come here."

The following day the boy went to their neighbor's

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farm. There he was given a team of oxen and told, "Plow this field."

Thinking that he had to plow that field in one day, he said, "Alas, white ox! Alas, black ox!" He worked the oxen so hard that day that one of them fell dead from exhaustion. At the end of the day he returned with just one ox.

The neighbor said to him, "Where is your other ox, my son?"

"That other ox died," the boy said.

The neighbor thought, "What can we do about that? The appointed hour of the ox's death arrived, and so it died."

next day they gave him another team of oxen and told him to plow. Again he said, "Alas, white ox! Alas, black ox!" And again he worked them so hard that one of the oxen died

When he returned to the neighbor's house in the evening, they asked him, "Where is your other ox?"

"He died."

The neighbor then said to him, "You are not the kind of worker we need. We don't want you to work here any longer. You may go wherever you wish, but don't come

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back here again.

The boy went home and said to his mother, "Mother, I cannot work any longer on our neighbor's farm. I cannot become a farmer. Tell me the truth about my father's trade, I shall do that kind of work."

His mother said, "Very well Your father was a fisherman." Then she unpacked the nets and other fishing tackle gave them to the boy. On the following day he went to river and began fishing.

When the other fishermen saw him there, they said among themselves, "The son of our former fishing companion now begun to follow his father's trade. Let us see what he will charge for the fish he catches."

On the first day the son of the fisherman caught one fish. In the evening he started back to the village carrying the fish. Along the way he came to a coffeehouse where other fishermen were sitting. They called out to him, saying, "Stop here with us for a while, Son of the Fisherman. What price will you charge for your fish?"

"I have never caught any fish before, and I have never sold any fish before, and so I do not know anything about prices. You know about such prices. Buy the fish and give me what it is worth."

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They said, "No, no Name your price."

"How can I know about the price? But surely do

They finally bought the fish from the boy for 200 kuruş.¹ Taking this money home, he said, "Mother, this job is better than the first one I had. I like this job.

The following day he caught another fish, and he sold it for the same price, 200 kuruş. This went on day after day. One day, however, he caught a beautiful fish, and, admiring it, he said to himself, "I shall not sell this fish even if they offer me a thousand liras for it." Taking this fish home, he made a pool for it in the garden and placed it in that pool

A few days later some of the friends of the Son of the Fisherman went to his house and said to his mother, "Where is your son? We have not seen him for several days.

The boy, who was in the garden watching the fish in the pool, heard them and came out to the front of the house at once. He said, "What do you want me for? Why

¹The kuruş was 1/100 of a lira. Devaluation of the lira--there were 1,600 liras to the U.S. dollar by the late 1980s--made the kuruş meaningless by the 1970s.

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have you been looking for me? I have something to keep me busy right here at home now."

"Let us see what it is that keeps you occupied here.

"Of course," he said, inviting them into the garden.

He went with him into the garden and admired the beautiful fish swimming about in the pool. They then said, "You have an attractive house and an attractive garden. Why don't you invite us here for dinner so that we can have a good time together?"

"All right," he said. "Come tomorrow evening."

On the following day he went to the market and bought various kinds of food for the dinner. Taking these home to his mother, he said, "Please prepare these for a dinner for my friends."

His mother said, "All right, but before I start cooking that food, I want to visit one of the neighbor women briefly."

After the mother had gone, the fish came out of the pool, took off its skin, and set to work. She cooked all the food required for the dinner, set out the necessary dishes, and put the house in order. After she had accomplished all this, the fish put on its skin again and jumped back into the pool.

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When the boy's mother returned from the neighbor's house, she was surprised to find that all of the food for the dinner had been cooked. It was all ready to eat.

The friends of the Son of the Fisherman came then. They enjoyed the dinner very much, and they had a good time talking and eating that evening. As they were leaving, the Son of the Fisherman said, "This was very pleasant. Come back tomorrow evening and we shall do the same thing then."

On the following day the Son of the Fisherman bought more food and took it home to be cooked for the dinner. Again the mother went briefly to the home of one of her neighbors before starting work on the dinner.

As soon as the boy's mother had left the house, the fish again came out of the pool and removed its skin. It then cooked all of the food, laid out the necessary dishes, and set the house in order for the arrival of the guests. Then, putting on its fish skin, it again jumped back into the pool.

When the woman returned from the neighbor's house, she said to herself, "Oh my God, what is going on here?" But she said nothing to her son about this.

During the meal the Son of the Fisherman said, "This

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food is unusually delicious! Mother, you have never before cooked food as delicious as this. How can we explain the marvelous flavor of this food?"

"Oh-h-h, my son," she said, "God caused this food to be so tasty."

But the boy was not satisfied with that answer. He decided to remain at home the following day and watch closely to see what happened. The next day he began watching. At first nothing happened. After his mother

left the house, however, the fish came out of the pool, took off its skin, and went into the kitchen. The fish had turned into a very beautiful girl. Gazing at her, the boy realized that she was as beautiful as the fourteenth of the moon.²

When she saw what he was doing with the fish skin, she said, "Alas, don't do that!"³ But the fish skin was burned, and very soon after that the Son of the Fisherman

²Throughout the Middle East--and nowhere more than in Turkey--the moon is a symbol of beauty. It is considered most beautiful when it is full. On the Moslem lunar calendar--no longer the official calendar but still used to record the religious year--the moon is full on the fourteenth night of the month.

³However well the fish girl adjusts to ordinary life, and no matter how much she was attracting the Son of the Fisherman, she still makes this last effort to preserve her relationship with the other world.

14th
of moon

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married the beautiful fish girl.

Everyone talked about the great beauty of this girl and after a while even the padişah heard about her. Someone reported to him, "There is a very beautiful girl who is married to a fisherman. There is no other girl anywhere in the world as beautiful as she is."

After this had been reported to the padişah several times, he decided that he wanted that woman himself. He said to his attendants, "Tell the Son of the Fisherman to come here." When the young man arrived, the padişah said, "I have a task for you to do. If you can do it, that will be fine. If you cannot do it, I shall have you executed."

"Tell me the task."

"I want you to bring me a very special bunch of grapes. It must have only three grapes on it, but I must be able to eat my fill from the bunch, my children must be able to do the same, my neighbors must also be able to eat their fill, and the whole country must be able to do so too. After everyone has eaten all he wants from this bunch, there must still be two grapes left. One of the remaining grapes will be thrown upon the road and the other upon the roof

This task seemed so impossible to accomplish that the Son of the Fisherman grew very depressed as he thought

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about it. He said to himself, O my God, how can I ever find such a bunch of grapes?"

When he arrived back home, his wife said to him, "What did the padişah want of you? Tell me." When the boy had repeated to her everything that the padişah had said,⁴ she said, "There is nothing easier than that. Go to the river and ask Big Sister Fatma⁵ for such a bunch of grapes. We have a great many grapes in our vineyard

Going to the river bank, the Son of the Fisherman shouted, "Hey, Big Sister Fatma! Hey, Big Sister Fatma Hey, Big Sister Fatma!"⁶

"Hey!" someone said.

The Son of the Fisherman said, "Your younger sister sent me to you. You are to give me a bunch of grapes, a bunch that has just three grapes in it."

"All right," she said, and disappeared. Very quickly she returned with a bunch of grapes that contained just three grapes.

⁴There is truncation here. In many variants the exact speech of the padişah is repeated. Folk audiences like such repetition.

⁵The Turkish here is Fatma abla; such a construction would normally be elided to Fatma'abla. Big here means older.

⁶The Turkish here is Fatma abla hu!

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Taking the grapes, he returned home with them. They had lunch, and after eating the other foods, they ate a grape from the special bunch. As soon as they pulled a grape from the bunch, another immediately appeared in its place.

The Son of the Fisherman then took the bunch of grapes to the padişah and placed it upon a table before the ruler. The padişah ate grape after grape; his children ate grape after grape; everyone ate grape after grape. But no matter how many grapes they ate, there were still two grapes on the bunch.

It was not long before the padişah again called the boy to his presence. He said, "I have another task for

The boy answered, "Let me hear what it is.

The padişah said, "My mother died twenty years ago. At the time of her death she was wearing upon her finger a ring of mine. I want you to go and get that ring and bring it back to me."

"All right, Your Majesty," said the boy. Returning home, the boy told his wife, "The padişah has ordered me to recover a finger ring of his that was worn by his mother when she died twenty years ago.

"Don't worry about it," his wife said. "It will be

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easy to get it. Just go and ask Big Sister Fatma to help you get it."

Going to the river, the Son of the Fisherman shouted, "Hey, Big Sister Fatma! Hey, Big Sister Fatma! Hey, Big Sister Fatma!"

"Hey!" someone said.

"Your younger sister sent me to you for help. The padişah's mother died twenty years ago. At the time of her death she was wearing on her finger a ring that belonged to her son. He ordered me to recover that ring for him

Big Sister Fatma said, "Follow me."

They walked and walked, and finally they came to a place where Big Sister Fatma said to him, "I shall leave you here." Pointing off to one side, she said, "You must go to that grave over there."

The boy went to that grave and knocked on its door. When the padişah's mother opened the door, the boy could see that she had been combing her hair. She said, "Are you a human being or a jinn?"⁷

The boy answered, "I am not a jinn but a human being.

⁷Anyone might ask a person that question if the person surprises him by appearing in an unlikely place--especially if the person's presence there seems in any way uncanny. The formulaic expression is İnmisin cinmisin?

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Your son sent me here to you. He wants back from you ring of his which you were wearing at the time of death

The woman said, "May he go blind! I had to put up with him and his problems for many, many years in the real world. Haven't I done enough for him already? Now he has hunted me down even here in the afterlife!" Regardless of her remarks, however, she took the ring from her finger and gave it to the Son of the Fisherman. The boy walked to the palace and delivered the ring to the padişah, placing it upon a table before the ruler

After a few days had passed, the Son of the Fisherman was again summoned into the padişah's presence. The ruler said, "I have another task for you to accomplish. If you can accomplish it, all will be well; but if you fail to accomplish it, you will be executed."

"Tell me about the task," said the boy

The padişah said, "I want you to bring me three eggs from one of these eggs the foal of a donkey must come forth."

When the Son of the Fisherman went home, his wife asked him, "What did the padişah say to you?"

"The padişah ordered me to take to him three eggs,

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After that*

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from one of which the foal of a donkey must come forth.

His wife said, "Go and ask my Big Sister Fatma for this."

Going once more to the river, the Son of the Fisherman called, "Hey, Big Sister Fatma Hey, Big Sister Fatma Big Sister Fatma!"

"Hey!" she answered. "What is it that you need this time?"

"I need three eggs, from one of which the foal of a donkey must come forth." She gave him three eggs, and the boy started home.

As he was walking along, one of the eggs was broken. A donkey foal immediately sprang forth from the broken egg and ran away. After he reached home, another one of the eggs was accidentally broken, and a second foal fled from it. Then only one of the eggs remained. He took that

egg very carefully to the palace and delivered it to the padişah. There were many people gathered at the palace. They had all come to see the Son of the Fisherman executed, for no one could believe that he would be able to bring an egg from which a donkey's foal would come forth. But when the egg was broken open, a small donkey climbed out of it, shook himself, and ran away

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The padişah was greatly confused at the sight of the donkey's foal.

A few days later the Son of the Fisherman was once more summoned to the palace. There the padişah said to "I have one final task for you to perform. I want to bring to me a newborn baby who will speak to me even though he is not yet a day old

When the Son of the Fisherman returned home, his wife asked him, "What did he give you to do this time?" After the young man had repeated the words of the padişah, his wife said, "Go immediately and be quick about it! My older sister is having a child right at this moment. Get him and take him to the padişah."

Going still once more to the river, the Son of the Fisherman shouted, "Hey, Big Sister Fatma! Hey, Big Sister Fatma! Hey, Big Sister Fatma!"

"Hey!" she responded.

"Your younger sister said that you had just had a baby. Let me borrow that baby for a little while so that I can take him to the padişah."

Big Sister Fatma covered up the newborn baby and handed him to the Son of the Fisherman. On his way home, the young man lifted one corner of the blanket and glanced

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at the baby. The newborn child gave him a disgusted look. The young man carried the baby to his own home first. There his wife caressed the child for a few minutes and then sent him along to the palace.

When the Son of the Fisherman arrived at the palace with the baby, he saw that almost everyone in the city had gathered there to see him executed. The young man placed the baby before the padişah

"Make the baby stand up," said the padişah.

But the baby said, "Speak to me, not to him, my padişah! What do you want from me? First you asked for a bunch of grapes from which people could eat and eat and eat without using up the grapes. Is that possible? Then you asked to have your ring recovered from your mother, who had been dead for twenty years. Has any such event ever been recorded in history? Next you asked for an egg from which a donkey foal would come forth Who ever heard of such a thing? Finally, you have now disturbed me before I was even completely born." Having said that, the baby snatched the padişah's sword and killed the ruler with it. Then he began swinging the sword in every direction, killing many people crowded around the throne. That is how the story ends