

Story 1098 (1974 Tape 48) Narrator: Şemsicihan Köymen, 84

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The Lady Sultan with Seven Veils

TE Once there was and once there was not,¹ at a time when the sieve was in the straw, when the camel was the town crier and the rooster was the imam,² and I was rocking my father's cradle, tingir mingir,³ there was a padişah who had two sons. When these sons grew to be young men, their father gave them a ring of forty-one keys and said to them, "Here are the keys to the forty-one rooms in this large palace. You may enter all of the first forty doors, but do not enter the forty-first door under any circumstances."

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Taking the keys, the boys agreed to obey his advice. They walked throughout the entire palace opening door after door until they had entered and examined the first forty rooms. When they came to the forty-first door, the younger son said, "I am going to open this door too."

"No, no, don't do that," said his elder brother. "Our father ordered us not to open the forty-first door."

¹ This is the opening clause of the best known Turkish tekerleme, a nonsense jingle (rimed in Turkish) used to amuse the listeners and prepare them for the fact that a folktale is about to begin.

² An imam is a prayer leader in a mosque.

³ Onomatopoeia for the sound of the rocking cradle.

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"I don't care!" said the younger brother. "Why did he tell us that? I am very curious, and I intend to open that door!" Entering the door, he looked about the forty-first room, at first seeing nothing unusual about its contents. Then he came to a place where there was a small wall panel with a handle on it. When he pulled open this panel, he found inside a piece of paper on which there was drawn the picture of a very beautiful girl. When the younger brother saw this picture, he immediately fell in love with the girl and said, "Oh-h-h, I must marry this girl!"

"But where is she to be found? She does not live here."

"Well, you ask our father whose daughter she is, and then I shall go and ask her parents for her hand.

But the older brother could not ask their father this question, for if he did, their father would then know that his sons had disobeyed him by entering the forty-first room of the palace. As time passed, the younger brother began to spend more and more of his time thinking about the girl whose picture he had seen in the forty-first room. As a result of this, the younger brother ate little and became totally inactive, and before long he had actually grown ill. When the palace doctors were unable to help the boy, his padişah father had doctors brought in from outside, but none of them

*Fainting at
Peculiar heart
falling in love
with picture
of girl*

June sickness

physicians 63-64

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was able to cure the boy's illness either. When the boy grew so ill that his life was endangered, a famous doctor advised the padişah, "Send him out on a journey. Perhaps traveling will take his mind off whatever it is that is bothering him.

The padişah followed this advice and he equipped his two sons for the journey. After all the preparations had been completed, the young men bade farewell, mounted their horses, and began wandering aimlessly from place to place. They were searching for the girl in the picture. At the bottom of the picture there was written, "Lady Sultan with Seven Veils." That was the only information they had about her, and so whenever they stopped, they asked if there was in that place a Lady Sultan with Seven Veils. They traveled by day and they spent their nights at inns, and at every inn they asked the same question, "Does there live in this area a Lady Sultan with Seven Veils?"

Time after time the innkeepers answered this question with "No!" After traveling through several countries in their search, they were finally successful. One night the innkeeper of the inn where they were staying said, "Yes there is such a person here. She is the padişah of this country. When her father died some time ago, she succeeded him as padişah. She never permits men to enter her palace

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except for the ⁶⁵⁻⁶ hoca⁴ who is teaching her to read the Koran. No one else is allowed to enter the palace."

Hoca hoca

"We'll find a way," the brothers said. While the younger brother rested at the inn, the elder brother left the inn to inquire about the sultan's hoca. To his surprise, he discovered that this hoca was a woman. Local people directed the elder brother to the door of this woman.

When the elder brother knocked on the door, the woman, wearing a scarf around her head, opened it. She asked, "What do you want, son?"

He answered, "My brother is close to death out of love for a Lady Sultan with Seven Veils, a girl whose picture he once saw. It is for that reason that I wish to enter the palace.

"But she never permits any men to enter the palace. How do you expect to do so?"

"I could wear your clothes and enter with the disguise of a woman

*Disguis.
65-67*

After receiving a bag of gold from the prince, the woman let him borrow her clothes. She then said to the young man, "Tomorrow morning a carriage will come for me, but you will go in my place. Those in the carriage will drive you to the

⁴ The word hoca signified both teacher and preacher in Pre-Republican Turkey. One person served both of these functions.

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palace gate, where the guards will let you enter the palace. The girl's servants will then descend from the living quarters and take care of you. One of them will lift you out of the carriage; another will carry you into the palace; a third will carry you halfway up the stairs. Still another servant will then carry you directly to her room. You will enter her room with the Koran in your hand, and you will sit in the chair on the right side. The sultan will then come and sit in the chair opposite you. Her face will be covered with seven veils. Before she starts reading her lesson, you will tell her that for each error she makes she will be required to remove one veil. By the time that the lesson has ended, she will have removed the last veil. She will then come and kiss your hand and leave the room. The servants will then come to the room and carry you downstairs, where they will place you in the carriage again. You will then be driven back here."

"Very well," said the older brother.

The following morning he went to the hoca's room and put on her clothes and took the Koran in his hand. Soon the carriage arrived and took him to the palace door. There the sultan's servants came to get him and carry him upstairs. They had to struggle to do this, however, and they said, "What

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has happened to you, hoca? You are so heavy today that we can hardly lift you!"

"I must have eaten too much. That must be why I am heavier."

Another servant tried to carry him but was unable to do so. She said, "Oh, hoca, I cannot lift you at all today." (This was because he was a strong young man, not a woman. Eventually they managed to carry him upstairs.

He entered the room, opened the Koran, and waited. The Lady Sultan entered with her veils completely covering her face. She read a prayer, but, making a mistake, she was required to remove one of her veils. After making a second error, she opened another veil, until at last all seven veils were opened. She was really breathtakingly beautiful. The young man said, "My younger brother was right! He fell madly in love with you after seeing your picture. Yearning for you he became so sick that doctors could not cure him, and now he lies close to death. We did not know that the girl he had fallen in love with was a padişah until we finally located you." Having said this, he removed the outer layer of female clothing that he had been wearing.

Seeing that the young man was very handsome, the girl asked, "Who are you, anyway?"

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"I am the son of the Padişah of India."

"Very well. If your brother is as handsome as you are, I might accept him, but there is a serious problem here. I am engaged to be married to the son of the Padişah of Yemen this week. Before I do anything, however, I must visit the grave of my mother at such-and-such a place. Bring your brother there so that I can see him. If I like him enough, I may break my engagement to the prince of Yemen. If I do not like him that much, then I shall go on my way as I had planned."

"All right. My younger brother is far more handsome than I. If you see him, you will certainly like him."

Returning to the inn, the young man said to his younger brother, "Good news! I have found the girl you love. Unfortunately, she is engaged to marry the son of the Padişah of Yemen next week. Before she goes to Yemen, however, she will visit the grave of her mother, and I shall take you there so that she can see you. If she likes you greatly, she will break her engagement; if she is not that fond of you, then will go on her way.

The younger brother agreed with this. He ate well and slept well that night, for now he was happy. In the morning he arose, still feeling very well, and he said, "Brother, I

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think that I can ride my horse today without assistance

"Very well," said the elder brother, and he then led younger brother to the tomb of the Lady Sultan's family

When they arrived there, they were stopped outside by guards, who asked, "Who are you?"

"We want to see the sultan's tomb. Here is some money for you," they said, giving the guards a bag of gold. They then entered the tomb and began waiting.

Soon after that, they heard the sound of an approaching carriage and then the sound of light footsteps on the walk. The girl, dressed in bridal clothes, opened the door of the tomb and entered. When the girl saw the two brothers there, she thought that the younger one was very handsome indeed. She wanted to break her engagement and go with the younger brother but she could think of no way to elude the bridal party that was waiting outside.

The older brother then said to her, "I have a suggestion for a way in which we can manage this problem. You trade clothes with me, and then you can leave with my brother, for the guards know that there were two men who came in here. After you have made your escape, I shall go out wearing your bridal clothes and pretending that I am you."

"How could that be?" asked the girl. "What will happen then?"

*They
69-72*

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"Don't worry about that. Just leave it all to me

The Lady Sultan agreed to try this, and she and the older brother exchanged their outer garments. When this was completed, the older brother said, "Now go ahead and have a good journey. You will ride my horse, and my brother will ride his own horse. You will be able to leave this country very easily in that way. I'll find some way to get away, when I do, I shall follow you and find you."

They now kissed farewell and left the tomb. The younger brother and the girl, dressed as a man, went first. After they had ridden away, the older brother, dressed in bridal clothes and wearing seven veils, walked out of the tomb. He was met by the woman who had expected to be the future sister-in-law of the Lady Sultan. "Where have you been, Sultan?" she asked. "You are very late, and the military escort is waiting for us.

"I had difficulty parting from my mother's grave," said the elder brother.

The procession going to Yemen then started, and without any difficulties along the way, they reached the bridegroom's country after a long journey. The wedding celebration and the feasting had already begun, and the travelers went directly to the padişah's palace, from which they had a good view of the

*Wedding
celebration
70-71*

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festivities.

In our tradition⁵ the bridegroom does not see his bride during the day. It isn't until the final night of the wedding that he sees her. On that nuptial evening the guests all remain with the girl until the bridegroom comes at night her. Then the guests leave, and the young couple go to the nuptial chamber. There they sit and eat sweetmeats and other food for a while, and then they go to bed.

And so the night came, and the guests departed after the bridegroom had come for his bride. As he was leading her to the nuptial chamber, the bridegroom took the bride's hand, but he was surprised to find that it felt coarse and masculine. He said, "My Sultan, I know well how beautiful you are, but why does a beauty like you have such a coarse hand?"

"I exercise a great deal and play games often. Those are the kinds of activities that make one's hands coarse."

After they had eaten the meal spread out for them, the bridegroom wanted to open the sultan's veils, but the elder brother would not allow him to do this. How could he? If he did, a man would be revealed beneath the veils. When it

⁵ This observation was clearly made for the non-Turkish collector, Barbara Walker. An all-Turkish audience would not have required any explanation.

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time to go to bed, the elder brother said, "Give me permission to leave in order to change my clothes, and then I shall come right back." As he left the room, he called the bridegroom's sister and said, "Can you help me undress?"

The girl agreed to do this, and the two of them went to the bride's dressing room. There the elder brother held girl's hand very tightly and spoke to her. "I'm going to tell you something, but no one else is to know about it. I am a man and the son of the Padişah of India. I exchanged clothes with the Lady Sultan while we were at her mother's tomb and sent her away with my younger brother, who loved her. I wore her clothes and came here pretending to be the bride, but I can pretend no longer, for it is now time for the bride to undress and go to the bridegroom. Of course I cannot do that. Instead I shall run away with you, for I like you very much. We can go at once to my father's country, just as my younger brother and the Lady Sultan have already done." When the elder brother had removed the bridal clothes, he was revealed to be a fine, strong young man, and so the girl agreed to accept his proposal.

The elder brother then said, "Put on some of your brother's clothes, and we shall slip out of the palace as two men. We shall also take two of your brother's horses, one for you and

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one for me. We should be able to travel quite some distance during the time that your brother waits for me to return to the nuptial chamber. Of course they will pursue us, but when they are unable to find us, the matter will be closed. We should reach my country shortly after my brother and the Lady Sultan do, and we can then have a double wedding ceremony."

The girl agreed to this, and after she had put on some of her brother's clothes, they went down to the garden. From there they went to the stable, selected two good horses, and rode away as fast as they could.

Meanwhile the bridegroom waited and waited for the bride to return. Finally he went out into the hallway and asked some of the servants, "Where is my sister?"

"Your sister left the palace dressed as a man. She was with another man. The two of them took horses from your stable and said that they were going to wander about for a while."

"Oh, no, there is more to it than that. That girl did not want to stay with me, and so she took my sister and ran away. Call out the army and have them get ready to follow me in pursuit of the two fugitives!"

The son of the padişah and his soldiers set out after the fugitives. They looked here and they looked there in every direction from the palace. They searched for days and days.

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By then, all of the troops were tired and hungry, and so they returned to the palace and gave up the search.

The elder brother and the princess of Yemen rode on straight to India. As they approached the capital city, they were met along the way by guards who had been stationed along the way to greet them. Cannons were fired to announce their arrival, and messengers took the news to the padişah that his elder son had returned.

When the two brothers were reunited, the younger one saw the girl who had come with his elder brother. "Brother, where did you find her?" the younger one asked.

"You were able to find a girl. Why shouldn't I be able to do the same? I also found a padişah's daughter to bring home. She would have been the sister-in-law of the Lady Sultan if the Lady Sultan had married the son of the Padişah of Yemen.

A double wedding was held at the palace of the Padişah of India. The wedding festivities lasted for forty days and forty nights, and after that they lived together happily.