

Story 1274 (1969 Tape 3)

Narrator: Ali Riza Yarar

Location: Aliçlık village, Bayburt
kaza, Gümüşhane Province

NOTE: Tale taped before
Bayburt city became
capital of newly
created Bayburt
Province (c. 1990)

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Taped by Dr. Saim Sakaoğlu

¹⁻³⁶
The Tasks of Ahmet and Mehmet

Once in the past there were a padişah and his wife who had a son. The wife of the padişah was not very well, and she died while she was still quite a young woman. When this happened, the viziers gathered around their ruler and said, "May Allah bless our padişah! There is no other ruler¹ like him!" Then after they had talked with him for a while, they made a proposal to him: "Now that your wife has died, let us make arrangements to have you remarried."

The padişah answered, "Marriage itself would be no problem, but, as you know, I have a young son, and I do not know how this child might get along with any woman that I might marry."

¹Literally the narrator says, "There is no other Reşat like him." He seems to be using Reşat as a generic term for ruler or sultan. Whether it refers to any specific Reşat is unclear. There were five sultans of that name.

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Even though the padişah objected in this way to their proposal, the viziers persisted, saying, "No matter what might happen, we think that it is most important for you to marry again." This discussion continued, off and on, for some time. Finally the padişah accepted the proposal made by his viziers. A woman was found who seemed to be an appropriate second wife for the padişah, and after all of the arrangements had been made, the two were married.

As it turned out, however, this woman who became the padişah's second wife was an immoral person. She not only neglected the padişah, but she did so in order to spend all of her time trying to lead astray the padişah's son. The boy thought, "What kind of a mother is this? Her ways are very different from those of my real mother.

During the time of the boy's real mother there had been an old woman who occasionally frequented the palace. The padişah himself had seen little of this old woman, and he had no way of knowing that she was a witch.² But after the padişah had remarried, this old woman began to be seen more often in

²The word witch in Turkish tales may refer to a person with magical power and/or contact with the supernatural world. She may be a ghoul. More often she is simply a corrupt and wily person whose services can be bought to carry out nefarious purposes.

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the palace. In fact, the old witch woman and the second became confidantes, sharing many of their secrets with each other. After the stepmother had failed in all her efforts to mislead the young prince, she said to herself one day, "Inasmuch as the old woman and I share our secrets with each other, let me consult her in this matter." The next time two were together, the wife of the padişah explained the situation to the old woman.

The old woman said, "Daughter, such a thing is impossible! You are the boy's mother now. How can you possibly betray the padişah in this way and wish to have an affair with his son? Put it out of your mind!"

But the woman could not be persuaded to change her mind. She said, "No matter what the cost may be, I absolutely must have this boy. If I am prevented from having my way about this, I shall destroy the lives of those who stand in my the padişah, his son, and you too!"

The old woman wondered, "Is this really possible?" Unable to avoid this situation, she suggested, "Stir some poisonous drug into a cup of sherbet,³ and when the boy returns from

³In Turkey sherbet is a cold fruit-flavored drink, not the icy confection that it is in the U.S.

Porru

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school, say to him, 'You look tired. Drink this sherbet, and it will refresh you

During the time when the boy's real mother was still alive, the padişah had acquired a very special colt which was the offspring of a sea stallion.⁴ Both the mother and her son had become very fond of this colt, and after his mother's death, the boy visited the colt every day twice--in the morning before going to school and in the afternoon on the way back to the palace. By now the colt had grown into a horse.

On the day that the stepmother planned to poison the prince, the horse warned the boy of her evil intention: "Today your mother will offer you sherbet. Don't drink any of it, for it will contain poison

When the boy returned from school that day, his stepmother offered him the poisoned sherbet. He threw it on the floor, saying, "I shall not drink any of this!"

One day, three days, five days passed, and the stepmother decided to consult the witch again. "I am not certain what we should do, but do you think we can succeed by doing some-

⁴In Turkish tales there is often reference to "river horses" and "sea horses," usually creatures with supernatural abilities, including prescience and/or the power of flight and/or the knowledge of human speech. River and sea horses apparently derive from ancient mythology.

Horse, supernatural

See Horse

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Amused, happy

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thing that I shall now suggest?"

"What is it?"

The witch explained. "Why don't we have a deep pit along the path he takes to school? We can have the bottom of the pit filled with sharp swords pointing upward. Then we can cover the pit with some kind of light material so he will not detect this hole in his path. When he steps on the light cover, it will not support his weight, and he will fall upon the swords and be fatally wounded by them. This is the only easy method I can think of right now

"Very well. Let us try it," said the stepmother.

The two women had the deep pit dug, and then they had the swords planted at the bottom of the hole with their points sticking upward. Then they hid the opening in the ground by covering it with a light cloth and some leaves. They expected that this trap would kill the boy

On his way to school that day, however, the boy was warned about this trap while he was talking with the sea horse. As a result, the prince changed the route he took to reach his school.

When he got home after school that day, his stepmother--let us call her his would-be lover--asked him, "Son, why did

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you take a different path to school today?"

"Oh, I thought that it was a shorter way to go, and so I decided to try it."

Thus the mother had failed again to get rid of the boy who had rejected her. Once more she called upon the old witch woman for help. The old woman said, "It now seems quite clear that we cannot get rid of the boy with the methods we are using. What does that child do when he is not in school? How does he manage to find out the plots we have made against him?"

"He does two things every day. In the morning before going to school, he visits his horse at the stable. Then when he is on the way home from school, he again visits that horse. Each time he goes to the stable, he spends quite some time there, but that is all that he does besides going to school."

"If that is the situation, then he must have been informed about our plans by that horse," said the old woman

"How can we get rid of the horse?"

The old woman said, "You must pretend to be very ill. Because your husband is the padişah, he will try all means of having you cured. He will bring in physicians. He may engage

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Jinn

magicians who have contact with the race of jinns.⁵ He may hire hocas.⁶ But you must not reveal any signs of recovery as a result of the efforts of these people."--The women made careful plans on how to proceed in this matter. Can they succeed?

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Following these plans, the second wife of the padişah one day pretended to be ill. Physicians were brought to the palace, but, one after another, they failed to cure her illness. Hocas were brought in to pray for and breathe upon the patient, but they also failed to improve her condition. Those who had contact with the jinns were employed to find some remedy, but their efforts were useless. Sorcerers were engaged to aid the woman, but they too failed to bring any relief.

Finally, after there was no longer anyone to whom they

⁵The word jinn suggests two very different kinds of supernatural creatures. The first is the huge supernatural being who comes forth from a bottle or appears in response to some signal, such as the rubbing of a magic lamp or ring. This creature then proceeds to give the caller supernatural or magic aid to achieve what he wishes. The other kind of jinn is never seen. It is a spiritual force referred to in some Sufi belief and in other mystical systems. A manipulator of jinn is a cinci.

⁶A hoca is a religious leader, a preacher, and, before the founding of the Turkish Republic, also a teacher. Hocas not only prayed for the sick but also blew their breath upon the patient. Sometimes they were supposedly blowing prayers to the patient. "Blowers" became such notorious exploiters of

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might appeal for help, the old woman went to the padişah with a suggestion. She said, "May Allah bless you, my padişah! I have come to tell you of a dream that I had last night. In that dream I was told that there is only one cure for your wife's illness, and that cure is in your stable. Only if she eats some of the flesh of the sea horse and is then wrapped in the hide of that horse will she recover."⁷

This presented the padişah with a dilemma. What should he do? It would be cruel toward his son to kill his horse, and he did not wish to harm the boy. On the other hand, unless he killed the horse, his wife would die, and he could not endure the thought of that. He went to his son and implored a favor from him. After explaining the problem to the boy, the padişah said to him, "Give your consent to have the horse killed, and afterwards I shall buy you any other horse that you may wish."

Although the boy did not want to lose the sea horse under any circumstances, he felt that he should not flatly refuse common people that among the Atatürk Reforms of the 1920's was a law forbidding the practice of the "blower" (üfürükçü). Some blowers were not bona fide hocas but sorcerers.

⁷The proposed cure is partly a matter of magic and partly a matter of folk medicine. From ancient time to the present, magical cures have involved the eating of the flesh of a certain animal, bird, fish, or human being. But Turkish folk

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his father's request. He answered, "Very well. But permit me to go and visit the horse a final time. Then you may do as you wish with it.

right," said the padişah.

Going to the stable, the boy explained the situation to the horse, which had actually known all about it before the boy had. It said, "Now saddle me and decorate me fully with the kind of embroidered cloth in which they dress a ram about to be slaughtered for a special sacrifice. Then ride around on my back for a while. Tell your father and the others, 'Let me enjoy this horse for just a little while. Then you may slaughter it and do whatever you wish with it.

"All right," said the boy. Saddling and bridling and decorating the horse as he had been instructed to do, the boy rode to the palace and spoke to the padişah. He said, "Father, this horse was a keepsake from my mother. Ever since the time when she was still alive, I have had great affection for this horse. Now, however, my stepmother is suffering from some kind of illness. Even though it will require the life medicine includes the wrapping of a patient in the still-warm hide of some animal. Usually the patient so encased is a victim of injuries, often including broken bones.

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of my dear horse to cure her, let us do whatever has to be done. Permit me to ride this horse about briefly to relieve its stiffness and shortness of breath. Then you may slaughter it."

After he had received his father's consent to do this, the boy rode forth into the city. He went directly to the home of a schoolmate of his named Mehmet. (I forgot to tell you that the prince's own name was Ahmet.) Mehmet, the son of a poor family, was surprised to see the prince there and asked, "Ahmet, what are you doing here with your horse?"

"I am taking the horse out to give it some fresh air.

"Please take me along on the croup of your horse." After both Ahmet and the horse had agreed to this, the two boys rode a little farther through the city.

The horse then said to the boys, "Close your eyes!"

Mehmet could not understand what the horse was saying, and so Ahmet directed him: "Put your arms around my waist. Then hold tightly and close your eyes."

After both boys had closed their eyes, the horse ascended and left. They went little; they went far. They went up hills and down through dales, but after all of that travel they had gone only as far as the length of a regular needle

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and the width of a packing needle.⁸ As they were passing over a hill on top of which was a spring, the horse descended. When the horse stopped before the spring, the boys opened their eyes and dismounted. They were tired by now, and the horse was also tired. After drinking some water and turning the horse loose to graze on some of the wild plants there, the two boys, somewhat afraid, walked around the spring in order to explore this place.

As they were walking around the spring, they saw on the edge of the water a very unusual feather. It glowed brightly, almost like a kerosene lamp or even an electric light of our own time. "Look here! What is it? What kind of feather can it be?" Liking the feather, the boys picked it up and took it to the horse.

"What is that in your hand?" the horse asked. "Why did you take it? Of what good can it be to you? You should not have taken it."

"Well, we have obeyed everything else you told us to do, but we wish to keep this feather. See how it glows! How

⁸This is a frequently formulaic pattern of figurative language in Turkish folktales to represent quickly and colorfully a lengthy and tedious journey. The details vary somewhat, but the pattern here includes several of the most common elements.

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could we avoid taking it?"

would have been better if you had not touched it at all." ■■■■

The boys then remounted the horse and traveled a long way farther before they reached a city. Because they were still really children, they could not go to a coffeehouse or to a caravansary. Instead, they stopped an old woman whom they saw on a secluded street and asked her for shelter. Ahmet had seen the witch woman at the palace frequently, and so he was accustomed to speaking to old women. "Grandmother will you take us in as guests?"

"Sons, how can I take you in? I have neither room for you in my house nor space enough for your horse in my stable."

"Come now, grandmother! Don't say that," answered Ahmet. "You give us shelter, and we shall give you some money."

sons. I cannot."

Taking out two gold coins, Ahmet said to her, "You take these, and for them you will give us a place to stay tonight."

When the old woman saw the gold, she exclaimed, "Oh-h-h! Come in, and I shall manage to make room for both of you and for your horse, too." Saying this, she welcomed them into her home.

Soon the sun set, and it grew dark inside the house.

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Ahmet said, "Grandmother, bring out some lamps and light them. Are you going to let us remain in complete darkness?"

"Oh, son, I dare not light a lamp tonight. The padişah of this country has issued a decree forbidding everyone to light lamps tonight. Anyone who disobeys that decree will be beheaded."⁹

"Very well, then. There is nothing that we can do about that." They all sat there in the dark for a while longer, and then the old woman went to bed. Then Ahmet, the son of a padişah, had a thought. "What about that feather we found?" he asked. "Let us get it out and see if it will also shine during the night." Taking the feather from their saddlebag, they discovered that it shone as brightly as any lamp.

Having issued a decree against the lighting of lamps that night, the padişah had, naturally, sent patrols through the streets of the city to see that his order was obeyed. They looked up and down street after street to see if there were any lamps burning in any of the homes. From some distance they saw the light in a small hut, but it did not look like

⁹We are not told why the padişah has required the black-out. Often in folktales such a decree is issued to protect the padişah and his vizier as they make a tour of inspection of the city by night.

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the kind of light given by a lamp. When they had drawn closer, they said to each other, "How very strange! What kind of light is it?" When they reached the poor dwelling in which the old woman lived, they looked inside through the chimney.¹⁰ There they saw two very young men sitting beside something that illuminated the hut. They were entranced by the beauty of that light. The guards set aside the ruling about lights the moment, saying, "Let us not disturb them right now." when they returned to the palace, they reported this situation to the ruler. They said, "May Allah bless you, my padişah We found no ordinary lamps burning anywhere in the city, but we saw something strange in the poor hut of an old woman in such and such a district. In that place we saw two very young men sitting with something between them--perhaps a gem or some kind of silver or gold--which glows with a strange quality. It is not like the light of a lamp or like any other light that we have ever seen."

Very curious about this, the padişah decided to take a look at it himself. "Take me to that place," he said. Going

¹⁰Chimneys of Turkish private homes are often capacious. At base they may be 8-12 feet wide to accommodate an oven and sufficient fireplace room for cooking. They are low enough to be looked into with little difficulty. They are so wide open that they are like megaphones in amplifying the voices inside the house, and it is a kind of rural sport to eavesdrop on neighbors through their chimneys.

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his patrol to the hut of the old woman, he looked inside and agreed that the light inside was really unique. He said to his men, "Do not disturb them right now. Make a note of the location of this place so that you can return in the morning and arrest them. Do not startle them now, for they may try to escape, but in the morning capture them and bring them to the palace."

"Yes, our padişah," said the guards.

On the following morning the padişah waited with impatience for the arrival of the young men. By the time of the morning prayer service,¹¹ the night watchmen were pounding on the door of the old woman's hut. "Open the door!" they shouted.

"What is the matter?" asked the old woman from inside.

"Open the door at once, and then you will see!"

When she opened the door and saw the watchmen of the padişah, she became frightened. "What is it?" she asked.

"Do not be concerned, grandmother," they said. "We are simply going to take to the padişah the two young men who are staying with you."

She consented to this, saying, "Take them away and do whatever you wish with them. All I ask is that you leave me in

¹¹The first of the day's five Moslem prayer services takes place at sunrise.

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peace."

As they were being led to the palace of the padişah, Ahmet and Mehmet asked each other, "What do you suppose he will do to us? Well, we shall soon discover that."

When they were shown into his presence, the padişah asked them, "Didn't you hear that there was a prohibition against burning lights last night?"

"Yes, we heard about it.

"Well, then, why did you light your lamp?"

"No, we did not do that! May Allah bless our padişah! Why should we light a lamp? Where would we even find a lamp? We were left in the dark, and without anything to do, we went to bed."

"No, no!" said the padişah. "I myself went to the place where you were staying, and I saw something bright between you. Whatever it was, it was giving off light. Bring forth that object here!"

There was no way in which they could deny their guilt any longer. Ahmet brought forth the object, and the padişah recognized it at once as a feather. Of course, as the feather was set down in the open air, its bright color reappeared--even more fascinating in the daylight than it had been the night

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before.

"How beautiful! How unique!" exclaimed the padişah. Then turning to his viziers, he said, "I want all of you to be witness to the fact that I am giving my daughter to this young man."

But the grand vizier was greatly annoyed by this announcement, for he himself was secretly in love with the daughter of the padişah, and he immediately began to plot against Ahmet. He said, "May Allah bless my padişah That young man may have brought that feather, but of what value is a single feather? He should have brought the entire bird, not just one feather, and then you could have enjoyed fully such beauty. If he brought a feather, he could also bring the bird!"

"Look! He is only a boy!" answered the padişah. "How could he find the bird itself and manage to bring it here? He may simply have found this feather in a field or in the countryside somewhere.

"No! He probably knows exactly where the bird is to be found. He looks like a very clever boy.

"Very well," said the padişah. Then turning to Ahmet, he said, "Son, I have given my daughter to you already, but I want you to bring to me the bird from which this feather came.

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That is my command."

"All right, my padişah," said the boy. Then he returned to the home of the old woman, where the horse awaited him. Even before Ahmet arrived at the old woman's stable, the horse knew about everything that had happened.

The horse asked him, "Why did you do this thing, Ahmet? Didn't I tell you that it would bring no good to you? I predicted correctly. So you got into trouble. Where do you suppose we can find that bird? Well, never mind. Come along! One must accept his fate."

Following the horse's directions, the boy strapped the saddle and saddlebag on the horse and mounted it. They then went to the marketplace of that city, where the horse ordered Ahmet to purchase specific objects. "Buy the tail of a sheep," said the horse, and Ahmet bought one. "Next buy a table," and Ahmet got one. "Now buy a tablecloth which will cover the entire table." After all three of these things had been bought, the horse said to Ahmet, "Now mount my back and close your eyes."

They then flew back again to the spring where the boys had picked up the brilliant feather. After they had landed there, the horse said, "Now set up the table." The boy did this.

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Then the horse said, "Now cover it completely with the cloth." After the boy had done this, too, the horse examined the tabletop and said, "Well done! Now place the sheep tail on the table

After the boy had placed the sheep tail there, he asked, "What now?"

"That sheep tail is bait to draw the bird here. You must under the table and stay hidden beneath the overlapping tablecloth. You will have to be very alert. If you fail to capture the bird here and he escapes, neither of us will leave this place alive. He is the (Padişah of Birds), and he will issue an order to have us both killed at once."

The boy was determined to follow exactly the instructions of the horse. On the one hand, he was influenced to succeed by his passionate love for the padişah's daughter. On the other hand, he was also influenced to succeed by his fear of being beheaded if he failed. He climbed under the table and began to wait.

In the meantime, the horse left and went to a place where he could not be seen. Finally he saw the bird approaching heard the buzzing sound it made as it flew

The bird circled the table several times, soaring closer

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and closer until it could land upon it. When the bird had completely settled and had begun to raise its tail, the boy reached behind it and grabbed it tightly by one leg. He then wrapped the bird securely in the large tablecloth and held it tightly in both his arms. The horse reappeared, and they set out immediately for the palace of the padişah. As soon as they arrived there, the boy rushed into the presence of the ruler and said, "May Allah bless my padişah! Here is the bird you want!"

As soon as he saw the marvelous bird, the padişah went mad with pleasure. It was not, after all, any ordinary bird but an otherworldly creature. Anyone who viewed this creature was greatly affected by its gorgeous beauty.

Although the padişah was delighted to see the bird, the grand vizier was not, and that evil man again began to plot against Ahmet. He said to the padişah, "This boy brought the bird all right, but why did he not also bring the structure in which it is accustomed to living? We cannot keep such a bird in any ordinary cage. It will be useless to have the bird here if it cannot be properly housed."

"See here!" said the padişah. "What does that matter? It is enough that he was able to bring that bird here. We

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can have a suitable cage built for it!"

But the grand vizier persisted in his complaining. it would be far better for us to have here the little building in which he lived in his own land."

The padişah was finally persuaded to the grand vizier's point of view. He therefore said to Ahmet, "You brought the bird to us, but we really also need the appropriate living quarters for such a wonderful bird. Go now and bring back whatever kind of little structure it was that he lived in in his own land."

Ahmet was greatly disappointed by this turn of events. But the padişah now made this further request of him, and there was no way in which he could refuse to accomplish this new task. He therefore agreed to undertake this work.

When the boy went to the stable to tell the sea horse about this new task, he discovered that that great horse already knew about it. "Oh, Ahmet, we are in trouble again, it said, "but do not be afraid of it. We must prepare at once to undertake it. Go to the market and buy a barrel of wine and forty sheep. We shall go to the top of such and such a mountain and see if we can find what we are seeking there

"All right," said Ahmet, and he left to make the two

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purchases that the horse had ordered. When he came back with them, he turned over the sheep to Mehmet, who had now rejoined them, and said, "Mehmet, you drive these to such and such a mountain."

Mehmet set out at once driving the sheep toward such and such a mountain. A day or two later, Ahmet mounted his horse with the barrel of wine and flew to the top of that mountain. There they found Mehmet with the forty sheep. Ahmet asked, "Mehmet, do you know what we are going to do here?"

"No. What are we going to do here?"

Ahmet explained to him the instructions which the horse had earlier given to its rider. "We are to slaughter all forty of these sheep, skin them, and then place their carcasses at regular intervals all around that spring over there we are to drain the spring, and after diverting the water flow in another direction, fill the spring cavity with wine. Birds will come and devour the meat, and afterwards they will be very thirsty. They will drink the wine and become drunk. Then we will slaughter the drunken birds, cut away their flesh, and with their bones we shall construct a box in which the Padişah of Birds will live at the palace. This is the only way in which we can accomplish the task we were given

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Well, all of this was very unusual, but the two boys thought that it was plausible. They set to work emptying the spring and diverting its source of water in another direction. Then they filled the original cavity of the spring with wine. After slaughtering the sheep, they placed their flayed bodies around the edge of the spring cavity. Having completed this hard work, they hid themselves carefully waited.

After a short while, birds discovered the slaughtered sheep and began eating the meat and drinking the wine. When all of the birds had fallen down drunk, the boys came out of hiding and slaughtered them all. After cutting away the flesh of the birds, they used their hundreds of bones to make an elaborate structure which would serve as a cage for the Padişah of Birds. Ahmet then mounted his horse with this cage and Mehmet climbed up behind him on the horse's croup.

When they delivered this cage to the palace, the grand vizier could not immediately think of any new task to block Ahmet's marrying the princess. The padişah said, "Well done, son My daughter is your wife. If you wish to remain here with her, you may do so. I can place you in a kiosk similar to mine, and you may spend as much as you wish of my almost

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limitless wealth

said Ahmet. "You are a padişah, and I am the son of a padişah. I should return after a while to my own land."

By that time, the grand vizier had thought of another way to persecute Ahmet. Going to the ruler, he said, "May you live long, my padişah. That Ahmet brought you the feather, the bird from which the feather came, and the required cage for the bird. There is one more thing that he could bring to you, something much more valuable to you than the bird or its cage."

"What is that?" asked the padişah.

such and such a sea there live sea horses, both stallions and mares. Any human being who drinks the milk of one of those sea mares has his physical condition reversed to what it was at the age of fifteen. After that, he will retain the youth of a fifteen-year-old person. Why don't we require Ahmet to bring some of that sea mare's milk for you?"

The padişah was thrilled by the idea of a return to youth, for he was by this time well along in years. Calling Ahmet into his presence again, he said, "Son, you have done much for me already, but there is one more favor which I must ask

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of you. If you can satisfy this request, I shall not ask for anything else.

"Tell me what it is that you want," said Ahmet.

In such and such a sea there are sea horses, including sea mares. I want you to bring to me some of the milk of those mares

Without asking any questions about this strange and difficult task, Ahmet agreed to undertake it. As usual, he went to his horse for help. Knowing all about the padişah's latest request even before Ahmet arrived at the stable, the horse

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greeted the boy with this remark: "Oh, Ahmet! This new task is different from those we have already accomplished. We may or we may not survive to return from this quest. You picked up a feather and insisted upon keeping it. Now you know what troubles we have suffered as a result of that act!"

"That is true, gray horse,¹² but what should we do now? Is there any way in which we can complete this new task?"

"Go now and buy some felt and a can of tar. Besides these things, we shall take along with us some firewood to use in melting the tar and a long rope of the best quality."

Ahmet went to the marketplace and bought the felt and tar. Then he bought from a woodseller enough firewood to burn to melt the tar. Loading these and a coil of good rope on the back of the gray horse, Ahmet said, "We are ready. Let us go now!"

The gray horse flew straight to such and such a sea and landed on its shore. It then said, "Let us see now, dear Ahmet, what we can do. Light a fire and place the can of tar above it so that it will melt." Ahmet did as he had been directed, and the two waited until the heat had melted the tar. The horse then said, "Now take the tar and pour it over

¹²In beginning here to call the horse "gray horse," the narrator adds a whole new set of mythological associations.

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the felt." Working carefully, he covered all of the felt thoroughly with a layer of tar. When this had been accomplished, the horse said, "Now wrap this felt around my body from one end to the other."¹³ Ahmet wrapped the main part of the horse's body with the felt, which was held tightly in place by the tar. This work took quite some time, but when it was finished, the horse said, "Now tie the rope around one of my rear legs."

When all of these arrangements had been completed, the horse said, "I shall now dive into the water and swim to the bottom of this sea. You must watch for the appearance of black foam on the surface of the water. As soon as you see that black foam, you must start pulling on the rope, and pull with all your might. Soon after that, we shall learn whether I shall (İnşallah)¹⁴ come out of this ordeal alive. If I am

From the very earliest times, lore and legend have pictured marvelous or magical horses as being gray. In the 9th- and 10th-century Turkish epic The Book of Dede Korkut, one of the central heroes is Bamsi Beyrek with the Gray Horse. Koroğlu, an outlaw hero of later times, rode a horse named Kırat (literally gray horse).

¹³The narrator says literally ". . . from top to toe." This anthropomorphic image is not, of course, appropriate for a horse.

¹⁴İnşallah means if Allah is willing. It is uttered by a

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to survive, that will be fine; if I do not survive, then you must take especially good care of yourself." Then, as he was ready to enter the sea, the horse said, "The mare I shall seek is my mother. Ahmet, your real mother kidnaped me from my mother when I was still a very small colt. Now we shall proceed and see what we can do."

The horse then plunged into the water and disappeared. After Ahmet had waited and watched for a while, he saw black foam rising to the surface. Right away, he began to pull on the rope. He pulled and pulled and pulled on the rope, all of the time saying to himself, "Come on! Keep pulling." He continued pulling.

Then, at last, the gray horse came to the surface and climbed onto the shore. The gray horse returned, but he looked very strange--almost as if he were intoxicated. All that he was able to say was, "Bring our water jar!" When Ahmet brought this jar to it, the horse vomited into it the milk which it had sucked from its mother's breasts. As soon as it had done this, the gray horse collapsed and died without saying another word. Ahmet was stricken with grief. He

person who has stated his plans or expectations for the future in order to avert retribution for what might otherwise appear to be a matter of hubris.

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cried and lamented, but the horse was dead, and there was nothing that he could do about it.

After he had recovered somewhat from his grief, Ahmet took the jar containing the sea mare's milk and set off for palace. The return trip was much slower, for now he was walking instead of riding on the magic horse, but after five or ten days, he reached the palace of the padişah. Handing jar to the ruler, he said, "Here is the milk of a sea mare that you requested."

The padişah was greatly pleased, and, as he had promised, he made no further requests of Ahmet. He said, "Son, now my daughter is your wife. You may remain here and live here, or you may take her and leave."

"I should prefer to leave," said Ahmet. No matter how much the padişah later pleaded with him or tried to persuade him to remain there, the young man would not change his mind about leaving.

The padişah asked Ahmet, "What is the relationship between you and Mehmet?"

"He is my best friend. I like him as much as I would a brother."

"Well, let him select as a wife any of the concubines he

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wishes from my harem." Mehmet chose a woman from the harem was married to her.

When the four young people were ready to leave, the padi-gave them many gifts. He gave them a large sum of money to use during their journey. Among his other presents was a fine horse for each of the four travelers. Then after the padişah had said, "May Allah protect you on your journey, they exchanged farewells and departed.

The four young people rode and rode and rode until at last they were too exhausted to go any farther. "We are tired. We need rest," they said to each other. "Let us stop and spend the night here." They then dismounted and spread blankets on the ground in order to sleep there.

Ahmet lay down and fell asleep at once, but Mehmet remained awake. He could not sleep because he was worried. He thought, "Ahmet is the son of a padişah, and therefore he will never be humiliated by being unable to provide for his woman. But my family is very poor. How can I care for her properly? Will she stay with me?" With such problems in his head, Mehmet was unable to sleep.

While Mehmet lay there awake, two birds came and perched on the branch of a nearby tree. These two birds began to talk

30-31, 32, 33, 34
 Hum in
 Spoken by
 birds

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with each other. The one said, "Sister!"

"What is it, sister?"

"A horse will soon arrive and go to the son of the padi-
şah. If he should pat that horse, he will immediately turn
into stone. If he does not pat it, he will continue to live
unharméd." As she was speaking, Mehmet was wide awake and
listening, but Ahmet was asleep and heard nothing.

Then the bird said, "If the prince is awake, he will hear
this warning. If, however, he is asleep, let it come to him
in a dream." Having spoken in this way, the two birds flew
away.

A short while after that, Mehmet saw a horse approaching.
It looked like a gray horse, but it was actually a bewitched
horse. It had been sent by the grand vizier, who was still
plotting against Ahmet. That grand vizier was a sorcerer,
now he was trying to kill Ahmet by means of magic. When the
horse came near enough, Mehmet drew his sword and killed it

Hearing the sound of the horse's fall, Ahmet awoke. Taking
a look at the dead horse, Ahmet exclaimed, "Oh, why did you
kill this magic horse? How could you stab such a creature?"

"Say no more about it!" said Mehmet. "Why do you interfere
with what I am doing? Come! Let us continue our journey

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ward home."

Leaving that place, they began traveling again. evening arrived, they were once again in need of rest. Again, Ahmet slept well while poor Mehmet lay awake. As they had done the previous night, the two birds came also to second stopping place. As soon as they had perched on a branch of a nearby tree, these birds again began to talk with each other

"Sister!

"What is it, sister?"

"There is now a ram on its way here. If the son of the padişah should pat this ram and try to catch it, he will at once be turned into stone. But if he leaves it alone does not pat it, he will continue to be safe."

Then the other bird said, "If he is awake, he will hear what we are saying. If he is asleep, let it come to him in a dream."

Mehmet was awake, and he now began to watch for the arrival of the ram. When it arrived, it was the most gorgeous sheep he had ever seen, but he did not hesitate for a moment. He drew his sword and beheaded the ram.

As before, the noise of the slaughter awakened Ahmet.

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When he looked at the carcass of the ram, he said, "Mehmet, why did you slaughter this ram? What an unusual ram it was!"

Mehmet answered, "Ahmet, do not interfere with my affairs. This matter was of no concern to you. What could we have done with a ram in such a roadless wilderness? Do we not have enough difficulties without adding the care of a ram to our problems?"

They were all awake by now, and so they mounted their horses and again set out toward home. At the end of the day they made their third encampment to spend the night. While Ahmet was sleeping but Mehmet was lying awake, the same birds returned and began talking.

"Sister!"

"What is it?"

"At no place where anyone else might overhear them should the two young men presently here speak of any of the secrets they have shared in their adventures. If they reveal any of those secrets here, they will both turn into stone. If they do not reveal them, they will remain safe."

The other bird then said, "If they are awake, they will hear this warning. If they are asleep, let this message come to them in a dream."

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Very early in the morning before Ahmet had a chance to anything, Mehmet awakened the group. He shouted, "Come Let us renew our journey. Travelers should always get as early a start as possible!" Just as soon as they could do so, the four travelers left that place unharmed.

On the evening of the fourth day of their travel, the four young people found another suitable stopping place and prepared to stay there for the night. After all of them but Mehmet had fallen asleep, the birds returned once more and began a conversation with each other.

"Sister!"

"What is it, sister?"

"On the night that the son of the padişah enters the bridal chamber, he will be seriously endangered by a spell cast upon him by a sorcerer. When the bride and bridegroom are ready to retire, a dragon will emerge from a hole in a lamp through which the wick usually protrudes. This monster will eat the newlyweds, thus preventing them from ever attaining their desires."

The other bird said, "If they are awake, they will hear this warning. If they are asleep, let the message come to them in a dream." In the morning they arose and prepared to set forth again. Mehmet said nothing of the warning he had

Dragon
34 35
R. del Chamber
Dragon

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heard during the night.

Finally, after their very lengthy travel, they arrived at city once ruled over by Ahmet's father. They discovered, however, that both Ahmet's father and stepmother had died during their absence. The palace was now quite desolate and in the care of the viziers. As soon as these officials heard that Ahmet had returned, they went to meet him and welcome him home. After the exchange of greetings and some brief conversation, they conducted him to the palace of his father

The viziers noticed, of course, that Ahmet was accompanied by a woman, and they asked about her. Ahmet explained the situation at once. "This is a woman whom I married in another land. She is the daughter of the padişah of that land."

"Very well," said the viziers. "We shall prepare a wedding feast in order to celebrate the marriage here." They prepared a lavish wedding celebration that lasted for forty days and forty nights,¹⁵ and on the fortieth night they took the young couple to the bridal chamber of the palace.

When they had first arrived back in Ahmet's home city, he had told the viziers, "This Mehmet is my closest friend. We

¹⁵Whether or not such celebrations ever lasted so long, forty days and forty nights constitute the Turkish folktale convention for such an event.

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share a common fate. You should, therefore, keep him informed of everything that concerns me or affects me." As a result of his statement, it seemed quite proper that Mehmet should have a hand in the wedding celebration and the preparation of the bridal chamber. After his work in the bridal chamber was completed, Mehmet did not leave that room, but hid himself there under a large table.

After the bride and groom had been brought separately to the bridal chamber, they embraced each other and then chatted with each other for a while. When the time came for them to retire, a dragon slowly began to come forth through the wick opening of a lamp in the room. Waiting until the head had fully emerged from the lamp, Mehmet drew his sword and cut it off, killing the dragon.

Ahmet was astounded by all of this, and when he saw Mehmet there in the nuptial chamber, he grew angry. "Look here, Mehmet!" he said. "We became close friends long ago--so close that we were like brothers. That was all well and good, but that did not mean that you were free to enter my nuptial chamber!" His anger grew into a great rage, and he began to call for his executioners.

"Wait until I tell you about some things that you know

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little about. I have never said anything about this part of our relationship, but I shall tell it to you now. Oh, you can kill me, of course, for you are a padişah and the son of a padişah. You can kill me yourself or have your executioners kill me, but let me tell you these things first." As soon as he began describing their adventures and the parts that he played in them, Mehmet turned to stone from his toes up to his knees.

As soon as he saw this, Ahmet exclaimed, "Oh, Mehmet! what has happened to you!"

"Yes, the birds whose directions saved our lives several times warned that we would be turned into stone if we spoke of these things. But now I must speak of these secret matters, regardless of what may happen as a result. Now that I am already partially turned to stone, I am no longer interested in living, and so I shall tell you the rest of our secrets."

"No, no! Say no more! Let the upper part of your body remain alive!"

"No, I must speak out now," said Mehmet. He continued reviewing their experiences, and as Ahmet grew more informed about them, Mehmet grew more and more into stone until he was a solid statue.

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Ahmet went to bed, but he was so filled with remorse that he slept only fitfully. He kept waking up and asking himself "Is it true? Has this really happened?"

During one of his brief periods of sleep, Ahmet had a dream in which he heard a strange voice speaking to him. This voice said, "You will have a son borne to you by the woman with whom you are sleeping. The very moment the child is born--before its mother even sees it--you will take it and kill it over the statue of Mehmet, allowing the baby's blood to fall upon the statue. The stone will then be revived, and Mehmet will be restored to life. If you do not sacrifice your son for him in this way, Mehmet will remain a statue forever."

Ahmet was awakened by this dream, and in his grief he said, "Allah Allah!" Although he lay down and tried to fall to sleep again, he could not do so. Then the same prophetic birds that had come to them in their travels reappeared and perched on the windowsill of the nuptial chamber. Again the birds talked with each other, but this time it was Ahmet and not Mehmet who was awake to overhear their conversation. What Ahmet heard them saying repeated the message that he had just heard in his dream.

Time passed, and Mehmet remained a stone figure of a man.

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After months had passed, the pregnancy of Ahmet's wife was approaching its end. When she began to have labor pains, Ahmet went to the midwives and servants attending and said to those women, "Listen! When my wife gives birth to her child, I am going to be right alongside of her. I want to see the child before she does."

"Our padişah, what is the reason for that?" they asked. But when he did not answer their question, they said, "Very well, our padişah. It will be just as you say." Throughout the labor pains and during the actual birth of the child, Ahmet did not move from her side.

Throughout the nine months of his wife's pregnancy, Ahmet had kept the petrified Mehmet right there in the nuptial chamber where he had fallen. The moment the baby was born, Ahmet grabbed it, held it over the stone figure, and slashed its throat with his sword. The blood of the infant's falling on the stone resuscitated Mehmet, and he began to move slightly.

The midwives and servant women were astonished. "Look! Look!" they said. "What is the meaning of this? Why did you do such a thing?"

"It was something that had to be done, and it had to be done in exactly this way," said Ahmet. "My wife and I are both

39-40
 sacrifice of child
 some other life
 information
 rocks to him

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young, and we shall have other children.

Mehmet was now alive again, and Ahmet made arrangements for him to marry the harem girl to whom he had been engaged at the time of his transformation into stone. The wedding celebration and the nuptial feast were exactly the same as his own had been. He had a palace built for Mehmet that matched in every way his own palace. He then made Mehmet his grand vizier

I remember well Mehmet's wedding celebration. We ate and drank and enjoyed ourselves throughout the entire forty days

forty nights. Three apples fell from heaven. One was for the teller of this tale; one was for the listener, and one was for Ali Riza Yarar ¹⁵

*Full full
Low mal
formula*

¹⁵This is one of the most popular formulaic endings for Turkish folktales. Often, as here, this ending has a humorous "kicker." While pretending to give the apples to three recipients, the narrator in fact gives one to the listener and two to himself, for he is Ali Riza Yarar.