

Story 1865 (Dictated)

Narrator: Mukaddes Darwish, 4

Location: İzmir, though her high school and college years were spent in Erzurum

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### The Judge and Maternal Instinct<sup>1</sup>

Once in a Caucasian village there lived a young woman and her husband. Time come, time go, at last the woman bore a child, a girl. But before that child had lived a year, the father died. Life was hard without the husband, and the widow was pleased one day to learn that a rich Caucasian bey<sup>2</sup> from a distant town wished to marry her.

There was only one problem about that bey, a problem that set every woman in the widow's village talking. One said, "I hear that he does not like children." And another said, "Especially young children are not welcome in that fine house of his."

The young widow heard this talk. Still, she thought daily how much easier her life would be if she could marry that bey. "I would be

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<sup>1</sup>This is clearly a development of a judgment made by Solomon, King of Israel. See 1 Kings 3:16-28.

<sup>2</sup>In Republican Turkey there are no beys. The term refers to a Turkish aristocrat of Ottoman, Seljuk, and pre-Seljuk times, and goes back to the 8th or 9th century—and perhaps earlier. The bey was a landed nobleman, sometimes wealthy and often politically powerful. In the 10th-century Book of Dede Korkut he was a tribal chief or one of his close associates. The Turkish bey was roughly equivalent to a British lord or baron.

Story 865

rich," she said. "Why should this child spoil my chance of such a good marriage?" Thinking led to doing: she wrapped the child and carried her to a creek at the edge of her village. She hid the child in the bushes along the creek bank and went back to her house alone.

In that same village lived an old woman who kept sheep to earn her daily bread. From the wool of these sheep she made beautiful socks and sweaters to sell. The woman was so poor that she had to gather sticks here and there for the fire in her small house. It happened that she was gathering sticks along the creek bank when she heard a child crying. There in the bushes she found a little girl baby, wrapped in a blanket and all alone. Quickly the woman picked up the child and carried her to her own house. Sheep's milk and love were all she could give the child, but food and love were what the child needed. The girl grew and brought much happiness to the old woman.

The bey's wife, too, was happy, and her rich life suited her very well. Years came, years went, and one day the bey's wife returned to visit her village. There she heard about an old shepherdess who was well known for the beautiful socks and sweaters she made. "I'll go to see the socks," she decided, thinking that such socks would be an unusual gift for the bey.

As she stood knocking at the door of the shepherdess's house, the bey's wife saw a pretty young girl caring for the sheep. As she

Story 865

stared at the girl, the shepherdess opened her door to greet the visitor. Forgetting her reason for coming, the bey's wife said, "Whose girl is that one tending the sheep?"

"She is mine," said the shepherdess. "I did not give birth to her, but I have taken loving care of her since she was a baby, so she is truly mine."

"Did you find this child along the creek bank in the bushes?" asked the bey's wife.

"Yes," said the shepherdess. "I found her there alone and crying. Allah Himself sent me that child. How would I like to talk with the woman who bore my daughter and thank her for the joy the child has brought to my life!"

"But that is my child," the bey's wife said. "I bore her. I left her there for a good reason, but now I want her back. She is mine, mine, mine! I am rich, and I can give her a good life."

"Ah, no," said the shepherdess, "she is really mine. I saw her first smile, and her first tooth. I saw her begin to walk. I cried when she was sick, and I cared for her and healed her. I love her more than I love myself. You may take my own life, but I will not give up my child."

The two women quarreled long and fiercely, and finally they decided to take their case before a judge in that region. The next day,

Story 865

they led the child before the judge. “Surely you can tell us whose child this is,” said the bey’s wife.

The judge spoke first to the old shepherdess. “State your evidence,” he said.

“The child and I have felt a strong bond between us from the day I found her abandoned in the bushes by the creek,” said the old woman. “I knew that the child needed loving care and attention. I had little money, but I could look after her tenderly.”

“But I carried the child for nine months,” said the bey’s wife, “and I nursed her. I did abandon her—I had my reasons—but now I realize my mistake, and I want her back. I have much money, and can give her a rich and comfortable life.”

The judge thought about what each woman had said. “Before I decide this case,” he said, “you must prove which one of you is better as a mother.”

The judge placed the girl in the middle of the courtroom and drew a large chalk circle around her. Then he said, “Each of you two women will take one of the girl’s arms and pull her as hard as you can. The one who pulls the child outside the circle toward her should keep the child.”

Both the shepherdess and the bey’s wife began to pull the girl, each by one arm. But when the child cried out in pain, the shepherdess

Story 1865

let go of the girl's arm. "In my heart I know I am her mother, but because this pulling hurts her, I'll not do it any more."

The bey's wife then pulled the girl outside the chalk circle toward herself. "She is mine! I won the test!" she said.

The judge sat without speaking, considering what was fair. Then he said, "Being a mother is more than giving birth to a child. A true mother gives a child loving care and protects her. Therefore I declare the shepherdess the girl's real mother."