

Story 2007 (1969 Tape 16)

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Location: Tokat, capital of Tokat Province, but tale was taped at Erzurum by Dr. Saim Sakaoglu.

Date: January 21, 1969; copy made for ATON by Dr. Sakaoglu in 1971.

The Pauper, the Slave, and the Whims of Fate

There was once a man who lived in a town where he was unable to earn enough money to support himself. In order to earn enough money to live more comfortably, he decided to move to another town. When he arrived at that second town, that man went to a coffeehouse. While he was drinking tea there, he heard a town crier announcing a display of beautiful slave girls at the center of town. He followed the other men and soon arrived at the town square.

There were several beautiful girls on a stage, and each had pinned to her clothing the price for which she might be bought. Even though the stranger who had just arrived had no money, he still wanted to see the girls. He went up close to the stage, and one of the slave girls caught his attention. The last girl in the line on stage had a very beautiful face, and he was attracted to her. He said to the owner of the girls, "I want to buy that last girl in line, but I do not have enough money to pay the full price for her today. I shall bring you the rest later."

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He took the girl to the coffeehouse from which he had come a few minutes earlier, and there they sat and talked for awhile. Then the girl said, "Let us take a walk around this town." As they were walking along, the girl asked, "Do you have a house in this town?"

"No, I do not have a house here. I have just arrived in this town."

"Why did you come here?" she asked.

"I am looking for work in order to earn some money," the stranger said.

Along their way they saw a house that was for sale. "We should try to buy that house," said the girl.

"But I have no money with which to do that," said the man.

Taking from her red purse a diamond, she gave this to her new owner and said, "Take this diamond to a jeweler and sell it to him. Then bring the money back here."

Following her directions, the poor man took the diamond to a jeweler and sold it for 20,000 Turkish liras.¹ When he returned with all that money, they paid the price asked for the house. Then the girl took another jewel from her red purse and said to her new owner, "Go

¹At various times in the past, 20,000 Turkish liras was a considerable amount, especially in the era when a lira was a gold coin. In the early 1960s it would have been worth about \$2,000, but severe devaluation of the lira had dropped the value of 20,000 liras by 1997 to a little less than 10 U.S. dollars.

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and sell this jewel also and use whatever part of the money is necessary to pay your debt to the slave dealer.” When that had been accomplished, the two moved into their new house. It was summertime, however, and the house was very warm inside. They opened all of the windows and let the fresh air blow through so that they could sleep there more comfortably.

The poor man woke up very early in the morning while the slave girl was still asleep. Wondering if she had any more jewels, he quietly picked up her red purse and tried to open it, but while he was doing this, a bird swooped through a window, snatched the purse from his hands, and flew away with it. The man was stunned by this and did not know what to do. He thought, “How could I possibly explain to the girl what has happened? How could I persuade her that a bird stole her purse? She will think that I was the thief. What a pity! She will think, ‘I paid for myself in the slave market, and I bought this house with my own money, and in return, this man has stolen what I had left!’ There is nothing that I can do now except run away.” Quietly he left the house and began traveling again.

Near the end of his first day of walking, he saw a large house ahead. He knocked on the front door of that house, and when someone opened the door, he asked if he could be accepted as a guest for the

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night. The owner of the house agreed to give the traveler lodging for the night.

In the morning the people of that house asked him who he was, where he had come from, why he was traveling, and where he was going.² The traveler answered, "I am from such and such a town, and I am traveling in search of a job. I shall stay at whatever place I can earn some money."

The owner of the house then asked, "Would you be willing to work for us? We need someone to do chores around the house and undertake small tasks here and there on our property." The poor man accepted that job, and he worked there for the full year agreed upon.

While he is working there, let me now tell you what the slave girl was doing. When she awoke in the morning, she discovered that her new owner had stolen her jewelry bag and fled. With the small amount of money left from the sale of two of her diamonds, she opened a restaurant. She served the usual kinds of Turkish food to those customers who could pay for them. To those who had no money she served specially prepared sheep trotters.³

²These are more or less standard questions likely to be asked any traveler as a matter of courtesy. Here they turn out to be more functional.

³A trotter is the combined foot and ankle of a sheep or pig, often called hock or hocky in rural America. There is very little meat

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After completing his year's work, the poor man said, "My ağa,⁴ I have worked for the time agreed upon, and I should like to have your permission to leave."

But the ağa said, "You have indeed worked for a whole year, but I should like you to remain just a short while longer in order to do one more thing for me. I should like to have you dig holes in the garden in which to set fence posts."

The poor man agreed to do this and he set to work at once digging postholes. As he was doing this, he noticed a family of birds flying around a nest in the top of a nearby tree. He said to himself, "Those birds look exactly like the bird which carried off the purse of my slave girl. Could this possibly be that same bird's nest?" When he

on such joints, and they are usually eaten only by poor people. They are sometimes pickled for the purposes of (1) flavor and (2) preservation.

⁴An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

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purse. Taking the purse at once, he looked inside it and found that it still contained two jewels. He placed the small bag in his hip pocket,⁵ climbed down, and continued digging the postholes.

Shortly after that, his pickaxe struck some hard object. When he dug around that object, he discovered that it was a large earthenware urn filled with gold. Deciding to hide that gold, he went quickly to the marketplace and bought two strong jars. He divided the gold between these jars and then buried them a short distance away. He then placed strong posts in the holes he had dug and set up stretches of brick wall between the posts, making a very sturdy fence. Greatly pleased with the fence, the ağa gave the poor man permission to leave and wished him good luck in the future.

The poor man went again to the marketplace, and this time he bought a donkey. Taking the donkey to the place where he had hidden the two jars containing gold, he loaded on the animal's back these two partially filled jars, and then to conceal the gold, he filled the top part of each jar with salt. He then took those jars to a nearby harbor and loaded them on an outward-bound ship. While waiting for the ship to sail, he decided to buy some food to take along on the voyage. He had

⁵The narrator says literally here that he put the purse in his kaynak, which means the place where the buttocks join .

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to walk some distance to buy that food, and by the time he returned to the harbor, he discovered that the ship had already departed.

When the ship reached its destination, none of its passengers claimed what seemed to be two jars of salt. The crew members said, "There is a restaurant in this town owned by a good woman. She gives food to people who have no money to buy it. Let us give the two jars of salt to her." They took the jars to that restaurant and said to the owner, "Because you are a kind woman who serves free food to the poor, we wish to give you these two jars of salt. You may be able to use them in your cooking." The woman accepted this gift and put the two jars in a storeroom.

After having lost his two jars containing gold, the poor man was very upset. He took the next ship that was going to the same destination. When he arrived there, he walked around for awhile to examine that town. By now, he had only a loaf of bread left, and he carried that loaf beneath one arm. Some people who saw him said to him, "There is a restaurant in this town whose owner gives away sheep trotters to poor people. Why don't you go to that restaurant and ask for a cup of sheep-trotter soup to eat with your bread?"

Following that advice, the poor man found that restaurant and asked for a cup of sheep-trotter soup. When the girl brought the soup to him, she recognized him at once. As he was drinking his soup, the

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girl said, "I do not request any money from any poor person to whom I give food, but I do ask each to tell me the story of his or her life."

Quite willing to comply with this request, the poor man then gave her an account of his entire life. He told her how a bird had stolen the red purse. He told her then how he had left that place because he was too ashamed to face the owner of the purse after all that the owner had done for him. He next described working at the home of an ağa, where he had not only saved most of his earnings but had also discovered a buried treasure. And finally he explained how he had lost his two jars of gold.

When he had finished his long story, the girl thought, "Oh, then he was not a thief at all! He left not because he was a bad man but because he was ashamed. I am glad that he is back with me, for he is my man." Then after a moment she asked, "Do you think that you could recognize those two jars that you lost?"

"Of course I could recognize them," he answered. After she had taken him to the storeroom and shown him the salt jars, he said, "Yes, these are my jars. You will find that the salt is only on the tops of the jars to hide the gold beneath." They then recovered the gold.

Soon after that, they were married. They closed the restaurant and returned home to the house they had bought. There they lived comfortably and happily.