

Story 2061 (Transcribed by  
Ahmet Ali Arslan from his  
tape and later used in his  
unpublished dissertation.)

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housewife

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Iğdır Province

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### The Herdsman and the Magic Gifts

There was once a village herdsman<sup>1</sup> who had seven daughters. One morning after he had taken the village animals to the pasture, he saw a snake lying on the grass. This was not an ordinary snake, for he was a son of the Padi-shah of Jinns.<sup>2</sup> The snake said, "Herdsman, give me your daughter in marriage."

The herdsman was so frightened that he was unable to say, "No." Instead, he said, "Let me go now, and I shall bring her later." He went on tending the grazing animals for the rest of the day, and as the sun was setting, he returned each animal to its owner.

<sup>1</sup>Many villagers have one or more cows and/or sheep and/or goats and/or horses and/or donkeys. Although these animals are housed at night in the village, they are taken to graze each day in the village pasture. The herdsman picks up the animals from their respective owners each morning and returns them each evening.

<sup>2</sup>The 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 beliefs and in other mystical systems.

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He then went home and had dinner with his family. They ate çöreks<sup>3</sup> made of a mixture of wheat and barley flour<sup>4</sup>. Later that evening he called his wife and daughters together again in order to talk with them. He said to his oldest daughter, "Listen, Daughter. I want to give you in marriage to a special snake

She answered, "What? A snake? Other fathers are giving their daughters to beys<sup>5</sup>, but here you are trying to give your daughter to a snake. I refuse to accept a snake as my husband."

On the following morning the herdsman took the animals out to pasture again. There again was the snake on the grassy field. The snake said, "Herdsman, why didn't you bring your daughter?"

<sup>3</sup>Buns or small round loaves of bread somewhat sweetened; occasionally they may have a fruit topping.

<sup>4</sup>Poor people use barley flour because it is cheaper. It is also coarser than wheat flour. Fine wheat flour is more expensive, and because of that, it becomes an economic status symbol.

<sup>5</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.

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The herdsman was so frightened that he couldn't say that his oldest daughter had refused to come. He said only that he would bring her on the following day.

The snake answered, "That will be fine, but be sure that you do so. If you do not, I shall hit you so hard that you will look like a fish."

That evening the herdsman again returned all of the animals to their owners. After the family had eaten its dinner of çöreks, the herdsman spoke to his second oldest daughter. "Let me present you to the snake as his bride."

"Ha!" answered the girl. "Every other family is giving its daughters to gentlemen, but you prefer to give yours to a snake. But I shall not agree to that."

"Herdsman, why didn't you bring your daughter?" asked the snake the next morning.

"Give me some more time, and I shall surely bring her."

As usual, the herdsman returned the village animals to their owners and then went home. After the family had eaten its çöreks, the father spoke to his youngest daughter, a girl of only fifteen. "Daughter, let me give you to the snake as his bride tomorrow."

The youngest daughter said, "You are my father. I

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shall go wherever you want me to go, either to the home of a snake or the home of a scorpion. If you should cut off my head, my blood would flow in whatever direction you wanted it to flow

"Bravo, my daughter!" said the herdsman

On the following morning the herdsman took his daughter by the hand, and after he had collected all of the village livestock, they went to the pasture. There the herdsman gave his daughter to the snake. The snake took her to the palace of his father, the Padishah of Jinns, and she discovered that life in that beautiful place was very comfortable and pleasant. It was almost like heaven.

Back in the village the herdsman continued his usual work. Time passed--days, weeks, months. One day his wife complained to him. She said, "Most fathers give their daughters to gentlemen whom we know, but you gave your youngest daughter to a snake whom we do not know. We do not even know where he lives, and so you have given no thought to going to see her."

"Don't say that, my wife! I shall go and see her. He put on iron shoes and got an iron walking stick,<sup>6</sup> and

<sup>6</sup>A formulaic expression to indicate a very long and arduous journey, one so difficult and extended that only iron accoutrements could survive it. Usually the trip takes months and may be quite aimless. It is an overstatement to

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then he set out to find his youngest daughter

The herdsman knew which way to go because the snake had given him directions. The snake had said, "If you should ever want to come and visit your daughter, go around to the other side of this mountain and find there in a grassy area a spring surrounded by rocks. When you reach that spring, pick up a small stone and strike it against one of the large rocks circling the spring. A door will then be opened to you, the entrance to our home

After walking all the way around to the opposite side of the mountain, the herdsman found the rock-rimmed spring. He sat down beside it to rest. When he had recovered his strength, he washed his hands and face in the cool water of that spring. Then he picked up a stone and struck it against one of the rocks surrounding the spring. He then knocked on the door which appeared before him. It was opened by a very pretty girl who recognized him at once and said, "Come in, Father! Come in!"

The herdsman was amazed at the beauty of the palace. It was filled with carpets and sofas, and its gardens were

ring in the iron accessories here, for the travel is brief. Both narrators and audiences enjoy formulaic descriptions even when they are not really warranted.

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filled with roses and other flowers. After he had enjoyed himself there for several days, he said to his daughter, "I have left your mother and your sisters alone and hungry. Ask your husband to take me to the door through which I entered this palace.

When the girl told her husband that her father wished to leave, the prince of jinns said, "Let us give him this magic sofra,<sup>7</sup> but be sure to warn him not to reveal its powers to anyone else."

When the girl gave the sofra to her father, she said, "Whenever you are hungry, say, 'Open, my sofra, for the love of the blessed Solomon.'<sup>8</sup> All kinds of delicious food

<sup>7</sup>A sofra is a small round table with legs only 10-15 inches high. Usually it is 3 or 4 feet in diameter, though some are larger. Because it is so low, diners who eat from it sit around it cross-legged upon the floor. It is still used in many peasant homes.

<sup>8</sup>The fact that this Solomon (Süleyman in Turkish) is called "blessed" indicates that the reference is to the Biblical prophet rather than to Süleyman the Magnificent or some other sultan named Süleyman. Solomon was empowered by the Deity with many special abilities, some of which were magical skills. Many folktales throughout the Middle East feature the preternatural capabilities of Solomon.

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will appear upon it, and as one dish is emptied, another will replace it. Even seven generations of your family could not consume all the food it will produce. But don't show anyone how this sofra works, for if you do, the person who sees it will find some way or another to take it away from you."

The herdsman folded up the sofra and left, but he did not believe that it had any of the magical power that his daughter had described. On the way home he decided to test its power. He said, "Open, my sofra, for the love of the Blessed Solomon." So much food appeared that he now believed what his daughter had said, that seven generations of his family could not consume it all. After he had eaten and eaten, drunk and drunk, he said, "Thanks be to Allah!" He then folded the sofra and wrapped it up again. He rushed on home with it.

When his wife saw him coming, she said, "You left us here without either food or water, and then you stayed away all this time!"

"Don't say that, Wife. I have returned and brought plenty of food for all of you, too. Gather around me and see what I shall do." He opened the sofra and said, "Open,

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my sofra, for the love of the Blessed Solomon." There then appeared all kinds of food in quantities too great for the family to eat. They ate and ate until they could eat no more. After saying, "Thanks to Allah!" the herdsman folded up the sofra, placed it in a chest, and locked that chest. "Wife," he said, "don't you ever show that sofra to anyone, for once a person has seen it, he or she will find a way to take it away from us

After some time had passed, the herdsman one day said to his wife, "I think that I shall invite the padishah and his staff here for dinner."

"No, that is not necessary," said his wife. "If you do, they may see our magic sofra and decide to take it away from us."

"Why should a padishah want our sofra? He doesn't need it, for he already has everything that he wants. No matter how much his wife protested, the herdsman proceeded to send an invitation to the ruler.

The padishah took his viziers and attendants with him to the dinner at the home of the herdsman. When they had all been seated, the host took out the magic sofra and said to it, "Open, my sofra, for the love of the Blessed

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Solomon." So much food was produced by the sofra that even seven generations of the ruler's family could have eaten it all. The guests ate and ate all that they could, and then they said, "Thanks to Allah!" The herdsman turned to the samovar and began serving tea to all of the diners.

While the host was busy doing that, however, one of the viziers exchanged an ordinary sofra for the magic one. No one else noticed this, and so when the guests departed, the magic sofra disappeared with them.

After the group from the palace had gone, the herdsman's wife and children said, "Now let us have some food, too."

Going to the sofra, the herdsman said, "Open, my sofra, for the love of the Blessed Solomon." This time, however, not a bit of food appeared.

This caused his wife to become angry. "Didn't I you that this would happen? Why did you invite them here for dinner? I warned you that they would take our magic sofra!"

"I couldn't believe that, Wife. I never expected to have such a thing happen."

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After three or four days had passed, the herdsman decided to visit his youngest daughter again. Putting on iron shoes and picking up his iron walking stick, he began making his way to the other side of the mountain. When he arrived there he washed his hands and face in the spring. Then he picked up a stone and with it struck one of the large rocks surrounding the spring. His daughter opened the door which appeared before him and said, "Come in, Father! Come in!" During his visit there, he told his daughter what had happened to the magic sofra. She, in turn, reported all of this information to her husband and asked him to give another gift to her father.

"He will let someone else take whatever we may give him," answered her husband. Nevertheless, he provided another gift for the herdsman and instructed him on the way to use it. "Take this red donkey to your stable. Give it soft grass to eat and straw upon which to lie. Whenever you need money, say to this donkey, 'Let them come out!' The donkey will then defecate two red gold coins.<sup>9</sup> You will be

<sup>9</sup>Red gold is a folk fantasy. There is no such gold, but peasants speak of it as being more valuable than yellow or white gold. If what passes for gold has a reddish tinge, it is probably an alloy of gold and copper.

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able to buy whatever you want with such money. Eat what you wish; travel to places you wish to visit; and live happily. But you should never reveal the source of your gold to anyone, for if you do, that person will surely, in one way or another, take the donkey away from you."

"All right," said the herdsman, but he thought, "Is it possible that any donkey can produce gold?"

After his daughter had shown him the way out of the palace of the Padishah of Jinns and locked the door again, the herdsman's curiosity overwhelmed him. He did not even go beyond the spring before he felt compelled to test the donkey's ability to produce gold. He said to the animal, "Let them come out, my donkey! Give me two red coins! To his great surprise, the donkey did indeed defecate two red gold coins. Although he wanted to go home as quickly as possible, he kept stopping along the way to get more gold from the donkey. By the time he reached home, all of his pockets were filled with gold coins.

Upon reaching his own house, the herdsman was again scolded by his wife. She said, "Again you have left us too long without either food or water!"

"Stop such talk, Wife," he said, and he gave her a

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handful of gold. He then took the donkey to the stable, where he fed it fresh grass and bedded it down upon clean straw

A short while later the herdsman's family discovered that the tin had worn thin on all of their copper pots and copper plates.<sup>10</sup> The herdsman therefore loaded all of these copper utensils on his donkey and took them to a local tinsmith. "Can you recoat with tin all of these copper objects for me?" he asked.

"I can do so if you will give me one red gold coin."

Upon hearing this, the herdsman said, "Let them come out, my donkey. Let me have two gold coins." The donkey then defecated the two coins.

The tinsmith was astonished to see this happen. While he was recoating the copperware of the herdsman, the tinsmith said very quietly to his apprentice, "Go secretly and replace this fellow's donkey with one of our own donkeys."

<sup>10</sup>Copper poisoning can be a fatal illness. Any copper container in which people cook or from which they eat or drink must be coated on the inside with a thin layer of tin. Until well into the 20th century one of the four major groups of Gypsies was called the Tinsmith Gypsies. They traveled from house to house tinning copperware. By the late 1980s copperware had become unfashionable and was, wherever possible, replaced by aluminum utensils. There are also, of course, many sedentary tinsmiths in Turkey.

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When all the work on the copperware had been completed, they loaded it on what had been the silversmith's ordinary donkey. As the herdsman was traveling toward his home, he decided to take two more gold coins from his donkey. As usual, he said, "Let them come out, my donkey; let them come out," but this time no gold appeared. The herdsman turned around at once and went back to the tinsmith's house. "Give me back my own donkey," he said. "This donkey cannot defecate gold coins."

"Get out of here, you son of a dog! How could a donkey defecate gold coins? Impossible!" The tinsmith and his apprentice then beat the herdsman severely and sent him back home.

When his wife heard what had happened, she grew very angry. She shouted, "You stupid man You son of a dog! I told you never to take that valuable donkey away from here. Why did you show that donkey to others? You should have carried the copperware there on your own back!"

After losing the gold-bearing donkey, the herdsman grew very sad. He did nothing but grieve over this loss for several days. But finally he decided to visit his youngest daughter for the third time. Wearing again his

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iron shoes and leaning again on his iron walking stick, the herdsman went to the opposite side of the mountain, where he again washed his hands and face in the spring surrounded by rocks. Then, after striking one of the rocks with a smaller stone, he saw his daughter at the door welcoming him once more. "Come in, Father. Come in."

As he had done on each of his earlier visits, he remained for several days at the palace of the Padishah of Jinns. During that time he told his daughter what had happened to the gold-bearing donkey, and he cried continually as he talked with her. As she had done earlier, reported to her husband every word that her father had said.

The prince responded, "As I told you, your father is likely to lose whatever we give him." But before the herdsman departed for home, his son-in-law decided to give him one more magic gift. This time it was a magic mallet. "Go at once and order the padishah to give you back your sofra. If he should say, 'What sofra? What do you mean?' take this mallet from your jacket and say, 'Go to work mallet. Strike the head of this padishah!' Blood will flow from his mouth and nose, and he will say to his vizier, 'Go and get his sofra before he kills me!' When you have

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your sofra back in your own hands, say, 'Stop, my mallet. Stop!' Return the mallet into your jacket. Go then to the tinsmith and recover your donkey in the same way.

But don't you ever tell anyone else about these magic gifts!"

"All right," answered the herdsman, but he wondered "How could a mallet by itself beat anyone?" His daughter led him to the door again and locked it after he had left. He stopped at the spring in order to test the mallet. "Go to work, mallet, and strike my head!" The mallet struck him so hard that he didn't even know where he was, but he did remember to say, "Stop, my mallet. Stop!" After washing the blood from both the mallet and his head, he wrapped a towel around his injuries and went home.

His wife met him at the door and said, "Again you left us here hungry and thirsty. Why did you stay away so long?"

"But I am here now, Wife, and you need never be hungry or thirsty again." He then immediately went to the palace to recover his sofra. He said to the padishah, "Give me back my sofra It is enough that you have had it so long. My children have had nothing to eat."

The padishah answered, "Get out of here! What sofra are you talking about?"

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The herdsman removed the mallet from his jacket and said to it, "Go to work, my mallet! Strike the padishah on the head!"

After the blows of the mallet had wounded his head badly, the ruler cried out, "Alas, my vizier, I shall be killed if this continues any longer! Bring the sofra back to him!"

Once the sofra was back in the hands of its owner herdsman said, "Stop, my mallet. Stop!" Returning the mallet to his jacket, the herdsman went home at once in order to feed his family. There he said, "Open, my sofra, for the love of the Blessed Solomon!" And as it had done before, the sofra provided a great feast for all of them.

After the sofra had been locked carefully in its chest, the herdsman went to the shop of the tinsmith. He said, "Tinsmith, give me back my special donkey. It is enough that you have had him so long!"

The tinsmith retorted, "Get out of here, you son of a dog! What donkey are you talking about?"

Taking out his mallet again, the herdsman said, "Go to work, my mallet, and strike the head of this tinsmith!"

When the first blow knocked his head into the forge he

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used for melting tin, the owner of the shop shouted to his apprentice, "No one can survive such blows! Bring his donkey back to him!" The apprentice returned the red donkey at once to its owner.

The herdsman and his family ate and drank and lived very comfortably after that. They never again showed their magic gifts to anyone else.

Remember that it was I who brought this news to you.