

Story 1156 (1973 Tape 3) Narrator: Unidentified

Location: Gümüşhacıköy, a kaza town  
of Amasya Province

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Bride Saves Bridegroom's Life by Outwitting Azrail<sup>1</sup> *ALL*

Once there was and once there was not,<sup>2</sup> "time within time,"<sup>3</sup> a man whose fortunes had fallen so low that he became deeply depressed. With no hope of improving his lot in his village, he left home and began to wander aimlessly. One day he encountered a horseman who asked, "Where are you going?"

"Where should I be going? My life has been so difficult that I am just traveling without any destination in mind

"Would you be willing to be my servant?"

"Yes."

<sup>1</sup> Azrail is the Moslem and Jewish angel of death. He personally appears to take a person's soul at that individual's time of death, a time known to him before the death actually occurs.

<sup>2</sup> This is the conventional opening for a Turkish folktale. It and the nonsense jingle which follows it are known as a tekerleme. Here only three words follow the opening line, though the tekerleme is usually longer.

<sup>3</sup> "Time within time" refers to the chronology of events in an interior world. A person may dream or fantasize at great length during only a few seconds of ordinary time. One may even seem to spend many years in that other world within; one may take a job, marry, have children, and see them grow to maturity. In Turkish this is called Zaman Zaman İçinde. It is elsewhere sometimes referred to as "Frozen Time" or "Moments of Eternity."

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The two now began traveling together. When they came to a fountain, the horseman said, "Hold my horse. I shall return here after a while." When the horseman did not return for a long while, the servant rode the horse around in a circle to pass the time. This brief ride was so strange that the servant was almost overcome by the experience.<sup>4</sup> When the horseman returned, he looked at his servant and asked, "What happened, boy?"

"What should have happened? When I climbed on your horse and rode around here in a circle, the entire world seemed only this big." As he said this, he held his thumb and forefinger close together to indicate a small object.

At the end of the day the horseman reached his home. There he said, "While you are here, you will eat nothing but the blood from my right arm." The servant ate only the blood from his master's right arm for a day, two days, five days. At the end of that time, he said to the horseman, "Master, I want to return to my own country."<sup>5</sup>

"Very well. Let me give you your pay for the work you have done. Shall I give you something small that will be blessed

<sup>4</sup> The narrator is not at all clear about what happens here

<sup>5</sup> Apparently the servant has been in the "other world" part of the time with Azrail. Apparently he has been told to drink the blood from his master's arm because there is no ordinary food there that a mortal man could eat.

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and multiply,<sup>6</sup> or shall I give you something large which will not yield much?"

"Give me something small that will be productive."

The servant took his pay and left. He had not gone far, however, before his head began to clear. He began to wonder what had been going on and where he had been during his employment with the horseman. "Let me return and ask my master where it was that he went and there made me drink the blood from his arm." He returned and said, "Ağa,<sup>7</sup> where were you traveling to while I worked for you? And why did you make me drink the blood from your arm?"

The horseman answered, "We have some work to do a short way from here. Let us go and attend to that, and then I shall answer your questions."

When they arrived at the place where they were going, they were met by a white-bearded servant who said, "Welcome, ağas!"

<sup>6</sup> The narrator uses here the term bereketli.

<sup>7</sup> An 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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Please sit down." As they were being greeted in this way, there came from the other side of the village a loud cry.

"What is that?" asked the horseman's servant.

"What else could it be but a human being parting with his soul?"

When they got to the place where the man was crying, horseman went and sat upon the dying man's chest pulling and pushing a sharp tool.<sup>8</sup> Then climbing off the dead man's chest, he said, "Well, there is no need for me to stay here any longer."

When they got back to the horseman's house, the servant said, "Ağa, I have just realized that you are really Azrail Aleyhisselam."<sup>9</sup> Tell me the day set for the time of my death

Azrail answered, "Boy, your time will not come until the night you enter a bridal chamber. As long as you do not marry, you will not die

The man returned to his village, and there he lived a year, two years, three years. He then began to act in an outrageous way, and the people of the village decided to have him married.

After the wedding ceremony was completed, the man went to the bridal chamber, but Azrail was already there at the door,

<sup>8</sup> The narrator says literally that the horseman was pulling and pushing a sharp thorn.

<sup>9</sup> A term which means blessed or holy.

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and he said, "Give me your soul."

Hearing someone outside the door, the bride called out,  
"Come in!

The bridegroom answered, "I can't, because my time has  
come to leave this life."

"But have you made your marriage agreement legitimate?"<sup>10</sup>

As soon as she said that, Azrail Aleyhisselam said, "Excuse me for just a minute." While he was absent during that minute, he conferred with Almighty Allah about this problem. When he returned, he said, "I have arranged for him to have seventy years of life. You are right. He should make his right legitimate for you."

So the man made the marriage agreement legitimate. It  
in this way that their desires were fulfilled.

<sup>10</sup> After a marriage, the husband must live with his wife for at least a short period of time. If the husband dies, divorces his wife, or separates for some other reason before they have lived together for a while, she is left in a kind of social limbo. She is not free to marry again. The bride here points out, sagely but correctly, that if Azrail takes the bridegroom's life at that point, he (and thus Allah too) would be forcing the bridegroom to commit an offense and to wrong the woman.