

Story 705 (1966 Tape 3)

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The Destruction of the Evil Mercan Efendi

TEK Once there was, and once there was not, when God had many people and it was a virtue to talk much but a sin to speak little, once back in such times there was a padişah who had three sons. For each of these three sons, who all looked exactly alike, the padişah kept a horse and a dog.

three horses looked alike, and so did all three dogs.

When the padişah died, he was succeeded by his eldest

This young man decided, shortly after he had become ruler, to make a tour of inspection of his country in order to see for himself the condition of the land and its people. Mounting his horse and taking along with him his

the new padişah set forth on his journey. After visiting a number of places, he came one day to a town that seemed deserted. There were no people to be seen anywhere except for a girl in a cage at a palace. As the young padişah was looking at the girl in the cage, she suddenly cried, "Look out! A giant mace weighing forty batmans<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>An older measure of weight varying from 5.5 to 22 pounds.

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1) Giants  
2) Forty-

is aimed at you." It was the mace of one of the forty giants who lived there. Looking up just in time to see the mace approaching his head, the young man caught it deftly and throwing it back with great force, he killed several of the giants on the spot. One of the giants picked up the mace and hurled it at the padişah's head again, and once more the young man caught it and threw it back. This time its force took an even heavier toll, and the giants, now terrified, fled until they could find places in which to hide.

At this moment there appeared an army of the girl's father, who was king of that area. This army had as its special charge the protection of the princess from the giants. When the army arrived, however, it killed the young man as the only threatening person in the vicinity.

"Oh, have you killed that fine young man?" the girl cried

If you have, lay his body in the courtyard, with his head beside it, and spread his overcoat over him. Place meat before his dog and grass before his horse, and then leave them there." The soldiers carried out her orders, placing the body of the young man in the courtyard, his head by his side, and covered him with his overcoat. Before the dog they placed meat and before the horse they placed grass.

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Before the young padişah had departed from his palace, he had said to his brothers, "Every morning when you awaken, look at the sycamore tree in the garden. If its leaves are falling, then know by sign that some misfortune has befallen me.<sup>2</sup> Then come to my assistance." When the middle brother awakened the very next morning, he saw that the leaves of the sycamore tree were coming down like rain. Announcing that some evil had befallen his elder brother, the middle brother bade the youngest brother farewell, took his dog, mounted his horse, and rode for six months and an autumn,<sup>3</sup> and when he looked ahead of him, he saw in the distance a poplar tree with a fountain near its base. Dismounting at the fountain, he fed himself, his dog, and his horse, and there all three of them rested briefly. Filling his water can, he set out again and soon entered a town that seemed deserted. There was but one apartment house<sup>4</sup> in

1) L. e. Joke  
2) Son of hand

<sup>2</sup>Heroes and villains alike often have external souls in objects of Nature, or more often, as here, talismans whose condition reflects or echoes the condition of their owners. Besides objects of Nature, the talisman may be a ring or a sword.

<sup>3</sup>This is a formulaic figure to indicate a very long journey. It is not really appropriate here, the distance being only a day's journey, but it is applied without thought almost automatically, as part of the oral formulaic tradition

<sup>4</sup>Urban apartment houses fascinate rural peasants, and so they can think of no dwelling more grand for the dwelling place of a king or emperor.

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that town, and there he saw a girl in a cage. In the (court-  
 yard) his horse and dog recognized his older brother's  
 animals, and they began to neigh and bark to each other  
 Then he saw his elder brother's body lying in the courtyard,  
 covered with his overcoat, and his head lying beside it  
 Seeing that his elder brother's head was actually cut off,  
 he picked it up and placed it on the corpse's shoulders. *Resuscitate*  
 Pouring water and his own tears on his brother's head, he  
 soon saw that it was becoming reunited to the body, and it  
 was not long before the young padişah was restored to life.

"Have you come, brother?" asked the padişah, he, too,  
 crying.

"Yes, I have come, and now that <sup>allah</sup> God has returned your  
 life, we can go home."

"No," said the revived padişah, "I shall not go. I  
 shall stay right here and deal with our enemies."

After the middle brother had departed homeward, the  
 padişah commenced to wage war against the army of the  
 father of the caged girl. One day he was captured but re-  
 leased and allowed to see the daughter of the king. Not  
 wanting to take the chance of having him killed again, the  
 girl gave him a ring of keys. "Take these keys," she said,  
 "and enjoy yourself wandering about the palace exploring its  
 rooms. The first forty rooms you may enter by using the  
 first forty keys on this ring, but do not use this forty-

*Iskro*  
*last room*

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first key to open the door of the forty-first room. Don't you dare open that one door!"

The young man enjoyed himself for a while exploring the contents of the first forty rooms. Eventually, however, he was overcome by curiosity about the forty-first room, and so he unlocked its door and entered. Inside he came upon a dining table all set for a meal, and on the wall he saw a whip that kept swinging back and forth all by itself and making a "Shack! Shack! Shack!"<sup>5</sup> And in the same room was a female giant with a millstone turning round on her neck, her head having been put through the hole in that millstone.

The giantess said to him, "Oh, please, young man, hold this millstone still with your hand." Ignoring her, he sat down at the table to eat, but just as soon as he started eating, the whip on the wall reached across the table and struck him, "Shack Shack! Shack!" Immediately the young man, his horse, and his dog were all turned into stone.

transformation

Now let us return to his brothers. When the youngest brother awakened the next morning and went out into the courtyard, he noticed that the leaves of the sycamore tree were falling fast, and from this he concluded that evil

<sup>5</sup>In real life, and even more in their folktales, Turks have traditional onomatopoeic sounds to represent scores of different actions.

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fortune had come to his brother. Immediately mounting his horse and taking his dog, he rode and rode until he came to the same fountain beneath the same poplar tree that his brothers had encountered. After a brief stop there to feed himself and his animals and to rest for a while, the youngest son remounted and rode on until he reached the palace. There he recognized his elder brother's horse and dog turned to stone in the courtyard; his animals also recognized the stone horse and dog. Leaving his animals there, the young man entered the palace. When the girl saw him approaching she was amazed, for she did not know that there were three brothers and that they all looked exactly alike.

Thinking that he was the one to whom she had given the ring of palace keys, she asked, "Well, did you take a look at all of the rooms of the palace, and did you enjoy them?"

"Yes, I liked them."

"Well, then, what are you thinking about so deeply? Let's take these keys and look about further in the palace, but remember not to open the last door."

The youngest brother took the keys and went through the entire palace, examining all of the rooms. When he came to the forty-first room, he found his elder brother, turned to stone, sitting at the dining room table. Because he had traveled a great distance, he was very hungry, and so he sat down and started to eat. When the giantess with the

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millstone turning around her neck said, "Please take your hand and stop this stone," he answered, "No, the secret of all this lies not in you but in that whip." He took a handful of food, but he kept his eyes on the whip. With every mouthful he took, he continued to watch the whip. When he had finished eating, he grabbed the whip and demanded, "Now restore my brother, his horse, and his dog to life! If you do not, I shall destroy you!"<sup>6</sup>

After the elder brother had been restored to life, <sup>Resuscitated</sup> the two of them returned to the captive girl. The girl was surprised and confused to see how alike they looked, and she wondered which of the two was her husband. To determine this, she decided to make up her bed, retire for the night and see which one came to sleep with her. They had known each other and had fallen in love.

In the meantime, the girl's father had sent still more troops. When the youngest son saw this, he said, "Come, brother, let us not remain here longer. <sup>Allah</sup> God has granted you life and restored your body. Let us go!"

the eldest brother answered, "No, not I, brother. You return to our city and rule the country, I shall stay

<sup>6</sup>The narrative logic here is askew. Is there another person (giant) guarding the giantess, and is it to this unspecified person that the youngest brother issues his ultimatum? The text reads, literally, "I'll kill you," not "I shall destroy you."

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here until I have destroyed our enemies."

youngest brother departed and started riding toward home. Along the way one morning he noticed seven or eight tents, whose occupants began at once to prepare for battle. He started killing the enemy force, riding through their ranks from one end to the other. When twice as many troops appeared, he repeated this action, killing all of them, too.

eldest brother, meanwhile, had had a dream in which he had foreseen that he himself would be captured. In the morning he told his wife about this prophetic dream and about his plan to leave her temporarily. Soon after he had ridden away on the following morning, he saw a green tent in which there was a little man named Mercan Efendi. Opening the tent flap, the young padişah said, "Selâmünaleyküm,"<sup>7</sup>

little man, however, refused to accept and respond to his greeting, saying, "The only one who would accept your selâm would be a homosexual!" (This little man was a fish below the waist and a human being above it.)  
*Handwritten notes:* Layuge, about me (in red); New Card needed FISH MAN (in blue)

*AN ER* Furious at this remark, the padişah struck the little man, but Mercan Efendi responded only with the word "Of!"<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Peace be unto you!

<sup>8</sup>People who are very weary or hard-pressed often call up a very powerful jinn by exhaling their breath (either deliberately or unwittingly) in an "of-f-f" sound. The "Of Jinn" may then appear and fulfill whatever orders are given him. Here no order seems to be given, but the "Of Jinn" provides the needed assistance.



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At the sound of the word, 1,000 troops suddenly appeared. When the padişah struck him again, he repeated "Of!" and another 1,000 soldiers arrived. Finally a third thousand came, and against 3,000 troops the padişah had no chance. Mercan Efendi ordered the troops to surround the young man and capture him. When they had done this, Mercan Efendi sent word to the girl's father, "Your enemy has at last been captured. Come see him and tell us what you wish to have done with him."

When the king came, he wished to kill the young man, but his daughter pleaded, saying, "Dear father, do not kill him. Imprison him if you wish, but do not kill him."

After he had spent some time in prison, the young man was released. He immediately began visiting the girl by night, and one night he asked her, "How can that Mercan Efendi be destroyed?" (This Mercan Efendi was sword-proof and fire-proof. Even the king was afraid of him, and the king had determined to give his daughter in marriage to any one who could destroy Mercan Efendi.

The girl went to Mercan Efendi the next day to try to discover the location of his life-force.<sup>9</sup> She said, "My

<sup>9</sup> Here the talisman is the life-force of external soul of a person or other creature. No matter what may happen to the individual personally, he cannot be destroyed so long as the life-force is safe.

Life force  
E. Paul. external  
Talisman?

10-21

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Five numbers  
b.l' to

Sword - invul-  
nerability to

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father wished to give me to you in marriage, but I really know very little about you. I know that you are fire-proof and sword-proof, but tell me, where do you keep your life-force?"

He answered, " I can be destroyed only if someone removes the shoe from the right front foot of my horse."<sup>10</sup>

After receiving this information, the girl went to the young padişah and reported, "Mercan Efendi can be destroyed only if someone removes the shoe from the right front foot of his horse." The young man went to Mercan Efendi's stable and removed all of the shoes from the feet of his horse, but nothing happened to Mercan Efendi.

The girl went to Mercan Efendi a second time and said, "I went to see if your talisman was really in the shoe of your horse's right front foot, but it is not really there. Please tell me where it is, for I am yours."

"Well, then, if that is the case, there can be no harm in telling you. You can have my talisman. My life-force is in two pigeon eggs in a nest of a tree along the River of

10-20<sup>10</sup> Monsters, giants, or others with an external life-force keep the location of their life-force a closely guarded secret. The creature's captive wife is the one who usually discovers its whereabouts. In Turkish tales she does so by saying that has nothing and no one with whom to play or converse during her husband's daily absence hunting. After telling her two or three false locations, he is finally coaxed into revealing the true location. Here, quite atypically, there is no believable reason for Mercan Efendi's surrendering his secret.

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Islands in the Sea of Islands.<sup>11</sup> If one of those eggs should be broken, my body below the waist would die. If both should be broken, my whole body would die. That is where my talisman is located."

The girl at once went to the young padişah and reported this information: "There is a River of Islands that flows into the Sea of Islands. This place is so distant that it can be reached only after riding for six months and an autumn. Along that river is a tree containing a nest in which there are two pigeon eggs. His life-force is in those eggs. If one of them should be broken, he would die below the waist; if both should be broken, his whole body would die.

One morning shortly after that the young man mounted his horse, took his dog, and set out to find these two pigeon eggs. He went and went and went for six months and an autumn, and when he looked up, he saw ahead of him a white-bearded old man sitting on a flat spot of ground and praying. He said to the old man, "Selâmünaleyküm, Hoca Baba."<sup>12</sup>

"Aleykümselâm."<sup>13</sup> But how did you know that I was a

<sup>11</sup>The Sea of Islands is the Aegean. The term used by the narrator is Adalar Denizi. The word Adalar is commonly used to refer to the whole Aegean Archipelago, with its hundreds of islands. large and small.

<sup>12</sup>Hoca is the word for priest, and Baba means father. When used together in this way, the two words indicate deference or respect.

<sup>13</sup>And peace be unto you also.

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hoca? And are you a supernatural being or a *Tom Van der* jinn?"<sup>14</sup>

"I am neither a supernatural being nor a jinn. I am a creature of God who created both you and me. I am a human being."

"Where have you come from and where are you going?"<sup>15</sup>

"Father, have you ever heard of the River of Islands <sup>of</sup> that runs into the Sea Islands? That is the place to which I am going."

"Son, although I am 100 years old, I have never heard of such a place. But I am one of the Padişahs of Birds, and when my birds all return this evening, it is possible that one of them will know of this place you seek. Let us wait until this evening, and then I shall put this question before all of my birds to see if any can answer it." That evening the birds returned, each taking his own seat. "O my birds, said the old man, "does any of you know of a River of Islands that flows into the Sea of Islands?"

The birds answered in unison, "O our padişah, you have spoken and we have heard, but we know nothing of such a place."

<sup>14</sup>In Turkish tradition, when one is surprised to see what appears to be a human being in a most unlikely place, one may suspect that what he sees is not really human, and so one asks the formulaic question "Inmisin cinmisin?"--"Are you a supernatural being or a Jinn?"

<sup>15</sup>This is one of the many formulaic questions asked of strangers in order to identify them and in order to test their sense of courtesy by the nature of their response.

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5  
12 13  
Three known consulted for  
a dove — in order of

The next morning the old man said to the young padişah, "Farther along is another plain where lives my brother, 100 years older than I. If anyone knows the answer to this question, he should, for his birds travel much greater distances than mine do." Saying this, he placed the young man on the wings of two large birds and sent him to his brother, who was also a Padişah of Birds

As they approached this second Padişah of Birds, the young man saw that he was worshipping. "Selāmūnaleykūm, father."

"Aleykūmselâm. Are you a supernatural being or a jinn?"

"I am neither, but instead a child of God's creation, a human being."

¶ "O son of man, where do you come from and where are you going?"

"Father, have you ever heard of the River of Islands that flows into the Sea of Islands? That is the place where I wish to go."

"No, son, I do not know of such a place. Let us wait until this evening, however, when my birds all come home. I shall put this question to them, and if even one of them knows, then you shall have your answer."

That evening his birds returned, all of them larger than the birds of the first Padişah of Birds the young man had met. "O my birds," said the old man, "do any of you know

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the whereabouts of a River of Islands that flows into a  
of Islands?"

"No, our padişah, we know of no such place," they all  
answered.

"Well, son," said the old man, "my birds do not know the  
answer to your question, but I have a brother 100 years older  
than I--300years old!--whose birds are much larger than mine  
and fly much greater distances. They may well be able to give  
you the information that you seek

In the morning the young man was placed upon the wings  
of two birds and flown to the presence of the oldest of  
Padişahs of Birds. Although the distance between the king-  
doms of these two sovereigns of birds would have taken six  
months of ordinary travel to traverse, the birds made the trip  
in just three days.

After exchanging greetings with the traveler, the very  
old Padişah of Birds said, " I do not know of such a place,  
but let us wait until my birds return this evening, for it is  
likely that at least one of them will be able to answer your  
question

When the large birds had returned that evening and taken  
their places, the very old Padişah of Birds addressed them:  
"O my birds, have you in your lengthy travels ever learned  
of a River of Islands that flows into a Sea of Islands?"

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"No, our padişah, we know nothing of such a place

But just then a vulture,<sup>16</sup> returning late that evening, asked, "My padişah, what did you say? I could not hear you.

"Did you ever hear of a River of Islands that flows into a Sea of Islands?"

"Yes, my padişah, but it is at a very great distance from here, a distance that would require a human journey of six months. While I was flying here this evening I encountered a weary bird. 'Where have you come from?' I asked him. 'I have come from the Sea of Islands,' he said, 'which lies at an incredible distance to the North. It is too great a flight for one who is 100 years old.' As soon as the exhausted bird said this, it dropped dead."

<sup>16</sup>In the folktale a protagonist seeking advice or information is often referred to a succession of wise old men (or wise old giants or wise old birds), each succeeding wise creature older than the previous one. Usually the three are brothers. This is sheer fantasy, for the interval of age between the first and the second, and then again between the second and third, is usually at least 100 years.

When a succession of three birds is used, the birds in the Turkish oral tradition are often vultures. The three consultants here are not vultures, but the narrator is sufficiently familiar with the tradition so that he chooses a vulture to play a role in providing the protagonist with the information he seeks. Vultures are indeed long-lived birds. In the early 1960s the Ankara Zoo contained a vulture whose documented age was more than 150 years, as well as others more than a century old. Such a venerable bird is often referred to as Ak Baba, white father.

See several other tales in ATON for successions of increasingly aged consultants. See also vulture consultants who appear either singly or in trios of successively greater ages.

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Hearing this, the oldest Padişah of Birds lined up three of his strongest birds and ordered them to carry the young man to the River of Islands. "Take turns in carrying him, he said. These three powerful birds set out with their passenger and, flying steadily, made the trip in three days.

When they flew above the River of Islands, the birds could not cross it. The river ran so rapidly that it sucked the birds downward. [Narrator's interpolation]: Sometimes they say of a river that it runs so fast it catches the birds above it.)

Noticing the great fatigue of the birds, the young padişah suggested that they land on the riverbank and continue on foot. "Let us wander about a bit here. If we can locate the exact spot I am seeking, it will be good. If we cannot locate it, then--very well--we shall turn around and go back home."

While the three birds remained on the riverbank resting, the young padişah walked about observing the area closely. He noticed a wild pear tree nearby.<sup>17</sup> Going to this tree, he climbed it and started picking its fruit, but as he did so, he saw a giantess with a large chest on her back emerge

<sup>17</sup><sub>16-18</sub> The Turkish word for pear is armud or armut, but the wild pear is called by different names in different parts of the country. Throughout most of Western Turkey the word for wild pear is ahlat. In Tokat Province, the source of this tale, the local dialect word is çördek.



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from the river. She placed the box at the foot of the wild pear tree and sat beside it. When she rapped on the chest once, a giant came forth. Throwing her breasts back over her shoulders, she asked this giant to search her hair for lice.

The young padişah climbed down the tree, crept up to the giantess, and sucked on her breasts from behind her-- where she could not see him. She then said, "If you had not sucked my breasts, I should have eaten you, for your flesh must be as tender as that of a partridge, but now I cannot, for you have become my child."<sup>18</sup> *milk relationship*

The young man asked her, "Mother, do you know of the River of Islands which flows into the Sea of Islands?"

"Son, this is the River of Islands in the Sea of Islands, and the nest that you seek is in that whirlpool in the river. What you must do is this. Gather some thin sticks and weave them into a basket. Plaster the inside of this basket."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>This involves the whole concept of milk siblings and milk relatives. If a child or young person sucks the breast of a woman other than his/her mother, that woman becomes his milk mother. Her own children become the milk siblings of the milk child, and hence no one in the family can harm the milk child. Rural mothers often establish "kinship" between their families by briefly nursing each other's children. Becoming the milk child of a giantess is the best possible protection for a human being among these large creatures.

<sup>19</sup>In English the word caulk would normally be used for sealing the seams in a boat or other vessel used in the water. We have kept the literal translation of the word plaster.

Handwritten notes in red ink: "flo legs", "n. tall", "q. r. H", "g. sh", "Dig", "wall".

Then sit in the basket and recite the Ismi Azîm<sup>20</sup> prayer as it floats into the whirlpool. The whirlpool will carry you down, and as you are descending, you must move your hands back and forth and round about in the water, and in this way you will find the nest."

*Advice* After receiving these instructions, the young padişah again climbed up the wild pear tree. The giantess again struck the top of the chest, and the lid opened. She put the giant back in the chest and closed it securely. Then, shouldering the chest, she disappeared once more into the river

After they had gone, the young padişah climbed down from the tree and made a basket from twigs. Telling the birds, "I shall return in a short time," he climbed into the basket and let it float into the whirlpool as he recited the Ismi Azîm prayer. As the basket turned around and around in the whirlpool, the young man moved his hands back and forth in the water, and soon he touched the top of the eggs, breaking one of them. As soon as that egg broke, Mercan Efendi's body below the waist, the fish part, died. Taking the other egg from the nest, the young man rose to the surface of the water and called to the three birds awaiting his orders, "I

<sup>20</sup> Literally, the Great Name prayer. There are ninety-nine names or epithets applied to Allah. This is apparently the prayer in which those ninety-nine names are repeated.

Handwritten notes in red ink: "After, and g. to", "2 Boks of -", "in game", "Lords".

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have found what I sought. Let us now return to your padişah."

He was carried on the wings of these birds back to their padişah. The oldest Padişah of Birds sent him on to the next oldest Padişah of Birds, and this middle brother sent him on to the youngest Padişah of Birds. There he mounted his horse, took his dog, and returned to the palace where his beloved awaited him. (He had completed the long journey in just three months.) "I have found Mercan Efendi's talisman!" he announced to the girl.

Mercan Efendi was lying in bed very ill. All of the ~~doctors~~ and ~~hocas~~ and learned men in the world had been summoned in to find a cure for his illness, but none of them had been successful. The young padişah said, "I know how to cure his illness." and he ordered the servants,

A suitable bath was found and rented. When it was heated, the young padişah and Mercan Efendi were taken there and left there alone. Sitting opposite the little man, the padişah spoke to him in this way: "O Mercan Efendi, you will remember that once when you were sitting in your green tent, I came along and greeted you, 'Selamünaleyküm.' You would not

<sup>21</sup>This is a hamam, a Turkish bath, housed in a separate building,

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accept my greeting and respond appropriately. Instead, you insulted me by saying, 'No one but a homosexual would accept your greeting.' I was so angry that I slapped you, whereupon you produced 1,000 soldiers. I slapped you again, and you produced another 1,000 troops, and this was repeated until there were 3,000 soldiers against me. You had me captured, tortured, and thrown into jail, but fortunately the padişah's daughter rescued me. Now woe to you!" Saying this, he picked up a mallet and started beating Mercan Efendi with it.

"You cannot kill me in this manner. You can kill me only by taking the egg from your pocket and smashing it against my forehead. Do not torture me, for I cannot be killed by blows."

Taking the egg from his pocket, the young man smashed it against the forehead of Mercan Efendi. As he himself predicted, this killed him. The young man now sent word to the father of the girl: "Come now and sit upon your throne! If you do not, I shall come, smash your crown against the throne, and thus break your crown into many pieces

When he received this message, the old king, who had been living in a settlement in the mountains, along with his men, ordered this settlement evacuated. Returning to his palace, he replaced the crown upon his head and again sat upon his throne

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"My king," said the young man, "you have suffered a great deal, but now I have destroyed your enemies. I have killed Mercan Efendi.<sup>22</sup> Now I have a wish that I hope you will grant. I should like to marry your daughter."

The king agreed to grant this wish, and he arranged for a wedding that lasted for forty days and forty nights. On the forty-first night the young couple entered the nuptial chamber. They ate and drank and were very happy together

May all of those who have hitherto not had their wishes granted now have them fulfilled! Three apples fell from the sky: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for the person who asks, "Isn't there any for me?"<sup>23</sup>

to still

<sup>22</sup>It was not clear earlier in the narration that the caged girl's father, the rightful ruler, had been driven out by the forces of Mercan Efendi. Nor was it made clear what relationship Mercan Efendi had to the giants of the initial conflict.

<sup>23</sup>This is one of the terminal formulae used in Turkish folktales. The three apples that fall from the sky are standard parts of this formula. Deciding upon the recipients of the three apples depends upon the whim of the individual narrator.