

Story 698 (1981 Tape 1)

Narrator: Ali Çiftçi, farmer
Location: Çıkırıkçı village,
 kaza of Sarıkaya,
 Yozgat Province
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The Man with the Silver Nose

In the old days when bachelors often went to Adana to find work, there was a man who frequented the bachelors' quarters there in order to talk with the men living there. He had originally been a poor man, a hunter. Some of the bachelors sitting in a coffeehouse wondered how he had come to have a silver nose. "Why do you have one part of your nose made of silver?" they asked him.

"Well, friends," he said, "as you know, I was once a hunter. One day I was so deep in the forest that I could see only the sky and Allah.¹ I was in a wilderness, and I walked and walked and walked until finally I came to a clearing large enough to grow wheat upon--large enough to raise wheat that would yield ten to fifteen şiniks² of wheat. This clearing was covered with grass that reached to my navel. On one side of the clearing was a pine tree, at the foot of which was a fountain. I drank some water from this fountain and then sat in the shade of the pine tree for a while. Then

arose, put my gun on my shoulder, and walked until I came

¹A figurative way of describing isolation or loneliness.

²A şinik is a measure of volume equivalent to a peck or a quarter bushel.

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to a pass. As I walked through this pass, I felt as if I were being carried along by the air, carried along quite involuntarily, and the force that was pulling me made me shake violently. The force was so strong that I soon found myself galloping."

"Were you on foot?"

"Yes.--Apparently there was a monster of some kind pulling me."

[Ahmet Uysal to Narrator: "Was the pull like that of a magnet?"

Ali Çiftçi: "Yes."

"I said to myself, 'I am as good as dead, anyway, and so I might as well take a shot at this creature. So I took a shot at him. (As you know, snakes ¹²⁰⁻¹²³ are very vulnerable to guns. They seem to attract bullets, and no matter how you aim, your bullet is likely to hit the snake. I just held the gun to my eye and pulled the trigger, and the bullet hit the snake right in the center of his forehead. A terrifying shriek sounded through the air. When I heard this, I fled and climbed to the top of the tree in the clearing and hid myself there. Soon there was an amazing number of snakes in the clearing running zivil, zivil, zivil,³ running everywhere like water. Among them was a yellow snake, only just a little over half a meter long but climbing over and under the others and all the

³This is onomatopoeia, to represent the sound of snakes moving in numbers.

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time watching me in the tree where I was hiding. I was afraid of that snake. He got a chance--I am not sure just how--to spring at me, and he caught me by the nose. (These faithless creatures⁴ have a terrible ability at leaping at people and knocking them down with one blow--from the impact of their bodies.) I took out my dagger and cut off that part of my nose to which the creature clung, and my nose and the snake fell from the tree to the ground. All of the other snakes came and bit my nose also until it was swollen to the size of a drum, and when struck, it went dim, dim, dim.⁵ *you*

"Later I returned to the pass to see the huge snake which I had shot. It lay motionless on the ground, except that its tail was slowly thumping the ground, put, put, put.⁶ When I examined it closely, I discovered that it had four red and green horns that glittered. Taking out my dagger, I carefully rooted out those four horns without damaging them. Returning with them to Adana first, I got enough travel money--it was a time when money was very scarce--to go to Istanbul. There I sold each horn for 10,000 Turkish liras (a fortune in those days), and with this money I had my silver nose made."

⁴The word faithless here is a reference to the Edenic myth.

⁵Onomatopoeia for the beat of a bass drum

⁶Onomatopoeia for the sound of the snake's tail striking the ground. It is a folk belief, both in Turkey and many other places, that snakes die slowly and that the tail dies last, and only after sunset when the stars have appeared in the sky.

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Question from audience: "What about all that tall grass in the clearing? What became of it?"

Internal Narrator: "That grass was so trampled that it looked like the straw cut up by a döğen.⁷

Suppose that three or four men went walking back and forth in your field of wheat? What would it look like? Well, the field of grass was like that--hardly any of it still standing."

Audience: "There must have been a great many snakes to do that.

Internal Narrator: "Yes, and they all came at the shriek of that monster."

Audience: "Was he their padişah?"

Internal Narrator: "Well, he was their great leader."]

Ahmet Uysal: "What would such snake horns be good for?"

Ali Çiftçi: "For many things. --Once I was on the way to Zile.⁸

There was a barley field on the way, and we came to a curve. A horned snake came from the barley field, trying to reach a stream nearby where it

⁷A döğen is a device for threshing grain. It is an oblong of heavy planks--about the size of a house door. Set into the bottom side of this oblong are many sharp pieces of flint which protrude from the bottom half to three quarters of an inch. Grain is thrown on the threshing floor, and this wooden frame is dragged over it many times, cutting the stalks of the grain to small bits and liberating the kernels of grain.

⁸Zile is a village near Ali Çiftçi's village of Çıkırıkçı.

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could drink water. Its head looked like a rainbow. I said to myself, 'Now I must take ablutions! Look at that horned snake!' But it turned and disappeared into the barley field, and I could not find it again. Its forehead looked just like a rainbow!"

Ahmet Uysal: "If you could catch a horned snake, would it really be worth money?"

Ali Çiftçi: "Yes."

Ahmet Uysal: "Would it be good for anything medical or perhaps something magical?"

Ali Çiftçi: "I do not know about anything magical, but it can be used to cure some illnesses. If it is struck, under water, against a stone (about the size of a walnut) taken from a mule's throat, that water will become a good medicine to relieve bloating. I actually saw such a stone and the horn from a horned snake being used by a Kurd who migrated from Russia to Turkey. The horns looked somewhat like the claws of a cock--slightly curved. One drop of that water would cure that illness."

Ahmet Uysal: "Did you ask if they were really snake horns?"

Ali Çiftçi: "Yes."