

Story #91 (Tape 20,
1961-62)

Narrator: Hacı Mehmet Deniz (31 yrs. old)
Location: Ovacık (Gülner kaza), İçel Province
Date: February 1962

Ifrit, His Uncle, and the Ağa

A padişah had three sons and a daughter. The padişah said to his children, "When I am dead, load my body on our white camel and let him go. Bury me wherever it kneels down to rest."

Sometime after that, the padişah died, and his sons put his body on a white camel which went and kneeled down by the side of a coal cellar. As the camel had kneeled down there, the sons had no choice but to bury the padişah at that place, according to his will.

The padişah, before he had died, had also given another strange order to his sons. He said to them, "When you come to visit my grave, be sure that you never take the right-hand road and that you always take the left." Sometime after the padişah had been buried, his sons decided to pray at their father's grave. The eldest son first went to the grave of his father, but he did not return. Upon this, the middle son set out for the grave of his father, but he did not return, either. Finally the youngest son set out for his father's grave, and after praying, he fell asleep at the side of his father's grave. As he slept there, his father spoke to him from

"My son," he said, "your elder brothers have been at my grave taken the first left-hand turn that they saw. I want you to do the same. When you take that left-hand turn, you will meet a dervish with a big fur coat. He will ask you to come and sit on his fur coat, but you will say, 'It would not be proper for me to sit on your fur coat instead of you, for you are older.' Then the dervish will sit on the coat himself."

After hearing this, the young man woke up and started walking along the road until he came to the junction. Then he took the left-hand turn and after a while, he saw a dervish sitting by the foot of a tree

The dervish asked the young man, "Will you not come and sit on my fur coat?"

"No, thank you," said the young man. "It would not be proper for me to sit on it while you are standing."

When the young man refused to sit on the fur coat, the dervish sat on it himself, and as he did so he suddenly fell down into a well over which the fur coat had been spread. This was the fur coat on which his brothers had sat, disregarding the directions given them by their dead father.

The dervish had a large palace near by, and now that he had fallen down into the well, the young man appropriated this palace. A few days after he began living there, he returned to his father's palace and told his sister that he had come to possess a palace that was even better than that of the padişah and he invited her to come and live with him there. She agreed to do this, and the two of them went to live in this new palace.

The youngest son of the padişah one day went hunting and he shot two birds. One of them was for himself and one of them was for his sister to eat. Now on that same day, his sister had been walking in the palace garden while her brother was away hunting. As she walked through the garden, she heard a voice coming from the bottom of the well. "There is a device in one of the highest rooms of the palace. If you will take that metal device and bring it here and touch it to the stone at the top of the well, it will enable me to get out of this place." The girl was greatly surprised at hearing this voice, but she went to the upper rooms of the palace, got the device that she found in one, and returned to the well with it. She touched the device on the stone part of the well, and a few

minutes later, the dervish came to the surface.

The girl fell in love with the dervish, and she had him in the palace. That day there were three birds that appeared before her brother, and he shot these three birds. He brought them home, and the three birds were all eaten by the end of the day. The brother noticed this, but he did not say anything about it.

Every day the brother went hunting, and every day he managed to shoot three birds and bring them home. This went on for about six months. At the end of that time, the brother noticed that his sister began to act rather strangely. He asked her if she were ill. She said, "No, I am not

The strange behavior of his sister went on for another three months, and then one day the brother found that four birds came close enough to him that he could shoot them. On that day he shot the four birds and took them home, and when he arrived there, he found that a son had been born to his sister.

When he saw the baby, he asked, "What is this, sister?"

"Well, this was my illness, brother," she said.

"Well," said her brother, "it is better that it should be revealed. I am very glad that you have a son now."

When the brother and the sister were considering what name they should give to the infant, the child miraculously began to talk. He said "Call me Ifrit."¹ The brother and sister thereupon decided to name him Ifrit.

Baby - unusual

¹The word ifrit, not of Turkic origin, means a spirit or a demon or a creature with some quality of otherworldliness about him. The dervish who is Ifrit's father has supernatural powers. Ifrit, is therefore, the offspring of a mortal woman and her demon lover. In The Arabian Nights ifrit is equated with genie or jinn.

Four or five months more passed during which the dervish continued to live at the palace. He and the sister were very much in love with each other. One day the dervish said to his wife, "This arrangement will not go on like this forever. Let us kill your brother."

"How shall we do it?" asked the girl.

"I shall become a snake," said the dervish, "and I shall hide on the transom of the door. When he enters the room, I shall spring on him and sting him to death."

The dervish's wife agreed to this and the dervish turned into a snake and lay on the transom of the door and waited for the brother to return and enter the room. But it so happened that his son, Ifrit, was standing in front of the door. When the dervish's brother-in-law came, he picked up Ifrit, for he was very fond of him. He put Ifrit on his shoulders and walked toward the door. When the dervish saw that his son was approaching on the shoulders of his brother-in-law, he changed his mind about killing the man, because in doing this, he might kill his own son, too. So the brother-in-law was saved from death in this way.

Now the dervish began another way in which he could kill his brother-in-law. He said to his wife, "I shall turn into a scorpion and I shall hide in his boot. Then when he puts his boot on, I shall sting him to death through the sole of his foot."

The padisah's son prepared to go hunting the next morning, and he put on his boot. His young nephew was with him, and the boy said, "Will you let me wear your boots, Uncle? I would like to walk around in them when you go."

"Of course, you may try them on," said his uncle. Before the boy put on his uncle's boots, he turned them upside down and the scorpion fell out. The child thus again saved his uncle from being stung to death. This was the second time the padişah's son had escaped, but the dervish made a further plan to kill him. This time he decided to turn into a poisonous bird and fly across his path. The brother-in-law was a hunter of birds, and so this would be a way that the dervish could reach him. He knew that if the brother-in-law shot and ate the poisonous bird, then he would die as a result. The dervish knew that because of his own magical power, he could return to life afterward and not be killed.

The padişah's son went hunting that day and on the way home he saw the most beautiful bird he had ever seen flying across his path. He aimed at it and shot it dead. He brought it home in the evening and he said to his sister, "Pluck the feathers of this bird, but don't throw them away. They are so beautiful that we can make a cushion out of them for Ifrit." This was exactly what the dervish wanted because it would keep his feathers from being scattered about, and as long as there was some part of him left, he could revive again.

The dervish's wife cooked the bird and put it before her brother. Just before the dinner, Ifrit shouted, "Uncle, Uncle, I saw a big crowd coming, just like a wedding crowd. It is approaching our palace."

His mother said, "Ifrit, come and be quiet!"

"Come and see for yourself," said Ifrit.

When his mother and uncle went to the window to see the crowd, Ifrit changed the plates, putting the plate of the poisonous bird before his mother and an ordinary bird before his uncle. When they returned to the table and sat down, they began to eat the food.

Story #91

The padişah's daughter said, "My dish is tastier than yours," but she was dead before she finished her sentence. Her brother began to cry.

Ifrit spoke to him and said, "Why are you crying, Uncle? Don't you know what they have done to us? Bring those feathers here. They belong to a devil who wants to kill you." Ifrit took the feathers and burned them.

Now that the sister was dead, there was only the two of them left, the padişah's son and Ifrit. After they had lived for some time in the palace, Ifrit said to his uncle, "You see that fire in the distance? I'm going to walk over there and get some fire and bring it here so that we can light a fire of our own."

Ifrit reached the place in a single jump even though the fire was as far away as Cyprus.² He reached it and found there above the fire a cauldron that was boiling there. He took an egg out of the cauldron, took a piece of burning ember from the fire, and ran back to his uncle in the palace with them. Now the padişah of the area where the fire was burning had long had a daughter who suffered from a grave illness. This girl, however, suddenly got well. Ifrit suggested to his uncle, "Why don't you go there and say, 'I cured your daughter'?"

"How could I prove that I cured the padişah's daughter?" asked his uncle.

"Well, it was because of this egg," said Ifrit. "We can prove that,

²Cyprus, long part of the Ottoman Empire (1571-1878), lies forty miles due south of the kaza of Silifke, where this tale was collected.

Story #91

too." They took the egg and had it read to by (a hoca³) and then they started to boil the egg again. As they boiled the egg again, the girl became ill again, and the more they boiled the egg, the sicker she became. They reported this to the padişah and told him that they could cure his daughter by taking the egg from the boiling water. He offered them a reward if they could cure her in any way whatever. When they stopped boiling the egg, the girl recovered again. The young man was in this way able to persuade the padişah that he had cured his daughter and he received the reward.

Ifrit and his uncle lived together for a long while and then one day Ifrit said to his uncle, "This arrangement of ours cannot go on forever. It would be better for you to go one way and for me to go another." Before they parted, Ifrit pulled out of his head two hairs and gave them to his uncle. He said to his uncle, "Whenever you are in distress, rub these hairs and I shall be there to help you."

magic hairs

Left. Supernatural

Ifrit went to the West and his uncle went to the East. After a long journey, the uncle came to a village and he found the ağa of that village and asked him for a job on his farm. The ağa agreed to give the young man a job, and provide his food for him, but he set certain conditions.

"I shall provide your food, but you must promise that you will never tear

³There is an incantatory quality ascribed to the reading of the Koran over an object or person. A dying person is read to continuously as a kind of blessing; objects over which a religious man (here a hoca) reads the Koran may take on magical power. In both the egg episode and in the magic hairs which Ifrit gives to his uncle the supernatural power of the boy is illustrated. The magic hairs, to be rubbed together when help is needed, recur as a frequent motif in Turkish tales; this is a variant of the magic lamp and ring of the Aladdin story.

the edges of the yufka.⁴ Also, you must not take the skin of cream from the top of the yoghurt. Furthermore, I shall feed you, but you must never say, 'I am hungry.' If you do say that you are hungry, I shall take enough skin off your back to make a pair of sandals. ^{garin} On the other hand, if you can upset me and make me angry, then you will take enough skin from my back to make a pair of sandals."

The young man agreed to this, and several days passed as he worked on the farm. Every day he became more hungry, however, for he could not eat. He could not eat the yoghurt without disturbing the skin of cream on the top, and he could not eat the yufka without breaking its edges. As a result, he began to starve to death. Three days and five days passed in this manner and the young man was not eating anything. Finally, he fell ill and lay down. The ağa came and asked him, "Well, shepherd, are you angry with me?"

"No," said the young man, "I am not, but I am really starving."

"All right," answered the Ağa. "Lie still there. I shall now take a piece of hide off your back." The Ağa took enough skin off the back of the padişah's son to make a pair of sandals with it.

Very pained, and crying from the sore place on his back, the young man put his hand in his pocket, took out the two hairs that Ifrit had given him, and rubbed them together. Immediately, Ifrit appeared, and asked, "What is the matter, Uncle?"

⁴Yufka is a kind of bread made without yeast. The dough is rolled to paper thinness and placed on a circular convex steel sheet about two feet in diameter and then baked for only a few seconds. While it is still hot, it is flexible and can be folded down into an easily manageable bundle that looks like a handkerchief. When it cools it becomes very brittle, like soda crackers. It is a whole yufka, unfolded, that is referred to here.

"Well, I bargained to work for this aḡa for my food. I was unable, however, to fulfill the terms of the agreement, and as a result of this, he cut a piece of my hide off my back." Then the uncle explained to Ifrit what had happened.

"Where is this aḡa?" asked Ifrit.

"He lives over there in that large house," said the uncle.

Ifrit went and asked the aḡa whether he would hire him also as a farm hand.

"All right," said the aḡa, "I shall hire you, but I have certain conditions under which you must work."

"What are they?" asked Ifrit.

"You must not disturb the cream on the top of the yoghurt that I give you to eat, and you must not break the edges of the yufka. You must never say, 'I am hungry.' If you break any of these conditions, I shall cut a piece of hide off your back big enough to make a pair of sandals. On the other hand, if you can make me admit that I am angry, then you will cut a piece of hide off my back big enough for a pair of sandals."

Ifrit began to work for the aḡa. He ate the yufka by cutting a large piece from the center of it with his knife and leaving the edges intact. He ate the yoghurt by breaking a hole in the bottom of the jar and sucking the yoghurt out in that way. The skin of cream was left whole in the jar. In that way he managed to eat as much as he wanted.

One day Ifrit made a large fire in a field. He put many skewers in the fire, and when they were red hot, he took them and stuck them into the bellies of the flock of sheep. In that way he killed five or six hundred sheep. When the aḡa came and looked at the pasture where hundreds of sheep were lying dead, he said, "What is the matter with them?"

"Ağa, they are tired and they are resting," said Ifrit. "Are you annoyed at me?"

"No--why should I be?" The ağa then asked Ifrit, "Do you know how to garden?"

"There is nothing that I know better," said Ifrit. The ağa gave Ifrit a forty-~~acre~~^{acre} orchard to tend, but Ifrit cut all the trees down in the orchard during the first night. When the ağa came to inspect the orchard in the morning, he was amazed at what he saw. He asked Ifrit, "What is all this?"

"Well, ağa," said Ifrit, "do you sleep standing up or lying down?"

"I sleep lying down!"

"Well, the trees are doing the same thing," said Ifrit. "They are tired. When they get enough sleep, they will wake up and stand up again."

The ağa was deeply concerned with what he saw. He wondered what Ifrit might do next. He suggested to his wife that they leave for somewhere else as soon as possible, because he realized that Ifrit was a very strange person. Ifrit overheard the conversation between the Ağa and his wife and he turned himself into a grain of millet and hid in a corner of the ağa's saddle bag. As the ağa and his family were leaving that town, they were attacked by three dogs. The ağa said, "I wish Ifrit were here to chase those dogs away."

When Ifrit heard this, he jumped out of the saddle bag. "Here I am, Ağa." He then killed the three dogs, and traveled along with the ağa and his family in his usual form.

At last they came to the bank of a river where they were going to spend the night, and they pitched their tent there. The ağa and his wife decided to get rid of Ifrit by throwing him in the river after he had fallen asleep.

While they were sitting about before bed time, one of the ağa's children said, "Mother, I have to urinate."

The ağa's wife said, "Ifrit, take him somewhere to urinate."

Ifrit took the child a short distance away from the camp site and said to him, "If you urinate, I shall kill you!" He then took the child back to the camp.

After a little while, the child again said, "Mother, I have to urinate."

Again Ifrit was ordered to take the child away to relieve himself. This time he said to the child, "I shall cut your throat if you dare to urinate!" Then he took the child back again.

Once again, the child complained that it had to urinate, and once again Ifrit was asked to care for him. "Take him and burst⁵ him, Ifrit," said the ağa's wife.

Taking this order literally, Ifrit took the child into the nearby woods, dropped a large rock on his belly, and burst him. He returned without the child and told the ağa's wife that he had done what she had ordered. While the ağa and his wife went to look at the child's body, Ifrit took from their chest one of the wife's gowns. After everyone had fallen asleep, Ifrit got up and put on the woman's gown. Then he carefully lifted the wife over to his bed and he crawled into bed alongside the ağa. Around midnight, Ifrit said, in a woman's voice, "Come, let us throw Ifrit into the river before he wakes up."

⁵The Turkish word for burst is patlamak or patlatmak; in the Silifke area where this story was collected there is a dialectical meaning: to take a child to toilet. I have been unable to discover whether there is a similar root meaning to urinate, or whether patlamak is simply a regional circumlocution. Often the order is to clean the child, an order which is interpreted to eviscerate him.

They went to the bed where the ağa's wife was sleeping. They lifted the whole bed by grasping the canvas sheet on which it was made, swung it back and forth three times, and then they heaved it far out into the river.

The ağa said, "Now we have at last gotten rid of Ifrit."

Ifrit answered, in his own voice now, "Now we have gotten rid of your wife." When the ağa realized what had happened, he began to cry.

"Are you crying?" asked Ifrit. "Are you annoyed or angry at me, ağa?"

"Of course I am angry with you," answered the ağa. "You have ruined my flock and my orchard, and now my family. You have killed both my wife and child."

When Ifrit heard the ağa say this, he cut a piece of hide from his back. He made a pair of sandals with this hide and put them on his feet. Wearing these sandals,⁵ he walked back to the farm for his uncle, and then the two of them left that land.

⁵The narrator used throughout the word çariklar where we have used sandals. The çarik (singular) is more nearly like a moccasin, but with a turned-up toe. It was formerly the standard footwear for the peasant, made of donkey or ox skin. Standard footwear now is a rubber, laceless loafer made by melting automobile tires and pouring the reclaimed latex into molds.