

Story 1193 1990 Tape 9)

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Location: Murgul, a kaza town of Artvin Province; taped at Ankara

Date: June 22, 1990

Fire-Child and the Giant

Birth not there
Once there was and once there was not, a very long while ago, there was born in a small Circassian¹ village in the Caucasus a very unusual child. The moment after he was born, flames began to leap forth from all parts of his body. Villagers who witnessed the birth of this strange child were horrified by what they saw. The elders of the village ordered that only the village blacksmith^{68,69} should handle this baby. When

blacksmith arrived, he grasped the baby by one of its feet with his tongs and soused it twice in a barrel of cold water. That action extinguished the flames, but the people of the village named the baby Fire-Child.

From the very beginning Fire-Child was different from all of the other children of that village. He began to develop in strength and size very rapidly. He learned quickly and well how to wield a sword, and how to ride a horse. By the time that he was six or seven years old he could ride a horse expertly and use his weapons very skillfully. He was far, far ahead of the

¹A non-Turkish minority group of Turkish citizens who came from lands presently part of the Soviet Union along the Black Sea and in the Caucasus.

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other children his age. By the time he was twelve or thirteen he had sufficient strength to wrestle with young men twenty to twenty-five years of age. He not only wrestled with them, but he always beat them in these matches. By the time that he himself had become a young man, he had the appearance of a brave hero.

At that time there was a ^{69, 78}giant who was oppressing the people in the village where Fire-Child lived. Every week that giant raided the village and carried off large amounts of the food the people had been accumulating as their provisions for the winter months. Many different people tried to capture or to kill this giant, but they all failed because the giant always rode on a lying horse. No ordinary horse could overtake the winged horse

The Fire-Child took it into his head to capture or kill this giant. With that purpose in mind, he went to see a very old sage who lived on the outskirts of that village. He asked this sage, "Grandfather, how can I kill the giant that oppresses our village?"

The very old man answered, "First go to our village blacksmith and have him make for you a sword with a blade three meters in length. Have the blade sharpened so perfectly that it can cut in half a hair falling through the air. Then have the blacksmith heat the sword red-hot twice, and each time after

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it is heated, have him plunge it in cold water."² Then, even though the old man was now blind, he pointed to a distant range of mountains and said, "On the other side of those mountains you will find an inland sea in the middle of which is an island. On that island lives an old woman who has forty horses. One of those horses is the mother of the giant's horse, and that mare will soon bear another colt. If you can win the sympathy of that old woman, she might be persuaded to give you that colt, which will also become a flying horse. Here is one further piece of advice. As you travel to reach that old woman, be sure to treat humanely both human beings and animals that you may encounter. Do no harm to any living creature

After thanking the old man, Fire-Child went at once to the blacksmith and ordered him to make a sword in the fashion that the old man had indicated. Then he prepared his horse, packed some food, said good-bye to his family, and set out in the direction of the distant mountains. After riding his horse hard all day long, Fire-Child became tired, and in the early evening, he selected a cool, shady spot where he could spend the night. He untied his bundle of food, but at the very moment that he was about to start his evening meal, he heard someone or

²Treating iron or steel in this manner will make it very hard but also very brittle. In real life, it would have to be tempered (softened) somewhat to give it some slight flexibility; otherwise it would chip or break easily.

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something moaning. Going in the direction of this sound, he discovered that it was being made by a ^{71, 73-76}crow which had somehow broken a wing. Fire-Child said to the injured bird, "Do not be afraid, dear crow. I have come to help you." Then Fire-Child picked some herbs and wild flowers, and with these he made a healing ointment. This he spread upon the broken wing and bandaged it tightly. "Now your wing will get well," he said.

After a short while the bird got up and began moving about again. "Look at me, young man! You are a very good-hearted person. If there ever comes a time when you need my help, wherever you may be in this world, just shout three times, 'Crow! Crow! Where are you? Come here!' Do that, and I shall immediately come to your assistance." Having said that, the crow disappeared.

Thinking about this incident, Fire-Child ate his food and then retired for the night. He slept very well. As soon as daylight returned, he set forth again and traveled farther, farther, farther

Two evenings later, just after he had found a campsite was preparing to eat his supper, he again heard a moaning sound. He thought that the sound resembled the moaning of a dog. When he followed the sound to its source, he discovered that it was the moaning of a wolf. This animal had somehow broken a leg, and it was now lying on the ground licking the injured leg and moaning loudly.

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Fire-Child behaved toward the wolf in the same way he had toward the crow. He prepared an ointment out of the same herbs and flowers he had used before. Then, after washing the broken leg, he spread some of the ointment on it and bandaged it tightly. Releasing the wolf, he said, "With this treatment you will well!"

The wolf seemed stunned for a while, but after it had regained full consciousness, it said, "Look at me now, young man! I am already beginning to recover. No one but a good person would have rescued me. If there ever comes a day when you need my help, wherever you may be in this world, just shout three times, 'Wolf! Wolf! Come here and help me!' If you will do that, I shall come at once." The wolf then vanished in the same way that the crow had, almost as if by some magic means.

Fire-Child returned to the place where he had left his horse and his other belongings. There he ate his evening meal, as he was doing so, he thought about the incidents in which he had rescued the crow and the wolf

In the morning he continued his journey, and after traveling for two more days, he came to the shore of the inland sea that the old sage had described to him. Thinking, "Well, I have come to the end of the road," he untied his bundle of food and was just about to start eating his evening meal. But before he had taken even a mouthful, he was distracted by something he saw out of the corner of his eye. It was a small fish which had somehow

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been washed ashore and was now flopping about on the beach, trying to get back into the water. Despite all of its efforts, however, it was not getting any closer to the water. Seeing this difficulty, Fire-Child picked up the fish and threw it back into the sea.

*Fish
again*

The small fish dived to the bottom of the water, but after a minute or two, it returned to the surface and spoke to Fire-Child: "Young man, you are a very good person. If there should ever come a time when you can use my help, just shout three times, wherever you are in this world, 'Fish! Fish Come to my assistance!' If you will do that, I shall come at once. It then disappeared into the depths of the sea.

Fire-Child ate his evening meal, and as he was doing so, he thought, "Tomorrow I should be able to reach the island that the old man told me about." Then he lay down and slept there throughout the night.

When he awoke in the morning, he could see the island in the center of the inland sea, but he could not find any means of reaching it. Nowhere along the shore could he find either a boat or a raft. He brooded about his difficulty for a while and then decided to ask the fish for help. "Fish! Fish Where are you? Come here and help me!"

Almost as soon as he had said this, the little fish reappeared and said, "Yes, boy! What do you want? Give me your orders!"

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"Fish, I have a request to make of you. I want to go to that island out near the center of this sea, but I have no means of getting there. Will you help me?"

"Of course I will! Wait here for a minute and I shall return with help." The small fish disappeared, but it very quickly returned with an enormous fish. Most people have never seen a fish of such great size. "Climb on the back of this huge fish, and it will carry you to the island." Fire-Child did as he had been directed, and all three of them moved swiftly to the island.

Soon after his arrival he found the home of the old woman about whom he had been told. She welcomed him, and after they had talked for a while, she asked, "Son, why did you come to such a distant place as this?"

"I came to ask you to give me the colt that is about to be borne by a great mare in your stableful of forty horses."

The old woman answered, "I shall give you that colt if you complete a task that I shall give you."

"I hope that you are not in any trouble, aunt. What is it that you want me to do?"

"Here is what I want you to do. You are to take my forty horses to the meadow and pasture them there today. Then this evening you are to bring back here all forty of them without having lost a single horse."

"All right, aunt," answered Fire-Child. "What could be

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easier than that?"

Driving the horses before him, he took them to the pasture that the old woman had pointed out to him. While the horses grazed, Fire-Child lay beneath a shade tree where he rested and slept. Toward evening, he said to himself, "Well, it is time now to take the horses back to their owner." But when he tried to gather the horses, he found that it was impossible to do so. The horses had spread out into every corner of the island. Because much of the island was heavily forested, the task was even more difficult than it would have been in open country.

Confused for several minutes by this difficulty, Fire-Child said to himself, "Oh, I wish I were a bird who could fly into the sky and look down upon the whole island." This reminded him of the crow he had helped, and so he at once shouted, "Crow! Crow! Where are you? Come to me!"

The crow arrived almost immediately and said, "Tell me about your difficulty, boy. What do you want of me?"

difficulty, dear crow, is this. I was ordered to herd a flock of horses in this pasture today and then, at the end of the day, I was to return all forty to their owner. But those horses have scattered all over the island, and I cannot find even one of them. Can you discover where they all are? Can you help me in this way?"

"Of course I can!" said the crow, and he called three times,

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"Gak, gak, gak."³ In response to his call, thousands of crows flew to that spot. The crow friendly to Fire-Child spoke some words to the throng of crows that had just arrived, and the entire group began to spread out everywhere in the island. Soon messages began coming back from the mass of crows, and these messages described exactly where each of the forty horses was located.

As it turned out, however, many of those horses were in widely separated places, and it would be an extremely difficult task for one person to gather them all together. As Fire-Child was considering this difficulty, he thought, "Oh, how I that I had a dog to chase down those horses!" Then he remembered the wolf he had helped, and he realized that wolves were dogs. He therefore called, "Wolf! Wolf! Where are you? Come here and help me!"

"What is the matter? What do you want of me?" asked wolf

"I was ordered to graze forty horses here in this pasture today and take all forty back together to the owner in the evening. But those horses have spread out over the entire island. Friendly crows have flown over the entire island and

³Different peoples perceive differently the calls of almost any given animal or bird. Thus, Americans hear crows call, "Caw! Caw! Caw!" while Turks hear, "Gak! Gak! Gak!" Americans hear dogs bark, "Bow! Wow! Wow!" while Turks hear, "Hav! Hav! Hav!"

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located every one of those horses, but they are in many different places. Can you help me to drive them together so that I return the entire herd to their owner?"

"Of course I can," said the wolf, and he howled loudly three times. In response to his howls, thousands of wolves rushed to him. When the wolf whom Fire-Child had befriended told the huge pack of wolves what was to be done, they spread throughout the island in small groups.

After the wolves had gathered all of the horses before Fire-Child, the young man drove them all before him back to the woman's stables. When he delivered these horses, he asked, "Now will you give me the colt I requested, aunt?"

"You must wait a little longer, for that colt will not be borne until tomorrow morning. I shall give it to you tomorrow. True to her word, a beautiful and lovable colt was born the following morning, a tiny brother of the giant's great flying horse.

This colt was also a ^{magical horse} magical horse, for just a few minutes after its birth, it rose to its feet. It said to Fire-Child, "Just climb on my back, and I shall carry you to any place you wish to go

"Don't say such a thing. You are much too small for me to ride upon. My weight would break your small back.

"No, no! It will not harm me a bit," said the colt. It then shook itself and grew larger than it had been.

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"Now that you are larger, I may possibly be able to ride you," said Fire-Child.

"But wait!" said the colt. "My mother told me that my brother was suckled just once by her. I have drunk her milk once, but if I drink it a second time, I shall become even stronger and faster than my older brother. Wait here until I have been fed again by my mother."

The colt returned to its mother to be suckled one last time. Then it returned to Fire-Child, who noticed for the first time that this was a winged horse too.

They then flew from the island and flew over the mountain range to Fire-Child's village. When he arrived there he was told that the giant had been approaching the village on his flying horse. Fire-Child mounted again and set out to encounter the giant. The giant was riding a flying horse, and Fire-Child was riding a flying horse too. When they met, Fire-Child began chasing the giant, and a great race began over hills and mountain peaks. But the older horse was stricken with panic. He said to the giant, "Oh, Allah My brother is faster than I am. He will surely catch us.

"No, that is impossible!" said the giant. "You can travel more swiftly than any other horse!"

"No, I cannot fly faster than this horse pursuing us. We were born of the same mother. We are brothers, and he can more swiftly than I can.

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At that very moment, the younger horse caught up with his brother. Swinging his three-meter sword, Fire-Child cut off the giant's head. The beheaded body fell to the earth with a great crashing noise. And it was in this way that the village was rescued from the oppression which it had been suffering.