

Story 1894 (1996 Tape 3)

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Just Deserts

Once there was and once there was not a certain place where there lived two sisters-in-law. One of these sisters-in-law was very poor while the other was rich. The poor woman used to spend all of her time working with a spindle. She made thread, which she then sold in the marketplace in order to earn enough money to feed three children. She spun thread all day long in the natural light of the sun, and at night she spun in the light of a lantern. While she worked so hard, her wealthy sister-in-law sat idle in her nearby mansion.

One evening while the poor woman was working steadily with her spindle, her lantern ran out of oil. Left in the darkness, the poor woman could no longer spin.

therefore went to the mansion of her sister-in-law and sat down to work in the light pouring out of one of its windows. After awhile when the rich woman saw her sister-in-law beneath her window, she turned off the house lights. The poor woman climbed up onto the roof

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of the mansion and looked about in search of some other light. Seeing a small light burning at some distance away, she took her spindle and her bundle of wool and walked toward that light.

When she arrived at the house from which the light was shining, she saw an old man sitting by himself and reading from the Koran. She quietly seated herself beneath his window and began to spin again. The spindle made an ar ar jur sound, and after awhile this noise drew the old man's attention from his reading to the woman beneath his window. Going outside, he saw a stranger spinning thread. He asked, "What are you doing here? Are you a ghost or a jinn?"<sup>1</sup> Why should you be here in the middle of the night?"

"I am neither a ghost nor a jinn but a human being who is a creation of Allah," answered the woman.

"Why then do you come here at such a late hour?"

<sup>1</sup>This is a commonly used formulaic expression. In Turkish it is "In misin cin misin?" ("Are you a jinn or some other supernatural creature?"). It is an expression of alarm uttered when a person is startled by the appearance of an unknown being in an unlikely place and/or unusual circumstances.

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"I came here because my lantern ran out of oil while I was spinning. I first went to the mansion of my sister-in-law and sat in the light shining through one of her windows, but when she saw me working there, she turned off her lights. Then I saw a light coming your house, and I came here so that I could continue to work. Otherwise I would not earn enough money to feed my three children. May I finish my work here?"

The old man then said to the woman, "My daughter, tell me which is the more beautiful, winter or summer?"

She replied, "They are both beautiful, for both were created by Allah."

"My daughter, let us talk for awhile, for each word you speak will cause a gold coin to fall from your mouth."

Not believing this, the poor woman pleaded, "Just permit me to sit here in the light and finish my work." But even as she was saying that, gold coins were falling from her lips.

On the following morning the wealthy woman saw her sister-in-law struggling along with a heavy basket. Going outside, she was amazed to see that that basket was

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filled with gold. She stretched her hand toward the basket, wishing to take some of the coins. "Where you get so much gold?" she asked. The once poor woman then gave a complete account of what had happened night before. When the wealthy sister-in-law heard this, she thought, "She is telling the truth, for every she speaks, gold does indeed fall from her mouth. Tonight I must go to that old man's house and do all of the things my sister-in-law did so that I too will get such a great amount of gold."

That evening the rich woman took her sister-in-law's spindle and some wool. She went to the house of the old man. There she sat in the light coming from one of his windows and began to spin thread. Soon the ar ar jur sound of the spindle was heard by a servant in that house. That servant went to the old man and said, "Master, I think that the same woman has come back again tonight to spin thread beneath your window."

"No, no, my son," the old man replied. "She would not return, for she got what she deserved."

"But there is a woman out there, master."

"Call her here," said the old man. When the woman

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entered the house, he asked her, "Why did you come here, my daughter?"

"I came here to spin thread in the light coming from your window."

the old man asked her the same question he had asked the poor woman. "My daughter, which is the more beautiful, winter or summer?"

"Summer is more beautiful. How could I have gotten here in winter? Allah's winter is ugly.

us talk briefly," said the old man, knowing that each word she uttered would cause her to fart. When the woman started to talk very rapidly, she gave forth a thousand farts: zart, zart, zart, zart. She quickly left the old man's house and returned home.<sup>2</sup>

On the following morning a number of neighbors went to her house and gathered around her. They wanted to see if she had returned with all of the gold she had expected to get. But when she responded to their questions, hundreds of farts burst forth from her, and the odor drove

<sup>2</sup>Breaking wind in public is a far more serious offense in Turkey than it is in most other places. It is, in fact, illegal. As late as the 1970s--perhaps even longer--gastric offenders were arrested, jailed, and fined.

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away all her neighbors. After that, she seldom spoke to anyone.

This is the way life is. If you have an evil heart, you will be punished for that sin. If you have a good heart, you will be rewarded for its virtue. These two women got what they deserved, and may all of us be given what we have earned.