

Story 2005 (1969 Tape 15)

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The Fortieth Son of the Padishah

There was once a padishah who had forty sons. When these sons had all reached a marriageable age, they decided to search for a family with forty daughters who could become their brides. The padishah ordered that forty wooden palanquins¹ be constructed for his sons' travels and that adequate soldiers and attendants accompany the princes.

The forty sons traveled from village to village and from country to country in search of a family with forty unmarried daughters. After they had been traveling for a long while, they were accepted as guests for the night in a large mansion. The lady of that house was cooking tripe soup. A young girl entered the kitchen, melted a spoonful of butter in a dish, put some tripe in it, and then left. Then a second girl came and did the same thing. Then another and another and another came until finally forty girls had taken forty dishes of

¹The Turkish word for this elementary conveyance is tahtıran.

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battered tripe. After the last girl had come and gone, the oldest of the padishah's sons asked the lady, "Are all of those girls part of this household?"

"Yes," she answered, "they are all my daughters.

The oldest prince then said, "We are the forty sons of the padishah of such and such a land, and we have been searching for forty sisters whom we might marry. Will you allow your daughters to marry us?" After some discussion with the princes and their attendants, the woman accepted this proposal. The engagement of her daughters to the forty princes was announced, and soon a wedding celebration began and lasted for many days. At the end of that time one marriage ceremony was performed for all forty couples.

After the newlyweds had remained there for a month, the princes prepared to leave and return to their own land. Each prince placed his wife in his own palanquin for the long trip. As they were departing, the people bidding them farewell said, "Stay on the main road, which is clearly marked and which is safe. Do not try to take any shorter route."

But the journey was long, and the princes were anxious to return home. They did decide, therefore, to take a shorter, more direct route. At the end of the day they came to a large plain, and there the attendants set up tents for the night. When they woke up the next

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morning, however, they discovered that it had snowed during the night, and the snow had covered all trail markings. Not knowing which direction to take on that open plain, they tried to clear away enough snow to find their way. But this was impossible, and so they were quite lost.

While they were in this confusion, an old man suddenly appeared. "Father, tell us how to leave this area," the oldest prince asked.

"I shall tell you," said the old man, "if you can answer a question that I ask you." Then the old man asked his question,² but none of the princes could answer it. He then said, "I shall now tell you how to find your way from here only on one condition. You must leave here with me your youngest brother and his wife and his wooden palanquin."

After the brothers had discussed this condition, they made a decision to accept it. One of them said, "Instead of having all of us trapped here, it would be better to leave just one of us here." Guided back to the main road, the thirty-nine brothers and their wives then continued their journey. When they reached the palace, they told the

²The narrator does not here state the question itself to her audience, nor does she do so until roughly 1,200 words beyond this point in the story.

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padishah what had happened on their way home and why they had left the youngest brother behind.

In the meantime, the old man had spoken to the youngest son. He said, "You must go and learn the answer to my question. If you find the answer, come back here, and I shall release you and your wife. Until you return with the answer, I shall take good care of your wife, but if you are unable to discover the correct answer, you will not be able to recover your wife."

The youngest son of the padishah set out at once to find the answer to the old man's question. He traveled here and he traveled there, but nowhere that he went could he find anyone who could answer the old man's question. Finally he came to a castle with a very high tower. If any man sat on the stone at the foot of that tower, it meant that he wished to marry the daughter of the owner of the castle.³ Knowing nothing about this, the youngest son sat on that stone at the foot of the tower simply because he was tired and wished to rest.

When the daughter of the owner of the castle saw the prince sitting on that stone, she went outside and spoke to him. She said, "Young man, by sitting on that stone, you have proposed to me, but

³This is typical of the symbolic language which appears often in Turkish tales and occasionally in Turkish real life. See Walker's and Uysal's Tales Alive in Turkey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 269.

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you must first pass a test before you will be given my hand. My family will give you that test. You will be given an axe and required to cut down several trees. Then, when you are tired by that work, you will be required to carry a cup of hot coffee up the stairs to the top of the tower and then back down again without spilling a drop of it. You will have to pass that test to marry me. It is a difficult test to pass, but I shall prevent you from failing it. I shall stamp your palm with this seal, and that will enable you to pass the test.” She then stamped his palm.

Others in the castle also observed the young man sitting on the suitor stone. They said, “He has proposed to the daughter of the pasha,⁴ and so he must be tested.” Then they gave him an axe and asked him to cut down several trees. After he had done that, they gave him a cup of hot coffee, saying, “You must climb up the tower to the top stair and then return without spilling any of the coffee.” He climbed successfully to the top of the tower, where he glanced out a window. From that height he could see Jasmine Mountain, near the foot of which his bride awaited his return. He became very emotional at the thought of that, and tears flowed from his eyes. Those at the base

⁴Today a pasha is simply a military general, but in pre-Republican times a pasha was often of greater status. He was often the military governor of a province or some other section of the Ottoman Empire.

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of the tower saw liquid falling, and when the prince had descended, they said to him, "You have failed the test. We saw drops of coffee falling."

"No," said the youngest son, "I did not spill a single drop of coffee. It was my teardrops that you saw falling. Taste those drops, and you will discover the truth. If the drops were coffee, they would be sweet. If the drops fell from my eyes, they would be salty."

They tasted the drops and found them to be salty. "He must indeed have been crying," they said. Then they spoke to the prince: "You have passed the test, and you have earned the hand of the pasha's daughter in marriage."

A wedding celebration was then begun, and it continued for many days. When it had ended, the marriage ceremony took place. The prince lived there for awhile, but he had not forgotten the purpose of his journey. He said to the pasha, "I am trying to discover the answer to a certain question. Because you are a powerful man, you may be able to help me find the answer."

The pasha sent out town criers to make this announcement: "The pasha has ordered that everyone must go to the town square tomorrow morning. The pasha is seeking the answer to a difficult question, and he hopes that some resident of this town will know the answer." When the people gathered in the town square the next

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morning, the pasha asked the question that the prince had given him, but none of his subjects there could answer that question.

But one of the people there said, “Pasha Efendi,⁵ there is a wise old man who lives outside the town limits. He probably did not hear the announcement made by your criers, for he is not here, but he may be the one who can answer your question.”

The pasha said to his attendants, “Go and bring that old man to the castle.” When the old man was brought there, he too was unable to answer the question, but he gave the pasha some valuable advice.

The old man said, “Perhaps the Emerald-Green Anka⁶ which lives at such and such a place near here can answer the question. She travels everywhere and sees more than anyone else. That Anka has a problem. Whenever she travels to get food for her nestlings, a dragon devours those babies. This has happened year after year. If someone goes and kills that dragon, the Anka will be obligated to take that person anywhere he wishes to go in search of the answer to your question. This much I do know.”

⁵Efendi was once an honorific attached to the first names of distinguished men: Ahmet Efendi, Hasan Efendi. By mid-20th century, however, the impact of the word had been so reduced that it was added to the names only of children and servants.

⁶The Zümrüdü Anka was one of the giant birds of Middle Eastern legendry. Others were the roc (rukḥ), the simurgh, and the phoenix.

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Upon hearing this, the youngest son went to the place where the Emerald-Green Anka lived and hid himself behind her nest. Placing an arrow in his bow, he waited. After awhile, the dragon came along and began climbing the tree that held the nest. When the dragon got close enough, the prince released the arrow and killed that monster. He then climbed down from the tree and hid in some nearby bushes. When the Anka returned to her nest, the baby birds told her how a young man had killed the dragon and saved their lives. Grateful for this, the Anka called to the young man, "You saved the lives of my children, and so I owe you anything you wish which I am capable of giving you."

The prince answered, "I wish only for your good health."⁷ The Anka responded, "I am a bird, and my health cannot benefit you in any way. There must have been some reason for your coming here. Tell me what it is that you are seeking." After she heard what it was that he sought, she said, "That is not easy to acquire, and the answer is to be found only in a very distant place. I am so indebted to you,

⁷This is the traditional demurral in Turkish tales of one asked to name his or her wish. Sometimes it is made twice or thrice before a wish is stated.

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however, that I shall carry you there. Go and get forty skins⁸ of water and forty kilograms of meat and load them on my wings. You will have to feed me water and meat during the long flight to Semet. You will sit on my back between the meat and the water, and I shall carry you to the palace of the padishah of Semet. But after that you will have to continue your search alone. Just in case the padishah or anyone else should try to kill you, however, I shall give you two of my feathers. If you should be in great danger, rub the two feathers together, and I shall come to rescue you.”

The young man said, “Very well,” and then proceeded to get the forty skins of water and the forty kilograms of meat. Placing the water on the bird’s left wing and the meat on her right wing, he himself sat between them on her back. The Anka flew over many countries, and as she flew, she was steadily fed meat and water by the prince. When she finally landed the prince near the castle of the padishah of Semet, she reminded him to rub together the two feathers if his life was ever threatened. Then she flew away.

The youngest son gained entry into the palace by asking for work there. He worked so hard that after a short while he came to the

⁸The narrator here uses the word tulum, which is a goat or sheep skin with all openings sewn shut to make it capable of containing liquids without allowing any leakage.

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attention of the padishah himself. The padishah admired him because of his unusual willingness to work without resting at any task to which he was assigned.

One day when the padishah had invited this excellent servant to walk with him in the royal gardens, the young man said to him, "My padishah, I have a great problem about which I should like to tell you. I came to this land to find the answer to this question: 'What did Gül do to the padishah of Semet, and what did the padishah do to Gül?' If you were the padishah of Semet referred to, please tell me the answer to this question."

The padishah answered slowly, "If I tell you the answer to that question, I may burn in the fire of hell, for after telling it to you, I shall have to kill you."

The youngest son replied, "I do not mind dying if only I can learn first the answer to that question."

"All right," answered the padishah. "Sit down and I shall tell you the story about Gül and myself. Gül was my wife. Some time after we had been married, I became quite ill and was confined to my bed for quite a long while. During my illness my wife, Gül, and one of my stable grooms were riding horses a considerable distance every night to attend wild parties at the meeting place of forty infamous bandits. They would stay at those parties all night long and return to the castle

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only at dawn. All of my fine horses either died or showed signs of illness because of galloping so far and so fast every night and then not receiving proper care. When I had recovered from my illness, I called the groom to me and asked, 'Why have so many horses died, and why are so many of the rest so sickly? I stocked grain and hay to feed those horses well. Why are they in such bad condition?'

"'I really cannot understand that myself,' answered the groom, but I did not believe him. I said nothing more to him about the matter.

"Then when I had fully recovered my strength, I decided to attend one of those wild parties myself. Without giving him any previous notice, I suddenly sent the groom on an errand to a distant city—an errand that would keep him away from the castle for at least two days. I had decided to take his place in the trip Gül made that night to the gathering of the forty bandits. I went to the stable that evening, put on some of the clothes of the groom, and covered my face with a cloth in the way that the bandits did. Then I climbed into the groom's bed in the castle and pretended to be asleep. Two hours later Gül came to the groom's room and said, 'Come on! Wake up! Get the horses ready. It is time for us to leave.'

"Actually, the real groom had already saddled and bridled the horses before he had suddenly been sent to the city, but I went to the stable and pretended to be making them ready for our departure. As we

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rode away from the castle, I said to Gül, 'I do not feel very well tonight, and so perhaps you had better lead the way.' In reality, I did not know the way. Leading the way to the meeting place of the forty bandits, she let the horses gallop and gallop the whole distance without allowing them to rest even once.

"She was the center of the party among the bandits. She danced, drank, and laughed steadily. After awhile all of the bandits except their leader became tired and went to their homes. Then Gül embraced the bandit chief, and the two of them began to kiss each other. When I saw my wife in the arms of another man, I lost all control of myself. Leaping up from where I had been quietly sitting, I grabbed the bandit by the arm and beat him to death. Gül now realized that it was I and not the groom who had accompanied her to the party. She cried and said, 'Why did you kill a man who was a stranger to you? How could you do such a thing?'

"I responded. 'Gül, why did you do this to me? Did I not feed you well and provide for your comfort in every way? What failure of mine led you to this evil place?' I took her back to the castle supposing that the worst had already happened, but I was wrong. As soon as we reached the castle, she found means of putting a magic spell on me which turned me into a donkey. Yes, I became a donkey and was

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forced to haul wood all day long, day after day until my back was so badly scraped that I bled.

'One day she was in the covered part of the castle courtyard. As I passed by, I saw in her hand what I then realized was a magic wand. She said, 'If this donkey is the padishah of Semet, let him now become a crane. Saying this, she touched me with her magic wand, and I did indeed become a crane and flew about in the sky for some time.

One night the other birds asked me to guard them as they slept. I failed in my guard duty because I was so exhausted that I fell asleep. The other birds were very angry at me. They bit me with their beaks and then pulled out all of my feathers. Injured in that way, I returned to the castle hoping that Gül would see me and restore me to my human form. Outside the castle I pecked loudly on the wooden fence until Gül heard me. Coming outside, she said, 'If this bird is the padishah of Semet, let him now become a dog. As she said this, she touched me again with her magic wand, and I really did become a dog.

'I remained a dog for quite some time but one day while I was in the castle yard, the daughter of a servant saw me and somehow recognized me. Entering the palace, she stole Gül's magic wand and then returned. She said, 'If this dog is the padishah of Semet, let him

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now return to his human form.' The form of my body was again changed, and I became a human being once more.

"Taking the magic wand from the daughter of the servant, I began to search for Gül. I found her sitting at the entrance of the castle with a giant black man. Touching them both with the wand, I said, 'May they remain sitting together somewhere until the end of the world. Let them constantly suffer from sharp pains until they die. Wherever they are, they continue to suffer even today. As I told you before, no one is supposed to know this story. You asked me to tell it to you, and I did so, but now I shall have to kill you.'

"That is all right," said the youngest son, "but first give me time to say my last prayers." The padishah granted that wish, and the prince took ablutions as if to prepare himself to pray. As he prostrated himself to pray, however, he took from his pocket the two feathers that the Emerald-Green Anka had given him. As soon as he rubbed those feathers together, the Anka swooped down, seized him, and flew away. The great bird then carried him back to the castle of the pasha where he had climbed the forty stair steps and descended again without spilling a drop of coffee. He went to his second wife, the pasha's daughter, and said, "I am going to travel to my home. If you wish, I shall take you with me." She agreed to accompany him, and the two set

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out in the direction of Jasmine Mountain. On a plain at the foot of that mountain, his first wife and his palanquin still awaited his return.

When they arrived at the campsite on that plain, the youngest son gave the old man the answer to the question he had asked: "What did Gül do to the padishah of Semet, and what did the padishah do to Gül?" The prince's first wife was so pleased to see him again that she accepted the daughter of the pasha as his second wife. She said, "I have no objection to your having a second wife. I know what you went through since you left this place to find the answer to the old man's question. I shall be glad to go with you to your palace."

The young man took both his wives to his own country to the palace of his father. There he and his thirty-nine brothers and all of their wives lived happily after that.