

Story 1187 (1990 Tape 5)

Narrator: Unidentified man

Location: Malatya, capital of
Malatya Province in
eastern Turkey

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Taped for ATON by Dr. Mehmet Yalvac

The Abused Stepdaughter and Her Supernatural Husband

There was once a girl who was often abused by her cruel stepmother. The girl was forced to do all of the housework for the entire family. Just when she thought that she could not stand this treatment any longer, she was given a special key and told, "Find a house whose door this key will open, and live there." /There is no indication as to who gave her this key; inasmuch as the tale has Cinderella elements, it was apparently given to her by a fairy godmother or other supernatural agency./

Taking the key[?] the girl tried to find the door lock into which it would fit. After she had tried, unsuccessfully, to fit the key into every door in her village, she carried her search to houses farther and farther away. Finally she found on a mountainside a house into the door lock of which her key would fit. It was a very beautiful house with a garden through

¹The narrator had not assimilated this tale sufficiently to render it well. He did not know or forgot to give causative links between episodes at certain points. Relying upon our knowledge of similar tales, we have supplied in brackets suggestions of the likely links.

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which a brook ran. Roses and other flowers bloomed everywhere in that garden, and nightingales sang there. The girl turned the key in the lock and entered this house. It was as beautiful inside as it was outside, and in the main room there was a pool of clear water. But, except for her, there was nobody there. She searched all of the rooms and found no one in any of them.

As it began to grow dark, she hid herself under the staircase in the main room. Soon she saw that the pool was bubbling and foaming, and after a few minutes a large black snake ²³⁻²⁸ crawled from its waters. This snake went upstairs, shed its snakeskin,² and reappeared as a prince. He was the son of the Padişah of Snakes. When he saw the girl under the stairs, he asked, "were you able to get here? How did you find and enter my house?"

The girl answered, "I was gathering firewood here on this mountain, and when it became dark, I needed some kind of shelter. That is why I entered your house."

After the snake prince had shown her a room in which she could stay, he said, "Meals will be brought to you here and placed outside your door. Eat every meal that is delivered. Don't bring the dishes downstairs afterwards but place them again before your door." When her first meal arrived, she ate it and placed the dishes exactly where he had told her to put

²The narrator said, literally, that he "changed his clothes."

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them. Even before she could close the door again, the dishes vanished.

After she had lived there for a short while, she married the son of the Padişah of Snakes.²⁴⁻²⁷ One day a month or two later

she said to her husband, "I want to go for a few hours to the ^{both public} hamam³ in my village."

"It would be better not to go there. But if you do go there, do not tell anyone that I am a snake

She was preparing to go to the hamam as he said this, and so she did not pay attention to his warning. When she reached the bath, the girl discovered that among the other women there was her stepmother. That woman said to her, "Aman!"⁴ Where have you been all this time? And where did you get such fine clothes?"

"My husband is the son of the Padişah of Snakes, and he is very rich. We live in a large and beautiful house. It has a pool in the main room, and through that pool my husband comes from and returns to the snake world

The stepmother said, "We are soon going to have a circum-
cision ceremony for your stepbrothers. Show me where your house

³A hamam is a public bath. Turkish baths are open at different times to male and female customers. Women often spend a whole forenoon or afternoon at the hamam, making their visit a social as well as a sanitary occasion.

⁴An exclamation which may (negatively) mean alas, or (more positively) oh, my goodness, or some equivalent of wow!

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is, and I shall come and get you to take you to that ceremony."

The girl then took her stepmother to her new home on the mountain. She showed her through the entire house, and she also pointed out the pool through which her husband came and went.

When the time arrived for the circumcision ceremony, the stepmother returned to the mountain to take the girl to her home in the village. She brought with her a small bag of broken glass, and when the girl went to get a chair for her stepmother to sit upon, the stepmother threw the broken glass into the pool.

That night when it was the usual time for the snake husband to return, the pool began bubbling and foaming, but this time the foam was bloody. As the snake slid over the broken glass at the bottom of the pool, he was cut the whole length of his body. After that, he did not return again.

When the girl returned from the circumcision ceremony, she waited night after night for the return of her husband, but he did not come. When she examined the pool, she found bloodstains on the walls, but she did not know what had happened. She began searching everywhere and asking many people in an effort to discover how to find him. She finally had a hamam built on the main road used by travelers passing through that area. All travelers were invited to use this hamam. They did not have to pay anything for this service, but every traveler that bathed

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there was required to be a storyteller and relate the most unusual experiences of his travels.

One day a woman and her daughter stopped at this bath. They had just arrived from a journey in a distant land. After they had bathed, the woman gave this account of one of their experiences. "One evening when we could find no other place to pass the night, we decided to rest beneath a large tree growing along the roadway. At midnight there was a tremendous noise, like thunder, and the earth split a short distance from where we were. ^{Physician 26-28} Several medical doctors in blue gowns entered the open earth, and then it closed behind them. Later the earth split again, and the doctors left. All the while that we were there, there was a bird singing in a tree above our heads."

When the wife of the snake prince heard this, she said to her guests, "Until I return, this hamam is yours. Now tell me exactly where to find that tree under which you slept when you saw the earth split open."

After she had received careful directions from the mother and her daughter, the wife of the snake prince went to the ket and bought a blue gown.⁵ She then traveled a great distance to the place where her two guests had seen the earth split. When she finally found that place, she heard the bird still

⁵This may be a reference to the blue-green clothes worn by surgeons in the operating room both in Turkey and elsewhere.

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singing continuously in the tree. After killing this bird, she drained its blood into a small bottle and placed the bottle in her sash. When the earth split with tremendous noise, she joined the blue-gowned doctors entering the opening in the ground. The doctors went immediately to the palace of the Padisah of Snakes and began to treat the wounded prince, who was now near death.

After the other doctors had returned to the surface of the earth, the prince's disguised wife began her own treatment. She rubbed the wounds of the prince with the blood of the bird she had killed, and the patient's condition began to improve at once. /Totally lacking in this tale is any indication of how the girl came to know that the blood of the bird had curative power./ Within a few days the snake prince had recovered completely.

When he was well again, the snake prince asked, "Doctor, what can I give you in payment for your saving my life?"

do not want anything but your help in returning to the upper earth," the doctor said

After the prince had shown her the way to the surface of the earth, the girl returned to her mountain home still wearing her doctor's gown. A few minutes after she had arrived there, the snake prince rose from the foaming pool. He had come back to kill her for what he thought was her treachery, but when he

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her blue gown, he realized that she the doctor who had
cured him this way they were reunited They ate and drank
and had all of their wishes fulfilled