

Story 915 (Tape erased  
on field trip  
after contents  
transcribed)

Narrator: Muammer Birkan, in 50s

Location: Taşköprü, kaza town  
in Kastamonu Province

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The Three Sisters and the Evil Thread-Seller

There was once an old peddler<sup>?</sup> who sold the kind of thread used by women in embroidery and in decorating their shawls.<sup>1</sup> He used to go from street to street, from door to door, selling colorful thread used for such purposes. One day he stopped at the door of a large house where three beautiful girls lived. "What are you selling, old peddler?" they asked him.

"I am selling thread."

"What colors do you have?"

"I have red, yellow, purple--almost all colors."

"No, no, we do not want any of these threads."

"Well, I have even better kinds of thread at home, including silk thread. If you will come with me, you may at them.

The girls followed the old man to his home. They were impressed by the very large house in which he lived. "Is this your house?" one of them asked.

<sup>1</sup>The narrator throughout the tale called the old peddler İplikçi Baba--Thread-Selling Father. This seems rather awkward in English, and so we have called him simply the old peddler.

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"Yes, it is mine."

"Do you live here all alone?"

"Yes, I live here alone." There were forty rooms in that large house, and he took them through all of the rooms except the fortieth.

don't you show us that room?"

"I can't do that," he said.

do you live here all alone, old man? Why don't you get married?"

"I should like to marry--especially one of you--but any woman I marry would have to do whatever I wanted her to do. Would you, for example, eat a finger of mine if I were to cut it off and give it to you to eat?"

"Yes," said the oldest of the three sisters.

"Well, if you didn't eat it, I would cut off your head."

The girl thought to herself, "If he should ever really give me a human finger to eat, I would not eat it. I would say, 'I have eaten it,' but, in fact, I would throw it away

After some further bargaining between the peddler and the oldest sister, they agreed to be married. After the marriage, when the two of them returned alone to his mansion, the old peddler cut off one of his fingers and told his wife to eat it. She put it in her mouth and chewed on it for a while but she could not swallow it. When the old man was not looking,

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she spat it out and threw it into the garden.

"Have you eaten my finger?" he asked her.

"Yes, I have," she said

He then called out, "O my little finger, my little finger!  
Where are you?"

"Where should I be? I am here in the garden." Saying  
this, the finger then returned to the old peddler.

He then cut off the head of the oldest sister and hung  
it on a hook in the fortieth room. On the next day he went  
to her parents' home and said, "Your oldest daughter has been  
taken away from me to serve as a concubine in the palace of  
the sultan." He then married the middle daughter and took  
her to his home.

Soon after they had arrived at his mansion, the old  
peddler cut off his finger and gave it to the middle sister  
to eat. When she thought that he was not looking, she spat it  
out and threw it under the dining-room table.

"Have you eaten my finger?" he asked.

"Yes, I have," said the middle sister.

The old peddler then called out, "O my little finger  
my little finger! Where are you now?"

"Where should I be? I am under the table." Having said  
that, the finger then returned to the old peddler.

He then cut off the head of the middle sister and hung

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it on a hook in the fortieth room alongside the head of the oldest sister. The following day he went again to the home of the three sisters and arranged to marry the youngest sister. But before he married her, he decided to test her.

The youngest sister was a very intelligent girl. When she went to the mansion of the old peddler, she took with her her favorite cat. The old man cut off his finger and said to her, "Here Eat this!"

When the old man was not looking, the girl spat out the finger. She then tossed it to her cat, which quickly ate it.

The old peddler then called out, "O my little finger, my little finger! Where are you?"

"Where should I be?" asked the finger. "I am in a small belly."

The old peddler then married the youngest sister. He said to her, "Everything will be yours. Here are forty keys to the forty rooms in my mansion. You may take whatever you wish from the first thirty-nine of these rooms, but you must not enter the fortieth room. If you should open that fortieth door, it will bring you disaster

For some time the girl enjoyed all of the riches and wonderful things that she found in room after room of the mansion. Finally, however, the temptation to enter the fortieth room became irresistible. Taking out the fortieth

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key, she opened the door of the fortieth room. Inside she found many skulls, including those of her two sisters. Terrified, she went immediately to the police station.<sup>2</sup>

The old peddler was arrested and tried for many murders. After she had thus taken her vengeance against the peddler, she inherited his large mansion and all of his wealth. She later married a young man with whom she had fallen in love.

<sup>2</sup>With this obvious anachronism, the narrator abandons entirely the never-never world of the ancient folktale and adopts a practical, modern attitude toward contending with adversity.