

Story 1646 (1987 Dictated) Narrator: Yusuf Kızıkan

Location: Mecitözü, kaza
town of Çorum
Province

Date: 1987

The Hapless Adventures of Nightblind

I do not have any mother or father. I used to do odd jobs for people in my area of the country. That was the way in which I used to earn my daily bread.

Our village roads in those days were usually in very poor condition. Automobiles could not run on such roads and all transportation used water buffaloes and oxen. One day one of the villagers said to me, "Son, we want to hire you to help us build a road to our village on which cars can travel.

"All right," I said. Early the following morning we began working on that road. It was not an easy job, but after many difficulties we finished that road several weeks later.

Some time later my ağa¹ said to me, "We no longer

¹An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older

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have any need for so many oxen. We shall take them to the market in such and such town tomorrow."² At the edge of

market my ağa said, "Son, sit here and wait for me. It will not take me long to sell these oxen." I did as he had told me to do, but with nothing to do but sit and wait, I became very bored. As a result, I soon dozed off into sleep.

When I woke up much later, I discovered that the market had closed and everyone, including my ağa, had gone. All of the stalls and tables had been removed, and I was sitting in an empty square in that town. Not knowing what to do or where to go, I began to cry. After a while I asked a passerby, "Uncle, which road goes to Çorum?"

Pointing to one side, he said, "Take that road over there. That road will take you to Çorum."

I started out along that road, and after I had gone some distance, I saw a farmer plowing in his field. I

went over to where he was and helped him hold steady the plow. The brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

²In rural areas, different villages and towns hold their weekly market on different days of the week. In larger towns and cities, the same marketplace may be open for business most of the week.

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handles of the plow as he worked. When the plowing was finished, the farmer said to me, "Bravo, son! What is name?"

I said, "My name is Nightblind

The farmer then said, "Nightblind, come with me."

Taking me by the hand, he led me to his home. When his saw me with my old clothes and my pale face, she pity for me.

His wife said, "Oh, oh! Who is he?"

The farmer answered, "He helped me while I was plowing the field, and so I brought him home with me. He does not have any place to stay.

While her husband was talking, the woman removed the stew pot from the fire and placed it on the table to cool down a little. Then she said to me, "Son, take off your sandals³ and be comfortable."⁴ My sandals were very tight, and while I was struggling to get them off, one of them slipped from my hand and flew into the pot of stew. When

³The Turkish word used here is çarık, a sandal made of donkey skin or camel skin. Until well into the 20th century the çarık was the most common footwear of rural peasants.

⁴In rural areas virtually no one enters a house without first having removed his or her shoes.

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the woman saw this, she shouted, "What have you done, Nightblind?"

I said, "It was not my fault, but you are right about my name. My name is Nightblind." I was grateful that they did not continue to shout at me for very long.

The next morning the woman said to the farmer "Since this boy is going to be staying with us, let us go and buy some better clothes for him."

The farmer said to me, "You plow the field today until I return. We are going to the nearest market to get some better clothes for you."

They left, and I went to the field to plow. By the time evening arrived, I had finished plowing the entire field. I then placed the yoke pad on my shoulder and started back to the farmhouse. Then I had an idea. I said to myself, "Why don't I let our dog carry this pad back?" So I placed the yoke pad on the back of the dog. This was all right until we met two or three other dogs along the road. Those dogs attacked our dog, and during the fight the yoke pad was torn very badly. Going home as fast as I could, I hung up the yoke pad and decided not to tell my foster parents that it had been damaged.

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When my foster father arrived home, he asked, "Well, how did you do, Nightblind?"

"I finished plowing that field."

"Bravo, bravo, my son," he said. Then he lighted a kerosene lamp and said to me, "Son, we have a calf that is very sick. It may possibly die tonight. Sleep in the barn tonight and watch that calf. If its condition does not get any worse, leave it alone, but if it seems to be about to die, slaughter it quickly."⁵

I said, "All right," and taking the kerosene lamp, I went to the barn and fell asleep. When I woke up, the lamp had gone out, and it was pitch dark there in the barn. I couldn't see anything, but I was too confused to light the lamp again. I tried to find the calf by groping around in order to discover whether it was dead or alive. My hand fell upon a tail a couple of times, but I could not feel any motion. "Alas, the calf is dead!" I said to myself. "My master will be very angry at me!" So I decided to slaughter the calf. Groping around in the dark, I found the animal's neck and drew my knife

⁵A dead animal could not be bled in the prescribed Moslem manner. It would, therefore, be a total loss, for the meat would be forbidden food.

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across it. But I had great difficulty holding this animal so that its struggle would cause it to bleed well. I said to myself, "It is struggling so hard that it does not seem to be a sick animal at all!" Finally I finished my job and went back to sleep quite happily.

In the morning I was awakened by the angry voice of my foster father. "So, son, what have you done? Oh, you have ruined everything! May Allah curse you, Nightblind! May Allah curse you!" He picked up a large stick and started toward me to beat me severely but I ran away as fast as I could.⁶

I left that village and started traveling down the road again. After awhile I saw a small village near the roadside. Seeing the door of one of the houses standing open, I went to it and called into the house, "Is anyone home? After a minute or two I saw a woman running toward the house. This frightened me, and so I hid in a large grain bin just inside the door of the house. After the woman had entered the house, she took a large pot from the stove and set it upon a table to cool. I was so hungry

⁶Nightblind has let the sick calf die and has slaughtered a perfectly healthy animal, but the narrator fails to say this. This is a very common Turkish tale, with several variants in ATON.

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that I came out of my hiding place. Looking into the pot, I discovered that it contained a chicken meal. I ate the entire meal, leaving nothing in the pot but the chicken bones.

After a while the woman returned, but she came this time with a man. Before they could see me, I quickly hid myself again. When the man opened the pot and looked inside, he said, "Hey!"⁷ Are we dogs that our meal is to be nothing but bones?"

The woman was very upset by what had happened. She said, "Oh, how terrible! Stones have fallen upon my head!" Then she hid her displeasure by saying, "Well, apparently some passerby ate that chicken meal. But that is all right. I shall make you some böreks."⁸ There is still a lot of time left before my husband returns." She began to make böreks.

After a while a man came along and began pounding loudly on the door. He shouted, "Wife, open the door! I have returned!"

⁷The word used here was ulan, an exclamation which can be given different English equivalents.

⁸Böreks are made of many layers of very thin pastry dough filled with meat, cheese, or some vegetable. They are cooked in deep fat.

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Very upset, the woman said to her lover, "Come here quickly! We must hide you! My husband has returned!" She then rolled up her lover inside a large mat and placed the mat against the wall. She then went and opened the door for her husband.

The husband entered carrying a very heavy bag on back. He said, "Wife, open the door of the grain bin so that I can pour this flour into it." She opened the door and her husband poured the flour on top of me, burying me from toe to head. Then he said, "Wife, bring me a shovel. We should move this flour back farther in the bin to make room for more." Of course, while he was shoveling the flour, his shovel struck against me. He asked, "Wife, did you carelessly place a whole unopened bag of flour in the bin at some time? My shovel is hitting something very hard."

The woman answered, "No, Husband, I did not forget what I was doing and throw a whole unopened bag of flour into the bin."

Then the man struck me so hard with the shovel that I screamed in pain and sprang out of my hiding place. When the husband saw me, he grabbed me by the arm. Very

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frightened, I said, "I am innocent, uncle. You should see the man rolled up in that mat over against the wall. The husband unrolled the mat and began punching the man who had been hiding inside it. After the two men had been fighting for a few minutes, I noticed a pack saddle lying at one side of the room. Thinking I might separate the two men and thus stop the fight, I said to myself, "I'll throw this pack saddle between them." But the saddle was too heavy for me to throw, and instead of placing the saddle between them, I stumbled and landed between them. Instead of hitting each other, both of the fighters were now hitting me.

Hearing the noise of the fight, some of the neighbors had come to that house to see what was happening. They shouted to me, "Run! Run! If you don't, they may kill you!"

I ran out of that house and out of that village as fast as I could. It was getting dark now, however, and I started wondering where I would be able to stay for the night. Coming to a village, I hid myself in a barn, where I thought I could sleep that night. After a while I heard two people talking. They were a gendarme⁹ and a girl,

⁹This loan word from the French is used to refer to a

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and they were getting close to the barn. The girl said to the gendarme, "Tell me what you like best about me."

I like best the way you walk," said the gendarme "Now tell me what it is that you like best about me."

The girl answered, "I admire you most when you aim your gun and shout, 'Come here Come here!'

Upon hearing that, the gendarme decided to show off He aimed his gun at the barn and shouted, "Come here! Come here!"

he aimed the gun at the barn and said that, I became confused and frightened. I thought that he was speaking to me, and so I ran out from my hiding place crying loudly and begging the gendarme for mercy. I said, "Please, please, ağa, don't kill me!" The two were startled to see me, and they were, in fact, even more frightened than I was. They fled and left me there alone. I was worried that they might return, however, and so I decided to find a different place to sleep. Near there, I found a group of bee hives, some of which contained bees and soldier whose duty has been transformed from the regular army to the Ministry of Interior. There is no regular police system in much of rural Turkey. Law and order are maintained by thousands of troops placed under the command of the Ministry of Interior.

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some of which were empty. Choosing one of the empty hives, I crawled inside and fell asleep.

Later that night some thieves came there to steal honey. Their leader said to them, "Lift up each hive to see how heavy it is. We shall take only the heavier hives, for they will be the ones which contain the greatest amount of honey." Because the hive in which I was hiding was the heaviest of all, it was one of the hives that they carried away. I was so frightened by what was happening to me that I urinated. The thief carrying my hive said, "Friends, something is dripping from my hive."

The others said, "Oh, it must be honey."

One of the other thieves put his finger on the shoulder of the man carrying me in order to get a little of the honey. After he had put his finger in his mouth, he was asked, "Well, how was it?"

"It does not taste like honey at all. It tastes like salt."

The thief carrying me said, "Never mind that. Last week I was carrying jars of salt on my back, and that must be what you tasted."

After these thieves had traveled some distance, one of them said, "We are now getting close to the city. We

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should now pour the honey from the hives into jars."
They poured the honey from one hive after another into large jars.

When they opened the top of my hive, I sprang up suddenly shouting, "Ah, ah, I am dying! Is there no one who can save me?" The thieves were terrified and fled.

I, too, left that place and began walking again the next morning. When I came upon a shepherd tending his flock, I asked him, "Brother, how can I get to Çorum from here?"

He said, "Follow this road until you reach an asphalt road. Turn right there and then stay on the asphalt road until you reach Çorum

I said, "Thanks," and continued walking until I reached Çorum.