

Story 737 (1976 Tape 11)

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Watching Over Dead Man Forty Days

Once there was and once there was not a girl who was the only child in her family. One of her regular chores was to go to the river every day to wash tripe. One day as she was doing this chore, a crow came along and spoke to her: "Gak! There is a severe trial which you must pass through. If you will give me a piece of tripe, I shall tell you what your bad fortune is to be." After that he came every day and repeated this remark. But the girl ignored him for some time. Finally, however, she became annoyed with this crow and said, "A plague on you!"¹ That is enough! Take this piece of tripe and go away! She then cut off a piece of tripe and threw it to the crow.

The crow caught the piece of tripe and swallowed it, Lap!² When he had finished the tripe, he said to the girl, "Your trial will be this: You will be required to attend a

¹This is a literal interpretation of the Turkish kıran giresice!

²This is meant to be the onomatopoeic representation of the sound of swallowing.

Trouble Bird
ORIGINAL (All)
Long, Hum-
spoken to animal

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after 1-5

dead man for (forty days and forty nights.)" 2

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When the girl heard this, she was upset by it. Thinking about this day after day made her ill. Her parents noticed how pale she was and became concerned about her health.

"Daughter, what is the matter with you?" they asked her repeatedly, but she never answered this question. Finally they asked some of her friends to help them in discovering what their daughter's illness was caused by

When her friends visited her, they asked her, "What is your ailment? You are losing more weight every day. What is the cause of this?"

The girl answered, "Yes, I am ill. I am worried about a great ordeal I must undergo. I have learned that I shall have to attend a dead man for (forty days and forty nights.)"

When her friends learned of the cause of her illness, they went at once and reported this to her parents: "Your daughter is sick with worry about an ordeal she must suffer. She has discovered that it will be her duty to attend a dead man for forty days and forty nights."

When the girl's parents learned this, they gave much thought to what they should do to help their daughter. They finally decided that the best solution to her problem that they could provide was to move to a village that had no cemetery. Accordingly, the following day they loaded all of

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their household goods on a wagon, leaving their original village and hoping to find another that had no cemetery. After traveling some distance, they came to a fountain on a plain. They stopped under a tree near that fountain to rest for a while before continuing their journey.

The mother said, "Come on; let's eat our lunch here and then travel on to a village that has no cemetery. How could a village be without a cemetery unless it were a village in which no one dies?"

fountain where they had stopped was beautiful. Water flowed from it to form a small lake a short distance away. Near that lake lay the ruins of an old palace. When the mother noticed the lake, she decided that it would be a good thing to have fish for lunch. She stood up to go to the lake to catch some fish, but the daughter said, "No, no, Mother! Let me go to catch the fish. Don't worry about me, Mother, for there is nothing here to harm me

The girl started out toward the lake, but on the way she became curious about the ruin beside it. She decided to take a look inside the old palace. While she was examining the interior of this palace, the heavy iron door³⁷ of the palace swung shut and locked. Standing inside the door, she began to cry, and when her parents came after her, they stood on the outside of the door and cried also. Night and day for a

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whole week they cried this way without being able to find a way to get the girl out of the palace. Concluding at last, "This is her kismet,"³ her parents left her there and returned to the village they had just recently left.

After being unable to find any way to escape from the palace, the girl thought, "Sitting here crying will achieve nothing. I should go upstairs and take a look around inside the palace." She did this and discovered that the palace had several rooms. When she opened the door of one of these rooms, she found the room to be filled with rice. She opened another door and found that room filled with gold. Opening still another door, she found behind it a young man lying upon the floor. In one corner of this room was some food all cooked and ready to be eaten. She could not stop crying, for she concluded that this was where her ordeal was located, and here was the dead man whom she was to attend for (forty days and forty nights).

She remained there watching over the dead man. When all but three of the forty days and nights had passed, she heard some noise coming from outside the palace. The sounds came from a passing caravan. Having been very bored by her long watch and wishing to have some company, she went to the window and called to the people in the caravan: "O people of ³Kismet is one's fate or destiny.

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the caravan! O people of the caravan! O you who put salt in your helva,⁴ I will give you a bag of gold for that bald girl⁵ among you." Bald

"All right, we accept that offer," they shouted. helped her to pull the bald girl up through the window, and she lowered to them a bag of gold. Now the two girls watched in the room of the dead man.

After the fortieth day and the fortieth night had been completed, the two girls were talking together when, all of a sudden, the young man revived and stood up. Then he went over and sat down between the two girls and asked, "O girls, which of the two of you stayed with me all that long time of forty days and forty nights?"

Quickly the bald girl said, "Master, pasha,⁶ I waited here with you throughout those forty days and nights."

The girl who had actually sat with him as her kismet could say nothing. She just sat there silently. The young man then married the bald girl in a ceremony that lasted

⁴ Helva is a candy-like confection made of sesame oil, flour, and honey.

⁵ The bald girl could be a female counterpart of a keloğlan, a boy suffering from baldness caused by ringworm infection of the scalp. It is also a euphemistic way of referring to an ill-favored, unattractive girl.

⁶ Pasha today means simply general. In an earlier time it meant a military governor of a province or other large area. Here it is used as a term of flattery.

Subtitle
Bald

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forty days and forty nights. The newlywed couple lived there in the palace, and a room was repaired and reserved for the girl who had completed her kismet.

After many weeks had passed, the young man decided that he would go on the pilgrimage to Mecca. He said to his wife, "Tell your sister in the other room that I am going to Mecca and that if there is anything she wants, I shall bring it to her on my return trip."

The bald girl went to the other room and said, "My husband is going to Mecca, and he says that you may request him to bring back for you anything that you wish."

"I do not want anything but a stone of patience and a knife of patience,"⁷ said the other girl. This was reported to her husband by the bald girl.

The young man went to Mecca and after carrying out his religious duties there, he started back to the palace. On the way back he found for sale a stone of patience and a knife of patience, and he bought these for the single girl living in his home. He asked his wife to deliver these two gifts

⁷The Stone of Patience is not listed either in the Aarne-Thompson Types of the Folktale or in the Thompson Motif Index of Folk Literature. In Turkish tales it is a special stone to which persecuted or unfortunate people tell their troubles. The implication seems to be that only a stone could listen to such a pathetic tale; sometimes, however, even the stone breaks apart on hearing the tragic recital.

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to the other girl, but he hid himself in a passage to that other girl's room where he could see and hear what she did and what she said.

The girl sat down and placed the stone and the knife before her. Then she began to tell her story to the stone. "O Stone of Patience, I was the only child of my parents. One of my chores was to go to the river every day and clean tripe. A crow used to come to the river and talk to me. After I had given it a piece of tripe, it told me that it was my kismet to watch over a dead man for forty days and forty nights. My parents were frightened at this prospect, and so they decided to move with me to a village that had no cemetery. On our way to look for such a village, we stopped near this palace. I wanted to catch fish in the little lake just beyond the palace, but I stopped here to look inside the building. While I was inside this palace, the iron door swung shut and locked, and I was thus compelled to remain inside. It was then that I began my watch of forty days and forty nights. Alas, O Stone of Patience! Alas, O Knife of Patience!" Saying this, she picked up the Knife of Patience

The young man who had been listening to her whole story realized now that it was this girl who had kept the vigil over him for the forty days and nights. He moved quickly out of hiding to prevent her from stabbing herself and said,

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"Now I realize that you were the one who watched over me
Why didn't you tell me this?"

Going then to the bald girl, he asked her, "Do you want
forty cleavers or forty mules?"⁸

"What could I do with forty cleavers? I'll take the
forty mules."

Shout Placing the bald girl upon a peevish mule and tying her
there, the young man then drove the animal out into the wilds
It ran forward with all its might and disappeared.

The young man then married the girl intended from the
beginning for him. Now they lived happily together.

⁸These are the standard options given to the condemned
in many Turkish folktales: Kırk satırmı, kırk katırma?
Almost always the condemned chooses the forty horses or mules,
sometimes hoping to escape on one of them. Here only one
mule is used, and this is true in about half the instances
where the option is given. When forty mules or horses are
actually used, the victim is tied to the tails of all forty,
and then the animals are driven off in different directions,
tearing the condemned apart. Regardless of how many horses
or mules are actually uses, the traditional formula, Kırk
satırmı, kırk katırma? is uttered.