

Story 1885 (1970 Tape 17)

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Location: Kumyaka (formerly Siği) village  
Mudanya kaza,  
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The Magic Gift Recovered from the Mouse Village

Once there was and once there wasn't<sup>1</sup> a family in which there was a son who was an excellent hunter. This family was very poor, and it survived by eating the game that the son brought home and then selling the skins of the animals.

The son had a cat and a dog which went everywhere with him. As usual they were with him when he went hunting. While walking in a mountainous area, they came upon a rabbit and a small snake which were fighting. Uncertain about what to do, the young hunter said to himself, "Which of them should I kill? If I kill the snake, we shall go hungry. If I kill the rabbit, we can eat its flesh and sell its pelt. Therefore I should kill the rabbit."

<sup>1</sup>This is the beginning of a tekerleme, the nonsense jingle that is a formulaic device used to begin many Turkish folktales. The tekerleme is comprised of a string of rimed absurdities and paradoxes. Here we have only the opening line of the most popular tekerleme.

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After the hunter had shot the rabbit, the snake started toward him. As the hunter was running away breathlessly, he heard the snake calling to him. "Don't run," it shouted. "Don't be afraid of me. I shall not harm you, for you have saved my life. I shall take you to my father." Then the hunter, the snake, the cat, and the dog proceeded to the home of the father of the snake. When they arrived there, snakes were lying about everywhere. The cat and the dog showed signs of wishing to attack those many snakes, but the young snake who was their guide said to the hunter, "Please tell your cat and dog not to harm any of these snakes or even touch them

A little farther on, they came to the small snake's father, Şahmeran,<sup>2</sup> who was the king of snakes. The small snake said to Şahmeran, "Father, this man saved my life today after I had been attacked by a large rabbit. He killed the rabbit and allowed me to live.

Şahmeran turned to the hunter and said, "Because

<sup>2</sup>In this tale Şahmeran is simply the king of snakes. In the best-known tale about Şahmeran, he is slaughtered by human beings so that his flesh may be used to cure an ailing padishah. In most Turkish tales Şahmeran is male; in many Persian variants Şahmeran is female, the queen of snakes.

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you saved the life of my son, you may ask from me anything that you wish

The hunter replied, "All that I wish for is your good health."<sup>3</sup>

Şahmeran said, "Son, my good health will not benefit you in any way. Make a better wish. Tell me what you would like for yourself."

Again the hunter replied, "All that I wish for is your good health."

And the king of snakes also repeated what he had said before: "My good health can be of no benefit to you. Ask for something that you would like."

Earlier, before they had entered the presence of Şahmeran, the little snake had given the hunter some advice. He had said, "If my father asks you to make a wish, tell him that you would like to have the tiny mirror that he keeps beneath his tongue."

Accordingly, when Şahmeran asked the hunter for a third time to state his wish, the young man said, "I should like to have the tiny mirror that you keep beneath

<sup>3</sup>This demurral is a conventional response to such a question in folktales. Out of respect for the person asking the question, the demurral is made two or three times.

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tongue.

Şahmeran immediately gave the hunter that little mirror and explained to him how it should be used. "If need anything, say to the mirror, 'Open, mirror, open!' There will then come forth from the mirror a huge black Arab with large lips.<sup>4</sup> He will carry out any order you give him

Taking the magic mirror, the hunter, accompanied by his cat and his dog, walked back to the forest and recovered his rifle. Then he started home, but after he had gone for some distance, he realized that he had grown very hungry. He said to the magic mirror, "Open, mirror, open!"

The big-lipped Arab came forth and asked, "What do you want?"

<sup>4</sup>Although in human form here, the creature called an Arab is a jinn. The word jinn suggests two very different kinds of supernatural beings. The first is the huge creature who comes forth from a bottle or appears in response to some signal, such as the rubbing of a magic lamp or ring. This creature then proceeds to give the caller supernatural or magic aid to achieve what he wishes. The other kind of jinn is never seen. It is a spiritual force referred to in some Sufi beliefs and in other mystical systems. --Turks know well that most Arabs are not black, but they frequently stereotype them as Negroes in folktales--sometimes, as here, even to the extent of giving them Negroid facial features.

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"I am very hungry," said the hunter. "Bring me some food." The big Arab immediately brought several dishes of delicious food. The hunter first satisfied his own hunger, and then he fed his cat and dog all that they could eat. The hunter was so happy that he threw the dishes into the forest. Then he continued on home

When his mother saw that her son was back, she said angrily, "May you go blind! Where have you been all this time? While you have been gone, we have had nothing at all to eat."

Her son answered, "Mother, I have brought you a rabbit. Take the meat and cook it for dinner. I shall go and sell the skin." When he returned from the market, however, he saw his mother still trying to cook the rabbit. Taking out his mirror, he said to it, "Open, mirror, open!" When the Arab appeared, the hunter ordered him to prepare a large tableful of many foods. It took the Arab only a few minutes to prepare this feast.

When his mother came into the room where the hunter was, she was astonished to see so much attractive food. She asked, "My dear son, where did all this food come from?"

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The hunter answered, "Mother, eat the grapes, do not ask from whose vineyard they have come." This is a Turkish proverb<sup>5</sup> which means, "Get the benefit from whatever you have, and do not worry about its origin." mother had never before seen so much food, and so she ate as much of it as she could and asked no more questions about it.

After a few days, her son returned to his practice of hunting. As he walked along the seashore on a very windy day, he looked out to sea and saw a large ship breaking apart and sinking. Among the floating wreckage, he saw an old woman clinging to a wooden plank. Jumping into the water, he swam out to that plank and towed it in to the shore. He took that old woman to his home said, "You may, if you wish, live here with my mother and me."

The hunter heard that the sultan had a very beautiful young daughter. One day when he had an opportunity to see that girl, he fell in love with her immediately and decided that he wished to marry her. When he returned home later that day, he told his mother to go to the

<sup>5</sup>See Yurtbaşı, Metin. A Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs (Ankara: Turkish Daily News, 1993), p. 586.

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sultan and ask for the hand of the princess for him. His mother walked to the sultan's palace, but when she got there, she was stopped by the palace guards. She could not tell these soldiers her reason for having come, but she said, "I want to see the sultan. I wish to ask him about something

The soldiers reported to the sultan, "There is a woman waiting outside the palace who says that she wants to see you."

The sultan said to those soldiers, "Give her a large bag of flour and send her back to her home."

Taking the bag of flour, the woman returned home and reported to her son what had happened at the palace. He at once took the bag of flour back to the palace. When the mother tried for a second time to see the sultan, she again failed, and this time she was given a large bag of food. That too the son returned. Then he said to his mother, "Mother, return to the palace once more. I do not want food or any other object. What I want is the hand of the sultan's daughter in marriage."

The mother returned to the palace, and this time she managed to find a way of gaining admission into

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the presence of the sultan. She said, "Your Majesty, I have come to ask for the hand of your daughter in marriage to my son. He saw your daughter as he passed by the palace and he wishes to marry her."

After thinking for a moment, the sultan replied, "I shall agree to have your son marry my daughter upon one condition, and that condition is that he must build a gold and silver palace one hand taller than my palace. If he can do that, I shall agree to the marriage."

To herself the woman said, "This is impossible! How could my poor son build a palace made of gold and silver?"

When she arrived home, she found her son there anxiously awaiting her return. "What did the sultan say to you?" he asked.

The mother repeated every word that the sultan had said to her. She then added, "My dear son, what the sultan has requested could never really happen. We are poor people."

But the son was not discouraged by this fact. He said to his mother, "It is not impossible. I can build a palace larger and better than that of the sultan. Oh, I am going to marry the padishah's daughter, and how happy



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we shall be!"

One night soon after that, the hunter said to the magic mirror, "Open mirror, open!" The mirror opened, and the large-lipped Arab stepped forth. The hunter ordered that Arab to build a large palace made of gold and silver across the street from the palace of the sultan. The large-lipped Arab did as the hunter had ordered, and there stood a palace better than the sultan's palace.

When the sultan's daughter arose the next morning, she looked out the window and saw the beautiful large palace across the street. She called out, "My dear father, look out the window and see the beautiful palace over there! The sun arose in the west today."<sup>6</sup>

Puzzled, the sultan asked, "My dear daughter, what are you talking about? How could the sun rise in the west?" Then he too looked out the window and saw the beautiful palace opposite his own. After observing it for a minute, the sultan said, "The hunter has built a palace more beautiful than mine."

<sup>6</sup>As the sultan indicates, this statement does not make sense here. It is a remark lifted from a variant of this text, where it is meaningful. The rival structure sits east of the sultan's home, and it is so towering that it blocks out the sunlight until after midday when the sun is west of its zenith.

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The poor hunter and the daughter of the sultan were married shortly after that. They had a wedding celebration that lasted for forty days and forty nights. After that, the newlyweds began to live together in his family home along with his mother and the old lady whom the hunter had rescued from the sinking ship.

Of course the daughter of the sultan had not learned to cook, or how to clean, or how to do other household chores, but her husband provided for having all of that work done. He simply used his magic mirror to command the large-lipped Arab to perform these duties.

After awhile the shipwrecked old woman began to wonder about the secret power the hunter had to accomplish all he had done. She spoke to the bride about this one day. "Since the day I was rescued from the sea and brought to this house, I have lived very comfortably with your husband and his mother. None of us has ever had to cook, clean, or do any other work, for every need we have had has been somehow provided by your husband. How does he manage to have all this done? What is the source of his secret power?" The princess did not know.

That night, however, she asked the hunter about it.

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"My dear husband, how do you manage to provide us with the things we have and all the things we receive? Since the day I married you, none of us has ever had to cook, clean, or do any other work."

The hunter responded, "My dear, enjoy the grapes but do not be curious about the vineyard from which they come."

But his wife was not satisfied with that answer, and after day she continued to ask him the same question. Unable to resist his wife's pleading any longer, the hunter finally decided to tell her about the source of his power. He thought, "Since she is my wife, there should be no harm done by telling her about the magic mirror." He took out the mirror and told her about it. "Whenever we need anything, I say to this mirror, 'Open, mirror, open!' When it has opened, a large-lipped Arab comes out of it and does whatever I tell him to do. If you would like to see how this works, go ahead and try it yourself right now

Very excited about this magic object, the wife said to it, "Open, mirror, open!" When the Arab appeared, she said, "I want a table full of candy, nuts, and tasty seeds." Before a second had passed, her request had been

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fulfilled, and she was delighted. Placing the mirror back in his pocket, the hunter departed.

Later that day the shipwrecked old woman again questioned the bride about her husband's secret power.

old woman was actually a very evil person. She asked "Have you learned your husband's secret yet?"

"Oh, yes, I have. He has a very small mirror which helps him to do anything he wishes. He just says to mirror, 'Open, mirror, open ' From the mirror comes a huge black Arab who does anything he is ordered to do.

The old woman smiled wickedly and said, "Thank pretty daughter, for this information." She then began thinking about how she might possess that magic mirror. One day soon after that, she saw the opportunity to it. While the hunter was taking a bath, she sneaked into his room and stole the mirror from his pocket. Then she called up the Arab and ordered him to do three things. She said, "First kill the hunter's mother. Then move the palace built by the hunter to Mouse Village, and then throw the hunter himself into some abandoned well." Of course all of these commands were carried out at once.

[Member of coffeehouse audience: "In this region is there really any place named Mouse Village?"]

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Narrator: "I have no idea. This is a story that I heard many years ago when I was a child. Maybe there is such a place and maybe there is not. If there was once such a village, its name could very well have been changed by this time."

After he had spent many hours at the bottom of the abandoned well, the hunter became hungry, but he had not been entirely forgotten. As time passed, the cat and the dog began to worry about their master. What had happened to him? They looked here and they looked there, but their search for him seemed to be quite hopeless. But near the end of the day the dog heard a sound that he recognized as his master's voice coming from the well. Realizing that by now the hunter must be very hungry, both the dog and the cat returned to the town to get some bread. When they arrived at the bakery, the cat said to the dog, "You stand here. I shall spring up onto the shelves and kick off some loaves of bread. You must catch them as they fall." Using this method, the cat and dog were able to take a whole armful of bread to their master

The hunter was pleased to receive this food, but he was even more pleased to see his cat and dog. He said to himself, "My cat and dog have found me, and so I shall be saved." For several days the cat and dog stole bread

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from the bakery in the same way and took it to their master.

But after awhile the owner of the bakery discovered that there was some bread missing every day. He questioned his employees about the missing bread, but the employees said, "We did not take any of the bread, and we do not know who has taken it."

The owner then said to himself, "I shall hide myself in the bakery, wait there, and find out who the bread thief is." While the owner was waiting in hiding, the hunter's animals entered the shop. The cat sprang up onto one of the shelves and kicked some loaves off it. As each loaf fell, the dog caught it. The owner immediately rushed out of hiding and started to chase the cat and the dog. Those two animals managed to flee to the well and dump the loaves down before they could be caught.

When the owner of the bakery saw what the cat and dog had done with the bread they had stolen, he became curious. Going to the mouth of the well, he shouted down, "Who are you? Are you a jinn or some other supernatural creature?"<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>This is the conventional query made in Turkish tales when someone is startled to discover a seemingly human being in a very unlikely place. The Turkish expression is in misin, cin misin?

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The hunter answered, "I am neither. I am a son of Adam and a human being like you."

The owner of the bakery pulled the hunter from the well and took him to his own home to recover from his ordeal in the well. There the hunter recounted the story of his life from the very time he had saved the life of Şahmeran's son through the time when the evil old woman had stolen his magic mirror and had had him cast into the abandoned well. After he had recovered, the hunter took his cat and dog and began searching for the evil old woman

After awhile they came to Mouse Village, a place where formerly only mice had lived. The cat and dog began at once to kill mice, but very soon a long-tailed mouse went to the hunter and said, "Please order your cat and dog not to kill the residents of this village. If you do so, I shall give you some valuable information about the beautiful palace in this village and about the evil old woman who lives there." The hunter told the cat and dog not to harm the mice any more, and right after that he saw his large palace towering above Mouse Village. He then said to the long-tailed mouse, "I shall never permit

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my cat and dog to harm another mouse if you will go to that palace and retrieve for me my mirror from beneath the tongue of that wicked old woman."

The long-tailed mouse went to the palace, and there he saw the sultan's daughter (who was also the hunter's wife) sitting on the floor with the head of the evil old woman in her lap. The princess was picking lice out of the old woman's hair. The mouse went into the palace kitchen, soaked his tail in olive oil, and then stuck it into a jar of ground pepper. He then jumped upon the old woman's chest and stuck his tail into her nose. This caused the old woman to sneeze--hapsu!--and when she did that, the magic mirror fell from her mouth. The mouse then ran back to the hunter with that mirror.

As soon as he had recovered his mirror, the hunter spoke to it: "Open, mirror, open!" He then ordered that the Arab who appeared must kill the evil old woman and then return the palace to its original position.

After the Arab had obeyed both of these commands, the hunter asked his wife to marry him all over again. They were remarried in a wedding celebration that lasted for forty days and forty nights, and they lived happily together forever after that.