

Story 2027 (Transcribed from tape  
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The Princess Who Became a Prince

There was once a sultan who had seven daughters but no son. His wife was pregnant again, and they hoped that this time the child would be a boy. But when the eighth child arrived, it was a girl. When the sultana learned this, she began to cry. The midwife asked, "Lady, why are you crying?"

"The sultan will become very angry at me. He may even have me executed, because he wanted me to bear a son. That is why I am crying."

The midwife said, "There is an easy solution for this problem. I can go and tell the sultan that you had a baby boy, and in that way I can save you." Holding the child in her arms, she went to the palace and said, "Good news, my sultan! Your new child is a baby boy!"

The sultan was delighted to hear this, for now he had seven daughters and a son. He was so pleased to receive that good news that he gave the midwife the very

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generous gift of a kilogram of gold.<sup>1</sup> He sent announcements of his son's birth to the rulers of all the surrounding countries. The sultans of neighboring lands sent a variety of gifts to the baby, one of which was a magic horse<sup>2</sup>

Years passed, and the child, always dressed like a boy, reached the age of ten. It was then time for the "boy" to be circumcised. The sultan ordered a large celebration for this occasion, to which he invited the royal families of several countries. When the sultana heard about this, she began crying again. Calling the midwife to her, she said, "You were the one who reported to the sultan that his last child was a boy. Now that the child

<sup>1</sup>This unusually large payment is probably only partly for the midwife's medical services. The rest may well be a reward for being the first to bring the desired good news of the birth of a boy. It was customary for bearers of good news to be rewarded. In some Turkish folktales messengers even presume to ask a ruler or other wealthy person, "How much will you give me for a piece of good news?"

<sup>2</sup>Common in Turkish folktales are supernatural horses, able to fly and endowed with the ability to speak in human language.

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is supposed to be circumcised, can you think of any way to save both yourself and me from disaster?"

The midwife thought for a moment and then she said, "Let us cook some of the child's favorite food and put poison in it." The mother objected to this idea, but the two women continued to discuss the matter. While they were talking, however, the child was watching them and overhearing every word which they spoke. Very sad, the child later went to her mother and said, "Mother, please do two last things for me. Give me your permission to leave this land. Give me also a statement that you have made helal<sup>3</sup> the milk with which you nursed me

The sultana answered, "I grant you both those

<sup>3</sup>Helal/Haram is a Muslim religious concept. That which is helal is that which is permissible according to canonical law. That which is haram is forbidden. There is no obligation or restriction or penalty for doing or taking whatever is helal, but there will be a penalty on Judgment Day for doing or taking what is forbidden. To accept something from a donor is helal; to take it or steal it is haram. Dying or endangered people often declare helal anything they have given to or done for another person, so that No. 2 will not go to Judgment indebted to another (which is haram unless declared helal by the benefactor). A mother can impose her will upon a child of any age by threatening not to make helal the milk with which she nursed the infant.

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requests."

The girl then mounted her magic horse and departed. As she did so, she could hear the sound of the circumcision celebration and see many guests arriving for that event. The sultan had ordered ten Janissary<sup>4</sup> bands to provide music for the feast. To feed all of the guests, he had ordered the slaughter of 150 sheep and 70 camels. But then it was discovered that the "prince" was not present. They looked everywhere in the city for "him," and search parties were sent out in all directions. No trace of the "prince" could be found. When the sultan finally admitted that his "son" had disappeared, the circumcision celebration came to a halt.

The magic horse had carried the sultan's eighth daughter (still dressed as a boy) a distance that would have required ninety days of walking. They then reached a city which at first seemed to be deserted. The streets were empty. After some time, however, the young "man" saw a woman standing in a doorway. He approached that

<sup>4</sup>The Janissaries were members of an elite Ottoman military corps which served several functions including that of Palace Guard. Their Mehter Bands may have provided the world's first military music.

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woman slowly and asked her, "Auntie, why is this city so quiet?"

The woman answered, "A giant comes to our city once a year and eats a human being. Tonight he will come and devour our governor."

The young "man" proceeded to the palace where he found the governor lying unconscious. The "boy" took his horse aside and pulled three hairs from its tail. When he rubbed those three hairs together, the horse began to speak, asking, "What do you want?"

The "boy" answered, "Do you know whether or not it would be possible for me to behead the giant who intends to devour the governor?"

"It would be possible for you to do so with my help," said the horse.

They waited outside the governor's palace for the appearance of the giant. Just as it was getting dark, they saw the monster approaching. It was as tall as a minaret. Riding the magic horse upward into the air, the "boy" was able to cut off that monster's head. The giant collapsed in front of the palace, and its blood covered much of the courtyard. The "boy" cut off one



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of the giant's ears and then left the palace with "his" horse and hid in another part of that city

When the governor woke up and saw the giant lying dead in its own blood, he announced that he would give a reward to the man who had killed that monster. Several people claimed to be the slayer of the giant. The governor doubted the claims of most of these people, but he nevertheless gave rewards to all of them. A week later the real giant killer went to the palace and said to the governor, "Those who claimed that they had killed the giant were lying to you. It was I who beheaded that very tall giant, and here is an ear that I cut from its head

The governor said to the young "man," "Wish for whatever you want, and I shall give it to you."

"I should like to have this servant girl," said the young "man." The girl was not really a servant but the daughter of the governor.

The governor turned to that girl and said, "Daughter, I shall give you in marriage to this giant killer."

"Very well." answered the girl, "but I have four provisions which must be satisfied before I shall accept him as husband."

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"What are those provisions?" the young "man" asked.

"I travel at night with a fairy boy who takes me to all sorts of unusual places. Can you discover where he takes me tonight?"

The young "man" left the palace and went to speak with "his" horse. "He" told the horse what had happened and what "he" was required to do that night. The horse said, "Take two hairs from my tail and heat them in the fire. That will cause an Arab to appear."<sup>5</sup>

When the giant killer had done as the horse had directed, an Arab appeared and asked, "What do you want from me?" The young "man" took from beneath the tongue of the Arab a magic seal which, when licked, would give "him" the ability to change "himself" into any form "he" wished.

That night the fairy boy entered as a pigeon into the room of the governor's daughter. He touched the girl with some magic object, and she too became a pigeon. The two then flew away. The giant killer, who had been watching the girl's room closely, licked the seal and turned "himself" into a sparrow. "He" then followed the pigeons, who

<sup>5</sup>A supernatural helper called up by means of magic often appears as an Arab in Turkish folktales.

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soon flew into a cavern which had before its entrance a poplar tree with golden leaves. The sparrow picked up two of those leaves, and after the giant killer had returned to "his" human form, "he" put those two leaves into "his" pocket. Later the two pigeons returned to the palace.

The next day the governor's daughter asked the giant killer, "Where did I go last night, my suitor?"

The young "man" answered, "You went to a cavern before which stood a poplar tree with golden leaves. Here are two of those leaves." After saying this, "he" handed the leaves to the girl.

The governor's daughter said, "You did discover where I went last night, and so you have fulfilled the first requirement of our agreement. If you can discover where I go tonight, you will have fulfilled the second requirement

As soon as it became dark that evening, the fairy pigeon again entered the girl's room. The girl reported to the fairy that the giant killer had discovered where they had gone the previous night. As before, the fairy touched the girl with a magic object and turned her too



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into a pigeon. As they flew away, the giant killer again licked the magic seal and became a sparrow once more.

When the pigeons reached the seashore, they shook themselves, became fishes, and plunged into the water. By licking the seal, the young "man" also became a fish and splashed into the waves. Deep in the sea they entered a palace, and there ate with golden forks and golden spoons food from golden plates. When the girl was not looking, the giant killer slipped off her ring and also took a golden fork and a golden spoon before they returned to the governor's palace.

On the following day the governor's daughter asked the giant killer, "My suitor, where did we go last night?"

The young "man" answered, "You went to a palace deep in the sea, where you had dinner on golden plates and ate your food with golden forks and golden spoons. Here are a golden fork, a golden spoon, and your ring, all of which I got there."

The girl responded, "You certainly have the right answer to my question. Here is my third condition for marrying you. There is a giant who lives in such and such a place. People who go to that place never return. The walls around his palace are made of human skulls. Before

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the giant's door there are growing a small pomegranate tree and a small quince tree. The pomegranate tree cries frequently, and the quince tree often laughs--kıkır, kıkır. I want you to bring those two trees here and plant them in front of this palace."

The young "man" hurried to the horse and asked, "Is it possible for us to get the crying pomegranate tree and the laughing quince tree?"

"Let us go there and see what we can do," answered the horse.

When they arrived at his palace, the giant was asleep. The horse stood between the two trees and the palace so that nobody inside that building could observe the young "man" uprooting the crying pomegranate tree and the laughing quince tree. The giant killer placed one tree under each arm and mounted "his" magic horse. When they arrived back at the governor's palace, the young "man" planted both trees before its main door.

When the governor's daughter saw those trees there, she said to the giant killer, "You now have just one condition to meet in order to win my hand in marriage. The giant from whom you took these trees has a golden mirror

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and a golden comb. If you bring those two objects to me, I shall happily become your wife."

Going at once to his horse, the young "man" explained this final requirement and then asked, "Can we get those two objects? I really have no choice but to do that."

"Let us attempt to do so," answered the horse.

After the young "man" had mounted "his" horse, ~~the~~ two of them set out again for the giant's home. When they arrived there, they found the giant cooking pilav.<sup>6</sup> When the giant saw the human being, it said, "Here is something suitable to roast and eat with my pilav."

The young "man" said, "Before you eat me, I have one wish. I should like to see your golden mirror and your golden comb." After the giant had revealed these two golden objects, the young "man" spoke again, saying, "I have also heard that you have a beautiful silver sword. May I see that too?" While the giant was looking on the ceiling for his silver sword, the young "man" grabbed the mirror and the comb, mounted his horse, and fled.

When the giant became aware of what was happening,

<sup>6</sup>A staple of Turkish diet, pilav is a rice dish which contains small flecks of meat and sometimes pine nuts.

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he shouted to the young "man," "Turn into a girl if you are now a boy! Turn into a boy if you are now a girl!" It was as a boy, therefore, that the suitor took the golden mirror and the golden comb to his bride.

The governor's daughter was so pleased that she agreed to marry the young man at once. A wedding celebration was begun. The music and feasting and games lasted for forty days and forty nights, and the two were then married