

Story #531 (Tape #5, 1974)

Allah met project
Narrator: Serif Ayildiz

Location: Sembik village, Belen
nahiye, İskenderun kaza,
Hatay Province

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The Extinction of a Family

I remember a story that Âşık Mehmet of Ak Bez village
Antakya] once told me

[Member of coffeehouse audience: Why don't you tell them about the
time you fell into the water?

Narrator: Let us not mix that in now.]

Once when I was a young man, I went to buy grain at the
village of Islahiye.¹ I had a companion a little older than I.
We reached that village and we started looking for a two-storey
house, the first storey being a stable where we could put our
horses. We finally found a two-storey house and called, "O owner
of the house, will you accept us as guests sent by Allah?" *Fwts of Allah*

A woman came out of the house and said, "Come in, sons.
your animals in the stable below, and then you come upstairs." We
pulled our animals inside, and then we went upstairs and sat down.
After Hos Bes and On Bes,² the woman said, "Sons, do you know
how to sing songs? Why don't you sing something sad so that we can

¹ In actuality this is not a village but a kaza town of Gaziantep Prov.

² This is a nonsense rime, a play on words. Hos bes means con-
viviality and refreshment in honor of a guest, but on bes, which
means simply fifteen, is quite illogical but is the kind of double
talk Turks sometimes use for humorous purposes.

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listen and thus while away the time?"

The older man said, "Well, auntie, my nephew does. Let him sing" (pointing to me).

She then said, "Come on, son. Let us hear you sing."

I sang a sad song about the following subject. There were some beys of Tiyek³ who were shot, and there were songs about their deaths. I decided to sing those songs, which I thought might please her. I sang one.

"Stop, stop, son," she said. "What shall I do with a song about others? I want a song about myself."

"Auntie, I am not a poet. I am singing a song I heard from someone else."

"All right," the woman said. "Let me sing, and you listen."

"If you do sing, we shall listen to you," I said.⁴

"Sons, we immigrated here--our fathers did, that is--from eastern provinces. I was the only child of my father, while my uncle also had an only child, a son. In time we both grew up. Our families bought property and land and became quite wealthy. One day my uncle and his wife came to us. He said [to my father], "Brother, I have not come here today as I did yesterday. Spread the cushions thick today."⁵

*Jug
Jug*

³ This reference is uncertain. In the Yakut Soviet Socialist Republic (predominantly Turkish) is Tyk, near the 70th parallel

⁴ The woman does not in fact sing but simply narrates her story in prose.

⁵ This is a figurative way of saying that he has come this time on serious business, not for a simple social call.

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"Very well; I shall spread the cushions two layers thick, if you wish."

They sat down and talked in a sociable way for a while. Then my uncle said, "Brother, thanks to Allah, our children have grown up. We are strangers here with but few relatives. If we ask for a girl from a stranger, people may use this to shame us. Your daughter has grown up as well as my son. With the permission of Allah,⁶ I want to have your daughter married to my son, and I have come as matchmaker⁷ to you."

"Of course, my brother. The girl is yours as much as your son is yours. But give me a day to talk this over with my wife. Come again tomorrow, and we shall fix it definitely."

Then my uncle arose and departed. But shortly afterwards my father shouted, "Daughter! Call your uncle back! I am dying!"

"Uncle! Something has happened to my father! Come quickly!"

My uncle reached him before he died, but they had barely enough time to say helâl⁸ to each other. My father said, "Brother, I am migrating to the other world, and I am trusting my family to you."

⁶ This is just part of the opening remark in the ritualized exchange between the matchmaker and the parents of the potential bride.

⁷ The narrator uses here the standard Turkish word for matchmaker, dünür.

⁸ Helâl means lawful or permitted, in most instances. Here it refers to a statement releasing another person from obligation or indebtedness. Unless one is released from all obligation or indebtedness from others, he will have to account for this indebtedness on Judgment Day. Moslems therefore ask a dying person for such a stated release, and they, in turn, give that same release to the departing. This indebtedness extends even to such things as the milk given by one's mother. A child asks her to make her milk helâl.

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"May you live long!" my uncle said, but the man died then.

Well, we wept and lamented for my father. About a month later my uncle came again, and this time he addressed my mother, "Sister-in-law, what can we do? We did not wish to have things happen this way, but it was our destiny kismet. It would be well to get these children married. Have you any suggestions?"

"Of course, my brother-in-law, both the girl and boy are yours Do as you wish."

My uncle arose and departed. Soon afterwards, however, my mother shouted, "Daughter! Call back your uncle--quickly!" By the time he reached my mother, they had time only to exchange helals before she died. Finally I was thus left a lonely girl living all by myself.

One day my uncle came to me and said, "What can we do? We did not wish to have things happen this way, but destiny prevailed."

"Uncle, uncle!" I said. "When you came once, my father died. When you came a second time, my mother died. This time it will be either you or I who will die."

"Whatever Allah ordains will happen, my daughter. It would be a disgrace for me to ask for the hand of someone else for my son while you live here all alone."

"I am not going to marry. I shall work as a slave until the end of my life, licking the ashes off the fireplace if necessary but I shall not marry. So marry your son to someone else. I think that there is some good reason for all of this." She thinks them unlucky.

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no! Whatever comes comes from Allah."

right, then," I said.

My uncle left and started preparing for the wedding, but before the ceremony could be held, my uncle died. Some time later, my aunt came to me. "My daughter," she said, "what shall we do? Everything seems to be going adversely."

"By Allah, aunt, I do not know what to say."

While she was saying, "Let us arrange for your wedding . . .," she too died all of a sudden.

At this point there were but two of us left, her son and I. The two of us moved into the same house, stretching a curtain across the middle, he sleeping on one side of it and I on the other. We lived for six months like this in the same house without exchanging even a word. He worked outside the house, and I did the house work, and we went on living this way.

One day my cousin finally spoke to me. "My cousin! My cousin!" he said. "Shall we continue like this? If I live until the morning, I shall slaughter my two-year-old ram, and next day I shall bring the drummers."⁹

*Faz
lany*

"Cousin, do not say that! I am afraid that something may happen to us." I could not sleep until the morning. I saw then that he was indeed slaughtering the ram. He invited in the neighbors and gave them a feast. When our wedding ceremonies were completed, we started

⁹ Syneccdoche for a wedding band--usually three or four pieces.

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living together as man and wife.

Two years, three years, five years passed, but there were no children. We went here and there, and we left no doctor or surgeon unvisited, but we could not find a remedy for our situation. We finally went to see Altunyan.¹⁰ (You know, Altunyan was a very famous doctor.) Well, Altunyan examined us and said, "Both of you have many children in your bellies, but what can I do? There is nothing wrong with you--any more than there is with me. What you must do is pray to Allah and hope for the best. Do charitable deeds, and if Allah then wishes to give you children, he will do so. If he does not, do not go on spending money here and there."

After this, we lost all hope of having children. One day I said to him, "I have a proposal to make to you, and do not refuse it. Tomorrow or the day after, either you or I will be dying, and then this house will be without offspring. Therefore, I shall marry you to another woman."

"Can you bear to do such a thing?"

"Have no fear about that. I can stand it." I went to one of the leading families and asked for their daughter, with the permission of Allah. I brought the bride with drum and pipe,¹¹ and now we were two women in the same house.

Polygamy

¹⁰ Altunyan was a famous Armenian doctor in Aleppo, now Syria. His son continues their practice as of the date of this tale.

¹¹ Again, this is a matter of synecdoche, the drum and pipe standing for the whole wedding celebration.

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After eating and drinking for five months I was pregnant. Five months later my sister-in-law was also pregnant. I said, "O Allah! The spell has finally been broken." Before the babies were born, however, my husband dropped dead. We two brides were left widows in the house, in time we had our babies, both sons. Mine we called Abdu, and my sister-in-law's Ali. We started rearing these children, crying and moaning.

Then one day my sister-in-law said, "I miss my parents. I shall make a visit to them."

"All right," I said, "I shall take you there."

My sister-in-law said that she wished to stay there for a while. She stayed one month, two months, and finally I went to her. My father-in-law¹² had more respect for me than my own father had ever had. He asked me, "Daughter-in-law, is there anything which you wish to tell us?"

"Yes, there is," I said.

"Well, then, let us hear it."

"You know, I asked for your daughter with the permission of Allah, and you gave her. We laid our heads on the same cushion. Come home with me and see for yourself what property your daughter has a right to take. those things and bring them over here to your house. Death is an obligation, and inheritance is helâl,¹³ for, according to what I hear, my sister-in-law

¹² Whether or not father-in-law is the correct term to indicate their relationship, this is the word that the narrator used.

¹³ In Moslem morality, all things are either helâl (proper, correct, permitted) or haram (forbidden). The narrator of the story-within-the-story is indicating that the second wife is entitled both legally and morally to her share of the dead husband's estate. The narrator did not wish to keep property not her own, for it would be haram to her and would eventually bring down upon her some divine retribution.

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is receiving many proposals. Perhaps you will let her marry again some day. I do not want to have anything that is rightly hers remaining in my possession."

"No, my daughter. Should a man about to wed that daughter be dependent upon your property? I cannot take even so much as a thread from you. You should live in your house and take care of your property. If you have any needs, just let me know."

right, then--and may you live long! But I do have a request to make of you."

what it is, my daughter."

"I cannot let the other son [Ali] be slapped about by some step-father. Would you let me keep the child?"

you think that you can provide for him?"

"Yes, I can." So I took one son on one arm and the other on the other arm. When at last they grew up, I said to them, "Sons, now I shall have you married. Which shall I marry first?"

My sister-in-law's son said, "Since my brother is six months older than I am, it is his right to be married first." Although I tried to persuade him to be married first, he refused, saying, "I cannot be married while my older brother waits."

I had Abdu married and brought the bride home. I was going to have my nephew engaged [but something intervened]. We had a piece of land near the house. The boys started plowing this field which we had bought from a neighbor. While the boys were at work plowing it, the former owner came to me and said, "They have plowed beyond your land into mine."

Then the brother of this former owner arrived. He also objected,

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saying, "We sold this field to you, and that line was the boundary, but your sons have trespassed beyond that boundary. What a thing to do!"

"I do not know," I said. "The children plowed it. I was not present."

Between themselves they said, "These brothel-keepers died and died, but they still did not die out. Now they are increasing again. Someday they will possess the entire village! Let us kill them and thus put an end to their line." They took their weapons to the field where the boys were plowing and shot ~~them--chat, chat!~~ ^{them}

When people heard the shots, they rushed to the field. As I was preparing breakfast, the people said to me, "Oh, come! Oh, come! Shots have been heard, and everyone is running to your field. What has happened?"

I went there and saw the two boys lying in different parts of the field, covered with blood. How could one bear this? You could not bear it even if your heart were stone. They exterminated our family, and then they--there were six of them--ran off into the woods. I paid 3,000 liras to have three of ~~them~~ shot in the mountains. The other three were arrested. One of them died in prison, and so only two remained. If they should ever get out of prison, I shall have them shot too. For me there is no longer any joy in living."

The woman sang a few songs that night about the two sons, until the time must have been one, two, or three o'clock. I was very sleepy and so I cannot remember the words of those songs [said ^{Âşik} Mehmet]."

Ahmet Uysal: Is ~~this~~ something that really happened?

Serif Ayildiz: Yes. And later those two men got out of prison, and the woman paid 2,000 liras to have them shot. Then she went to the government Treasury and donated all of her property

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saying, "I have no heirs. Let all my property go to the state Treasury."

He [Âşik Mehmet] told me this tale, which I enjoyed very much. He is the kind of man you cannot find elsewhere, and you should visit him. He also knows the lives of sixty-two âşiks. If I were not a shepherd with work to be done, I should go with you to see him.]