

Story 1995 (1992 Tape 9)

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Location: Kılıçkale village,  
Lefkoşa kaza, North  
Cyprus Turkish  
Republic

Date: December 27, 1992

### Two Disloyal Wives

There was once a poor man who supported his family by selling bushes and shrubs which he had dug out of the nearby forest. One day the daughter of this poor family said to her mother, "Mother, everyone else goes to the hamam<sup>1</sup> and takes a good bath. Let us go to the hamam and do the same thing."

"We must wait until evening when your father comes home. Then I shall ask him about this matter," the woman answered.

When the bush and shrub seller reached home, his wife said to him, "My dear husband, our daughter and I shall not bathe for two days, and then we should like to go to the hamam and bathe very well. Can you give us enough money for that purpose?"

"All right," said the man. "Here is enough money for that."

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<sup>1</sup>A hamam is a Turkish public bath. Before the time of modern plumbing, hamams were numerous and were heavily used. They had an abundance of hot water flowing either from hot springs or from large boilers in the basement. Most of the time they were patronized by men, but at least one day of every week was reserved solely for the use of women.

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As the woman had said, she and her daughter waited for two days and then went to a hamam in Lefkoşa. While they were bathing themselves, they saw another woman enter the hamam. She was the wife of the leader of a band of thieves. As soon as the wife of the hamam owner saw the thief's wife, she rushed to her and welcomed her warmly. She then helped the thief's wife bathe. Later she had some of the bath attendants peel apples and other fruit, cut them into small pieces, and drop them slowly into the mouth of that special customer.

After the wife of the bush seller and her daughter had finished washing themselves, they returned home. When her husband came back from work that evening, the wife reported to him what had happened at the hamam. "My dear husband," she said, "when we went to the hamam today, no one welcomed us there, and none of the other women there included us in their conversation. But when the wife of the leader of the the band of thieves entered the hamam, she was treated very differently. The wife of the owner ran to her and welcomed her warmly. Then she helped that customer to bathe. Later, attendants peeled apples and other fruit, cut them into small pieces, and dropped them into the mouth of that customer. Nobody offered us such hospitality. You must become a thief so that we too will be recognized by others."

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The bush seller was shocked by this suggestion. He said, "How can you think in this way? How can I, at the age of seventy, become a thief and steal things from other people?"

"You should learn how to become a thief. Go to the leader of the band of thieves and ask him for a job. He may teach you how to steal successfully."

After they had argued about this proposal for awhile, the husband felt that he had no choice but to appeal to the master thief for help. Going to that leader, the old man said, "Hey, friend, I have a problem." Then he told him about his wife's experience at the hamam and that she had urged him to become a thief so that she and her daughter would be treated more respectfully by other women. "She thought that you might teach me how to become a successful thief."

"There is no special training needed to become a thief," said the master thief. "I shall take you to the yard of a wealthy home. You will enter that yard quietly, take whatever you see of value, and leave quietly. That is all there is to it."

That evening the master thief walked with the old man to a house which had a large yard and left him there. The bush seller saw in that yard a large cauldron and a fat sheep. He was about to take the cauldron, but he thought, "If the owner of this house should slaughter this sheep in the morning and then wish to cook it, he could not do so

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if I should have removed his cauldron.” Then he decided to slaughter and cook the sheep himself for the owner, after which he could steal the cauldron. He tied the legs of the sheep and laid it down to be killed, but the sheep bleated so loudly that it awakened the owner.

The owner came down into the yard and shouted, “Hey, you old man! Who are you and what are you doing in my yard? Are you a thief?”

“Oh, how could a man of my age be a thief? I was planning to borrow your cauldron, but then I thought that perhaps you might wish to slaughter your sheep in the morning and cook its flesh in this cauldron. So I decided to slaughter your sheep myself and cook it for you. After that, I would feel free to borrow your cauldron.”

“Be!”<sup>2</sup> said the owner. “Change your mind and do not do such a stupid thing!” He liked the old man’s explanation, and so he got a small bag of gold and gave it to him, saying, “Take this small bag of gold. Use it until you can find some respectable work and stop behaving dishonestly.” The old man took the bag of gold and left.

On the following day the master thief asked him, “What did you find of value in the yard of that house last night?”

“I saw nothing worth taking before the members of the household awoke and made it necessary for me to flee.”

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<sup>2</sup>An explosive interjection which could mean Hi! or I say!

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That evening the old man was taken to another wealthy home. In the yard of that house he found a golden grinder. He started to take this grinder, but then he noticed a box of black pepper seeds alongside of it. He thought, "If I take away this grinder, the lady of the house will not be able to grind her black pepper seeds." So he decided that he should first grind the pepper seeds for her and then take the grinder.

As the old man was grinding the pepper seeds, the owner of the house was awakened by the noise. He shouted, "Hey, old man, who are you? Are you a thief—or what?"

The bush seller replied, "How can someone as old as I am be a thief? I saw this grinder in the light falling from your window, and I wished to borrow it. But then I saw the box of black pepper seeds alongside of it, and so I decided to grind them for the lady of this house before I borrowed her grinder."

The owner of the house liked this intelligent answer, and so he too rewarded the intruder. He said, "Here is a handful of gold for you. Use it to change your way of life and do something useful with your time."

In the morning the master thief asked, "Old man, what valuable thing did you steal last night?"

"I could find nothing in that yard to steal."



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That evening for the third time the master thief took the bush seller to the yard of a large house to find something to steal. There he saw a beautiful quilt spread out on the grass. He was about to take that quilt when he discovered that there was a young girl sleeping beneath it. He thought, "If I take this quilt, the girl may grow cold and become sick." Looking around, he saw standing against the house the kind of closet used to store bedding.<sup>3</sup> He hoped to get from that closet something with which he could cover the girl so that he could take her quilt. Unable to find the key to this closet, he took an axe and cut through the closet door. Hearing the crash made by the axe, the homeowner awoke and came running down to the yard. "Hey, old man," he shouted, "what are you doing?"

"To keep myself warm until dawn, I wanted to borrow the quilt spread over this girl, but I was afraid to leave her uncovered lest she catch cold. I was searching in this closet for a blanket with which to cover her." The people of that household liked that response, and so the owner gave the old man some money. He said, "Father, take this money and stop such improper behavior."

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<sup>3</sup>This is a sandık, the lightly built wooden chest that may be used for this purpose or as a young woman's hope chest. The narrator uses a dialectal form of the word, sandral. It is stored atop a wardrobe closet.

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The old man went home and said to his wife, "Woman, I am going to cease being a thief. The master thief will not believe me much longer when I tell him morning after morning that I got nothing valuable from the yard to which he had taken me."

His wife grew very angry and shouted at him, "If you will not continue to be a thief, then you must become a pimp!"

The bush seller went to the local title office and sat down outside the main door. After awhile an assistant clerk went to him and asked, "Why are you sitting here?"

The old man answered, "I am sitting here because I am a pimp." Then a little later a clerk went out and asked him the same question. The old man gave him the same answer. Finally the head clerk appeared and repeated the question that had already been asked twice. "I am here because I am a pimp," said the old man for the third

The head clerk replied, "If you are a pimp, you cannot loiter here. This is a respectable title office. You should go to the brothel district for your business."

After the bush seller had found the brothel district, he sat on a bench in a small park there and waited. Soon a well-dressed young man came along and asked him, "Who are you?"

"I am a pimp."

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When the young man heard that, he wrote a brief letter and handed it to the old man. "Take this letter," he said, "to the address I have written on it and give it to the woman whose name is above that address." With the letter, he handed the old man a mecidiye.<sup>4</sup> The old man took the letter to that woman at the address indicated. She read the letter and wrote a response. When the young man received that response, he put the letter in his pocket and walked away. But the old man did not let him escape so easily. He began following the young man about. When the young man ran in flight, the old man ran in pursuit. No matter how the young man tried to elude the old man, he was unable to do so. When the young man entered the woman's house, the old man slipped in through the door behind him.

The woman said, "I have prepared food. Let us all sit at the table and enjoy it." After they had finished the meal, the woman dismissed the old man, but before he could leave, there was a knock on the front door. Looking through the keyhole, the woman discovered that the person standing before her door was her husband, back from a five-year stay in London. She said to her lover, "I shall hide you under the bed, and I shall put the old man above in the bedding closet." After she had hidden her two guests, she opened the front door and

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<sup>4</sup>A silver coin put into circulation by Sultan Abdul Mecit (1823-1861).



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welcomed her husband, pretending to be delighted to see him. She said, "Oh, my dear husband, what a wonderful surprise! I saw you in my dream last night, and now you are here! You cannot imagine how happy I am to see you! I have prepared some food, which I was going to eat by myself, but you are here now and can join me in a meal." A few minutes later, she asked, "Did you think about me at all while you were away from home?"

"I placed your welfare in the hands of the One above. I hold him responsible for your present situation."

When he repeated that statement a few minutes later, the old man in the bedding chest called out, "Stop saying that the one above is responsible for your wife's present situation! The young man really responsible for that is hiding beneath the bed."

The young man then came from beneath the bed, and the old man climbed down from the sandık. The husband said to the young man, "Take this woman and go away. I do not want to see her in my house again." Then turning to the bush seller, he asked, "Old man, what do you have to say for yourself?"

"I say that I wish my wife had never gone to the hamam. All of my troubles started with her and my daughter's visit to the Lefkoşa hamam. Wanting more money and more attention, she forced me to become a thief. As if that were not bad enough, she later forced me to

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become a pimp. The young man asked me to carry a letter to this woman, and I did so. Being hungry, I followed the young man to this house, where we had just finished eating when you arrived.”

The betrayed husband said, “Hey, old man, forget what has happened. I have just come from London with a large amount of money. Give your daughter to me in marriage.”

The former bush seller returned home and got his daughter. After her marriage to this wealthy man, she became a fine lady.