

Story 1790 (1976 Tape 16)

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Location: Aliçerçi village,  
Bozkır kaza,  
Konya Province

Date:

Two Brothers Try to Arrange Marriage  
for Widowed Mother

There was once an old woman who had two grown sons. She had gotten these sons married, but ever since the weddings, she had spent much of her time beating the two brides.<sup>1</sup> One day the younger brother said to the older one, "Ağa Bey,<sup>2</sup> what do our brides do that causes our mother to keep beating them? They are serving her well

<sup>1</sup>Unless young Turks are well employed or financially comfortable, they and their wives live with their (the grooms') parents. In that situation a bride becomes a virtual slave of her mother-in-law. She is expected to do all of the housework and to wait on her mother-in-law hand and foot without any thanks or indication of gratitude. All too often she leads a miserable life until she and her husband can escape to quarters of their own.

<sup>2</sup>The word aga means literally rural landholder. Outside that context, however, aga is often used as a mild honorific. A bey in pre-Republican times was an aristocrat similar to a British baron or lord. Nowadays the term is often used as an honorific or courtesy expression. To show respect to a Turkish male, you may call him Ağa Bey. This is also the standard term of respect used by siblings when addressing their oldest brother.

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They prepare her bed each night and make it up for in the morning. They help her to perform her ritual ablutions before prayers. They are really serving her very well. What is her complaint with them? Ağa Bey, let me offer to seek another husband for our mother."

"Oh, but she is eighty-five years old! How would you offer to a prospective husband a woman her age? For the love of Allah! Are you crazy?"

"Well, let us at least try once to do that," said the younger son. Going to their mother, he said, "Mother, I shall go and try to arrange to have you married to Ahmet Ağa. Aren't you very bored now? Isn't that why you keep fighting with our brides?"

The mother started laughing, "Ha, ha, ha! I have had two husbands, but look at me now and see what you would be offering in marriage. Long live my son!"

"Very well, Mother. You may laugh, but you never know what may happen. I shall go and get an imam<sup>3</sup> and

<sup>3</sup>A religious leader whose main work is to conduct the five daily prayer services in the mosque.

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have him conduct your engagement service."<sup>4</sup>

Although the old woman laughed at her son's idea, she was very pleased by it. She was so excited that she went and sat outside the front door to await the arrival of the imam who would conduct the engagement ceremony. She sat there a very long time, growing colder and colder. As night came on, she was so cold that she grew very stiff. She became almost paralyzed. She thought, "They probably couldn't find an imam. Perhaps they couldn't remember my full name." As she was freezing to death, she kept saying, "My name is Habiye--Habbu-bu-bu That was how she died

The next morning the older son started looking for her and calling, "Mother! Mother!" But by the time he found her, she was frozen as hard as a tree stump. Going to his younger brother, he said, "I think that you are

<sup>4</sup>Engagement to be married is a far more important and formalized matter in Turkey than in many other places. The engagement service and the party that follows it may be as expensive and include as many guests as the wedding celebration itself. This may in part be a concomitant of arranged marriages. The engagement is often the culmination of matchmaking negotiations and mutually exploratory visits between the two families involved.

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responsible for our mother's death."

The younger one answered, "What can we do if she is dead except to say, 'May Allah have mercy on her!?' We have already earned merit in the eyes of Allah by saving the lives of our brides."