

Story 1581 (1977 Tape 17)

Narrator: Behçet Mahir, 68

Location: Erzurum, capital city
of Erzurum

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The Sword of God and the Faithful Servant¹

Once in the past there was a bey² who was very rich. This bey had a servant, a very honest young man, who had worked for him for seven years. One day the bey's wife said to the bey, "Husband, our servant has now been working for us for seven years, and he has been a good man. Let us now show him what kind of master you are and what kind of master's wife I am. I shall look for a suitable bride for him, and then after I have found one, you can give him some money with which to start a business of his own. After that has been done, we can let him live in the building which is attached to the back of our own house." The bey liked very much these thoughts of his wife.

¹This interpolated story in ATON No. 1700 is a folktale in its own right. In order to avoid losing its identity entirely in that extremely long tale, we have (for indexing and cataloguing purposes) entered it here under its own ATON number.--Five months later (May 1977) Behçet Mahir inserted this same tale into his rendition of one of the great Middle Eastern love stories, "Ferhat and Şirin" (ATON No. 1701).

²In earlier times a bey was a landed aristocrat. They were sometimes given political assignments. Since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 there have been no beys of this kind. Today the word bey is sometimes placed after a man's first name as a gesture of respect: Hasan Bey.

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One day the bey's wife said to their young helper, "Son, get the carriage ready. I am going to take some of the neighborhood girls and go to Cermik³ for a day's outing." The servant hitched the horses to the carriage and then drove the bey's wife and the girls to Cermik. When they arrived at Cermik, he pitched a tent for the ladies

As the wife of the bey and the girls were preparing to go to the hot mineral bath at Cermik, they took off all of their jewelry. The bey's wife wrapped all of this jewelry in a large handkerchief, but instead of putting the handkerchief into a chest in the tent, as she had intended to do, she placed it in her bosom. When they were ready to go to the bath, the woman said to her servant, "Get the meal ready for our return. And you should eat something, too

She then started walking to the bath with her girls. Along the way she stumbled and fell to the ground. Although no one noticed it, when she fell, the handkerchief full of jewelry dropped from her bosom and slid under a stone. bey's wife was not injured, and so they proceeded to the bath. After they had finished bathing, they returned to the tent,

³This is Çermik. (In eastern Turkey the sounds of the Turkish letters c, ç, and k often deviate from their pronunciation in Standard Turkish.) Çermik is a village or nahiye just west of Erzurum. It is named after the hot-spring bath there, for the word çermik (synonymous with kaplıca) means hot-spring bath--much preferred to baths using furnaces to heat their water.

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where the servant had the meal prepared for them. But when the bey's wife opened the chest, she could not find within it the handkerchief of jewels which she thought she had left there. She immediately called the servant and asked, "Son, have you seen a handkerchief full of jewelry which I placed in the chest before we went to the bath?"

The helper answered, "No, lady, I have seen no such handkerchief. I did not touch the chest during your absence."

She repeated the same question, and the helper gave the same answer. Because the jewelry was very valuable, she wanted some explanation of what had happened to it. She questioned him very rigorously and accused him of having stolen the jewelry. They then returned home in great haste.

The woman went to her husband and said, "Sit down, Husband. I have something very serious to tell you. It has snowed upon the mountain that we thought was safe. I am very sad, because the male servant who has hitherto always been so honest today stole all of my and the neighborhood girls' jewelry, but he denies this completely."

The bey called the helper to him and asked him the same questions that his wife had asked. He got the same answer that his wife had received. This made the bey very angry, and so he decided to take the helper to court.

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On the day of the trial the judge said to the helper "Son, take your ritual ablution and then take an oath in the name of God that you neither took nor even saw the jewelry.

But when the helper had taken his ablutions and had placed his hand upon the Koran to take his oath, he saw the sword of God descending from the ceiling over the head of his master because the master had accused him falsely. When he removed his hand from the Koran, he saw that the sword ascended again into the ceiling. The judge said to him again, "Son, do not be afraid. Tell us the truth.

The helper thought for a moment. He looked at his master, at his master's wife, and at their children. He thought, "If I take that oath on the Koran, I believe that the sword will cut off my master's head. Therefore I shall not take that oath." To the judge he said, "I cannot take an oath upon the Koran. Tell me how many years I shall be required to work to pay for the missing jewelry."

The judge said to the bey, "Your servant was afraid to take an oath on the Koran. Tell me how much time he would have to work to pay for the jewelry.

"Very well," answered the bey. "To do that he would have to work for seven years without any pay." The servant agreed to this, and he began at once to work for another seven years

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Time passed, and at the end of a year the bey's wife said to the helper, "Son, take me to Cermik again. Last year at this same time we went to Cermik, and I had a very bad experience there. This time I want to go there and enjoy myself."

The helper got everything ready, and they went to Cermik again. There he pitched the tent at exactly the same spot it had been the year before. The bey's wife then said, "This time I shall give you my jewelry with my own hand so that we shall not have any confusion about it later on."

The helper said, "Yes, lady. Now I am placing your jewelry in this chest. When you return from the bath, I shall give it back to you. In this way you will be able to go anywhere you wish with peace of mind."

The wife left the tent and started toward the bath. Along the way she saw her old handkerchief on the ground under the edge of a stone. Taking the handkerchief up from the ground, she opened it up and found inside all of the jewelry that she thought had been stolen. She was greatly surprised and puzzled. Returning at once to the tent, she said, "Son, I have found all of the jewelry that I lost last year. But, son, you knew that you had not stolen it. Why did you not take an oath to that effect?"

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The helper said, "I shall answer that question only if we return to the same court and the same judge."

They again returned home from Cermik in great haste. Then the master, his wife, and their helper went back to the same judge. After the recovery of the lost jewelry had been explained to the judge, the judge asked the helper, "What was the matter, son? Why didn't you tell the truth to us a year ago here in this court?"

The helper answered, "O judge, when I was about to take the oath, with my hand upon the Koran, I saw the sword of God descending upon the head of my master. If I had taken the oath, my master's head would have been cut off by that sword. That is the reason that I did not take the oath."

The judge then arose and kissed both the eyes of the helper.