

Story 1201 (1990 Tape 12)

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The Absentmindedness of Three Old Ladies

One day three old ladies who lived in retirement were having a heart-to-heart talk about some of their problems. Soon the discussion turned to the absentmindedness and forgetfulness of old people.

One of the old ladies said, "Oh, sisters, I have become very forgetful. Sometimes when I am talking on the telephone, I cannot remember whether I made the call or the person speaking with me made the call, and so I do not know which of us should end the conversation."

A second old lady said, "Oh, that is not so bad! My situation is even worse. Sometimes when I am out walking along the street, I cannot remember whether I am on the way to my home or from my home."

The third old lady said, "Ha! This sort of absentmindedness never happens to me!" Then to protect herself from being punished for this boast, she knocked on wood, pulled her earlobe,

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and said, "May the Devil's ears be sealed with lead!"¹ Looking around suddenly, she asked, "Was that someone rapping on the door?"

¹Excessive pride or arrogance--often called hubris in Western civilization--may (it is often thought) bring retribution from some supernatural power. To hedge against such retribution, the old lady here makes the traditional Turkish gestures (knocking on wood, pulling her earlobe), and utters the traditional Turkish request ("May the Devil have lead poured in his ears!" or "May the Devil's ears be sealed with lead!"). Turkish audiences know well this tradition, and so they immediately burst into laughter at the old lady's final question.