

Story 1496 (1976 Tape 3)

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Location: Kırşehir, capital of  
Kırşehir Province

Date: June 30, 1976

The Padishah's Three Sons and the Quest for the Unique Nightingale

Once there was and once there was not, when Allah's worshipers were many but to say many was a great, great sin<sup>1</sup> Well, back in that time there was a padishah who lived in a palace with his three sons. One day a witch woman<sup>2</sup> came to the palace and said, "My padishah, you are very handsome and so are your three sons. You have everything in this fine ace except a unique<sup>3</sup> nightingale."

"Where would one find such a nightingale?" asked the ishah.

The witch did not answer that directly. She only said, "One who searches may find both evil and his God."

<sup>1</sup>The opening lines of a well-known tekerleme, a formulaic opening for a Turkish folktale. The tekerleme is a comically nonsensical, rimed jingle filled with paradoxes and non sequiturs. It has three purposes: to signal that a folktale is about to begin, to entertain the audience, and to stimulate the wits of the audience into readiness to appreciate a good story.

<sup>2</sup>In Turkish folktales the word witch may mean different things. It may refer to someone with supernatural powers or to someone with such powers who is also a ghoul. It may refer to a troublemaker with evil intentions. Or it may refer simply to a shrewd and manipulating older woman willing to sell her services for the carrying out of any nefarious scheme. The witch here seems to be of the third of these types.

<sup>3</sup>The word unique was added by the editor. In this fairly common folktale type, the quest is almost always for a specific

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When the padishah's three sons heard about this, they decided to go and find a unique nightingale for their father's palace. Taking their horses from the stable, they filled all three saddlebags with gold and set forth on their search. After they had traveled for some time, they came to the foot of a large boulder at an intersection where they intended to separate and proceed in different directions. The oldest brother said, "Let us all leave our rings on this rock. Then the one of us who returns here first will go in search of the other two."<sup>4</sup> After leaving their rings there, the three brothers rode off in three different directions.

The routes taken by the two older brothers led them to large cities. There they both spent their money foolishly until they were impoverished and had to take very lowly jobs in order and very unusual nightingale: a golden nightingale, a magic nightingale, a Haziran nightingale, and so forth. The nightingale is such a widely distributed bird that there would be no need to go on a quest for just any nightingale.--This is the only word that we have added to this tale. Elsewhere, however, footnotes indicate other lapses in the narrative of this aged and sometimes inept raconteur.

<sup>4</sup>In this tale type when brothers (two or three) leave objects at a crossroad where they are to separate, those objects are usually life tokens. The present narrator is apparently unaware of that tradition in Turkish tales. In Turkish folktales there is a wide range of what may be called life tokens. Talismans and amulets are often much more than simple good-luck charms, for they are integrally related to the physical condition or even the life itself of a human being or other creature. Some life tokens are separable souls hidden in some secret place--a box, the stomach of a deer, the stomach of a

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to survive. They both became porters<sup>5</sup> and were reduced almost to the condition of animals.

The youngest brother continued along the road he was traveling until he came to the tent of a fine young man. He did not see the owner of the tent but he saw that young man's sister sitting nearby washing bloodied clothes. He called, "Selamünaleyküm."

"Aleykümselam,"<sup>6</sup> answered the girl.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"We are involved in bloody battles, and that is why I am here doing this," she answered.

fish--in order to protect the lives of their owners. If you can find the separable soul and destroy it, you thereby kill its owner. Sometimes, on the other hand, the life token must be kept in the possession of its owner. If it is taken away, the owner may lose consciousness or be transformed into some other form. Sometimes a life token is a gauge of a person's condition and is watched closely by its owner's friend or relative in order to keep posted on the welfare of the owner. It may be a gem which changes color if its owner is in serious trouble; it may be a knife which turns rusty for the same reason

<sup>5</sup>A Turkish porter (hamal) is on the very lowest rung of the labor ladder. Neither of the elder brothers becomes a literal porter, and so the term hamal is used in a generic sense to indicate any very lowly job.

<sup>6</sup>Selamünaleyküm/Aleykümselam--traditional exchange of greetings between Moslems not well acquainted with each other. It means roughly May peace be unto you/And may peace be unto you, too. If Selamünaleyküm is not responded to, the speaker should be wary of the one so addressed.

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"Where is the war?"

"It is at such and such a place," she said.

The youngest brother went to the place she described, and he found there an army of giants fighting an army of other soldiers. As he approached, he was observed by the giants, one of whom said, "This battle is so even that if that stranger joins our side, we shall win. On the other hand, if he joins the other side, we shall all be killed."

The youngest son joined the army of giants and together they killed all of the troops on the opposite side. The giants took him to their home after the battle had ended, and there they fed and entertained him for months. The young man fought with the giants; he stood with the giants; and now he sat with the giants. One day he said to the sister of the giants, "I have been in your part of the world all of this time, but you have never asked me why I came here."

is not proper to ask a guest why he has come," said all of the giants.

"Very well. Then I shall tell you why I came. I came here in search of the unique nightingale for my father's palace."

"I shall make it possible for you to find the way to the

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place where that nightingale is kept."<sup>7</sup>

[fairy] girl said, "Continue from this place along the same road that brought you here. After a while you will come to a palace so high that it seems to reach all the way to the sky. Before that palace is a meadow. Dismount and let your horse graze in that meadow, and while it is doing so, you lie on the grass and rest."

The youngest son did as the fairy had directed. When he came close to the high palace, he dismounted and let his horse graze while he himself lay on the grass.

There soon came to the meadow an Arab who said, "Would anyone who knows my reputation dare to dismount from his horse and lie here in this meadow? Bring some meat for him which still has blood in it." When the meat was brought, the youngest son took one taste and spat it out. "Eat!" said the Arab

"I was born only once, not twice," replied the youngest brother

"Very well. Now let us wrestle," said the Arab.

fairy girl had told the youngest son about all that was now happening. She had said, "That Arab who will demand

<sup>7</sup>There is apparently a brief episode omitted from the tale here. A fairy girl aids the protagonist here, and she is one of the three girls he starts home with as wives for himself and his two brothers. There is no indication here, however, of how the protagonist moves from the home of the giants to where the fairy girl lives. The sister of the giants is here indistinguishable from the fairy girl.

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that you wrestle with him is not really a man. It is a girl dressed to look like a man. When you wrestle with her, you can defeat her by grabbing her breasts. In that way you will be able to throw her.

The youngest brother now remembered that advice and grabbed the girl by the breasts and threw her to the ground. As he sat upon her chest, the girl opened up her veil and revealed a beauty so great that it seemed that the moon had risen.<sup>8</sup>

The youngest brother then took her into the palace, which was her home. There he discovered that he was the only man in the building whose head was still on his shoulders. All of the other men there were headless, and their heads filled shelves around all of the walls. "What is your wish?" the girl asked

"I am searching for the unique nightingale for our palace.

"All right," she said. "Now that I am your friend, I shall tell you how to get that nightingale. Continue along the same road by which you came here and you will soon come to a stream of foul water. Take ablutions in that water and perform two

<sup>8</sup>Throughout the Moslem Middle East the moon is greatly admired as a symbol of beauty. Both oral and written literature testify to this. To compare any woman's beauty to that of the moon is to flatter the female. Here the girl is not only being compared with the moon but she is said to exceed that celestial orb in beauty. So great is her beauty that it seems to be saying to the moon, "There is no point in your rising tonight, for I am more worthy of that role."

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rekats<sup>9</sup> of prayer service.<sup>10</sup> You will see a palace nearby. As you get closer to that palace you will pass through forty doors that are open and then forty doors that are closed. Open all of the closed doors and close all the opened doors. Then right before the entry of the palace you will see tied on one side forty wolves before whom grass has been placed, and on the other side you will see forty bulls before whom raw meat has been placed. Switch the food, placing the meat before the wolves and the grass before the bulls. Inside the palace you will find an Arab sleeping beneath a perch on which a nightingale stands and sings. Cut the cord tied to the nightingale's leg, grab the bird, and rush from the palace without looking back even once

The boy passed the two sets of forty doors after closing the open doors and opening the closed doors. He changed the food before the wolves and the bulls, giving meat to the

<sup>9</sup>A rekat is a series of physical movements and gestures performed during prayer. The number of rekats performed varies with the particular services of which they are part. At a service at which a dozen or more rekats are required, there is a considerable amount of energy expended.

<sup>10</sup>The narrator has forgotten (or possibly never known) the function of the foul water. The protagonist is usually instructed to ingratiate himself with various obstacles or guards along the way so that he will gain their assistance. He pleases the water, usually in a stagnant spring or clogged fountain, by declaring it sweet and pure, after all others have for years maligned it as being foul and stinking. Although the youngest brother takes ablutions in the water, he says nothing to placate its hurt feelings.

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wolves and grass to the bulls. Passing through the entryway of the palace he saw the Arab with the nightingale above his head. After cutting the cord tied to its leg, he seized the nightingale and fled. The Arab awakened and shouted, "Oh, wolves, come to the rescue and stop that thief!"

The wolves replied, "We had had grass before us for years until he came along and gave us meat to eat. We shall not stop him!"

Then the Arab shouted, "Oh, bulls, come to the rescue and stop that thief!"

"No!" replied the bulls. "We have had meat before us for years which we could not eat, but when he came along, he gave us grass. We shall not stop him!"

The boy then started his return journey.<sup>11</sup> Along the way he came to a palace containing a great amount of gold and silver. The owners of the palace were not there at that time, and so the youngest son and the girl who had been dressed as an Arab each took forty mules from the stable, loaded them with gold and silver, and continued on their journey. Retracing the route by which he had come, he stopped to get the

<sup>11</sup>The inept narrator has forgotten the last obstacles which reject the Arab's appeal for help in stopping the flight of the youngest brother. These are the many doors which the boy has obliged by changing their positions.

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fairy girl. Then he went to the home of the giants and got their sister.

Traveling steadily with the three girls, the youngest brother finally got back to the intersection where he and his brothers had parted. On top of the large boulder there he found the rings of the three brothers. He said to the girls, "Set my tent up here and wait in it until I return."

The fairy girl, who knew what he was thinking, said, "You are going to find your brothers, but after you have found them, they will cause you a great amount of trouble."

The youngest son traveled to the city where the oldest brother had stopped, and there he found that oldest brother working as a cleaner of sewers. Taking that brother with him, the youngest brother then went to another city where the middle brother was working as a laborer. He took both of his older brothers to a bath and had them thoroughly cleaned, then he bought new clothes for both of them. Going then to the tent of the youngest brother, they joined the three girls, and all six then set out for the boys' country.

As they were going along, the middle brother spoke privately to the oldest brother. He said, "Our younger brother has proved to be braver and more able than we are. We are now returning home with him and all that he has gained.

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father will admire him greatly, but what will our father say to us?"

As they reached the border of their own country, the oldest brother said, "I shall choose a place for us to spend the night." He selected a place where he knew that there was a well. Going to that well, he spread his prayer carpet over its mouth. Soon after the youngest brother dismounted, he stepped upon that carpet and immediately fell into the well. In the morning when the youngest brother did not reappear, the rest continued on toward the padishah's palace.

Before the youngest brother had fallen into the well, the fairy girl had given him three small boxes and told him that he would need them after his return home. She had also left at the well mouth her small dog. Whenever a passerby gave the dog something to eat, it threw the food down into the well, and this was enough to keep the youngest brother from starving to death.

Meanwhile, the older brothers and the three girls arrived at the padishah's palace. There the older brothers presented the unique nightingale to their father and told him of the three girls they had brought back. Not knowing that his youngest son had not returned, the padishah at once began to make arrangements for the weddings of his three sons. But the girls

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refused to marry until their conditions were satisfied. One girl said, "I shall not marry until I am given a dress which has never been sewn with a needle or cut by a pair of scissors."

A second girl said, "I shall not marry until I receive a golden chain which has never had any of its links struck by a hammer."

And the third girl said, "I shall not marry until I am given a string of very large pearls."<sup>12</sup>

While this was going on, the youngest son was still in the well. One day, however, a bezirgan camped near that well, and he soon heard a moaning sound coming from the well. He sent down into the well one of his servants, who rescued the youngest brother.

After parting from the bezirgan and his servants, the youngest son disguised himself as a keloğlan<sup>14</sup> and entered

<sup>12</sup>The narrator has confused the whole matter of the demand for three seemingly unattainable gifts. From ancient times to the present in folktales these gifts have all been demanded by one girl, one after the other, to postpone a marriage that she does not want until her true love can return to rescue her. This was already an old routine by the time that Penelope used it in the Odyssey.

<sup>13</sup>A traveling merchant. He, his servants, and his pack animals constitute a small caravan.

<sup>14</sup>The word keloğlan means bald boy, but the baldness is not caused by aging. It is caused by ringworm infestation of the scalp. This disease often strikes the younger and perhaps improperly tended younger children of large peasant families. It is encouraged by uncleanliness. In folktales the keloğlan is a definite personality type, a winner, and a sympathetic figure. In tales the keloğlan image is often used as a disguise.

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the city where his father ruled as padishah. There he found everyone talking about the weddings and the three gifts demanded by the three girls. Keloğlan went to the shop of the tailor who had been ordered to provide the dress never sewn by a needle nor cut by scissors. There he asked, "May I become your apprentice?"

"Go away!" said the tailor. "I must somehow provide for one of the brides at the palace a dress that has never been sewn with a needle or cut with scissors. Why should I take you as an apprentice?"

"Because I can make that dress for you. Bring me some food to eat as I work tonight, and by morning I shall have the dress ready." Keloğlan ate the food that was brought to him and then he slept very comfortably for the rest of the night. In the morning he took from one of the boxes the fairy girl had given him the dress that was required and handed it to the tailor. Very pleased, the tailor took it to the palace.

When the girl who had wanted this dress saw it, she said, "He has come!"<sup>15</sup>

Keloğlan then went to the goldsmith who had been ordered to provide a golden chain which no hammer had struck. "Will you accept me as your apprentice?" he asked.

Disguisers hide their hair by covering it either with a sheepskin turned inside out or with the cleaned lining of a sheep's stomach.

<sup>15</sup>A reference to the youngest brother.

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"Why should I accept you as apprentice at such a time as this? The padishah will have me hanged unless I can make the kind of gold chain one of the brides at the palace wants."

"Bring me food for the night while I am working on it in the morning I shall have such a chain finished," said Keloğlan.

"How can you do such a thing?" asked the goldsmith.

"No one else has done so, but I can make it." The goldsmith was desperate by then to be able to provide the chain that was needed, and so he put Keloğlan in a room of his shop gave him a good quantity of food. Again Keloğlan ate and slept through the night, and in the morning he handed the goldsmith the gold chain which had been in one of the boxes given to him by the fairy girl.

Keloğlan then went to the jeweler who had been ordered to provide a string of very large pearls. "Will you accept me as your apprentice?" he asked. After further conversation with the jeweler, Keloğlan spent the night there and in the morning handed the jeweler the kind of pearl necklace that had been ordered.

Keloğlan then managed to find a way to talk with the fairy girl. He asked her to provide him with a horse. When she brought him a good horse from the padishah's stable, he mounted

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it and attacked his brothers. He first struck the oldest brother on the head and then the middle brother, killing both of them.<sup>16</sup>

He then went to his father and said, "I am your youngest son. It was I who found and brought back the unique nightingale and it was I who brought back the three beautiful girls. My jealous brothers tried to kill me by throwing me into a well,

I escaped from the well and came here."

They ate and drank and attained their wishes.<sup>17</sup> May you also eat and drink and attain all of your wishes.

<sup>16</sup>Such forthright, undisguised murder of the protagonist's treacherous brothers simply does not occur elsewhere in tales of this type. In almost all versions he enters a cirit game (like a European medieval jousting tournament) that is part of the lengthy wedding celebration of the oldest brother's marriage. The protagonist, in disguise, kills the oldest brother in the course of the cirit game. Later during the cirit game that occurs for the middle brother's wedding, he kills that middle brother in the same way.

<sup>17</sup>The narrator neglects to say which of the girls the protagonist weds. It could well be the fairy girl, or it could be all three girls--an option that is taken in one of the ATON variants.