

Story #217 (Tape #6, Summer 1970)

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The Snake-Husband Lost to and Recovered from Other World

There was once a couple who had no children. They said, "Oh, God, we wish that you would give us a child, even if he or she should be a snake, a lizard, or anything else like that." As this sort of thing was in the will of he let such a child be conceived by the woman. When nine months and ten days were completed, a snake child was born to the woman. They placed some wool on the ground and put the snake on the wool and covered him with a sieve [kalbur]. When he said ciyik [jiyik] ciyik, they gave him milk, and when he said ciyik ciyik again, they cleaned his bottom. As he continued to grow, they put him in a clothes basket. As he grew larger, he was changed to a straw basket, still keeping wool under him. When he was seventeen or eighteen years he wanted to be married. His parents said, "Son, the whole world has heard you are a snake." But he insisted that they go and ask for the padişah's daughter. His parents said, "No, we cannot do that

"If you do not do this, I shall destroy you," he threatened. Of course, he was a snake, and who would not be afraid of a snake? Nevertheless, the father went to the padişah unwillingly and sat on the match-maker's stone [dünür's stone*]. He was called to the padişah's court and asked what his

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*Folktales often have symbolic seats. Sitting in a red chair as opposed to a green chair, or the left instead of the right, has a special meaning. The protagonist is instructed to sit in the correct chair to signify the marriage he wishes to convey. Often sitting in one of two chairs means a declaration of war, and sitting in the other means a request for matrimony. Here the match-maker's stone is substituted for the matrimonial chair, but all the characters understand its function.

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purpose was. He offered God's order,** "We have come to ask for your daughter's hand." In those days, when someone offered this, it was always taken seriously. They [the palace people] told the padişah about this, and added that he could not be refused immediately, but that some excuse must be found to refuse him. Having found this plan acceptable, the padişah had his men go and make the following proposal to the young man's parents: "We want forty mule loads of pearls and amber from him."

How was a poor family going to find these things? The father of the snake-child returned home and began thinking gloomily about it

"How did you fare?" the son asked

"They will give the girl only if we can provide many things."

The son said, "Father, get up and take ablution; perform two rekats of namaz. Then go to such and such a place and pull a ring you will find there in a stone after saying Bismillah and reciting the Kulhuwallahi. Then pull the ring in the stone and deliver the goods that will come out, without looking back."

He did as he was told, but on the way from the place he accidentally glanced back and the corner of his eye caught the fortieth mule, where the column of eighty mules, all loaded with jewelry, was cut off, and he was allowed to take only forty. The rest of the mules turned back and went. He came home with the forty mules.

He delivered these to the palace. When he came home, his son asked again, "Father, how did you fare?"

**Kara Yakup is here telescoping the formulaic statement of the dünür: "I have come with the will of Allah and the permission of the Prophet to ask for the hand of your daughter."--In modern practice the response to the question is often not made for two months.

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"Well, this time they had another excuse. They said, 'You may take the bride, but you must pave the road all the way from here to Elma Dağ [a town northeast of Ankara; also a mountain range there] with carpets and cover them with green curtains [canopies].' But how can we get this?"

July 1st

The son said, "Father, invite the neighbors and bring the girl here in the morning.

The carpets were gotten and laid until the morning, and the neighbors were invited. When they came, they all smiled, for they could not believe a snake could marry a girl

The padişah's men suggested to the padişah that they should not continue torturing the young man any longer and that he should give his daughter to him. He agreed to it and came to the wedding and ate and drank with the neighbors of the young man who had been invited. He then gave his daughter to the young man

She was brought home. When the time came to enter the nuptial chamber, they just pushed the girl into the room on top of the basket. The snake came out of the basket and started lashing the girl with his tail. He lashed and lashed and lashed. He then came quietly and asked the girl, "Are you afraid?"

"Yes, I am.

He then started lashing her again and lashed and lashed and lashed and asked, "Are you afraid?"

"Yes, I am."

He said, "Do you promise to keep my secret?"

"I promise."

Then out of the snake skin came a young man as *Sanjuntari* handsome as the fourteenth day of the moon. The girl was surprised. They made love, and the next morning the young man re-entered his snake skin. When the girl friends of the girl came

to visit her, they asked, "How do you get on with the snake?"

She said, "Could there be anyone like my snake?"

They thought her a very strange girl, for they would not think of marrying a snake husband as she had done

A year or two passed, and the girl's father held a horse race. It was his custom to hold such horse races. He had his daughter invited, but as he was a snake, he had omitted his son-in-law. But the young man said to himself, "Let me go there on a red horse and see my father-in-law." He told his wife that he would appear there on a red horse. He went there in the form of a young man on a red horse. He rode around the race track passing all the other horsemen and then came home. In two days the girl [his wife] returned.

He asked, "Did you see the young man?"

She answered, "Yes, I did."

The next year another race was held, and the young man told his wife he would go on a black horse. The padişah had placed guards all over the track not to allow any strangers to participate in the race. The young man rode around the track and beat all the riders again and came home

When his wife returned, he asked, "Did you see the young man?"

"Yes, I did."

In the third year, he told his wife, "I will go on a gray horse this time." He did as he said he would, and defeated all the others again.

His wife's elder sister said to her, "Sister, you are more beautiful than me and our youngest sister together, and you go and marry a snake."

Her younger sister said, "Oh, sister, you are more beautiful than me and our eldest sister, but you have contented yourself with a mere snake. You could have married such a fine young man [as this young man, i.e.] in the race."

The wife said, "How would you like it if he were my snake?"

When the young man returned home, he found that his basket was unlocked and he said, "Oh, my secret has been revealed."

He said to his parents, "Your wish was incomplete. Because of an incomplete wish, your son was born a snake. I am now leaving and do not want this world any longer.

When his wife came home and entered the bedroom, she found that the snake was not there but that his skin lay on the floor. She immediately went to his parents and asked, "Where is my snake?"

"Well, O daughter, he revealed to you his secret when we did not know, and you have given it away. Now he has departed, saying, 'Let this world be haram [forbidden, or sinful] to me.'"

She asked, "Did he not leave any message for me?"

"He said that you should search for him until the iron shoes were worn out and the walking stick was bent. 'Let her search for me; let her find me. If she cannot, I shall be gone [i.e., lost forever]. Let this world be haram to me.'"

The poor woman took three kurus--what could a poor woman have?--and had iron sandals made. She went to a blacksmith and had an iron walking stick made.

Found
Effect
She went a little; she went far; she went over hills and dales, and she walked for six months and finally came to a fountain and sat down. As she was hungry, she ate. When she looked at the walking stick in her hand, she noticed that it was bent. When she looked at the sandals, she noticed that they had holes in them. To herself she said, "I seem to be close to him. I hope I can find him." She saw that a young man was coming toward the fountain with two empty buckets

in his hands to get water. She looked and saw that it was a snake. The snake looked and saw it was the sultana.

He said, "Good. I have come close. Now follow me, but do not look to left or right."

This was the palace of the padişah of the (fairies). He went and said to the padişah of the fairies, "A fellow citizen of mine has arrived, dressed like a man. I shall take him in as a guest."

"All right

It happened that on that day, the daughter of the padişah of the fairies was getting married to the young man. "Let this guest sleep in the same room as us, but separated by a curtain."

The padişah of the fairies accepted this proposal.

When they lay in bed, the young man lay in the middle and the daughter of the padişah of the fairies lay on one side, and, curtained off, the young man's real wife lay on the other. In the night, the daughter of the padişah of the fairies fell asleep and the wife killed her, cut her flesh into pieces, and hung them on the wall. He had learned the skills of the fairies. He went out and whipped the daughter of the padişah and then whipped himself, and both became pigeons and started flying about. We do not know how far they flew that night, but in the morning the padişah of the fairies said to his other daughters, "Go and find out where your sister is and what she is doing."

When they went in search they found that their sister's flesh was torn to pieces and hanging on the walls. "Oh!" he said, "the one who came last night must have been a female. Let us mount on the glazed pot [sırlı kup = glazed pot]. The eldest sister mounted this pot and finally caught up with them in a country, but there they disappeared. The young man whipped the girl and she turned into a cypress tree. The eldest sister searched but could not find them, and returned

"What did you do, my daughter?" asked the padişah of the fairies.

"I caught up with them, but they got away."

"Was there not anything there?"

"Just two cypress trees."

"Why did you not destroy them?"

Now the second daughter went this time and found the two pigeons in a land who said to one another "Kanakçal, kanakçal [fly fly!].

Then the young man whipped the girl and she became a fountain, and then he whipped himself and he became a fountain spout.* She kept searching for them but could not find them, and so she returned.

"What did you do, daughter?" asked the padişah of the fairies

"I caught up with them in another land, but they disappeared

"Did you see nothing there?"

"There was a fountain there."

"Could you not destroy it? They were that fountain," he said

This time he mounted the pot himself and chased them. They went and went on; they went over that hill opposite our village, saying "Kanakçal, kanakçal. The padişah's palace was this place where we are now. As they flew, the pot reached them from behind, and the girl in the form of a pigeon went through a window of the palace and hid under the fur coat of her father. All the viziers were seated there. The young man turned himself into a rosebush and placed himself on the table. The magic pot landed in the courtyard of the palace. The padişah of the fairies whipped himself once more and became a man; he lashed himself again and became a beggar.

alms, saying,

in order to see the signs.

"Give me a branch of

*They call the spout cörtés, a dialectal word; the standard Turkish is oluk.

that rose."

They said, "No, we cannot give you anything of that. It was sent to us by God

He was thus able to ascertain that it was the young man, and he insisted that a small twig be given to him. When they broke off a twig, it turned into grains of millet. The padişah of the fairies turned himself into a chicken and started picking up the millet grain, tık, tık, tık. Then the millet grains started going round and round and became a whirlwind. Then it went round and round, and struck the chicken and killed it. Then it lashed itself with a whip and became a young man. He then went and took the pigeon out of her father's furcoat and she was turned into a girl. They then kissed the hands of the padişah and the viziers and said, "Your majesty, I am your son-in-law, the snake, and this is your daughter."

Following this, they had a wedding which was to last for forty days and forty nights, and it is still going on.