Story 706 (1966 Tape 3)  

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Seven Brothers and a Sister

Once there was and once there was not, in the old days, when the sieve was in the straw, when camels were barbers and the cock was a town-crier. Well, in such very old times, there was a man who had seven sons but no daughter. When these boys were attending school, one of their classmates was visited by his brother-in-law. Someone said to the seven brothers, "Look at that boy. He is so-and-so's brother-in-law. Wouldn't it be nice to have a brother-in-law? If only one of you had been a girl, then it would be possible for all the rest of you to have had a brother-in-law.

That day when they returned from school, the seven brothers said to their mother, "Mother, today a classmate put us all to shame because we have no brother-in-law. He was visited by his brother-in-law, and someone said to us, 'Instead of all of you being boys, at least one of you could have been a girl so that all of the others could have a brother-in-law.' This remark hurt us badly. If you give birth to a daughter, that will be fine; but if you do not
we shall all leave home and go up into the mountains permanently." Saying this, they all arose and left. They went little, they went much, they went for one autumn over hill and dale. They went and they went, but when they stopped to look back, they discovered that they had gone only the length of a grain of barley.¹

Finally they reached a mouldy forest where they stopped and built a house suitable to their needs. Before they left their village, they had said to their mother, "If you should have a daughter this time, hang a flour sieve² on the branch of the oleander tree³ in front of the house so that we shall know about this. Every once in a while we shall come to see which one of which sieve⁷ is hanging there."

One day passed, five days passed, several more days passed, and they came several times to observe, but the grain sieve was still hanging on the tree. Seven and eight and ten years later they came back again to look, but the grain sieve still hung on the oleander tree. During all of this time the brothers' house cat had made an annual visit to their mother's house.

¹This is a formulaic figure of speech often applied to long and/or arduous journeys. It is deliberately nonsensical and meant to be humorous.

²It would be unusual to hang a flour sieve on a tree branch where it would become dirty or its fine mesh be damaged. A straw sieve (kalbur), used in threshing, might be hung on a tree branch when not in use.

³In Turkish this tree is called iğde.
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house. Now, the mother had in fact had a daughter soon after the sons had left home, and that daughter had grown to seven, to eight, to ten years of age. One day this girl said to her mother, "Mother, this cat has been visiting us every year for seven years now. Whose cat is it?"

"Daughter, you have seven brothers, and this cat belongs to them. He comes here once every year."

"Well, if that is so, Mother, then I shall follow that cat the next time it comes and in that way go to see my brothers."

When the cat made its annual visit the following year, the girl was determined to follow it back in order to join her seven brothers. Before she left, she was given this warning by her mother: "My daughter, along its route this cat will pass over the Boncuk Mountain. You had better not accompany it, for if you do, you will be fascinated by the beads there, stopping to pick up this bead and that bead and then you may never return home."

"No, Mother, I shall go anyway!" Saying this, she left with the cat. When they reached the Boncuk Mountain, the girl started to pick up colorful beads, and while she was busy doing this, the cat ran off and left her there. The girl cried and moaned for some time, but she finally found

4 Boncuk is the Turkish word for bead
Again next year the cat appeared for his visit, and once again the girl followed it when it left. This time, however, she tied a bandage over her eyes when they approached Boncuk Mountain and held one hand on the cat until they had descended on the other side of the mountain. In this way she at last reached the cottage of her seven brothers, arriving there at a time when they were all out somewhere working swept the house, put things in order, cooked food, and then she hid herself before the brothers returned.

When the brothers arrived home, they discovered that the cottage had been cleaned and neatly arranged. They said to the cat, "This does not look like your work. You have never cleaned the house or cooked meals. Who has been here?"

The cat answered, "Whom else do you have besides me? I swept the house, I carried the water, I cooked the meal—all of it!"

But the brothers remained suspicious about this for one or five days. The youngest brother then spoke to the oldest brother about this: "Oh, my oldest brother, why don't you remain here at home tomorrow and find out who it is who does these things? This fragrant and aromatic food does not appear to be something cooked by a cat."

The oldest brother accepted this suggestion, and the next day he stayed at home when the other six departed. But
because he was a hunting man, who spent most of his time living out-of-doors, he became drowsy when he remained indoors, and soon he fell fast asleep. While he slept, sister came from hiding, swept the house, cooked the meals, carried water, and then hid herself again. And so the oldest brother did not discover anything.

The following day the next-oldest brother remained at home while the others went hunting. But he, too, was not accustomed to being indoors for long, and he, too, fell asleep and failed to discover who it was who did so much work in their cottage. The first six brothers all failed in this way. On the seventh day it was the turn of the youngest brother. He made a thorough examination of the house, and for a while he watched very diligently. But soon he too felt drowsy, and he lay down to rest, but he first took the broom and placed it beneath his head as a kind of pillow on stone floor. He thought that before anyone could use broom to sweep the house, he would be awakened by that person.

After he had fallen asleep, the sister came out from hiding, cooked a meal, and carried some water, but when she was about to take the broom, the youngest brother awakened.

The narrator does not actually say the next-oldest brother but instead the middle brother. In doing so he is responding automatically to a convention in the oral tradition. Most folktales, especially in Turkey, that include brothers feature three brothers: an oldest, a youngest, and a middle brother.
When he looked at her he thought that she must be like the Most Beautiful Girl in the World. He asked her, "Are you a supernatural being or a jinn?"

"I am neither fairy nor jinn but just a human being, a creature of the same God who made "But who are you?"

"I am your sister"

"No, we have no sister. If we had a sister, we should not be here at all.

The girl had brought with her in her bosom some apples from their family orchard. Taking out one apple, she showed it to her brother, saying, "See! This apple is from such-and-such a tree in our orchard."

Just as soon as the boy saw the apple, he knew that it was indeed from a tree in their orchard, and he realized then that the girl actually was his sister. "So we really were destined to see the day when we would have a sister!" he said. They embraced each other, both crying, and they spent the rest of the day talking.

6 The narrator here uses a common folk shortening of the expression The Most Beautiful Girl in the World, calling her A World Beauty.

7 In this tale no such destiny or prophecy was mentioned earlier, but it is an element in many variants of the basic A-T 451. Here it seems to be an echo of such variants.
The other six brothers spent the day hunting, and by the time they returned in the evening, the youngest brother had hidden their sister again. As soon as they arrived they asked him, "Did you find out anything?"

"No, like all of the rest of you, I too failed to discover anyone here"

After they had eaten dinner, the youngest brother said, "It seems that we have a sister, and it is she who comes and cleans our house every day."

When they all refused to believe this, he said, "I can call her here if you wish."

"Very well, then, do so!"

"Come out, Sister!" the youngest called.

She did so at once, and the six older brothers were amazed. They held a great reunion in the cottage on this very happy occasion.

Before the seven brothers left the following morning to go hunting, they gave the following instructions to their sister: "If the dog barks, feed him. If the cat meows, give him his food. If you do not feed the dog, he will urinate in the fireplace and put out the fire, and you will be unable to make another fire. You will be unable to get one anywhere, for we live at a great distance from any other house. If you do not feed the cat, he will go and upset the
lamp and put out the light, and you will then have no way to light it again."

A few days passed without any difficulty. Then one day the girl remembered the beads that she had picked up on Boncuk Mountain and she decided to string them. She said to herself, "Instead of just sitting here and doing nothing most of the time, I shall string my beads." While she was at work stringing the beads, there was a bark and a meow, but she forgot all about the time for feeding the dog and the cat. "Wait just a minute," she said. "I have just a few more beads to string, and then I shall feed you both."

The dog barked and the cat meowed several times more for food, but each time she had still not quite finished the beads, and so she could not feed them. Then the dog urinated in the fireplace, extinguishing the fire, and the cat upset the lamp, leaving the room in darkness. The girl started to cry. After a while she went to the very top of the apartment house. Looking out from the balcony, she saw smoke rising from somewhere a great distance away, and she decided to go there to get some fire.

She walked and walked and walked, and at last she

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8 This is a matter of acculturation. The seven brothers live in a cottage, not an apartment in an apartment house. Turkish peasants, however, are fascinated by apartment houses, and they often insert them into tales where, realistically, they could not exist.
reached the spot from which the smoke was rising. There she saw a giant sleeping on the ground and seven women boiling bulgur. Approaching these women, she said, "O sisters! I am a woman, like you. I live by myself in a house on top of yonder mountain, and I have come to you to ask some fire. Will you give me some?"

"Sister, that giant who sleeps over there has counted every one of these embers, and if he finds even one of them missing, he will eat all of us." But the women conferred among themselves and finally decided to cut a small piece of coal from each ember with a pair of scissors so that he could not detect the loss. These they gave to the girl, and they also gave her some bulgur, which she carried before her in her skirt, intending to eat it on the way home.

As she walked toward home, she was eating the bulgur and worrying lest the giant should awaken and chase her. Soon she stumbled over a stone in the path and fell down. One of her toes began to bleed, and the spool of thread which

9Bulgur is cracked wheat, cooked and dehusked, and dried. It is a ready-cooked cereal food that can be heated quickly in a small amount of water. It is a basic food, a staple, of rural Turkey.

10The narrator apparently means coal, the fossil fuel, rather than burning bits of wood. If so, then this is an anachronism, for actual coal is still not available in most rural areas.
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she used to string her beads fell upon the ground and unwound. As she walked on, the thread trailed along behind her. Finally she reached home.

In the meantime, however, the giant had awakened. Arising, he looked to the left and then to the right, and said, "There is here the scent of a rose which has not been touched by human hands."

"You dirty fellow," the women said. "Go and pick your teeth! Who would ever come here into the presence of an old fellow like you?"

Not satisfied with this explanation, the giant again looked left and right, examining the ground carefully, and finally found some blood drops and a few grains of bulgur. Then he found the end of the spool of thread. Licking up the drops of blood and rolling up the thread as he went along, the giant soon found himself right at the front door of the girl's cottage. "Open the door!" he shouted.

"No!"

"Open the door!"

"No!"

Finally the giant said to the girl, "All right, then, but put your finger through the keyhole so that I may suck on it."

The girl put her little finger through the keyhole of
the door, and the giant began to suck on it--suck! suck! suck! This made the girl feel so weak that she finally collapsed on the floor.

When her brothers came home that night, they noticed at once how pale her face looked. Every time they asked her what had happened, she said nothing. This continued for another day, five more days, and several more days after that, and all the while her brothers pleaded with her to tell them what was troubling her: "Sister, what has been happening to you? Please tell us. It would be a disgrace if we seven brothers should not be able to find a remedy for our sister's condition.

Finally the girl revealed to them all that had happened. "I did not listen carefully enough to your advice. I let the dog put out the fire in the fireplace and the cat overturn the lamp. Now that giant comes every day and sucks on my finger, and this leaves me very weak."

When the brothers heard this, they were all very angry. "How could any giant dare to come here to our house and do this to our sister?" After conferring for some time about this situation, they said to the girl, "Sister, the next time that the giant comes, at first refuse to open the door. When he wants to suck your finger, refuse this too. Then when he again says to open the door, do open it
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this time, and we shall take care of this matter."

The seven brothers prepared their bows and arrows, and then they hid themselves in different parts of the house.

The next morning the giant came again and shouted, "Open the door!"

"No!"

"Well, then, put your finger through the keyhole!"

"No!"

"Open the door!"

This time the girl did open the door, and immediately seven brothers attacked the giant and killed him.

They then hauled his carcass away from the house and cleaned up the mess where he had been killed, but from the ground which his blood had flowed there sprang up at once onions and parsley. The seven brothers kept cutting these down at the roots, but by evening they would have grown again to the height of the roof. The brothers warned their sister about these plants: "Do not ever put any of the onions or any of the parsley into our soup, because if any of us eats those plants, he would go mad, leave home to live in the mountains, and there run wild."

One day passed, five days passed, and soon after that the girl was cooking a meal which required some onions and parsley. She remembered what her brothers had said, but
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she thought that if she took just two of the onions and only a few sprigs of parsley, that would surely not be enough to do them any harm. After the brothers had returned home and eaten dinner that evening, they all went completely mad and disappeared, running wild in the forest. The youngest brother, who had eaten most plentifully of the meal, also ran wild into the forest. There he found some water standing in the hoof print of a deer. He drank this water, and he himself turned into a deer.

The girl was now left entirely alone. Every day she would climb to the top of the apartment house and cry loudly. One day the son of the padişah of that land happened to be hunting nearby. Seeing, through his binoculars, a beautiful girl on the top of an apartment house, he walked to that building and asked her to come down. When she came down, he asked, "Are you some supernatural being or a jinn?"

"I am neither fairy nor jinn, but rather a creature of

11 Although this variant of A-T 451 varies considerably from the type, it echoes it at a number of points. One common form of the type has the seven brothers turned into ravens as soon as a sister is born and fly away. Here they are not transformed either at her birth or at their first learning of her birth. But here, near the end of the tale, they are, through a careless act of hers, converted into wild men who run about the forest, the youngest going the whole distance into the animal world.

12 This is a common anachronism in Turkish folktales.
God who made both you and me. Then, weeping again, she said, "I had seven brothers, but now they have all gone mad and left home to run wild in the forest.

"Would you marry me if I were to find your seven brothers for you?"

"If that is what God has written, I would. I give you my word that if you find them, I shall marry you.

The prince then took the girl to his own palace, where he left her while he himself set out in search of her seven brothers. While he was wandering around in the forest, he came upon a deer gathering place, and among the deer he found the youngest brother and took him back to the palace.

The prince and the girl now decided to get married. At night the deer would lie at the foot of the bed. As he slept, he said in his sleep all night long, "This is my sister's leg. That is the leg of my brother-in-law.

(As you will recall, the initial problem was the desire for a brother-in-law.)

Quite a while previous to this, the prince had married an Arab girl, and almost immediately this Arab girl became jealous of the new bride. One day she gathered her laundry

13 This is probably truncated from "what God has written on my forehead." It is a Muslim belief that one's destiny has been written upon one's forehead. It can be seen and read only by saints and people of great spiritual endowment.
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together and took it to the riverbank to wash it. new bride and her deer brother went along too. After a while the Arab girl suggested that it would be pleasant to walk along the riverbank for a while. She walked on the inside of the path, and the new bride walked on the outside, close to the edge of the water. When they came to a very deep and swirling part of the river, the Arab girl pushed the new bride into the water. (You will remember that at the beginning of this tale I told you that one of its titles is alabalik. Just then a large trout alabalik swam along there and swallowed the new bride. Her deer brother started saying, "O sister! The Arab girl has pushed you into the water and a trout has swallowed you!"

The Arab girl went back to where she had left her laundry, gathered it up, and took it back to the palace. There she put on one of the dresses of the new bride, and went to the prince's chamber. They went to bed together, and the deer slept at the foot of the bed, saying, all night long, "This is the leg of the Arab girl, and that is the leg of my brother-in-law. This is the leg...."

The prince felt that there was something strange about this, for before this the deer had repeated, "This is the leg of

It may seem ridiculous to have a princess scrubbing clothes on a riverbank, but peasant narrators place their tales in the setting and circumstances with which they are familiar.
my sister, and that is the leg of my brother-in-law."
did he change his chant now?

When the Arab girl arose in the morning, she claimed
that she was not well. She said to the prince, "If you will
only kill that deer, I shall get well.

"No, I shall not kill that deer, but I shall go and
hunt down another one for you.

"No that would do no good. It must be this very one.

After some time had passed, the prince went deer hunt-
ing one day. The first deer that he encountered, however,
was their own deer. He asked this pet deer, "What are you
doing here?"

"The Arab girl pushed my sister into the water, and I
have come here to be with her." This deer continually
wandered about the woods singing elegies for his sister:

"Oh, that Arab girl who pushed my
sister into the river
And now the alabalîk has swallowed
her up!"

Now as he wandered along the riverbank, he heard a
voice singing to him from the water:

"Brother, the Arab girl was the one
who pushed me in,
And the alabalîk did swallow me up,
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But now a child with golden locks
lies in my lap."

She had given birth to a child in the belly of the fish.

The prince said to the deer, "How can we believe that
this is your sister? Your sister is home at the palace,
sick in bed."

"Well, then, just listen to what the river says!" And
he himself sang again:

"O sister whom the Arab girl has
pushed into the river,
And the alabalik has swallowed you up!"

From the water came the same voice as before with the
same song:

"Yes, my brother, the Arab girl did
push me in,
And the alabalik did swallow me up.
But now a child with golden locks
lies in my lap."

"O prince! Did you hear that?"

Now at last the prince realized what had happened.
Taking the deer brother along with him, he set all of
soldiers and servants to work building a dam downstream in
the river. When this was completed, they began to cast nets
in the river to catch the large trout containing the new
bride and her new child. When the great trout was finally caught, its belly was cut open and the bride and her child were removed safely.

After they had returned to the palace, the prince asked the Arab girl, "Do you want scimitars or mules?" 15

"Oh, scimitars are fit only for the necks of our enemies. Mules are better, because I might ride on them."

The prince selected two mules, one of which was hungry and the other thirsty. He tied one leg of the Arab girl to each leg and then whipped the mules. The thirsty mule pulled toward the water, and the hungry mule pulled toward the pasture, and in this way the Arab girl was torn in half.

Then the prince and the rescued bride had a wedding all over again, and the celebration lasted for forty days and forty nights. They ate, drank, and had all of their wishes fulfilled.

Three apples fell from the sky: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for anyone might be offended if he did not receive one.

15 The question about the choice of method of execution is usually expressed with a rhyming line: *Kırk satırmı, kırk katırmı?* / forty cleavers, or forty mules?/