

Story 888 (1964 Tape 8)

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Selahattin
Mehmet Ağa¹ the Woodcutter and His Amazonian Wife

Once there was and once there was not an old man called Mehmet the Woodcutter. One of the padişahs of that period became angry and ordered that all of the women from a certain area be destroyed. They were all to be gathered in a mosque, and then the mosque was to be burned down. The women were gathered, according to his order, and put in a certain mosque. Before the mosque was set afire, however, one of his men reported, "Your Majesty, we have done as you wished. The women are now locked in the mosque--that is, all of them except one. Mehmet the Woodcutter has refused to allow his wife to be taken to the mosque."

"Bring that Mehmet the Woodcutter to my presence at once." When the padişah asked him whether or not he had refused to allow his wife to be taken to the mosque to be burned, Mehmet responded with a story that explained his behavior.

"It is true that I did not obey your order, but I have a

¹An ağa is usually a rural landowner, usually wealthy, often powerful. In such a case, the word ağa is a title. It may also be used after an important person's name not as a title but as an honorific. Here Mehmet owns so much property and is so widely considered the leading citizen of the area that he is probably an actual ağa.

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special story to tell you about this. Listen to my story, and then, if you wish, I shall turn over my wife to your jailers.

"Earlier in my life I had fought with many men and never been defeated by any of them. One day as I was sitting before the coffeehouse,^{10,71} I saw a horseman approaching at such a great speed that he was throwing up a cloud of dust and smoke as he came.² The rider turned out to be a very handsome young man, and as soon as I saw him, I found him very attractive. He went straight to the blacksmith shop and ordered the smith to shoe his horse at once. 'I want four new shoes put on immediately.'

'We shall do the work for you,' said the blacksmith, 'but right now we are shoeing the horse of Mehmet Ağa, who is one of the most important fighters in our region.'

"'I care nothing about any such person,' said the horseman. 'You will shoe my horse at once!' As he said this he began striking the blacksmith.

²This expression is not to be taken literally. In earlier times a whole army on the move could be detected approaching a day or two before it was actually sighted. Thousands of horses and men literally kicked up huge clouds of dust. That army's cooks and blacksmiths kept fires going along the route, and so there was also much smoke mingling with the ascending dust. The description of such a dusty, smoky approach has been applied to any rapid approach, though most such approaches generate no smoke!

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"I was watching all this from the coffeehouse, and I shouted to the blacksmith, 'Shoe his horse and let him go! I happened to own that shop, and the blacksmith was my employee.

"While his horse was being shod, the stranger went to a restaurant and ordered a meal. When they served him food on an ordinary plate, he said, 'I am not a child. You should bring food to me in large pans.'

"When he finished eating, he was given a bill by the restaurant manager. The stranger refused to pay this bill instead struck the manager several hard blows. It so happened that it was I who owned this restaurant, and as I observed what occurred there, I said to myself, 'What sort of fellow is this? Acting in such a way in this town, he will rob me of my whole reputation.'

"The young stranger then went to the coffeehouse and drank coffee. When the waiter presented him with the bill, he again refused to pay. Instead, right there in my coffeehouse he beat my employee. From there he went back to the blacksmith shop, where his horse had by then been shod. Mounting his horse, he rode away without any further word to anyone

"After he had gone, everyone in town kept staring at me. Finally they asked me, 'How could a man as gallant as you behave in this way in the presence of a young stranger? All

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these shops in town belong to you, but all of their employees were beaten while you stood by and did nothing. Why didn't you do something?'

"Realizing now that I should indeed have done something about it, I decided to pursue the young man. I did this, and when I caught up with him, I called, 'Oh, young man, stop there! You have carried my reputation away with you. Didn't you know that I was Mehmet Ağa the Woddcutter?'

"Since the young man was completely indifferent toward what I said, I approached him and dealt him a tremendous blow with my mace. But the young man so struck did not even look back at me. When I raised my arm to strike again, the stranger grabbed my arm and pulled me from my horse. He then dismounted and jumped on top of me as I lay on the ground. 'Why did chase me and then hit me with your mace? Why?' he asked

"'Because you came to our village, pulled everyone and everything down, and robbed me of my good name. I had to take steps of some kind in order to recapture my reputation. Now, however, I realize that you are much stronger than I, and so I beg your pardon. Please do not kill me.'

"'Very well, I shall not kill you, but in return for this you must follow me wherever I go, and you must obey my orders

"'All right As long as you do not kill me, I shall go anywhere with you

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"We went a short distance, we went a great distance, a we came at last to the mouth of a large cave, where there w also a large stream of water. I was afraid to ask where we were going next.

'Mehmet Ağa,' 'you will remain right here. All six of my brothers were killed by a giant, and I have now come to take my revenge against him. I shall now enter this cave, and in about half an hour I shall shout. When you hear my first shout, you will know that I have started fighting. When you hear my second shout, you will know that I am about to win. And when you hear my third shout, you should also enter the cave, for by that time I shall have torn the giant to pieces. But if you do not hear any shouts from me and you have to flee, ride on my horse instead of on your own. The saddlebags on my horse are filled with emeralds and rubies and diamonds. Take them They will provide enough for you for the rest of your life But if you run away before I end my fight, I shall catch you and bring you back, even if you fly on the wings of a bird.'

"Listening quietly, I soon heard the three shouts in succession. At the third shout, I drew my sword and entered the cave. When I looked around inside, I saw blood so deep that the huge body floated in it. The giant had been all torn to pieces. We emerged from the cave, washed ourselves, and

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then set out for my village again. There the young man said to me, 'If you will come with me, I shall be your slave, your ² kurban.³ If you do not wish to come with me, that will be right. In that case, I shall give you one of the saddlebags filled with jewels.'

"I did not know what to say in response to this invitation. On the one hand, I was afraid to refuse to go with him, lest he become angry at my refusal and beat me. On the other, if I accepted his invitation to go with him, I was afraid of where he might take me. I said, 'Please--I do not want you to be my slave. I shall be your slave and go with you.'

"All right then. Come along.'

"This young man was really a great warrior who would fight as many as fifty men like me at one time. We rode together for forty or fifty days, talking as we went along. day he suggested that I be married in the next town we came to. I agreed to this, and after we arrived at that next town, a suitable bride was found for me, and a wedding was arranged. But on the nuptial night I waited and waited in my room for the bride, but she never appeared. The young stranger then came to me and asked, 'Hasn't your bride come yet?'

³ Kurban means sacrifice. To be someone's kurban means that you are willing to give your life on his behalf if that should become necessary.

'No.'

'Very well I shall soon present your bride to you but first close all of the chimney openings and the doors.' He then removed his mask and became one of the most beautiful girls in the world. She then said, 'I am to be your bride, and we shall be married. I shall be yours, and you shall be mine from now on.

"Your Majesty, that young warrior whom I told you about is my wife now. You know now why I did not send her to the mosque with the other women. If you want to take her, send soldiers to my home and let them try to do so, but I shall have no part in it.

The padişah seemed to be quite impressed with my account. He said, "If that is the case, then open the doors of the mosque and let the other women imprisoned there return to their homes. And that was the way it all ended.