

Story 1107 (1966 Tape 4)

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Location: Örencik village,
Çekerek kaza,
Yozgat Province

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Azrail¹ Furloughs His Former Servant

The man who sought his Arab in the previous story² had a younger brother. This younger brother had one great fear throughout his life, and that was the fear of Death

One day he said to his mother, "Mother, I am going to the Immortal Village." He then went out of this room--and out of the world in one sense.

As he was traveling along, he saw approaching him a horseman on a white horse. The horse kicked up a great cloud of dust as it came. This horseman was Azrail. The angel called out to him, "Where are you going?"

"I am seeking the Immortal Village."

"The immortal Village is where I live," said the horseman. "I am Azrail. If you stand by me, you will live; otherwise you will die."

The young man went with Azrail and worked for him for

¹ Azrail is the Angel of Death in both Moslem and Hebrew belief. He is usually pictured as a huge creature with enormous wings.

² This is Tale 1106 in the Archive of Turkish Oral Narrative.

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seven years. Azrail paid him seven akçe³ at the end of that period, one for each year's work. The young man said, "Azrail Father, I want to return to my home village. When shall die? When will you come to take my life away?"

Azrail took his notebook from his pocket and looked inside it. Then he said, "When you were in your mother's womb, your destiny was written down. You will live until you enter the nuptial chamber. If you marry and enter the nuptial chamber, I shall come for you."

"Very well, then," said the young man. "I shall never get married, and then you will never have occasion to come after me."

Azrail then gave him the seven gold akçe⁴ as his wages for seven years. The young man put them in his bag and departed. He went little, he went much. He went through rivers, over hills, and across plains.⁵ He came to a village

³ A small silver coin of earlier times worth 1/3 para. There were 40 para to the kuruş and 100 kuruş to the lira. In the late twentieth century the lira has been so sharply devaluated that an American dollar is the equivalent of 2,000 lira. Akçe, para, and kuruş are all meaningless in today's market.

⁴ This is an error. The akçe was silver. It was used so long ago that most Turks now know it only as an earlier monetary unit.

⁵ The two sentences in the text preceding the note number are formulaic. They are used frequently in Turkish tales as a convenient way of indicating a long journey.

*Formulaic
expression*

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one evening where he was accepted into a large house as guest of God.⁶

At that house there was a young woman who was very ill. As they were giving water to the patient, Azrail entered through the doorway. No one saw him except the young traveler. This young man immediately arose and showed respect to Azrail. Inasmuch as the young man had served Azrail for seven years, he knew very well why the angel had come. The owners of the house however, knew none of this, and they scolded the young man. They asked him, "Why did you cause a disturbance just now? Our sick woman here is about to die."

"Azrail has come to take the young woman's life," said the young man.

He had no sooner said that than Azrail moved to the foot of the bed of the sick woman and took her life. The family was amazed that he had known what was happening. They asked him, "Are you Hızır or Hazır?"⁷ How did you know that Azrail had come?"

⁶ That is to say someone accepted him as guest for the sake of God. The expression always says, literally, "the guest of Allah," but the beneficiary of such hospitality is only indirectly Allah's or God's guest. When one appeals for shelter in these terms, he/she is usually accepted immediately.

⁷ Hızır is usually considered a saint by Turks. He is often a last-minute rescuer from disaster, a granter of wishes, and a person who knows what will happen before it actually happens. (To some rural Turks he is also a water deity and fertility god, but this is not the meaning intended here.) Hazır means ready or prepared. The word is used here for verbal effect, inasmuch as Hızır and Hazır both alliterate and rhyme.

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"I served Azrail for seven years, and that is why I could detect his presence." The family members then apologized to him for having scolded him. Dinner was served shortly after that, and following the meal the young man took leave of his hosts and continued traveling toward his own village

When he reached his village, he was welcomed back after his long absence. "What kinds of experiences did you have in your search for the Immortal Village?"

He explained to them everything that had happened. "I also discovered something else about my life and death. Azrail told me that as long as I remain single, he will not come to take away my life."

"That is just an old tale," said one of the women

The young man decided to settle down again in his native village. He began to do this by having a fine house built. When it was finished, he became engaged to a girl. Shortly after the engagement had been announced, the couple were married in a wedding ceremony that lasted for forty days and forty nights. When the final day of festivities had ended, the couple went to the bridal chamber, but as they entered that room, the bridegroom said, "He will be here at any time now, yes, any time. He told me that he would take my life on my nuptial night."

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They had no sooner entered the bridal chamber, hand in hand, when there was a knock on the door. Azrail entered and said, "Get up, Ali Ağa,⁸ I have come to take your life."

"Wait for me," Ali Ağa said, "and I'll explain the situation to you in a minute

But the girl said, "Now look here! People doing military duty get a few days off every two or three months. You served Azrail for seven whole years, and yet you never had a single day of furlough. Ask permission to have a furlough now.

Going to the Angel of Death, the young man said, "O Azrail I served you steadily for seven years, and during that time you never gave me a single day off duty. In the military service men are allowed to have a few days' furlough occasionally Can't you give me a few days of furlough now?"

While this conversation was going on at the entrance to the room, the girl was inside the room praying to God to grant her wish and give her husband a few days more of life.

God accepted her prayer and sent Gabriel⁹ to intervene.

⁸ This is the first time in the tale that the name of the protagonist has been given. 109-110

⁹ Gabriel (Cebrail in Turkish) plays several roles. In Turkish folktales he is often the messenger and/or agent of God. His duties are often confused with those of Izrafel, who is supposed to be the messenger. A further identification of the two can be seen in the fact that Moslems believe that the final trumpet of Doomsday will be blown by Izrafel.

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God said to Gabriel, "Tell Azrail that I have given forty more days of life to Ali Ağa and that he should not, therefore kill him."

After he had received this message from Gabriel, Azrail turned to the young man and said, "God has granted you forty more days of life." And so it was that their wishes were fulfilled