

Story 1278 1988 Tape 12)

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Province

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The Rooster's Several Exchanges

Once there was and once there was not, when Allah's people were many.¹ It was in the old times when the sieve was in the straw,² when camels were town criers and fleas were barbers, when I was rocking my mother's cradle. Back at that time there was a rooster.

One day this rooster was wandering around when he got a thorn stuck in his foot. He went to the house of an old woman and asked, "Will you take this thorn out of my foot?" After the old woman had removed the thorn, the rooster left her house. She threw the thorn away and went on with her work baking bread. But a few minutes later the rooster returned and said, "I want my thorn back. If you don't give me back

¹Formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales, this is known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a nonsense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce in English the rhyme scheme.

²The sieve is never in the straw. While threshing grain, workers pass the detached grain and finely ground straw through a large-mesh sieve. Longer pieces of straw which may still have grains attached to them do not pass through and will need further threshing. So the straw is in the sieve, not the sieve in the straw.

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my thorn, then I want some of that bread you have baked." The old woman gave him two loaves of bread, and the rooster left again.

The rooster walked down the road farther. He walked and he walked until he came to a shepherd tending a flock of sheep. He said to the shepherd, "Brother, if you will provide some sheep milk to soak this bread in, we can have a good meal from it later." The shepherd agreed to this, and they put the bread in the milk. While it was soaking, the rooster wandered away for a while, but while he was gone the shepherd became so hungry that he ate all of the bread. When he returned, the rooster said, "I want my bread."

The shepherd answered, "But your bread has been eaten."

"Well, if you cannot give me back my bread, then I want a sheep in its place." The shepherd gave him a sheep, and the rooster went on his way.

After a while he came to a house where a wedding celebration was going on. The rooster said to the owner of that house, "May I leave my sheep here for a little while?"

"Yes," said the owner. After the rooster had left, the man said, "We have been trying and trying to get one more sheep for the wedding feast. Let us use this sheep." So they slaughtered that sheep, cooked it, and added it to the feast.

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When the rooster returned, he said, "Give me back my sheep now."

can't," said the owner of the house, "because we have eaten it."

you cannot give me my sheep back, then I must have the bride in place of it." So they gave him the bride, and the rooster took her and continued on his way.

After walking for a short while, the rooster came to a man who was playing a zurna³. He said to that man, "Will you give me that zurna in exchange for this bride?" The man agreed to this, handed the rooster the zurna, and took the bride.

The rooster walked along playing the zurna until he came to a man beating a drum. He said to that man, "Will you give me that drum in exchange for this zurna?"

"Yes, I will," said the man, and the two exchanged those musical instruments

The rooster walked along beating on the drum. But after a while the drum slipped from his hands, fell down a cliff, and burst.

³A double-reed wind instrument. For many Turkish people, the zurna is almost always associated with the drum. At virtually all rural weddings and at some urban weddings drum and zurna music is played throughout the entire time of the wedding celebration. Village weddings last for a week.