

Story 1330 (1988 Tape 6)

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Location: Ortahisar village,
Ürgüp kaza, Nevşehir
Province

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Two Brothers and the Forty Thieves¹

Once there was and once there was not,² when the sieve was in
the straw,³

When the camel was the town crier and the flea was a barber,
We decided to go to the trough at Damascus

In the season when walnuts were flowering in the mountains
and fields,

Causing fat-legged people to fall upon Delahat⁴

¹As the title may suggest, this tale is a variant of the
well-known tale of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" in the
Arabian Nights.

²Formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales, this is
known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run to several
lines, though most narrators 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.

³The 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 fur-
ther threshing. So the straw is in the sieve, not the sieve
in the straw.

⁴Delahat seems to be a place name, but we have been unable

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There were eighty cauldrons of Muscat apples,⁵

And ninety cauldrons of stuffed grape leaves.⁶

I ate and ate but still was not satisfied.

If that was a lie, then this is a lie: A snake swallowed an elephant.

One rides a donkey but carries a camel.

Is that a lie too?

Back in those days there were two brothers who were very poor

The younger of these brothers was the cleverer and the more adventurous. One evening while he was walking in the forest, he saw a band of robbers carrying somewhere all of the things that they had just stolen. They went to a door in the side of

a hill and said, "The third Wednesday." As soon as they had spoken those words, the door swung open and admitted them into a cave where they deposited all of their stolen goods. When they came out of the cave to leave, they said, "The heir of Thursday," and the door swung shut again.

to document this.

⁵Muscat is located in Oman, a small state in the south-eastern corner of the Arabian peninsula. Climatically, it would seem to be a most unlikely place to grow apples.

⁶The dolma is one of most Turks' favorite dishes. It is made of ground meat and rice either wrapped in grape leaves or stuffed inside a green pepper or other hollowed-out vegetable

younger brother

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The younger brother kept himself carefully hidden, but he watched and listened to everything that happened. Thinking, "What could be simpler than that?" he ran home, got a large sack, and returned. "The third Wednesday," he said, and the door of the cave swung open. The younger brother entered and filled his sack with valuable goods, and then, as he was leaving, he said, "The heir of Thursday," and the door closed.

The riches he had taken from the cave provided the younger brother with enough wealth to build a shop for himself at the (marketplace)

When the older brother saw this, he asked, "What happened to you? You were as poor as I was. How could you afford to build a shop?"

"Listen carefully," said the younger brother. "At such and such a place in the forest there is a cave where a band of robbers hide all of the money and jewels and other valuable things they steal. They arrive there with their loot between the evening and night prayers.⁷ Hide yourself nearby and listen to what they say. Then you too will be able to take from their hoard a sack full of precious materials which will make

⁷These would be the fourth prayer of the day, known as Akṣam (Evening) Prayer, which comes around dusk, and the Yatsi, which comes around 9 P.M.

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you rich.

The older brother took a sack and went to the place in the forest that his brother had described. As usual, the robbers came to the cave between the evening and night prayers and said, "The third Wednesday." After they had left their plunder inside, they closed the door by saying, "The heir of Thursday." Then they left.

"What could be easier than that?" thought the second brother. "I shall go into the cave myself." After he had said, "The third Wednesday," the door opened, and he went inside and began to fill his sack. But by the time he had filled his sack and was ready to leave, he had forgotten the words to be said to close the door. As he kept saying different things to try to close it, the older brother could hear the robbers returning to the cave. He therefore forced the door shut and barred it on the inside. Then he hid himself among the heaps of goods in the cave.

When the robbers arrived, they said several times "third Wednesday," but the door failed to open. "There is someone inside our cave," their leader said. After trying repeatedly to open the door, they were finally able to force it open. Once inside, they began poking into all of the bundles and stacks of goods with their swords in order to find the intruder

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Just before they got to where the older brother was hiding, he stood up and said, "Here I am! Here I am!"

The robbers at once began to question him. "What are you doing here? How did you get in? Who are you?"

The older brother then explained, "I have a brother who came here. He listened to what you said to open and close this cave. He got enough valuable materials here to become rich. I tried to do the same thing, but I was unable to manage it."

"If we go to his house as forty horsemen, will your rich brother accept us as his guests?"

"Oh-h-h! Of course he will," said the older brother.

"Very well. Then we shall come and visit him on Thursday. Would that be all right?"

"Yes, my brother has room to house even eighty guests. I shall tell him that you are coming." He then went home and told the younger brother what had happened. He told him also that the forty thieves were going to come and be his guests on Thursday.

"Very well! Let them come," said the younger brother.

On Thursday the younger brother lighted his large outdoor

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oven⁸ and fired it until it was very hot. He had bought a great amount of raki⁹ and wine, and when the forty thieves arrived, he served them a great feast. Throughout the meal he kept filling their glasses with alcoholic drinks until they were all beginning to be drunk. He said to them, "Tell me if you need to go to the toilet, and I shall carry you there on my back. I do not want any of you to fall down outside in the dark and be hurt." Each time someone asked to go to the toilet, the younger brother carried that man outside and threw him into the oven. Before the evening had ended, he had thrown all forty thieves into the oven and killed them.

On the following day the younger brother returned to cave with his donkey and brought away from it all of the treasure that was left there. In that way he was able to eat and drink and attain all of his wishes.

⁸Some Turkish rural homes have ovens built into their large chimineys. Others have ovens apart from the house, either sunk into the ground or housed in a small, low stone structure.

⁹An anise-flavored liquor, the favorite distilled beverage in Turkey. It is a clear liquid (like gin or vodka), but it turns white when diluted with water and is then known as "Lion's Milk." It is distilled by a government monopoly.