

Story 1364 (1988 Tape 10)

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Köroğlu¹ and Bolu Bey²

At one time the Bey of Bolu was a very powerful man. He controlled the whole area of Bolu, and he had a great many men working for him, including a bearded old man who was a horse trainer. This old man knew a great deal about horses of all kinds. One day Bolu Bey called this horse trainer to him and said, "Father, you are to go among my great herds of horses and select from among them a colt of the highest quality. You are to select a colt which will, when fully grown, become the fastest of all horses in the land.

The trainer went among the herds of Bolu Bey's horses and examined more than 100 colts carefully, one by one, keeping in mind the qualities that the bey desired. The foal that he chose and took to Bolu Bey was thin, weak, and ugly,

¹Köroğlu means Son of the Blind Man.

²In earlier times a bey was comparable to a feudal lord. A bey was an aristocrat similar to a British baron. There are no longer any beys, but the term bey is sometimes placed after a man's given name as a gesture of respect: Ahmet Bey, Hasan Bey.

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but the trainer knew that one day he would become a magnificent horse.

When Bolu Bey saw this colt, he became furious. He shouted, "You went among all my horses and selected the worst possible colt! Do you think I will tolerate this kind of behavior? You may keep this worthless colt, but to punish you I shall have you blinded!" Several of Bolu Bey's servants led the old man to a place outside the town. There they tied him to a tree, gouged out his eyes with a hot iron, and left him there. The old man remained there crying out and suffering for some time before a passerby found him and took him to his home.

Blinding

The old horse trainer had a son who was still just a boy at the time his father was blinded. Throughout his childhood and youth, this boy grieved for the suffering of his father and dreamed about avenging his mistreatment. By the time he had reached young manhood, this son of the former horse trainer was being called Koroğlu. As this boy grew into manhood, the colt which his father had selected for Bolu Bey grew into a magnificent horse. It was trained and groomed by one of Koroğlu's uncles.

One day Koroğlu mounted this fine horse and said, "Oh,

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Bolu Bey, you are the one who blinded my father. I shall now ride to your palace and take vengeance against you! Your punishment will be death!"

When Köroğlu approached Bolu, Bolu Bey ordered his soldiers to attack him. Köroğlu pretended to flee, but in fact he was leading the soldiers into the mountains. There, riding his swift horse, he was able to separate these soldiers and then attack them one after another. In this way he killed all of the soldiers. Then riding back to Bolu, he gouged out the bey's eyes with a hot iron rod, just as Köroğlu's father had been treated, and he left Bolu Bey lying by himself to suffer. In this way the son avenged the cruel treatment which his father had suffered.³

³This is a mere smattering of one episode in the long cycle of Köroğlu tales which many scholars consider to be an epic (destan in Turkish). The narrator does not mention the name of Köroğlu's father (Yusuf) or of his marvelous horse Kırat. Nor does he even suggest the process by which Kırat became such a marvelous horse. There is no mention of Köroğlu's being a Turkish Robin Hood or of his being a minstrel who sang some of his best lines to the accompaniment of a saz (the three-stringed folk instrument played by Turkish folk poets and folk singers).