

Story 1438 (1971 Tape 7)

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Location: Karakaya village,
Silifke kaza
İçel Province

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The Cat That Terrified Karakaya

In former times there were so many rats in Karakaya that they prevented the people living there from eating any of their meals comfortably. There were so many rats in the village that at mealtime they would completely overrun the table and carry off most of the food.

One day a tax collector made an official visit to this village. He was considered an important guest, and he was housed in the muhtar's¹ own home. They said to the tax collector "We have a very unusual custom here. We have to eat our dinner before dawn. Otherwise, the rats prevent us from eating whatever food has been prepared. They overrun everything and take all of the food

"I shall have to bring you a cat to change this situation," said the tax collector. And the next time that he visited the village he did just exactly what he had promised to do: he brought a cat with him. He did not remain in the village overnight this time but left in the early evening.

¹The head man in a village or city district. Until recently the muhtar was the only elected official that many villagers ever saw, for most of the governmental administrators are appointees of one or another of the federal ministries.

Story 1438

The people said to the tax collector as he was leaving, "We don't know what to feed this cat. What can it eat?"

"Oh, it can eat anything," answered the tax collector. "Whatever he can find to eat, he will eat."

The cat began to catch and eat rats as soon as it arrived at Karakaya. Every day it caught a great many rats and ate them, and after a while there were no more rats to be seen anywhere in Karakaya. The people were pleased with this result, but they also began to be somewhat frightened. They said, "The tax collector said that this cat could eat whatever it could find to eat. Until now the rats provided him with food, but our turn may be next. He may soon eat us!"

The villagers all started chasing the cat, but they were unable to catch it. Very frightened, the cat fled from them and ran into one of the houses. Then the villagers said, "We shall never be able to catch this cat by chasing him. The best thing that we can do is to burn down this house and in that way destroy the cat." Accordingly, they closed all the doors of the house and set it on fire. But the cat climbed out onto the roof of the house, and from there it leaped to a nearby plane tree. "Did you see that? Did you see that?" asked all of the villagers. "He means to eat us!" Too frightened to remain there, all of the villagers ran away and settled in another place.