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Narrator: Bayram Sat

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Silifke kaza,
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The Faithful Wife of the İstanbulite

There were once two friends. One lived in İstanbul and the other lived in Ankara. One day the İstanbulite went to visit his friend in Ankara, and the two men talked at great length. After a while, however, each began to boast about his own city. The İstanbulite said, "Oh, the palaces of İstanbul are unequaled anywhere else."

The Ankaran replied, "But the buildings of Ankara are far more modern and comfortable."

This argument went on until both men were angry. They shouted accusations at each other, and finally the Ankaran said, "You do not even have an honest wife. I shall bet you such and such an amount of money that she is unfaithful to you!"

The İstanbulite replied, "Here is my address. If you can succeed in seducing my wife, I shall pay you the amount of this wager."

The Ankaran went to İstanbul, and there he immediately hired a witch woman.¹ He had a chest made that was large

¹In Turkish folktales, the word witch has various connotations. It may be a person associated with cosmic evil. It may be a person with supernatural powers who may or may not

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enough to hold him, and then he said to the witch woman, "Have me carried in this chest to such and such address and persuade the woman who lives there to allow you to leave the chest in house until tomorrow. Then come back tomorrow with a porter and recover the chest."

The witch woman hired a porter and had the chest carried to the address she had been given. When the lady of the house opened the door, the witch said, "I am making preparations to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca. May I leave this chest with overnight for safekeeping?" The lady of the house agreed to this, and the chest was set inside the front door

When night came, the lady removed her clothes and jewelry placed them on a table in her bedroom before she retired. In the middle of the night the Ankara man very quietly got out of the chest and went to the lady's room. He picked up her jewelry and began to leave the room, but he first observed the naked woman lying on her bed, and he noticed that she had a mole on one of her breasts. He then returned quietly to the chest locked himself inside it again

also be a ghouL. With or without supernatural powers, it may be an old woman available for hire to undertake nefarious deeds of various kinds. In this latest capacity, she may be simply a shrewd, wily, and unscrupulous accomplice in covert action against someone. The witch in this tale is clearly of this last type.

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In the morning the witch woman returned and said, "May I now recover my chest? I have brought a porter to carry it for me."

"Yes, of course," said the lady.

The witch woman then loaded the chest on the back of the porter and had it carried to her own house. There the Ankaran got out of the chest, paid the witch woman for her services, and started back to his own city.

When he arrived back in Ankara, he went at once to the Istanbulite. "Well," said the Istanbulite, "what happened?"

Taking from his bag a bracelet, the Ankaran asked, "Isn't this your wife's bracelet?"

"I don't know. One bracelet looks very much like many other bracelets."

Taking from his bag a pair of earrings, the Ankaran asked, "Aren't these your wife's earrings?"

"Any pair of earrings can look like many other pairs of earrings," answered the husband.

"Very well, then," said the Ankaran. "Answer this question: Does your wife not have a mole on her left breast?"

"That is enough!" said the husband. "You have won the bet!" And he then gave the Ankaran the large amount of money he had wagered on his wife's faithfulness.

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After the two men had parted, the İstanbulite made a tuluk.² Then he asked several people, "Where does one get the best drinking water in this city?" When someone took him to the fountain that had the best water, he filled his tuluk with it. Then, taking a cup in his hand and putting the tuluk on his back, he walked up and down the streets of Ankara shouting, "Free water! Free water!"³ To each man who took a cup of his water the İstanbulite said, "May Allah give one a woman who can be trusted!"

When the İstanbulite did not return home at the time he was expected, his wife began to search for him. She hired a very powerful man to accompany her during her search for her husband. This man was so large and strong that when he smoked, he used a whole okka⁴ of tobacco. Each time he was thirsty he drank a whole okka of water. And every time he sat down to a meal he ate several okkas of bread.

This strong man finally located the Ankaran who had deceived the İstanbulite. That Ankaran had become so rich through

²A tuluk (more often tulum) is an animal skin used as a container for liquids, soft cheeses, and other wet products.

³In many places in Turkey, potable water is sold on the streets both by the jug and by the individual drink.

⁴A measure of weight equivalent to 1,282 grams.

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his deception that he was now called ağa.⁵ The strong man was also very clever, and he led the ağa into a conversation in which the Ankaran told the whole story about how he had deceived an İstanbulite and become rich as a result.

The wife, who had been listening to this whole conversation, now came out of hiding. She said to the Ankaran, "See how I finally found you and exposed you!" Then, turning to the strong man, she asked, "Did you hear everything that he said?"

"Yes, I did," answered the strong man.⁶

⁵An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

⁶This tale ends without the reunion of husband and wife and without the punishment of the villain.