

Story 1644 (Dictated)

Narrator: Yusuf Kızkapan

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The Youngest Son and His Frog Wife

There was in the old days a padishah who had three sons. One of these sons was eighty years old, one was fifty years old, and the youngest was twenty-five. One day the oldest son said to his brothers, "The sun rises and the sun sets every day, but we have not yet had any enjoyment from this life." After talking about their problem for a while, they finally decided upon a way of telling their father that they wished to get married. They stuck three knives into a watermelon and sent it to their father.¹

The padishah was not able to understand the message

¹Although this is a tale seriously narrated, its first paragraph sounds like a travesty of a well-known story opening. When three daughters reach a marriageable age, they wish to marry, but they cannot tell this openly to their father. Instead, they signal their situation by sending him a tray upon which are three melons: one slightly overripe (representing the oldest daughter), one perfectly ripe (representing the middle daughter), and one just ripening (representing the youngest). The father usually understands the message without any assistance. Here, the three children are sons, two of whom are elderly, and all of whom should be able to communicate directly with their father. The melon motif is partially retained, but only one melon is sent to the father, and that melon has three knives stuck into it (representing, without distinction, the three sons).

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that his sons had sent him by means of the watermelon. But his vizier said, "Oh, my padishah, are you still unable to understand your sons' messages? They are telling you that they wish to get married."

When the padishah finally understood the message his sons had sent, he said, "Have all the daughters of all the viziers line up in the garden." When the girls had gone to the garden, the sons of the padishah went there and shot arrows into the ground before them. The arrow of the oldest son landed near the feet of a daughter of the grand vizier, making her the bride of his selection. The arrow of the middle son landed before the feet of the daughter of another vizier, and that girl became his bride-to-be. When the youngest son shot his arrow, it sailed over the heads of all the people in the garden and landed some distance away. The padishah was so annoyed by this that he said to the youngest brother, "Son, go elsewhere and seek your own destiny!"

The youngest son mounted his horse and rode away from the palace. He went little, he went far, and after a while he saw a fountain alongside the road. When he stopped there to get some water to drink, he found his arrow lying upon the ground beside a frog. He said to himself, "This

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frog must be my destined bride." He therefore picked up frog and returned with it to his father's palace.

When the padishah saw his youngest son back again, he asked, "Oh, Son, what did you do? What did you find?"

The youngest son answered, "Father, this frog turned to be my destiny." He then told his father how he found the frog where his arrow had landed beside a roadside fountain

When the padishah discovered that his youngest son had brought home a frog as his bride, he became very an-

He gave an order to some of his men: "Take that traitor and kill him in the morning!"

When the young man's mother heard that order, she into great sadness. During the night she had her maids clean out one of the palace henhouses, and then she hid her son and his frog in that small building. The youngest son placed the frog in a jar containing some water and began living in the henhouse. Much to his surprise, however, he discovered each morning when he awoke that the henhouse had been thoroughly cleaned and that his small dining table was covered with dishes of delicious food. He supposed that his mother had come there during

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the night and had done this, but when he learned that she had not left the palace, he was confused. He kept wondering who had done all of the cleaning and cooking.

One night soon after that, he pretended that he was asleep, but he was really lying awake, waiting and watching. After a while the frog came out of the water jar and turned into a very beautiful girl. She cleaned the henhouse and then began cooking food. When the youngest son saw this, he tried to break the water jar so that the girl would not be able to return to her frog form. The girl, however, pleaded with him not to do this. She said, "Please, please do not break it! If you break it, your head will always be in trouble!" But the youngest son refused to listen to her. He broke the water jar, and in that way he made it impossible for her to return to her frog form.

After more time had passed, a day arrived when the frog girl decided that she could not continue living in a bare and uncomfortable henhouse. She said to the youngest son, "My brave young man, I cannot stand living this way any longer. Put this handkerchief in your pocket and do not any longer fear your father or your sisters-in-law.

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Go to the palace garden and bring me a walnut from one of trees growing there."

The youngest son went to the palace garden and got a walnut from one of the trees growing there. When the girl broke open that walnut, many beautiful and expensive things began to pour forth from its shell: rugs, furniture, golden necklaces, and bracelets. These things were not only beautiful but also unique. They made the interior of the old henhouse look like a room in a palace. The frog girl then said to the youngest son, "Give this towel to my father-in-law and this sheet to my mother-in-law

tell them that I am inviting them here to drink coffee." The youngest son delivered this invitation to his father.

The padishah was angered by this invitation, but he decided to accept it anyway. He and his wife went to visit their youngest son. When the padishah saw the magnificent rugs on the floor of the henhouse, he was so amazed that he did not dare step on them. When he saw the priceless jewelry, he could not believe his eyes. But when he saw the great beauty of his youngest son's wife, he was so overwhelmed that he lost his mind. He said to himself, "Aman,² Allah! What a beauty! She deserves no

²A mild expletive or interjection. In its negative

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one less than me! Only I should have that girl!"

After he had returned to his palace, the padishah ordered some of his men, "Bring my son and his wife here right away!" When the two arrived at the palace, the padishah said, "Look here, my son! A girl as beautiful as your wife deserves to have a padishah like me. I shall let you keep her only if you can perform certain tasks that I shall assign to you. If you can accomplish those tasks, then you may keep her. If you cannot accomplish them, I shall have you executed and then I shall take this girl." The padishah then told his son the tasks which he wished to have completed. "I want you to bring me an egg from which a male donkey can be born as a result of its own braying. I want you to bring me a tent large enough to hold seven companies of soldiers. I want you to bring me a cauldron in which seven different kinds of food can be cooked at the same time without becoming mixed with each other. Finally, I want you to bring me a newly born baby which can talk." He thought that he had given his son such impossible tasks to perform that he would surely be able to possess the beautiful frog girl.

But the frog girl whispered into her husband's ear, sense it means "Alas!" In its positive sense, it means roughly, "Wow!" or "Good heavens!"

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"Don't worry. Just a few days ago a child was born to one of your sisters-in-law. Go and get that child and bring it here."

The youngest son went and got the newly born baby from his sister-in-law and took it to his father. However, since the young man had not completed any of the other tasks, the padishah ordered the executioners to cut off his head. But before they were able to do this, the newly born baby began to speak. It said, "What other padishah would ever do what you are about to do? What kind of father could do such a thing? Don't you have any shame? How could you desire your son's wife? How could you request your son to do several impossible things?"

As the padishah listened to what the baby was saying, he realized how mistaken he had been. He now felt so ashamed that he wished he could sink into the ground and disappear. He said, "Forgive me, Son; please forgive my great error." Then to his viziers he said, "Prepare a wedding celebration for my son that will last for forty days and forty nights."

After that the youngest son of the padishah moved into the palace to live with his parents and his brothers

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The youngest son of the padishah and the frog girl had their wishes fulfilled. Let us all go and sit in their seats.³

³This is a greatly truncated version of a very popular and widely distributed folktale type. (See ATON Notes Vol. IX, for Aarne-Thompson and Eberhard-Boratav type numbers and titles.) In most variants the normally impossible tasks assigned the protagonist are accomplished with the supernatural or magic aid of the supernatural wife, the Frog Maiden. Here she demonstrates her supernatural power only by making the newly born child speak eloquently to the padishah. (See ATON Notes volume also for list of ATON variants.)