

Story 1823 (1970 Tape 16)

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Abandoned as a Child, Abused as a Mother

There was once a man who had a wife and two children, a daughter and a younger son. By the time the children were partly grown, their mother died, and their father soon married a second wife. His new wife had a child a year later, but she did not want the children of her husband's previous marriage. One day she said to her husband, "If you will cast out or kill those two children, I shall continue living with you. Otherwise I shall divorce you."

This demand presented the man with a dilemma which he could not resolve right away. After a while, however, he was forced to take the children of his first marriage to a mountain and abandon them there. He said to them, "Children, come along with me to the mountain today while I cut some firewood there."

"All right," they said.

After they had reached the mountain, the father said,

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"You may play while I cut wood, but keep listening to the sound of my axe so that you do not get lost." As soon as the children were out of sight, their father tied together two pumpkin shells which he had brought along and hung them in the branch of a tree. As the wind knocked two pumpkin shells together, they made a tak, tak, tak noise like the sound of an axe.

To pass the time, the children decided to hunt for mushrooms. They wandered about, saying, "Here there may be some mushrooms," and "Over there there may be some!

were not afraid, because they kept hearing the tak, tak, tak sound which they thought their father was making with his axe

When evening arrived, the children went to the place from which the tak, tak, tak sound was coming. There they discovered that the sound was being made by the pumpkin shells. They said, "Oh, pumpkin shells, our beloved father has gone and left us with you!" They did not know how to get home, and they both began crying. They walked and walked, and after a while they saw a light in the cabin of a shepherd. They became guests of that shepherd for the night.

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In the morning they again began walking in search of their home. After a while they came to a fountain. By then they were very thirsty, and the boy said, "I am going to drink water from this fountain."

But his sister was old enough to read the sign on the fountain: "Whoever drinks this water will be turned into a gazelle." She shouted to him, "No, no, my brother! Don't drink a drop of that water or you will be turned into a gazelle!"

Walking farther along their way, they came upon a second fountain, on which there was a sign: "Whoever drinks this water will be turned into coral." Although his sister read this sign to the boy, he was now so thirsty that he could not restrain himself from drinking some of the water. As soon as he did so, he was, by the will of Allah, turned into stone

His sister, now completely alone, again burst into tears. As she stood there crying, a Mother Angel¹ and two

¹This part of the narrative is especially vague. What is a Mother Angel (Melek Anne)? What is the function of the accompanying pigeons? The girl lives on, though for some time beset by adversities. The transformed brother is not disenchanted; in fact, he is completely forgotten and never mentioned again.

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pigeons dropped from the sky and landed in front of her. The Mother Angel lifted up the girl and took her to palace somewhere in the sky. There she said, "My girl, there are forty-one rooms in this palace. You may enter the first forty of these rooms, but never open the forty-first door."

"All right, Mother." The girl enjoyed for several days all of the interesting things that she discovered in the first forty rooms. After that, however, she began to grow more and more curious about what was contained in the forty-first room. Finally, she could no longer resist this curiosity, and so she opened that final door. When she did so, she discovered that the room was filled with heavenly light, a ray of which settled upon her littlest finger.

Although the Mother Angel was not there at that time she knew at once that the girl had opened the door of the forbidden room. When she returned, she asked the girl, "Daughter, did you open the door of the forty-first room?"

"No, I did not open that door, Mother."

"Daughter, you can achieve nothing here by lying," said the Mother Angel. She then took the girl back to the

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place on the mountain where she had found her. She was alone again, and she remained alone until one day she was found by chance by a hunter. He took her to his village, where his friends arranged a wedding and had the two married.

About a year later the girl bore a child. A few days after its birth, the Mother Angel appeared before the girl and asked, "Daughter, did you open the forty-first door?"

"No, Mother, I did not open that door."

After the girl had gone to sleep, the Mother Angel smeared blood on her mouth and face. She then took the baby from its bed and disappeared with it.

In the morning the members of the hunter's household noticed that the baby was missing. Seeing the girl's mouth and face covered with blood, they thought, "This woman is a monster! She has eaten her child!"

When a second child was born the following year, the Mother Angel returned and asked the girl the same question. As before, the girl answered, "No, Mother, I did not open the forty-first door." Again the Mother Angel smeared her mouth and face with blood while she slept, and then she disappeared, taking the second baby with her.

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The husband's mother went to him and said, "My son, do not sleep again with this woman that you found in the mountains. She is not a human being but a monster, and she may eat you as well as her children!"

But at the end of the third year they had another child. When the Mother Angel repeated her question, the girl answered, "No, Mother, I did not open the door of the forty-first room." So the girl's mouth and face were again smeared with blood, and the third child disappeared as the first two had.

The hunter's neighbors had grown more and more upset about the disappearance of the babies. They believed that the hunter's wife had eaten all three of them. They felt sure now that she was a monster, and so they decided to get rid of her by burning her to death. They heaped up a large amount of firewood and chained the girl to it. When they set the wood on fire, the Mother Angel reappeared to the girl and asked, "Daughter, did you or did you not open the door of the forty-first room in the palace?"

"Yes, I opened it, Mother."

Then, by the will of Allah, the Mother Angel caused clouds to gather. Heavy rain immediately began to fall upon the fire and soon extinguished it. The Mother Angel

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then took the girl to the palace in the sky again.

Returning to earth, she took the girl's husband to that palace. She then said to the couple, "Here is your first child. Here is your second child. And here is your third child."

They all lived together there happily after that.