

Story 1834 (1970 Tape 16)

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Location: Karaağaç village  
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### The Guessing Children I<sup>1</sup>

There was once a man who had three sons. It was clear that this man's time in this world was soon to come to an end. He was so very ill that he was unable to leave his bed. One day he said to his sons, "I am going to die. Unfortunately I have almost no worldly goods to leave to you except this house and a donkey. They are all that I can leave you. I have always been a woodcutter, and on the back of that donkey I have for several years carried from the forest the wood that I cut there. You too can become woodcutters and use the donkey as I have done in order to make a living."

Soon after that came an order from Allah to Azrail<sup>2</sup> to take the life of the father. After he had died, his sons began making their

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<sup>1</sup>Tales about what are called "Guessing Children" or "Guessing Friends" are divided between those based on intuition or numerology (I) and those based on very sharp observation of physical details followed by inductive reasoning about those details—the methodology of the detective (II).

<sup>2</sup>Azrail is the Angel of Death in both Judaic and Moslem mythology.

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living as woodcutters. On the first day the oldest son took the donkey and went to the forest to cut firewood. When he had cut quite a bit of wood, he loaded it upon the back of the donkey and took it to the marketplace, where he sold it. The next day the middle brother took the donkey to the forest, where he cut wood, loaded it on the donkey, and later sold it at the village marketplace. On the third day the youngest brother did exactly what his two brothers had done before him. They then continued taking turns in this way at woodcutting and wood selling.

One day, however, when it was the turn of the youngest brother to cut wood, he went to the stable and discovered that the donkey was not there. He wondered if one of his older brothers had taken it and gone somewhere with it before he had reached the stable. Going to the oldest brother, he asked him if he had taken the donkey. "No, I did not take it. I wonder if our middle brother took it."

The youngest brother went and asked the middle brother about this. But the middle brother said, "No, I did not take it."

The three brothers then came together to discuss their problem. They said over and over to each other, "Our donkey has been stolen! How are we going to find the thief?"

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The oldest brother then said, “The thief is a köse<sup>3</sup> .”

The middle brother said, “If the thief is a köse, then he is short-legged.”

The youngest brother said, “If he is a köse, and if he is short-legged, then his name is Musa.”<sup>4</sup>

They set out in the direction they thought the thief might have gone. After they had gone some distance, they saw a man wearing a turban and riding upon a donkey. One of the brothers called, “O turbaned man, where did you get that donkey?”

“I bought it,” answered the stranger.

“No, you did not buy it. You stole it, and you stole it from us.”

The turbaned man insisted that it was his donkey, and the brothers insisted that it was theirs. After they had argued for awhile,

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<sup>3</sup>A köse is a character type who appears most often in folktales, though there are real-life human beings who seem to possess some of his physical qualities. He is supposedly beardless and short-legged. He has a heart-shaped face. He is extremely shrewd, unscrupulous, and vicious in his exploitation of innocent and/or unsuspecting people. So vicious is he that he has to some extent replaced the monster in Turkish folktales. Once identified, he is, therefore, often treated ruthlessly.

<sup>4</sup>The characteristics of the thief intuited by the three brothers are false leads. The short-leggedness and the name Musa are present in some köse tales (as the narrator obviously knows), but they are completely out of place here, for the thief does not turn out to be a köse at all.

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they agreed to take the matter to a judge and let him decide whose donkey it was.

After the dispute had been explained to him, the judge asked the three brothers, "How did you know that this donkey was yours?"

"Something inside us told us that it was our donkey."

"But how could you be sure that your feelings were correct?"

"We were sure of it."

After the judge had thought about this unusual case for a few minutes, he said to the brothers, "I shall test you to see whether or not your intuition is dependable. I shall disguise something and hide it completely from your view. Then I shall ask you to identify it. If you can identify it, I shall then award the donkey to you. If you fail to identify it, I shall award it to the man who has it at present. Come back here tomorrow to be tested." But until that time the judge placed the brothers under the observation of some guards.

In the meantime, the judge went to the marketplace and bought a quince. After wrapping the quince in forty layers of cloth, he brought it back to the courtroom and placed it upon a table.

On the next day the judge called the three brothers into his presence. After they had arrived there, he asked them, "What is the object all wrapped in cloth on the table?"

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The oldest brother thought for a minute, and then he said, "The object is round."

The middle brother said, "If the object is round, then it is yellow."

The youngest son then said, "If the object is round and yellow, then it is a quince."

The object was then unwrapped, and it was, of course, a quince. All of the people who had witnessed this test were surprised that the brothers had been able to identify the wrapped object. But the judge was uneasy about this matter. He still had some doubts about the brothers' power of intuition. He said, "Sons, I am going to test you once more, and if you pass that test, I shall definitely give you the donkey. Come back tomorrow." As before, they kept the brothers under surveillance, but this time they doubled the number of guards, because the judge suspected that they might somehow have gotten clues about the quince.

After the brothers had left the courtroom, the judge also departed. He went home to his garden, where he had a number of beehives. Removing one of the bees from one of these hives, he placed it in a cloth bag. He then took the bag to the courtroom and placed it upon the table.

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On the following day the judge again called the three brothers into his presence. After they had arrived in the courtroom, the judge asked them, "What is in the bag upon that table?"

The three brothers began to think about this question. Then the oldest brother said, "What is in that bag is alive."

The middle brother said, "If it is alive, it has some connection with honey."

youngest brother said, "If it is alive, and if it has some connection with honey, then it is a bee."

The bag was then opened, and everyone present saw that it was indeed a bee. The judge said immediately, "Very well! The donkey is yours, but before you leave this place, I want you to come to a banquet at my home tomorrow noon." The brothers accepted this invitation.<sup>5</sup>

When the judge reached home that day, he went to his butcher and said to him, "You are to slaughter one of the best-fed sheep you have for a banquet I am giving to some important guests tomorrow noon." Then he went to his baker and said, "You are to take your best flour and make the finest bread you can make for a banquet I am having tomorrow for some important guests."

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<sup>5</sup>Beginning at this point the narrator confuses *The Guessing Children I* with *The Guessing Children II*—the story of the lost camel often titled "The Three Princes of Serendip." What follows from here on belongs with II (Type 348 in the Eberhard-Boratav Type Index), not with I (Type 347 in the Eberhard-Boratav Type Index).

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On the following day the dining table was set and the food made ready for the banquet. Calling aside one of his servants, the judge instructed him, "When the guests arrive, tell them that I have been called away very briefly but will return soon. Tell them to proceed with the meal that has been specially prepared for them." But actually he went and hid behind a curtain in the dining room. He did this because he was curious to know what the three brothers would talk about while they ate.

When the three brothers arrived, the servant insisted on taking them into the dining room right away. They protested, however, saying, "We do not want to start eating until the judge arrives."

"Never mind that," answered the servant. "He said that you were to start eating and that he would be here very soon."

When the brothers started to eat, the oldest brother broke bread from a loaf and said at once, "Oh-h-h-h, it smells like a dead human body, not like bread!"

When the middle brother took a piece of meat, he said, "Oh-h-h-h, it smells like the flesh of a dog, not a sheep."

Then the youngest brother spoke up and said, "The judge, is hiding behind that curtain over there, is a bastard."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>In *The Guessing Children I*, here, the youngest son intuits that the judge is a bastard—as he and his brothers intuit all other revelations. In *The Guessing Children II*, the brothers conclude the

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When the judge heard that remark about himself, he came out from behind the curtain and asked the youngest son, "What makes you say that?"

"You are a bastard," repeated the youngest brother. "Go and ask your mother if that is not true."

Then, turning to the oldest brother, the judge asked, "What made you say what you did about the bread?"

The oldest brother answered, "Go and ask your baker."

Next the judge asked the middle brother, "What was it that made you say what you did about the meat?"

"Go and ask your butcher about that."

Going to the butcher, the judge asked, "What possible reason could my guest have had for saying that the meat we served him smelled more like the flesh of a dog than it did of a lamb?"

The butcher answered, "I had a lamb whose mother had died. After the lamb had gone hungry for a day, I let it suckle with a newly born puppy. It was fed briefly with dog's milk, and that may be the reason its flesh smelled like that of a dog."

Going then to the baker, the judge said, "One of my guests complained that the bread you made for my banquet smelled like a

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judge is a bastard because he fails to eat with his guests; this is not intuitive but rational (inductive).



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dead human body. Is there any reason why it should have smelled that way?"

"When there was a flour shortage a short while ago, I hid a bag of my best flour in a grave. It did not smell bad to me, but that was the flour I used to make the bread for your banquet."

Understanding now how perceptive the two older brothers had been, the judge went next to visit his mother. He wished to know whether or not the remark made by the youngest brother had also been accurate. He said, "Mother, was told today that I am a bastard. Why did you make me a bastard?"

"That is not true," she answered. "You had both a mother and a father." But when the judge insisted upon knowing the truth, she said, "Oh, Son, my husband was incapable of fathering a child. We were quite wealthy, and I did not want all of our possessions to be inherited by someone who had no relationship to either of us. I therefore slept with another man but afterwards pretended that you were my husband's child."