

Story 1849 (1981 Tape 1

Narrator: Niyazi Özden

Location: Melekli village,
İğdir kaza,
Kars Province

Several years after this tale was taped, İğdir became capital city of new province of the same name.

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Catching an Alkarısı

Forty or fifty years ago horses were the most common means of transportation in my home area. We had several very good breeds of horses. But in those days there were also creatures known as Alkarısıs who often made horses unusable. These Alkarısıs were small creatures somewhat like dwarfs. There may have been other names for them, but the villagers in my area always called them Alkarısıs.

These Alkarısıs would come to a stable and ride the horses there all day and all night right there within the stable where no one could see them. As a result of this continuous running, the horses often

¹See ATON 843, which is a similar tale (about Alkarısı's damaging horses) that was taped near Tercan, a kaza center in northeastern Erzincan Province. In general, however, the Alkarısı is more often feared in Turkey as a killer of newborn babies and sometimes their mothers, too. In this function the Alkarısı is sometimes identified with the very ancient malevolent figure of Lilith. For a useful brief commentary on the Alkarısı myth see Türk Ansiklopedisi, Vol. II, p. 12.

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became so exhausted that their owners were not able to use them for the purpose of transportation. If anyone happened to enter the stable while the Alkaris1s were there, the Alkaris1s would disappear, but usually by that time they had already tired the horses.

The people in my village once decided to try to capture one of these Alkaris1s. They thought and thought about how they might be able to do this. They finally decided to put tar on the back of one of their horses so that an Alkaris1 would be stuck to the horse she mounted. This plan was only partly successful, but one farmer did catch an Alkaris1 that way.

It is said that Alkaris1s are powerless against steel. If you stick a needle into an Alkaris1, she becomes helpless. She cannot remove the needle herself, and so she can be kept right there and made a slave. They stuck a needle into the dwarf creature they had captured with tar and made her a maidservant in their household. She remained with them long enough so that she learned their language. One day, however, when she was alone with the children of that family, she was enabled to escape. She begged and begged one of the children to pull the needle from her flesh. Feeling sorry for the Alkaris1 and not knowing what might happen, the child pulled out the needle. The Alkaris1 then immediately disappeared. —This story is often told in my region.

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[Ahmet Uysal: “The Alkarısı also bothers women still recovering from childbirth. don’t know if that is believed also in your area. They can be very dangerous. In order to keep the Alkarısı away from the lohusa,² people often keep the light on in the woman’s room. They also attach red ribbons to the lohusa, for the Alkarısı is said to be afraid of that color.”³]

²The word used in some sections of Turkey for a woman who has just given birth to a child.

³This is ironic in one sense in that the Alkarısı is often thought to be red herself.