

Story 1912 (1995 Tape 4)

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Lazy Ahmet and the Padishah's Daughter

Once there was and once there was not,¹ time within time,² when the sieve was in the straw,³ when the camel

¹Formulaic opening for many a Turkish folktale, this is known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run to several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a non-sense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is used both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce in English the rhyme scheme.

²"Time within Time" refers to the chronology of events in an interior world. A person may dream or fantasize at great length during only a few clocked seconds of ordinary time. One may even seem to spend many years in that other world within; one may take a job, marry, have children, and see them grow to maturity. In Turkish this is called Zaman Zaman İçinde. It is elsewhere sometimes referred to as "Frozen Time" or "Moments of Eternity."

³The humor here derives from the fact that the sieve is never in the straw; the straw is in the sieve. It refers to the threshing of grain on farms too small or too remote to have available modern threshing machines. On a dried-clay threshing floor stalks of grain are thrown. They are chopped up into small pieces by a döven, a large wooden rectangle from the bottom of which protrude scores of sharp pieces of flint. When the chopped-up mass is winnowed, the chaff blows downwind, but there fall directly to the floor kernels of grain and small bits of

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was a town crier and the flea was a barber, and I was rocking my father's cradle, tingir mingir,⁴ there was in a certain country a padishah who had a son named Sadi and three daughters named Dilber, Gülper, and Nilüfer. Sadi was engaged to a girl named Yasemin, who was the daughter of the padishah of Mosul, but before the time for their marriage had arrived, Yasemin was abducted by bandits. When all efforts to find her and rescue her had failed, Sadi became very depressed. He did not wish to talk with anyone, and despite his father's urging, he refused to consider marrying any other girl.

His three sisters, however, wished to be married, but they did not dare to tell this to their father directly. Instead, they decided to inform him about this by means of a riddle. The riddle was presented to him in the form of three watermelons. The oldest daughter sent him a very ripe watermelon on a very beautiful tray. The

the stem to which grain is still attached. Both the kernels and the small pieces of grain-laden straw are then thrown into a sieve (about thirty inches in diameter). The kernels fall through onto a sheet of canvas, but the grain-laden straw remains in the sieve. The final threshing of these bits of straw is done by the fingers of the threshers.

⁴Onomatopoeia for the sound of rocking.

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middle daughter sent him a watermelon that was somewhat less ripe. And the youngest daughter sent him a watermelon that was just beginning to ripen.⁵

The padishah called his three daughters to him and said to them, "I enjoyed your riddle." Then he said to the oldest daughter, "What kind of person would you like to marry?"

Dilber answered, "Father, I shall accept whatever man you may select to be my husband." Pleased with this response, the padishah gave Dilber in marriage to grand vizier. When he asked Gülper the same question, she responded with the same answer her older sister had given, and as a result of that response, Gülper was married to the commander of the padishah's army.

The padishah then spoke to his youngest daughter. "Nilüfer, what kind of a person would you like to marry?"

Nilüfer answered, "Father, I should like to marry

⁵This kind of symbolic language is not infrequent in Turkish folktales. Although it may be less common in some other cultures, the specific instance used here is known internationally. See Motif H611.1 Ripe melon symbolic of marriageable girl.

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a man much younger than the men to whom my sisters were married."

The padishah was so annoyed by this answer that he remained silent for a moment. Then he ordered his aides, "Go out and find the laziest young man in the country and bring him here to become the husband of my youngest daughter." After searching for some time, his aides found the man whom they agreed was the laziest young man in the land. He was called Lazy Ahmet, and it was to Lazy Ahmet that Nilüfer was married

Nilüfer then began living with Lazy Ahmet and his mother in a shack on the edge of the city. All day long Lazy Ahmet sat idly before that shack while his old mother and Nilüfer worked hard and did all of the family chores. It was not long, however, before Nilüfer became angry at this situation. Taking a stick, she went to Lazy Ahmet and began beating him severely with it. She said, "Go and find a job at which you can work!"

right, all right Stop beating me! I shall go right now and find a job." He left the house and entered the main part of the city. There he found work as a porter. He remained in the city until after dark, and then he

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returned to his home in one of the outskirts. He knocked on his own door, and when his mother came to open it, he asked her, "Is my wife here?"

"Yes, she is," answered his mother

"Is she still carrying her stick?"

"Yes, she still has that stick in her hand."

Hearing that, Lazy Ahmet became frightened. After giving his mother most of the money he had earned that day, he returned into the city. Time passed, and this little episode repeated itself every evening.

One day Lazy Ahmet's very hard work attracted attention of a rich merchant. That merchant said to the young man, "I shall be departing tomorrow on a business trip to Bagdad. Would you like to accompany me on that trip?" After Ahmet had agreed to go with him, the merchant gave him fifteen gold liras, saying, "Go and give this money to your family to support them while you are away."

Ahmet went home, and when his mother answered knocking on the door, he asked her, "Mother, is my at home?"

"Yes, she is."

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"Is she still carrying her stick?"

"

After hearing that, Ahmet gave the gold liras to his mother and returned to the center of the city. On the following morning he departed for Bagdad with the merchant. After they had been traveling for some time through a desert, they came upon a well at the side of the road. Ahmet climbed down into the well in order to get some water. While he was there, he dislodged a large stone in the wall of the well. Removing that stone, he found beyond it a lighted compartment. Upon exploring that underground compartment, Ahmet came upon a very beautiful girl. He immediately asked, "Are you a jinn or some other supernatural being?"⁶

⁶In Turkish tales, and sometimes in real life too, one who suddenly comes upon a person in a very unlikely place wonders about the nature of that person. One asks the formulaic question, "In misin cin misin?" Literally it means "Are you a human being or a jinn?" In means human being. The literal meaning is often corrupted, however, to mean, "Are you a jinn or some other supernatural creature?" This extended meaning can be inferred from the answer, "I am neither."

The word jinn can denote two very different kinds of otherworldly creatures. The first is the large being which comes forth from a bottle or appears in response to some signal, such as the rubbing of a magic lamp or ring. This creature then proceeds to give the caller magic aid to achieve what he/she wishes. The other kind

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The girl answered, "I am neither but Yasemin, the daughter of the padishah of Mosul and the fiancée of Sadi, the son of the padishah of this land. I was abducted by bandits, brought here, and locked in this underground place. Please save me. While you are doing that, you can also take the bandits' treasure of stolen gold and jewels."

Taking some of the gold with him, Ahmet returned to the surface, where he bought two of the still unloaded camels from the merchant's caravan. He also returned to the rich merchant the fifteen gold liras which he had given to Ahmet. He then loaded the bandits' treasure into the saddlebags of his two camels, and after that Ahmet and Yasemin each rode atop one of the camels back to their native city.

There Nilüfer was delight to see once again her husband and her brother's fiancée. She sent a message to the padishah, saying only, "Father, we have a great surprise for you."

of jinn is never seen. It is a spiritual force referred to in some Sufi beliefs and in other mystical systems.

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Pleased by this announcement, the padishah ordered a great feast in honor of his youngest daughter and her husband. About halfway through that feast Ahmet arose and said, "Your Majesty, now you will see our surprise." Pulling aside a curtain, he revealed the presence of Yasemin and the bandits' hoard of gold and jewels. The ruler and his son, Sadi, were almost overcome with joy at the sight of Yasemin. A lengthy wedding celebration was held, and at the end of those festivities Sadi and Yasemin were married.

The padishah now discovered that he liked very much his son-in-law Ahmet. He was no longer called Lazy Ahmet by anyone. A few days after the wedding of Sadi and Yasemin, the padishah made Ahmet one of his viziers.

They all had their wishes fulfilled. Let us hope to move up and sit in their seats.⁷

⁷This is a terminal device for many folktales. It utilizes a Turkish social custom which requires some explanation.

In rural areas of Turkey there is often a set pattern for the seating of guests at social occasions. The person of greatest status is placed directly across the room from the main entrance. People of lesser rank spread out in graduated distances to right and left of this central position all the way to the door, or, in extremely crowded conditions, even out the door into the hallway.

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If someone of any degree of status enters a full room, everyone of lesser status must move down a notch. The wise person with no status at all therefore seats himself well toward the door so that he will not be affected by the possibly frequent shuffling of positions. The narrator in this terminal device wishes higher status for herself and for the members of her audience.