

Story 1989 (1992 Tape 8)

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The Hunter, the Snake, and the Fox

One day a hunter was walking through a field when he saw a small fire ahead of him. When he reached the fire, he saw that a snake had been trapped in the midst of the flames. Sticking the barrel of his gun into the fire, he called to the snake, "Climb onto my gun, and I shall pull you out of the fire." The snake did as the hunter had suggested and was thus saved from being burned to death. But as soon as the snake had crawled off the gun barrel, it said, "Now I am going to bite you!"

The hunter was astonished. This was not at all what he had expected to hear the snake say. He replied, "I have just saved your life, and you should be grateful to me. How could you wish to bite me?"

The snake said, "All of mankind is evil and deserves to be bitten!"

The hunter and the snake argued about this idea for awhile, and then they agreed on a way to resolve their difference of opinion. The hunter made a suggestion. He said, "Let us ask three different creatures if they think mankind is so bad that it deserves to be attacked by

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snakes.” The snake accepted this suggestion, and the two began to walk together in search of three creatures to consult.

When they entered a wooded area, the hunter said, “O forest, even though I saved the life of this snake by rescuing it from a fire, it wants to bite me because it thinks all humanity is evil. Will you give us your opinion on this matter? Is the snake right or wrong?”

The forest answered, “I think that the snake is right and that mankind is nothing but a troublemaker. Your people come to me for parties in the summer. They eat and drink beneath my trees, and when they go away they leave trash and harmful waste behind them. So the snake should bite you!”

A short time later they met an ox. The hunter said, “O ox, even though I saved the life of this snake by rescuing it from a fire, it wants to bite me because it thinks that all humanity is evil. Will you give us your opinion on this matter?”

The ox replied, “Mankind makes oxen work like slaves as long as they are able to do so, but when they cannot work any longer, they are slaughtered by human beings who then eat their flesh. Therefore the snake should bite you!”

After the hunter and the snake had walked a little farther, they met a fox. The hunter said, “O fox, even though I saved the life of this snake by rescuing it from a fire, it wants to bite me because it thinks

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that all humanity is evil. Will you give us your opinion on this matter?"

"My father was a kadı<sup>1</sup> for many years, and I noticed that in his court the plaintiff and the defendant never stood close together, as you two are now. You are walking too close to each other." Then he said to the hunter, "Fall back four or five paces behind the snake. Going to the snake, the fox said, "As plaintiff, you should walk ahead of the defendant."

After the two contenders had moved apart as he had suggested, the fox went to the hunter and said, "Don't be a fool! Use your rifle. That is my answer to your question."

After the hunter had shot the snake, he said to the fox, "Thank you for saving me from this snake. I am going to get a chicken and bring it to you in return for your help."

The fox answered, "There is no need to do that. Do not trouble yourself to do that. I do not want to be paid for helping you."

But the hunter insisted upon rewarding him. He said to the fox, "I shall leave a chicken in a bag by that tree over there, and you can come there to get it." Bidding the snake farewell, he returned to his home. There he took a large sack to his henhouse and put two chickens in it.

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<sup>1</sup>A kadı was a judge of canonical law during the Ottoman times.

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The hunter's wife saw what he was doing, and she rushed to the henhouse. "Husband, what are you doing? Why are you putting chickens into that bag?" The hunter told her the whole story about how the fox had helped him. When she heard that, she said, "You ill-mannered husband! Every other man in this village has brought home a fox fur for his wife, but here you are planning to give our chickens to a fox!" After much wrangling, she persuaded the hunter to put a greyhound in the bag with the chickens. He then took the bag and placed it where he had said he would.

Later that day the fox went to that place to get the chicken promised him. When he opened the bag, however, the greyhound sprang out of it. The fox ran for his life, and the greyhound pursued him. As he fled, the fox uttered curses against the hunter and shouted insults at him. The fox finally found a hole and dived into it, but it was such a small hole that his tail stuck out of it. Grabbing the tail, the greyhound tried to pull the fox out of that hole, but all he got was the tail, which broke off as the two were pulling in opposite directions.

Although he had saved his life, the fox was now tailless. All of the other foxes made fun of him and called him "Short-Ended One." The tailless fox responded to these taunts by saying, "I may be short-ended, but I am the only one who knows where the most delicious pears can be found." After he had said this several times, the other

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foxes began to wonder where those delicious pears were located. When they asked him this question, he said, "I know where the orchard is, and I know which tree in that orchard bears the most delicious fruit. I can take you there, if you wish, and show you how to get some of those pears."

The other foxes agreed at once to this proposal. When they reached the orchard and went to the special tree, the tailless fox said, "You can see how big this tree is and how difficult it is to climb. In order to get to the top, where the sweetest pears grow, I shall have to tie you all together head to tail and use you as a ladder. Once I get to the very top, I can throw down those delicious pears to you."

The other foxes were so eager to taste those pears that they consented quickly to this arrangement. After the other foxes had all been tied together to form a ladder, the tailless fox climbed along their backs to the top of the tree. There he ate some pears and threw a few down to the others. They had just begun to taste those pears when the tailless fox shouted from the treetop, "Run! Run! Run for your lives! A hunter is coming with his pack of greyhounds!"

In their alarm the foxes forgot that they were tied together, and so they tried to run in different directions. In that mad tussle there were so many tails pulled out that after that no one in their village called anyone else "Short-Ended One."