

Story 2000 (1984 Tape 7)

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Nasreddin Hoca,¹ Two Wives, and Two Geese

At one stage in his career Nasreddin Hoca was appointed kadı² of Eskişehir. This was a piece of good fortune, but he did not enjoy it fully for very long, for a few months later his wife died.

After the Hoca had lived alone for some time, his neighbors grew concerned about him. Among these neighbors were Bully Boy Recep, his nephew, and an elderly lady who was called Granny Raziye by almost everybody. Thinking that Nasreddin Hoca must be a very lonely man, she one day approached him and said, “Hoca Efendi,³ with your permission, I should like to find a new wife for you.”

¹A hoca is the preacher and religious leader of a community. In the pre-Republican era the hoca was also the community’s teacher, for education was then the responsibility of the clergy. Separation of “church” and state in the Republic required that teachers be people with secular rather than religious training. Nasreddin Hoca belonged to the earlier period. For centuries he has been Turkey’s most beloved comic folk character.

²A kadı was a judge of Muslim canonical law in pre-Republican Turkey.

³In earlier times Efendi was an honorific following a man’s name: Ahmet Efendi. By the mid-twentieth century its complimentary nature had so eroded that it was used only after the names of servants and children.

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Nasreddin Hoca answered, “Granny Raziye, I should be greatly pleased if you would do that.”

Granny Raziye continued, “I shall arrange a marriage between you and a beautiful young woman. You deserve a young wife, for you are an honorable judge.” The old lady then went to Mutavet, a village attached to the provincial capital of Eskişehir, where she knew a suitable girl named Zeynep, who was twenty-two years old. After greeting the girl’s parents, Granny Raziye spoke to Zeynep, saying, “Zeynep, you are in luck! I have found a good husband for you. He is not only a good man, but he is also the honorable kadı of Eskişehir.” She then talked further with Zeynep’s parents, and they agreed that Zeynep should marry the Hoca. The wedding ceremony was completed a few days later.

Most of Nasreddin Hoca’s neighbors were people of his own class, but his nephew, Bully Boy Recep, was partly of lower-class origins. He was neither very respectable nor very reliable. The fence between his house and the Hoca’s house was made of wooden stakes. Through the spaces between the stakes Recep began to gaze secretly at the Hoca’s young wife whenever she walked in the garden. One day while Zeynep was in the garden, Recep peeked through the cracks in

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the fence and called out, “Zeynepabla,⁴ lovely one, are those your legs which look like squash flowers?”

Annoyed by this remark, Zeynep said, “What a bad-mannered fellow you are! Such improper talk!” And to herself she said, “I should go and slap that rude man’s face!”

But when she got closer to the fence, Recep grabbed her by the wrists and said, “O lovely one, I am mad about you! How could you wish to slap me?”

Even though she came from a good family, Zeynep was not strong enough morally to resist temptation. She really liked the attention given to her by her neighbor, and so she said quietly, “This is not the place to talk that way, but I could arrange to talk with you in our house this evening.”

On that same day Nasreddin Hoca decided to buy a goose. After having it plucked and gutted, he took it to a bakery to be roasted, for he thought that their oven at home was too small to hold such a large bird.

When Recep saw the Hoca going to the bakery with the goose, he returned to Zeynep and said to her, “Your ugly old husband is going

⁴When the suffix -abla is added to a woman’s first name, it means big sister. It is not meant literally but is instead a metaphor of respect, usually used by a child or someone younger than the person addressed.

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to bring a roasted goose for dinner. You must find some way to prevent his eating it. He is an old man who does not deserve a goose to eat. I am the one who should eat it.”

That evening Nasreddin Hoca went home with the roasted goose and asked his wife to set the table so that they could have their dinner. Zeynep said, “Oh, Hoca, how nice it is that you have brought home a roasted goose for dinner. But I should feel uncomfortable about eating all of the goose ourselves when we know that the night watchman in our neighborhood has so little. He has been guarding our house and calling out the time as he has passed by. Couldn’t we ask that poor man to come and dine with us?” The Hoca admired his wife’s generosity, and so he went to the night watchman’s house, which lay just beyond Recep’s house, to invite that old man to dinner. While he was gone, Zeynep gave the goose to Bully Boy Recep.

By the time that Hoca returned with the night watchman, Recep had already left the Hoca’s house. Seeing nothing of the goose, the Hoca asked his wife, “What has become of our dinner?”

Pretending to be very upset, Zeynep answered, “Our kitten, Mercan, ate it when I wasn’t looking.”

Nasreddin Hoca exclaimed, “Amazing! Little Mercan weighs only half a kilo, but that big goose weighed three kilos! How could he

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possibly have eaten that goose?" But he let the matter pass and did not question his wife any further.

A few days later the Hoca bought a second goose and took it to the same bakery to have it roasted. After inviting the night watchman to dinner that evening, he took the goose home and asked Zeynep to serve it for their dinner. Zeynep had to find some way of getting her husband and their guest out of the house so that she could then give the goose to Recep again. After thinking for a minute, she said, "Hoca, none of the bread we have in the house is fresh. It is all stale and dry. I am glad that you invited the night watchman to dine with us, but he will not be able to chew that bread with his old teeth. Will you please go to the bakery and get some fresh bread?"

After the Hoca had left to go to the bakery, Zeynep put some butter in a mortar and began to beat it with a pestle. The old guest asked, "What are you mashing in that mortar?"

Zeynep exclaimed, "Oh, Uncle Bekçi,⁵ I feel so sorry for you! You poor old man! You do not know what the Hoca plans to do! He suffers from some kind of madness which compels him to put hot butter on the backs of his guests."

⁵Bekçi is the Turkish word for night watchman.

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When the old watchman heard this, he arose at once and left, saying, “O Allah, what an ill-mannered man he is! He may be the kadı of this city, but he has no sense of courtesy!”

Of course after the old watchman had left, Zeynep gave the goose to Recep. And when the Hoca returned with the fresh bread, he found that the second goose had also disappeared. When he asked what had become of the goose, Zeynep said, “Uncle Bekçi carried it off to his own house.”

The Hoca set out angrily in pursuit of the watchman. He shouted, “Please stop, Uncle Bekçi! I do not want the whole thing, but give me back at least part of it.”

When the watchman looked behind him and saw the Hoca following him, he spat—tuh!—and shouted back, “You shameless, brazen-faced man!” The watchman ran and ran, and the Hoca ran after him. But the watchman escaped into his own house and locked the door, and thus the Hoca never learned what had happened to either of his geese.