

Story 2024 (Transcribed from tape  
of Atatürk İlkokulu)

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Dilber and the Substitute Bride

Many years ago there was a garbage collector named Hasan. He collected garbage every day from dawn until dark but that earned him only enough money to buy one loaf of bread. One day his wife said, "Bring me some liver to eat for dinner today. I am pregnant and I have a craving for liver." But that day Hasan was unable to earn enough money to buy liver, and so he returned home with his head hanging down.

The wife had a wealthy sister, and on the following morning she went to visit that sister. She said, "Sister I am pregnant, and I have a craving to eat some liver. Will you buy some for me?" Unfortunately that wealthy sister was a cruel person. She bought some liver but fed it all to a cat while the pregnant woman looked on hungrily.

When the child was about to be born, the weather was cold. Since Hasan could not afford to heat his house, his wife looked for some other place to deliver the child. She went to a public bath kept warm by its boilers, and there, after all the customers had left, she gave birth to her baby,

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a girl. Immediately after the birth, one of the walls of the bath opened and three fairies appeared.<sup>1</sup>

The first fairy said, "My gift to this little girl is this: whenever she cries, pearls, not tears, will fall from her eyes."

The second fairy said, "My gift to this little girl is this: whenever she smiles, roses will bloom on her cheeks."

The third fairy then said, " My gift to this little girl is this: whenever water is poured over her head, that water will turn into gold pieces."

All three fairies joined to place a necklace on the child, and they said to its mother, "If this necklace is removed from her neck, this child will die."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>It is common belief in Turkey that public baths are "haunted" at night. The supernatural beings who appear there are usually benevolent--either fairies or some other species of "little people." They reward virtuous people and punish those who are evil or who are rude to them. There are numerous tales in ATON which contain such diminutive creatures.

<sup>2</sup>Like many an amulet or talisman, this necklace is also a "life token," something in which the vitality or even soul of a person is enclosed. Sometimes this is referred to as an "external soul." If it is either removed from its owner or damaged, the result can be very dangerous, even fatal, to its rightful possessor.

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The woman later returned home and told her husband what had happened at the bath. To test the accuracy of one of the fairies' statements, they poured a few drops of water on the baby's head. Just as the third fairy had predicted, the water was turned into gold. Hasan immediately took a small gold coin and went to the market, where he bought, among other things, all of the liver that his wife could possibly eat. Hasan and his wife then named their daughter Dilber.

As time passed, they grew rich from the gold that fell from Dilber's head. They built a large house and hired many servants to tend to their needs. In fact, Hasan became as rich as a king. His wealthy sister-in-law became very jealous of this and tried to find ways of harming Dilber and her parents.

By the time Dilber became fifteen years old, she was so very beautiful that people throughout the whole land were talking about her. Accounts of her great beauty also spread into neighboring countries. A prince in one of those countries fell in love with Dilber just from hearing descriptions of the girl. That prince came to her village and asked Hasan for the hand of his daughter in

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marriage. After an engagement had been made, the prince returned home to make arrangements for the wedding. At the same time, Dilber's parents made preparations to take their daughter to the land of that prince.

When Dilber's jealous aunt heard about this, she became even more jealous, for she wanted her own daughter an ugly child, to marry a prince. She went to Hasan's house and said, "Let me be of service to you. I shall be glad to escort Dilber to the palace of her future husband." Hasan and his wife accepted this offer.

A few days later, Dilber, her ugly cousin, and her aunt set forth in a coach for the prince's land. Along the way the aunt gave Dilber some very salty food to eat. Of course the girl became very thirsty as a result of that salty food, and she soon asked for some water to drink. The aunt said, "We have no water with us, but if you will give me one of your eyes, I can buy a cup of water for you." Dilber was so very thirsty that she gave both of her eyes for two cups of water. She was then blind.

The aunt at once took the wedding dress off Dilber put it on her own ugly daughter. After that she threw Dilber out of the coach and left her by the side of the

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road.

The cruel aunt and her daughter traveled a short way and they traveled a long way<sup>3</sup> before they finally reached the palace of the prince. When the prince lifted the girl's veil and looked into her ugly face, he was startled. "Are you the beautiful Dilber?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, "but I probably do not look very beautiful now, for I am exhausted from many days of travel." The prince said nothing.

Let us see what has happened in the meantime to Dilber. After she had been thrown from the coach, she sat by the side of the road crying. After awhile a shepherd who was passing along that route found the girl and felt pity for her. He took her to his home, where he turned over the care of Dilber to his three daughters. While those daughters were bathing Dilber, they poured water over her head and were amazed to see gold fall to the floor. They immediately told their father about this, and then Dilber, in turn, told the whole family her life

<sup>3</sup>This is a formulaic expression used frequently in Turkish folktales to indicate a lengthy journey: Az gitti, uz gitti (went little, went much). This particular expression is sometimes protracted to twice or thrice this length.

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story. In a few days the shepherd became rich from the gold that fell from Dilber's head. He then took the girl home to her own parents. Hasan and his wife were deeply saddened by Dilber's account of what had happened to her.

One day Dilber smiled and roses fell from her cheeks. She said to Hasan, "Father, take these roses to the land of the prince and walk back and forth before the palace selling them. Call out, 'I am selling this bunch of beautiful roses for two eyes.' My eyes have been kept by my cruel aunt. Maybe you can recover my eyes for me in this way.

Hasan rushed to the prince's palace and did exactly as Dilber had directed. The ugly daughter of Dilber's aunt exchanged Dilber's eyes for the bunch of roses. Hasan then returned home with his daughter's eyes. As soon as he got there, he called several doctors to his home to replace Dilber's eyes.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Calling doctors to replace the girl's eyes is an anachronism in this tale. The action of the tale takes place in a world of fantasy, where eyes are preserved for a very long time without refrigeration or medicines. In most variants of this tale the eyes are returned to their original sockets with no actual medical procedures. The sockets are simply rubbed by a curative leaf, after which the eyes are slipped into place and immediately become fully functional again.

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Meanwhile in the neighboring land the prince returned from a short trip and entered his palace. He saw at once the bunch of bright and beautiful roses. When he asked his wife where they had come from, she answered, "As you must have heard, when I smile, roses sometimes bloom on my cheeks." The prince smelled the roses, and that act (by the will of Allah) caused Dilber to become pregnant at that very instant.<sup>5</sup>

When the cruel aunt discovered that her ugly daughter had traded the eyes of Dilber for some roses, she became alarmed. She went out at once to a witch<sup>6</sup> and said to her, "If you will bring to me the magic necklace which Dilber wears, I shall give you a handful of gold." That witch

<sup>5</sup> Pregnancy caused by sniffing the scent of a flower is an international motif: T532.1.1.1 Conception from smelling flower. In most (but not all) cases the scent of the flower is inhaled by the female who will bear the child. This is a pivotal motif in the action of a 5-hour- and-20-minute tale in ATON, "The Ordeal of Latif Shah and His Family." The tale was published in Walker's and Uysal's More Tales Alive in Turkey.

<sup>6</sup> In Turkish folktales the word witch has various connotations. It may be a person associated with cosmic evil. It may be a person with supernatural powers who may or may not also be a ghoul. With or without supernatural powers, it may be an old woman available for hire to undertake nefarious deeds of various kinds. In this latest capacity, she may be simply a shrewd, wily, and unscrupulous accomplice in covert action.

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started out at once for the land where Dilber lived. walked and walked for days and nights until she reached Hasan's house. When the witch knocked on the door of that house, Hasan's wife permitted her to enter.

Dilber was displeased by this, for she sensed that the old woman was in some way an evil person. She said to Hasan, "Father, if I should die tonight, have a golden casket made for me. Place that casket in a golden tomb which should be constructed in the forest just a short distance from the prince's palace. Allow the door of that tomb to stand open at all times."

Hasan was unable to believe what his daughter was saying. He said only, "May Allah protect you!" and then he went to bed.

After everyone else had fallen fast asleep, the old woman entered Dilber's room and removed the magic necklace which the girl was wearing. She escaped with it immediately. As had been predicted, Dilber died when loss occurred. When morning arrived, Hasan and his wife were shocked to discover that their daughter was dead. They grieved loudly, tore their hair, and beat their knees<sup>7</sup>--

<sup>7</sup>This is a common gesture of grief in Turkish tales. When a person in anguish is seated, he or she is likely to lift and sharply lower his/her hands, hence "beating" his/her knees.



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but what else could they do? The only other thing they could do now was to carry out Dilber's deathbed request about her casket and her tomb.

One day while the prince was hunting in the nearby forest, he came across the tomb of Dilber. Entering that tomb, he saw the golden casket. When he lifted the lid of the casket, he found inside a sleeping girl of great beauty with a baby at her breast. The prince took the baby to the palace and ordered everyone there to take good care of it.

One day the baby saw the necklace being worn by the ugly wife of the prince. The baby grabbed the necklace and pulled it from the ugly woman's neck. No one was able to force the infant boy to open his tiny hand and release the necklace. When people attempted to do this, the baby screamed loudly. Hearing these cries, the prince supposed that the child wanted its real mother, and so he carried it back to the tomb. There the child put that magic jewelry on Dilber's neck, and at the moment he did that, Dilber revived and opened her eyes.

The prince was astonished when he saw this happen. He asked Dilber who she was, and Dilber told him her whole life story from the beginning to the present time.

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The prince hugged Dilber, and they both cried. They then went to the palace, where the cruel aunt and her ugly daughter were both executed and their bodies were thrown to the dogs. Bad people are always punished.

Dilber and the prince were then married and had a wedding celebration that lasted for forty days and forty nights.