

Story 2034 (1997 Tape 2)

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Location: Yeşilova village,
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Date: June 9, 1997

Divine Protection

Once there was a very cruel and unjust ruler¹ in Iran named Fendun. He ruled his people by means of force and sometimes violence. One day he saw on a street in his city a very beautiful woman whom he wished to include in his harem. When he returned to his palace, he said to his attendants, "Today I saw on such and such a street a beautiful woman whom I wish to have as a companion. Go and find her." He then described the appearance of the woman, including the kind of clothes she was wearing.

The attendants left the palace at once in search of that woman. They wanted to discover who she was and whether she would be willing to live in the palace. After awhile they returned to the palace and reported to Fendun. "Our ruler," one of them said, "we went out and located the home of the woman you described. She and her husband lead a simple but very religious life. They pray five

¹The narrator here uses a term for ruler that is rarely heard in Turkish folktales. The term is hükümdar

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times daily, and they are respected and loved by their neighbors. If you carry off that woman to be your companion in the palace, this may make you look bad in the eyes of many of your subjects. It may cause them to lose respect for you. We should find some way to get rid of her husband, and then it would be acceptable for you to marry his widow."

"How should we get rid of him?" asked the ruler.

"Well, her husband is a carpenter. You could order him to deliver to you by tomorrow morning ten elegant boxes made of willow wood. If he failed to fulfill your order, you would then have reason to have him executed."

The ruler agreed with his attendants and accepted the plan they offered. He ordered that the carpenter be brought into his presence. When the carpenter appeared before him, the ruler ordered him to build ten ornate boxes made of willow wood. "I want them all finished by tomorrow morning, and if they are not done by that time, I shall have you beheaded

The carpenter was surprised by such an unreasonable order, and he became alarmed about his life. He said, "Your majesty, it is impossible for anyone to build ten

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ornate boxes worthy of a ruler in one night. You should allow me more time than that."

But the ruler had already made his plans, and so he refused the carpenter's request. He said to that man, "All the time you have is tonight. Go home and construct those ten boxes from willow wood. Early in the morning my men will come for them, and if they are not finished by that time, your head will be cut off."

The carpenter returned home feeling very tired and upset. His wife knew at once that something was bothering him. She asked, "What has happened? What is wrong with you? Why are you upset?"

At first the carpenter did not want to tell his wife what had happened, but when she kept insisting upon knowing his difficulty, he finally explained the matter to her. "The ruler has ordered me to make for him from willow wood ten ornate boxes. They must be completed by tomorrow morning. If they are not, I shall be beheaded. It is impossible to build even one ornate box between now and tomorrow morning." He soon began to cry.

His wife then asked him, "Have you ever harmed anyone?"

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"No, not as far as I know. I have never used force against anyone, nor have I taken unfair advantage of any person

His wife said, "Then you have no reason to worry. If you have not harmed others, great Allah will not allow others to persecute you. Stop worrying, and try to get some rest tonight."

They went to bed, but neither of them could sleep. The carpenter soon arose and began working on a box. His wife continued to encourage him. She repeated what she had said before: "Allah will not permit anyone to persecute a man as good as you are."

Early in the morning there was a loud knocking on the door--tak! tak! tak! The carpenter said, "Oh, my dear wife, the ruler's men are here to take me to my execution." He then went and opened the door. As he had said, the ruler's men were outside waiting for him. The carpenter kissed his wife good-bye.

But the men outside the door asked him, "Why are you kissing your wife good-bye, as if you would not return?"

The carpenter answered, "It was impossible for me to

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construct ten ornate boxes in one night. As a result of that failure, I know that I shall be beheaded. That is why I kissed my wife good-bye

The men from the palace said, "We are here for an entirely different reason. Last night the old ruler, Fendun, died in his sleep. The new ruler sent us here to ask you to construct a coffin in which to bury Fendun."

The carpenter looked at his wife with relief and joy. She had been right in saying that Allah would protect him. The two of them continued to live together in happiness for the rest of their lives.