

Story 2088 (Videotaped and translated into English in the late 1980s by Ahmet Uysal for a UNESCO project directed by Raol [?] Dostra.)

Narrator: Tuncay Tanboğa

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The Old Woman and Her Cow

There was once an old woman named Grandmother Fatma who lived in an Anatolian¹ village. This woman earned her livelihood by selling the milk of her cow. As the cow grew older, it could no longer produce milk. When it had become so feeble that it could no longer stand up, it sickened and died. Now greatly concerned about her own welfare, Grandmother Fatma went to a local marketplace to select another cow. She saw a light brown cow which she wanted, but the price was more than she could afford. She and the seller bargained and bargained until at last she bought the cow for one gold lira.²

As Grandmother Fatma was traveling back to her village, she came to a ditch over which the cow refused to jump. The old woman tried various means of making the

¹Anatolia is the 97 percent of Turkey that lies in Asia, all of it east of the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles.

²The lira is the largest unit of the Turkish monetary system. At one time it was quite valuable, but at the present time (May, 1999) it has been so greatly devaluated that it takes 390,000 Turkish liras to equal one U.S. dollar.

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cow jump across the ditch, but she failed in every attempt. She was about to lose her wits, but when she saw a dog coming along, she thought of another tactic. She decided to have the dog bite the cow to force it to jump across the ditch. But try as she would, she was unable to make the dog bite the cow.

Looking around, she saw a wood seller nearby. Going to that man, she asked, "Wood seller, wood seller, will you give me a small stick?"

"What are you going to do with that small stick?"

"I am trying to make my cow jump over a ditch. To do this I need a stick to strike a dog and force it to bite the cow. That will make the cow jump."

"It is not right to beat a dog to force it to bite a cow in order to make that cow jump. I cannot give you a stick for that purpose

Grandmother Fatma was very upset by this. She said, "I know a way of getting that stick from you!" She went to a hardware store and shouted, "Oh, salesclerk, salesclerk!"

"Yes, lady. What do you want?"

"Give me a bottle of oil and a box of matches."

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"What will you do with oil and matches?"

"The wood seller refuses to give me a stick with which to beat a dog in order to force that dog to bite a cow and make it jump over a ditch. I want to burn that man's heap of wood

"No, lady, I cannot give you oil and matches for such a purpose," answered the salesclerk.

When Grandmother Fatma saw a young man coming along the street, she asked, "Oh, son, what is your occupation?"

The young man answered, "Just between you and me, I was once a thief, but I have repented and no longer steal anything.

Grandmother Fatma thought that she had now found the right person to help her. "Look here, son," she said, "I want you to rob a hardware store for me."

"Why should I do that?" asked the young man.

"Well, that store would not sell me oil and matches thus preventing me from setting fire to the yard of a wood seller. The wood seller refused to give me from his woodpile a small stick with which I could beat a dog to compel it to bite my cow. If the dog bit my cow, it could force that animal to jump across the ditch."

"I cannot rob that hardware store, for its owner has

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not done anything wrong."

By now Grandmother Fatma was furious. She rushed straight to the village guard, shouting, "Watchman! Watchman!"

"Oh, lady, why are you shouting?" asked the guard.

"Because I want you to arrest yonder man, who is a thief."

"What did he do?"

"He refused to rob that hardware store over there!"

"Oh, Allah, Allah! How can I arrest a man for not having robbed a store? I can't do it."

"Well, then, I shall go straight to a judge and give evidence against you."

Grandmother Fatma went to the office of a local judge and knocked on the door. When she was admitted into his court, she said, "Oh, Judge Efendi,³ I want you to punish that watchman over there."

"Why? What did he do?"

After she had recounted all of her complaints, the judge opened a law book with a black binding. He searched

³Efendi was formerly a term of respect used right after the name of a distinguished man. By the middle of the 20th century this honorific had lost so much prestige that it was appended only to the names of children and servants.

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and searched in that book for anything that applied to the old woman's situation. But he finally said, "Lady, there is nothing in my book that concerns your problem. I cannot, therefore, punish that watchman."

Grandmother Fatma was now so desperate and yet helpless that she lifted up her hands⁴ and cried out, "O Azrail,⁵ come and take this woman's life!" At that moment lightning flashed, and thunderbolts made a deep rumbling sound.⁶

This great turbulence caused the judge to fall off his seat. He shouted, "Bring that watchman here to be punished!"

Grandmother Fatma, accompanied by the court officers went after the watchman. When that watchman saw Grandmother Fatma returning with court officers, he realized

⁴When Muslims pray, they do not clasp their hands together in the Christian fashion but reach upward with palms opened toward heaven.

⁵Azrail is the Hebrew and Muslim Angel of Death. When a person has lived out his/her allotted span of life, Azrail is sent by Allah to take that person's soul.

⁶Azrail is almost always pictured as a huge, fierce, and frightening creature. Folk belief has it that only the archangel Michael has more sets of wings than Azrail. His approach is almost always tumultuous, whether accompanied by thunder and lightning or other tokens of violence.

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something serious was happening, and so he ran at once to arrest the thief. The thief, in turn, was also alarmed by what was going on, and he ran toward the hardware store with the intention of robbing it. When the owner suspected that his business might be attacked, he quickly handed Grandmother Fatma a bottle of oil and a box of matches. That old woman then proceeded at once to set fire to the wood seller's yard. Fearing that he might lose his entire business if he did not appease Grandmother Fatma, the wood seller quickly handed her a stick. When she struck the dog with that stick, the dog bit the cow in the leg. The cow immediately jumped over the ditch, and Grandmother Fatma led her new source of milk to her own village.

Oh, listeners, this is a moralistic tale⁷ which I learned a long while ago. If I made any slips of the tongue while telling this story, I hope that you will forgive me.

⁷Although the narrator calls this a moralistic story, it is not included among moralistic tales in the Archive of Turkish Oral Narrative. Chain tales of this kind are amusing to folk audiences and are therefore listed there under Humorous Tales.