

Story 2197 (1976 Tape 18)

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of Muğla Province

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Bandit Gold

Once there were many bandits in the Beşparmak Mountains<sup>1</sup> near here. Gendarmes<sup>2</sup> and soldiers used to pursue these outlaws. At one time bandits robbed several rich ağas<sup>3</sup> in and around the village of Bafa, which was on the shore of Bafa Lake.<sup>4</sup> One bandit leader and two of his men plundered a great amount of gold from that village and hid it somewhere in a nearby forest. A few days later

<sup>1</sup>The small range of mountains known as Beşparmak (Five Fingers) Mountains is in Muğla Province near Milas and Bafa Lake.

<sup>2</sup>Turkish cities and towns have police forces, but rural areas usually have none. Law and order are supposed to be maintained in rural sections by troops assigned to the Ministry of Interior. These special troops were designated by a loan word from the French, gendarmes.

<sup>3</sup>An ağa is a rural landowner, sometimes rich, often powerful. Most farm workers are employees of ağas. The title is neither official nor hereditary but rather a sign of economic status. Throughout both rural and urban Turkey ağa is sometimes used as a mild honorific when placed after the given name of a distinguished man.

<sup>4</sup>This is located about 30 kilometers due north of Bodrum.

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soldiers tracked down these bandits and engaged them in combat. One of the bandits was killed. One was badly wounded. The third one fled from the scene, but the hoard of bandit money remained in the forest, though no one else knew just where it was located.

Not far from there, in Yeniköy, a village of Söke kaza, there lived a shepherd who soon afterwards acquired some buried gold, though no one knew whether or not it was part of the plunder taken at Bafa. Like most shepherds, Little Mehmet was a poor man, but he was able to employ a boy to help him with his work. Among Little Mehmet's flock of sheep were a few goats, one of which was pregnant. One morning when that goat was not among the flock, Little Mehmet sent his assistant to search for her. After a short while he found her lying on a large flat rock as she was giving birth to her kid. When the baby goat was born, it rolled off the rock and into an open place beneath one side of the rock. As the boy followed the mother goat there to recover the kid, he observed beneath the rock something else. He saw a number of small clay jars which, he soon discovered, were filled with gold. There were too many jars for him to carry, but he managed

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to take several of them to his master. Little Mehmet was amazed to see so much gold, and he made the boy promise not to mention this treasure to anyone else. As a reward, he offered the boy his daughter in marriage.

But acquiring so much wealth had a bad effect on Little Mehmet. It seemed to change his attitude toward others. He refused to allow the assistant to marry his daughter. In fact, he turned so negative against his assistant that he refused to have any further contact with the boy. He also became suspicious about his former friends and refused to exchange greetings with them. This shows that if Allah so wills, he may make available wealth on a mountain or on a plain to almost anyone.

In the Ilda Mountains near Milas<sup>5</sup> (formerly under foreign rule) bandits plundered not only people who were traveling but also people who never left their homes. would take from homes both money and things which could easily be sold for yet more money. Two bandits joined forces and soon possessed a vast fortune. They lived much of time in a cave in a mountainside. They buried most of their

<sup>5</sup> Just northeast of Bodrum, about halfway to Söke, Milas is a kaza town of Muğla Province.

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money somewhere in that cave. (An uncle of mine named Ali learned both about their cave and their great wealth, and he later told me about these two bandits.) Despite their almost incredible riches, the two cave dwellers did not always get along well together. After awhile they quarreled, and one killed the other in his sleep. The survivor may have thought that both he and the fortune were secure, but if he did, he was mistaken, for a month or so later he was arrested and thrown into jail. Soon he became ill, and his condition worsened so rapidly that it was necessary to move him into a hospital. There he was placed, just by chance, in a room which was also occupied by a man who had been his village companion in their youth. As the bandit's condition grew even worse, he felt certain that he would soon die. He therefore revealed to this old fellow villager some information about the whereabouts of his ill-gotten treasure. "Since I shall not live to use that money, you should recover it and spend it happily

After this hometown friend of the bandit was released from the hospital, he went to the village nearest to the site of the cave. There he confided to another old friend his knowledge about the cave and its contents. The two of

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them then began to search, day after day, for the cave, but their efforts were in vain. Their repeated comings and goings aroused the suspicions of the other villagers.

"Where are those two fellows going every day? What are seeking?" These were questions being asked.

There also lived in that village a hunter who had been a friend of my father. When I asked him about the treasure cave, he said, "People have long searched for cave unsuccessfully, but just yesterday I came across it accidentally while hunting."

After he had given me directions on how to locate the cave, I asked him, "How will I know if I have the right cave? Does it look any different from any other cave?"

He answered, "The bones of the murdered bandit are still there. Someone made a pillow of sand on which the bones had been placed. There is a gun rack there on which the rusted rifles of the bandits still hang. But search as long and as hard as I would, I could find no trace of buried gold."

If that hunter is still alive, he must be 80 or 85 years old by now. They used to call him Piron Ali. He

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was an honest man. Some time after our first meeting, he invited me to go with him to the cave to make a final effort to uncover the buried gold. I did not have time to do that, nor could I accept any of several other similar invitations which he sent me. The treasure is apparently still there somewhere.