

ALTINBAS – THE GOLDENHAIR

Once upon a time, there lived a young couple in the Northern countryside of Anatolia. They were farmers working in the fields during the summer growing corn, cabbage and bean and then selling the crop in the market to buy enough goods for the long winter days. They were poor but lighthearted people never complained about the hard work and well respected in the village. They were living in a small farm house, old but neatly taken care with their two goats, ten chickens, two dogs and one cat.

Since the first day of their marriage, the young couple passionately longed for having a child. They knew that children were joy of the house and life had never been complete without them. Nevertheless as the years passed by, there was no sign of a baby. The couple was deeply hurt with the situation while the absence of a child became a hindrance of happiness in their life. They decided to consult Dervish Baba, who was known to be the source of wisdom and enlightenment in the village. Dervish Baba was living in a small hut at peak of the mountain where all year-round fog and snow were never missed.

After listening to the young couple carefully, Dervish Baba took a deep breath and then spoke out. He said “I’ll give you

the map of the Golden Valley where the finest wheat crop in the country is harvested. You should go there in the month of September, fill two sacks with finest wheat grains and then bring it back to me. I’ll grind it for you and then mix the flour with zamzam water to prepare bread dough. You will then eat nothing but this bread three months long. A baby will be born in less than a year.”

ALTINBAS WAS BORN

As Dervish Baba suggested, the young couple went to Golden Valley and brought back two sacks of finest wheat. Dervish Baba ground the grain, added zamzam water and prepared bread dough. The young couple ate nothing but bread for three months long and at the end of one year; they had a baby girl.

They have never been so happy in their life. She grew up day by day occupying a bigger space in their hearts. She had curly, beautiful, golden hairs and people started calling her “Altinbas” – Golden Hair.

When Altinbas was 8 years old, there was a big draught all over the country. Rivers were dried up, the crops were ruined and cattle died with thirst. The severe conditions put the farmers at the edge of famine. The poor couple soon had no other choice to sell their goats, then their chickens and finally their household furniture to buy some food in return.

In one of those days, they were in the market place looking for a buyer; a

merchant approached them and started negotiating for the price. They were almost agreed on the terms when Merchant’s attention was taken by Altinbas. He went beside her and made compliments about her beauty and charm in the mean time analyzing her hair carefully. After a brief moment, he proposed that he would double his payment if they cut an inch of her hair and gave it to him. The couple was puzzled by his request but they were in no position to question his generous offer.

*“Do not cut her hair to trade for money”
Dervish Baba warned them “it will never grow again.”*

Upon arrival back to village, without more ado they found their way visiting to Dervish Baba and explained him what took place in the market place. Dervish Baba listened to them attentively. Then he asked Altinbas to be brought to his attendance. He cut a sample from her hair, placed it on a cast iron platter and then put it in the middle of the burning wood fireplace. The hair slowly melted and turned into liquid gold among the astonishing looks of everyone. Dervish Baba proclaimed that Altinbas’ hair was indeed made of pure gold and she was among one of those wonder kids that was flattered by the gift of alchemy. He warned the young couple saying that “You should take care of your little girl. Do not cut her hair to trade for money;

it will never grow again.” They promised.

The news spread very fast in the village. Altinbas became the center of attention. The young couple was proud of their daughter.

EACH HAIR WAS WORTH OF ONE THOUSAND LIRAS

Winter went by and spring came. Things went back to normal. Warm sun rays melted the ice, rivers rejoiced with abundance of rain and the earth became more fertile than ever. There was a feeling of joy and happiness around.

The young couple rejoined the other farmers to prepare the fields for cultivation. The work ahead of them was hard and demanding. Soon they became exhausted and couldn't handle the work any longer while their bodies were softened and weakened by the long and famishing winter. Desperation was on the way.

One day Father said to Mother “I saw one of our neighbors using a horse for plowing the fields. We should have one otherwise we will never be able to finish the job.” Mother told him that they were not as wealthy as their neighbors and possibly could not afford a horse. Father said “What about Altinbas's hair? We can cut an inch of her hair just enough to buy a horse.” Mother replied “We promised not to trade her hair for money.” Father confronted her saying “Silly you! Why shouldn't we take advantage of the

situation when we need it desperately? She will benefit from it like all of us.” “Over my death body” Mother cried “I'll not let you cut my angel's hair and trade it for a horse.”

It took only two weeks for Father to wait till one night he sneaked into Altinbas's room and cut an inch of her hair without Mother noticing him. He woke up early in the morning, melted her hair in the oven and took the gold to the market place to sell it. He got one thousand liras from the merchant good enough to buy a horse, a new dress for Mother and all sorts of food, candies, chocolate, sesame bars and delights for Altinbas and went back to home. He filled up the table with enough food for the entire village.

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Mother was upset to learn what took place, but she couldn't say a word when she saw Altinbas overjoyed with her Father's treat. The little girl was delighted being surrounded by all sorts of delicacy. Things settled and they forgot the incident. The addition of horse made them more productive in their jobs. They had more time now to relax and enjoyed playing with Altinbas. But the comfort and peace was not enough to satisfy the greedy and selfish nature of Father.

Day by day he became more preoccupied with this ultimate desire to access to wealth and possessions. First he wanted to have another horse. Then they purchased two donkeys. Cows, goats, a flock of chickens and turkeys were added to the farm. Very soon they didn't have enough space to accommodate all the animals they have and Father suggested building a new barn. Next to barn a new guest house was built. The farm house was refurnished and decorated with finest ornaments and fabric. A horse carriage was purchased to have sightseeing tours in their leisure time. And last but not least Father decided to hire a cook, a butler and a nanny to help them in the household. While all those things were taking place, the poor mother was helplessly watching the changes around her and praying God for forgiveness.

The extravagance continued till one day they realized that Altinbas had no hair left to sell. When Father saw the poor little kid sitting at the corner and looking at her bald head in the mirror, he felt so bad with the situation that he started crying. When Mother saw him crying beside Altinbas, she understood the situation right away but she was unwilling to show any mercy to him. She said “It's too late for tears. You're deaf to my words while I was trying to warn you for this possible outcome. Now it did happen, you should be ashamed of your reckless behavior.” Father cried saying “Tell me what I need to do. I'm ready to do anything to bring her hair back.”

They knew that the good days came to an end. They had a house full of servants but not enough money to pay them, a barn full of animals but not enough food to feed them and a big guest house abandoned for wreckage.

They let go the cook, butler and nanny first. Then they sold some of the animals in the market including two horses and donkeys. Father knocked down the guest house, so that they could have some wood to burn during winter. But worst was not over yet.

One day when Altinbas was playing in the garden, she stepped over a bush full of stinging nettles and cut herself on the head. The poison in the stinging hair caused rashes on her skin and she became very sick all of a sudden. She had high fever, stopped eating and didn't step out of the house for a week. Mother and Father were so worried about her condition that they took her to the presence of Dervish Baba immediately.

Dervish Baba listened to their story, pleadings and cries without interrupting. Then he raised his voice and spoke angrily saying "I warned you about the consequences but you ignored my words and broke your promise." He then examined Altinbas. After a short pause, he said "I want you to go home now and come back in two weeks time. Till then I prepare a remedy for her."

ALTINBAS RECOVERED

The young couple visited Dervish Baba two weeks later as he suggested. He gave them a tub of skin cream with the instructions how to use it. Upon arrival to home, they applied the cream on her head without delay. Day by day Altinbas felt better and in a month she totally recovered from the illness and became cheerful and energetic again.

The couple was so happy to have their daughter back and promised to care for her more than anything else in the world. A couple of months passed by, when they noticed that Altinbas started growing hair. Soon her head was covered with curly hair – this time it wasn't made of gold but it was in golden color - and she was more beautiful than she had ever been.

(2/7/2008)

THE END