

Story #122 (Tape # , Summer 1964)

Narrator: Sukru Darıcı

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Semsi Bani, Padişah of Pigeons

Once there was a padishah whose only child was a daughter. When the infant had grown to a girl, she used to spend her time sitting in the harem section of the palace, crocheting. One day a bird flew into the palace and carried away her needle before she could stop it. The girl became so upset by this event that she grew ill, and she weakened and began to fade away. A few days later, while she was sitting in the palace garden, the bird came again and this time flew away with her thimble. After this her health grew much worse, until finally she had to be taken to the hospital.

Her father called all of the famous doctors in the land to try to cure his daughter's illness, but none of them could help her. One of the wise men advised the padishah: "Let us build a large bath in town which anyone might use for the price of a story. Everyone who uses the bath will tell a story to your daughter, and perhaps one of these tales will cure her." The padishah accepted this suggestion, and within a short time a bath was built. In one corner was built an apartment where his daughter lay, and it was there that bathers went to pay their admission price of a story. These stories meant little to the girl, and her health did not improve as a result of hearing them.

At this same time, in another country far away, there was an old woman traveling about, begging for her food. One day when this old woman was resting by the side of the sea, she saw moving into the

water several mules and camels loaded with all kinds of merchandise and foods. She followed them, holding one of these animals by the tail as it slipped into the water and sank to the bottom of the sea. After traveling some distance under water, they came to a beautiful building on the bottom of the sea. The old woman entered the building with the camel whose tail she was holding and there she came to a great chamber containing a large pool around which were tables containing all sorts of fine food. The old woman was very hungry, but as she reached for a ladle to serve herself from one of the bowls, a voice said, "You may not eat of that food!"

Upon hearing that voice, she looked around, but she saw no one but the camels all standing over in the corner of the room. She went over and sat down among them. At that moment a pigeon flew into the room, circled around the pool several times, and then dipped its wings into the water. As soon as it did this, it turned into a handsome young man. Soon another pigeon entered the room and in the same way circled the pool, dipped into the water, and turned into a handsome young man. To make a long story short, within a short time between two and three hundred young men gathered there, all of them entering as pigeons. Apparently they were going to have a dinner party, but they waited for some time, and then one of them said, "Our padishah is late today." All this time, the old woman sat silently among the camels watching them and observing everything that took place. Finally another pigeon flew into the room and dived into the water, whereupon all of the young men stood up and shouted, "Here is our padishah!"

When the padishah of pigeons came from the water, they all sat down and ate the rich feast spread out upon the many tables. After dinner, they talked among themselves for a while, and then, one by one,

they all left except the last comer, the padishah, who was finally left there all alone. As soon as he was alone, he went to a table, pulled open a drawer, and took a needle from it. Addressing himself to this object, he said, "O crocheting needle, how fine you are and how delicate must be the hands that sew with you. Let everywhere weep!" Everything in the building wept except the camels standing in the corner; they and their stable laughed aloud. Then he took from the drawer a thimble, and holding it up to the light, he said, "O thimble, how fine you are! I wonder how delicate must be the hands which wear you. Let all things cry!" All things did cry except the camels and their stable and those things laughed aloud. Then the padishah of pigeons put these back into the drawer and walked out of the room.

The old woman noticed that now the camels, all unloaded, were beginning to leave, and so she caught hold of the tail of one of them and moved along with the group. Traveling along on the bottom of the sea, they finally arrived at a land which the old woman had never seen before. Although she had but scant clothing, she slept that night among the bushes and thorns, for it was summer and quite warm. On the following morning, when she woke up, she saw a man walking along, and she asked him, "Son, will you please take me to town with you?" The man placed her upon his donkey and took her along with him toward the nearest town. As they went along, he said to her, "Mother, you are very dirty from traveling. In the town which we are approaching there is a free bath. Why don't you go there and wash?" The old woman was very pleased with this suggestion, for she had, in fact, been traveling for many days and was very dirty.

When they reached the town, she thanked the young man and left him, proceeding to the bath. At the entrance of the building she was told that according to the custom of the land all could use the

without paying any charge but that all bathers had to tell a story to the sick daughter of the padishah, who resided there. She entered the bath, went to the place where the sick girl was sitting, and told the following story:

"An old woman was traveling, and one day as she sat to rest along the seashore, she saw a train of camels coming along, and when they came to the sea, they continued walking right into the water. The old woman caught hold of the tail of one of these animals and traveled along with them on the bottom of the sea. They reached a large house, after a while, and when they entered, they came to a large chamber with a pool in it. Soon pigeons began to fly into the room, and as each dipped into the water, he turned into a handsome young man."

The daughter of the padishah took more interest in this story than she had in most others, and so she said to the old woman, "Come a little closer, mother, so that I may hear you better." The old woman moved closer to the girl, and then she went on:

"Soon the padishah of pigeons arrived, and then all of the handsome young men sat down and spent much time eating a great feast that had been prepared there for them. After all the rest had left, the padishah of pigeons went to a table and took from a drawer a needle. Holding it up, he said, 'O crocheting needle, how fine you are, and how delicate must be the hands that sew with you! Let everywhere weep! Everything except the camels and their stable wept, and these laughed aloud. Then the old woman started to leave, saying, "I am going for my bath now."

"No, no, stay, mother, and tell me the rest of the story. You can take your bath afterwards," said the daughter of the padishah

"Well," the old woman continued, "the padishah then took from the drawer a small thimble and holding it up to the light said to it,

'O thimble, how fine you are and how delicate must be the hand that wears you. Let all things cry!' Then everything wept except the camels and their stable, and these laughed. At this, the young man left the room. Then the old woman noticed that the camels were about to leave so she grabbed the tail of the animal nearest her and so followed them until they returned again to dry land. That is my story."

"It is a wonderful story," said the girl, "but tell me, mother, who the old woman was."

"It was I, daughter," she said.

When the daughter of the padishah heard this, she embraced the old woman and ordered her attendants to bathe her and dress her in fine clothes. When all this had been done, the old woman looked like a very respectable lady. Every day for a week the old woman told the sick daughter of the padishah the same story, and then the girl said, "Mother, let us go together and find these camels again."

The old woman said, "First get permission from the padishah to leave. Then we shall go."

The girl went to the padishah and said, "Father, we wish to walk down to the seaside with the old woman."

"Very well, daughter. I place the old woman in your command. But I shall order a coach to carry you to the sea.

The girl and the old woman rode to the seashore in the coach, and when they reached the water, the old woman said to the driver, "If we do not come back to you within an hour's time, then go on back to the palace without us." After the two women disappeared, the coach driver waited one, three, and five hours, and then when they did not return, he went back to the padishah and told him what had happened.

"Never mind," said the padishah. "Everyone will recognize them, and whoever finds them will bring them back safely." But after three

or five days, the padishah gave up hope of their returning, and he regretted having allowed his daughter to leave the palace. Now let us leave him crying and go back to the seashore.

A large number of camels with their loads of food--rice, and lentils, and other things--again came along and walked right into the sea. Each woman took hold of a camel's tail, and after traveling along on the bottom of the sea for a long way, they came to the building that the old woman had visited before. There the camels were unloaded by invisible attendants, and the two women entered the large hall and came to the pool surrounded by tables filled with all kinds of food. They were very hungry after their trip, and so the daughter of the padishah reached for a plate of the food, but, just as before, a voice said, "You may not eat that food."

Then the women went and sat among the camels in the stable at a place where they could see the pool and the dining tables. As each pigeon flew into the chamber, the old woman asked the girl, "Is that the bird that stole your needle and thimble?"

"No," the girl said each time until, at last, the padishah of pigeons flew in. "That's the one!" she said.

Once again the padishah of pigeons remained after the others had left. Going to a table, he pulled open a drawer, took from it a needle, and said, "O crocheting needle, how fine you are, and how delicate must be the hands that sew with you. Let everywhere weep!" Everything wept but the camels and the stable, which laughed. Then he took the thimble again from the drawer and, holding it up to the light to look at it, said, "O thimble, how fine you are, and how delicate must be the hands that use you. Let all things cry!" Again everything wept except the camels and their stable, which laughed aloud. This time the padishah of pigeons was annoyed and walking over to the stable said,

"Why are you so disrespectful?" There was no answer, and then the young man saw the two women among the camels and asked, "Are you fairies or jinns?"

The old woman stood up and said, "Neither. We are God's creatures."

Then the sick daughter of the padishah stood up and said, "You cruel thief! You stole my needle and thimble and you have reduced me to this condition!"

The old woman grabbed the tail of a camel as the animals were leaving the stable, but the girl remained there and married the padishah of pigeons, with the will of God. At the end of nine months the girl was about to give birth to a child. Then the padishah of pigeons said to her, "It is not safe for you to remain here any longer, for it will be impossible to hide both you and the child. If the other pigeons should discover you here, they would immediately kill both of us. I shall direct you to a place where you will be quite safe. I am actually the son of a human padishah, and my father and mother are both alive. My name is Shemsi Bâni. When you reach our palace, knock on the door and say to the person who opens it. 'Let me in for the sake of your lost son, Shemsi Bâni.'"

The girl followed the directions Shemsi Bâni had given her, and after traveling for some time she came to the palace of his parents. When she knocked on the door, a maid opened it and asked, "Whom do you want, young lady?"

"Call the lady of the house here," she said. When the wife of the padishah came to the door, the girl said to her, "Accept me as a guest in your house for the sake of your lost son, Shemsi Bâni."

"How did you know that we had a lost son?"

"I just know it. If I didn't, I shouldn't be here," said the girl.

The wife of the padishah admitted to the house the young woman

who, in a few days, gave birth to a child that cried, "Vyah, vyah, vyah."
A short while later Shemsi Bâni came in bird form to the window of the palace and pecked at the glass with his beak. The young woman opened the window, and the bird sang:

"O soul of my soul, and sultan of my soul,
Did my mother recognize you when she let you in?
And did she embrace the child of her child?"

The young woman answered:

"O soul of my soul, and sultan of my soul,
Your mother didn't recognize me when she let me in,
And she didn't embrace the child of her child."

After the bird had flown away, one of the servants who had overheard this conversation went to the wife of the padishah and reported to her that the young woman talked out the window to some secret lover. "How could this be?" asked the lady.

"I do not know," said the servant, "but I heard it."

"The next time this happens, call me so that I may hear it too," said the wife of the padishah.

The next day Shemsi Bâni again came in the form of a pigeon and sang:

"O soul of my soul, and sultan of my soul,
Has my mother recognized you yet?
And has she yet embraced the child of her child?"

And again the girl answered:

"O soul of my soul, and sultan of my soul,
Your mother has not recognized me yet,
And she has not yet embraced the child of her child."

But this time the wife of the padishah had been called, and she had listened outside the door of the girl's room to this conversation. After

the bird had flown away, she knocked on the door, and when she was admitted to the room, she asked, "Who was the person to whom you were just talking?"

"O lady, that is a hard question to answer. Actually he is somehow your son, and I shall tell you what I know about him." And then she told Shemsi Bâni's mother all that had happened.

"How can I see my son again?" asked the mother.

"Cut a small hole in the door and look through that tomorrow when he comes to visit me again."

The woman agreed to this, and the next day when it was time for Shemsi Bâni to return, both she and the padishah were watching through the hole in the door. The girl placed a large bowl of water near the open window and then hid herself. The bird came and sat on the window sill and sang:

"O soul of my soul, and sultan of my soul,

Has my mother recognized you yet?

And has she yet embraced the child of her child?"

From her hiding place the girl answered:

"O soul of my soul, and sultan of my soul,

Your mother has recognized me now

And she has embraced the child of her child."

The bird could not see the girl, and so he entered the room, looking for her. When he saw the bowl of water, he dived into it and at once turned into a handsome young man. The mother and father, watching through the hole in the door, were amazed to see their son come to life in this way. But soon he turned back into a pigeon and flew away.

As soon as he had left, both his parents rushed into the room and asked, "Isn't there something that you can do to make our son stay here?"

"I do not know of anything," she said, "but let me ask Shemsi Bâni

about this." The next day Shemsi Bâni again flew into the window, dipped his wings in the bowl of water, and became himself once more. "Your parents have seen you through the hole in the door," his wife said, "and they want you to come home again. Is there anything that we can do to keep you here? Why must you fly away?"

"When I was seven days old I was stolen from my home by fairies. I lived with them until I grew up, and then they made me their padishah. If I try to stay here, my suit of feathers must first be destroyed, for the spell on me is in those feathers. As long as they exist, I shall go mad trying to find them. Tell my parents to build a bath one hundred meters from the palace and place a large pile of firewood near it. Then tomorrow night, when I shall come and spend the time with you, have the feathers burned while I am asleep. But make sure that the bath is a hundred meters away, for if I sense that the feathers are being burned, I shall rush madly to them and perhaps be burned to death in the fire."

The girl reported all this to the padishah, who had a bath built and supplied with a great pile of pitch pine wood. The furnace was then fired until it was red hot with burning pitch pine. When Shemsi Bâni came to his wife's room, she gave his pigeon feathers to his father, who ran with them to the furnace of the bath and threw them into the flames. When the smell of burning feathers came to Shemsi Bâni as he lay in bed with his wife, he jumped up and started running wildly in the direction of the fire. But the padishah had taken measures against this and he had placed three rings of soldiers around the bath. As Shemsi Bâni rushed toward the bath, they grabbed him and held him until the feathers were consumed in the flames.

"What a terrible thing you have done to me," he shouted. "What shall I do now? When the fairies find out, they will come and kill me."

But when the feathers were completely burned, the spell was broken, and after that, Shemsi Bâni remained at the palace with his father and mother, his wife, and his son. The pigeon fairies waited three and five days, and then they knew that their padîshah would never return.

After a while, the padishah said, "We must have a wedding ceremony for our son." Then there was a wedding that lasted for forty days and forty nights, and when it was over, the girl said, "My father was a padishah, too. Let us go and visit him." So they traveled to her kingdom, and there they had another wedding that lasted forty days and forty nights. In the end, Shemsi Bâni came to rule over both kingdoms, and they and their children lived happily ever after that.