

Story #481 (Tape #11, 1970)

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Good to the Good, and Damnation to the Evil

One day the padishah of a long while ago said to his grand vezir, "Go find me a poor man who can tell me a few things every day and for this earn some money."

The vezir went out and found a man. He came to the padishah and said, "Yes, your majesty? You sent for me?"

"Well, now, my lion,¹ I want you to come to me three times every day, and each time you come you are to say, 'Good to the good, and damnation to the evil.'" The padishah wanted him to say it three times every day: once in the morning, once at noon, and once in the evening. "For this I shall pay you three gold coins every day."

The next morning the man appeared in the presence of the padishah, standing there with his head bent to one side and his hands locked before him,² and said, "Your majesty, 'Good to the good, and damnation to the evil.'" He received his pay of one golden lira and left. This went on

¹This is sometimes a term of affection, sometimes one of encouragement.

²Both of these gestures were signs of submission traditionally made in the presence of the ruler. Tilting of the head is still a gesture of some Turks used when seeking a favor or concession from a person of superior social or political status.

for some time, and the man became quite wealthy, for he collected many golden liras on this job.

One day as he was about to go into the presence of the padishah, the man was stopped by the grand vezir. As they were talking, the vezir detected from the strong smell of the man's breath that he had been eating garlic that day. The grand vezir warned the man: "His majesty does not like the smell of either garlic or onions. If he learns that you have eaten one of these before appearing in his presence, he will have you executed."

"Your honor, it just happened that there was some garlic in the food I ate today."

"If that is the case," said the vezir, "go into the padishah's presence with your face wrapped in a cloth, and do not stand close to him, lest he smell your breath."

The man went and stood before the padishah and greeted him, saying, "Selâmünaleyküm!"³ Then he repeated, "Good to the good, and damnation to the evil," after which he received his gold coin and went away.

After he had gone, the grand vezir entered the padishah's presence and asked him, "Your majesty, did you notice how that man looked today when he came to you?"

"Well, I noticed that his head and face were wrapped in cloth, and I thought that perhaps he was ill."

³This is the traditional Moslem greeting, meaning "Peace be on you."

"He is not ill at all," said the grand vezir. "Do you know what he told me outside? He said, 'Our padishah's breath smells terrible. I wrap my face so that I will not smell it. It is, in fact, so bad that I would not come to visit him if I were not afraid of his great power.'"

"So that was what he said? Very well."

When the man appeared the next day, he had nothing wrapped about his face, for he had been careful not to eat any foul food. As usual, he said, "Good to the good, and damnation to the evil."

As he was leaving, after having received his reward, the padishah said to him, "Just a moment." He then handed the man a sealed envelope. "Take this letter to such-and-such a place, where you have a reward awaiting you. Take the wealth accumulated there for you, and then go your way, visiting me no more."

Quite ignorant of what was going on, the man took the envelope, thanked the padishah, and left. As he was leaving, the man met the grand vezir, who said to him, "What is that in your hand?"

"Sir," said the man, "I have been told not to return. I am taking this letter to such-and-such a place where I am to collect a reward that has been accumulating there for me. I shall collect it and depart."

"Give me that letter," said the grand vezir. "I shall go and draw the money for you."

After the man had handed him the letter, the grand vezir went to the place to which the padishah had directed the man to deliver it.

The secretary of that place where the grand vezir took the letter examined the records and found that there was no one of that name among their creditors. What the padishah had written in that letter was this: "The one who brings this letter is to be executed on the spot."

The secretary summoned the executioners, and one of them said to the grand vezir, "Bow your neck."

"Look here," he said, "I am the grand vezir. How can you do such a thing to me?"

They showed him the letter. "Here is the padishah's ferman⁴ which says, 'The one who brings this letter is to be executed on the spot.' You will, therefore, be executed."

"Just a minute," said the grand vezir. "Let me first telephone⁵ the padishah."

"There is no need for that. Here is the padishah's ferman," they said. Then they proceeded to chop off the head of the grand vezir.

The padishah knew nothing of all this. One day while he was out walking, he saw on the street the man whom he had ordered executed "I sent that man to such-and-such a place. Why did he not go there? Call him here!" When the man was brought into his presence, the padishah

⁴Ferman, or firman, as it is often spelled, refers to a royal edict issued by a sultan.

⁵It is an obvious anachronism to have telephones in a tale about times so ancient that rulers could, at their pleasure, have people beheaded without even the semblance of a trial.

asked him, "Where did I send you with that letter the other day? did you not go there?"

The man said, "Sir, I took the letter to go with it to the place you directed. But your grand vezir stopped me and told me to give the letter to him, saying that he wanted to get my accumulated wealth for me. I gave him the letter, and he went there."

The padishah sent word to that place, saying that he wanted to know what had become of his grand vezir. The answer came back that, according to his ferman's order, the bearer of the letter had been put to death. The padishah then called the man to him and asked him, "was it that a few days ago you came into my presence with your head and face covered?"

"Your majesty, on that day I had eaten some garlic in my food. Your grand vezir warned me that you disliked the smell of garlic and onions. I therefore wrapped my face so that you would not smell my breath."

The padishah said, "That is a very different explanation from the one he gave me. You were said to have said, 'The padishah has such foul breath that I am wrapping my face in order not to have to smell it.' Now I realize why I have been paying you those fees. Good will indeed find good, and the evil will find damnation. From now on, you will be my grand vezir. You are good, and you have found goodness. He was evil, and he has found damnation." And in this way the padishah appointed the man grand vezir.