

Story 769 (1970 Tape 14)

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Location: Ova Akça village,
kaza merkezi of Bursa,
Bursa Province

Date: July

Sultan for a Day

The wife of a peasant had just died. She was taken to the cemetery in a funeral procession and buried there. After the funeral service everyone left the grave site except the woman's husband and the (hoca). The hoca stood at the head of the grave and started advising the spirit of the dead person.¹ The husband of the woman remained there in deep grief for a while, but then he pulled himself together and decided to smoke a cigarette. He reached into his cigarette case but found it empty. He looked around for someone from whom he could get a cigarette, but by then all of the rest of the mourners had left. He decided then to leave the cemetery and see if he could find someone who had some cigarettes, but as he started walking, he saw four or five people sitting at the other end of the cemetery and smoking. Walking to them, he said,

¹It is customary for the hoca to remain at the grave after other mourners have left. There he prays and makes suggestions to the deceased about how to answer the questions of the Angels of Death, Nekr and Munkr, who come and interrogate the corpse on the principles of Islam. Telkin vermek--to make suggestions--is the expression used here, except that the narrator uses the dialect form talkın vermek.

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"Selâmünaleyküm."

"Aleykümselâm,² father," they said

"Will you give me a smoke?" he asked them.

"Are you a drug user?"³

"I am not only a user but one desperate for the drug now."⁴

"In that case, come and join us. We are sharing a drug cigarette. Here, take a puff."

He took a puff then and again each time the cigarette came around to him. Before long he passed out. When he opened his eyes again, he discovered that he was lying in the furnace room of a public bath. He noticed that beside him lay someone unconscious. He thought, "I wonder if this person is dead or just asleep?" When he nudged the man and got no response at all, he concluded that the man was dead. He now thought, "I may be accused of having murdered this man. What can I do?" He lifted up the corpse and threw it into a tank of boiling water there in the furnace room in order to give his death the appearance of having been

²Traditional exchange between Muslim strangers: Peace be unto you / And may peace be unto you too.

³The Turkish term used here is harman.

⁴The Turkish term used here is duban.

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an accident.

When he entered the main chambers of the bath, he was shown great attention. He undressed and had a hot bath, but when he returned to dress again, the place where he had left his clothes contained an entirely different set of clothes. Someone else's clothes were there. He decided to wait a while before dressing, for perhaps they had mistaken him for someone else. But attendants came and helped him dress in the clothes that were there, and they said, "Your carriage is ready, Your Majesty."

He went along with them to the carriage, quite amazed at what he was doing but unable to do anything else. He told the driver to take him home. After a short ride the carriage stopped before an apartment house.⁵ There two women came to meet him, the one asking, "Are you well, sir?" and the other asking, "Did you have a good bath, sir?" Each woman took one of his arms and led him upstairs. They thought him tired after having taken a bath, and they suggested that he lie down for a while. After they had helped him into bed, the man fell asleep

⁵When modern peasants tell tales about kings and sultans, they cannot imagine a more elegant residence for them than an apartment house. This, of course, reflects the rustic's wonder at and admiration of the conveniences and comforts of urban living.

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almost at once.

A little later when he half awoke, he saw one woman on the right side of his bed and one on the left. The one woman said, "He loves me much," and the other woman said, "He loves me so much," and they tried to waken him fully by spraying a mist of eau de cologne on his face. He lifted his eyes slightly to see which of the women was the more beautiful. What he saw when he did this was a (excuse me! dog three feet away urinating into his face

What had actually happened was that he had passed out in the cemetery and awakened only when the dog had urinated on him.