

Story 844 (Tape erased in field for re-use, but first translated.)

Narrator: Hâlil Doğan

Location: Hamaylı village, Oğuzeli kaza, Gaziantep Province, but the tale was taped at Sinop Penitentiary

Date: August 1964

### The Guessing Children

Once there was and once there was not an Arab sheik<sup>1</sup> who was the leader of a tribe of about 1,000 families. This sheik had married one of his cousins, but he made it a practice to sleep with his wife only once a year. Even so, he had two sons by this woman, both of whom he named Mohammed. Once on that particular day of the year the sheik happened to be entertaining a number of guests. As the evening wore on, an Arab slave reminded the sheik what day of the year it was, but the sheik went on talking with his guests

This Arab slave was the most trusted of the sheik's servants. He was the only one of them who was permitted to enter the harem section of the sheik's home. When the sheik did not go to his wife's bedroom, the Arab slave went there and, in the dark, slipped into the wife's bed. The wife had no way of knowing that it was not the sheik, for she had long

<sup>1</sup>In the Turkish tradition the word sheik (shaykh) usually refers to the head of a group or school of dervishes. In the Arabian tradition it more often refers to the political leader of a tribe or community.

## Story

made it a point not to speak to the sheik on these annual occasions. The Arab slave, therefore, made love to the woman and then returned to serve his master and his guests again

Some time later that night the guests said to their host, "It is getting very late and time for you to retire. We shall see each other again in the morning.

It was a disgraceful thing, according to Arab custom, to leave one's guests in order to go to bed, and so the sheik said to his guests, "In our country we would die when our guests die." But the guests insisted that he retire while they slept there in the visiting quarter

Unwillingly, the sheik accepted their courteous gesture in his behalf and went to his own room and entered the bed with his wife. Although the woman was in the habit of refraining from all speech on the special night when her husband slept with her, she could not refrain from asking, "Why do you come to make love to me twice in the same night? I have been your wife for three or five years,<sup>2</sup> and up till now you have always seen me just once a year. What is the reason for this? I should like to know."

"I beg your pardon, cousin," he said, "but it seems that I have failed to control myself today, and thus I have come

<sup>2</sup>The expression three or five need not be taken literally. It means a few, a small number.

Story 844

to your room twice."

But the sheik began to wonder who it was who had lain with his wife before he had done so. He wondered if it could have been his special Arab slave. That slave was a very smart man in some ways. People from all over the country used to come and consult him about a variety of matters. The sheik reluctantly concluded that it could have been only that slave who had slept with his wife. The following morning, after he had bidden his guests goodbye, he killed that slave and disposed secretly of his body

In time the sheik's wife bore a third son, whom the sheik also named Mohammed. All three of his sons were named Mohammed.

By the time that his three sons were all young men, the sheik had himself grown quite old. After he had been ill for some time, the sheik one day called his wife and three sons to him and said to them, "I feel that my time to depart from this world has come. I am going to make my will and divide my property among you so that there will be no quarreling among you afterwards. I am going to give property to Mohammed, to Mohammed, but nothing to Mohammed."

His wife said, "What do you mean by that? Speak clearly." But the sheik had delivered up his soul, and the wife could get no further response from him.

## Story 844

After the sheik's funeral had been held and mourning for him had been carried on for a suitable length of time, his sons were faced with the problem of their inheritance. They decided to go and consult a certain wise man who was known for his competence in legal matters. He lived at some distance from their home.

On their way to visit him they saw the footprint of a camel. The oldest son said, "A camel has passed this and that camel was blind in one eye." <sup>147-15</sup> <sup>blind 147-150</sup>

The middle son said, "The camel was loaded with honey on one side and butter on the other." <sup>147, 148, 150</sup>

The youngest son then said, "There was a pregnant woman riding on the camel. And the camel itself was unusual in that it had somehow lost its tail."

No one of the brothers asked either of the others how he knew the facts that he had stated about the camel. just continued on their journey in silence. Before long a horseman rode up to them and said, "Selâmünaleyküm!"

"Aleykümselâm!"<sup>3</sup> the brothers answered.

The horseman asked them, "Where are you going?"

"We are going to visit such-and-such a wise man."

<sup>3</sup>This is the traditional Moslem exchange between strangers. The two terms mean Peace be unto you / And may peace be unto you too.

Story 844

"What is your business with him?"

"We have to see him about a certain matter. What you doing and where are you going?"

"I have lost a camel, and I am trying to recover it."

The oldest brother asked, "Was your camel blind in one eye?"

"Yes."

The middle brother asked, "Was your camel loaded on one side with honey and on the other with butter?"

~~1-8/150~~  
"Yes."

The youngest brother then asked, "Was there a pregnant woman riding on your camel? And had your camel in some lost its tail?"

"Yes, yes. Now tell me where my camel is."

All three brothers said together, "We don't know. We have not seen your camel."

The horseman refused to believe this, and he insisted that they had his camel. "How could you know everything about my camel if you do not have it or if you have not seen it?"

The oldest brother said, "No, we neither have your camel nor have we seen it. But come with us. Let us go on to the wise sheik we are to visit and tell him your story. If he thinks that we have your camel or know of its whereabouts, then

118-56

Story 844

we shall attend to it

They all traveled together until they reached the home of the wise Arab sheik. They were admitted to his home and treated as guests, and for three days they did nothing but accept their host's care and attention. In the Arab tradition it is improper to ask a guest the purpose of his visit before three days have elapsed since his arrival. On the fourth day the wise sheik asked his four guests, "Where are you going? Where have you come from? What is your business here?"

The oldest of the three brothers said, "Let this fourth man explain his problem first, and then we shall speak

"Very well," said the sheik. Then turning to the horseman he asked, "Let us hear from you first."

"Well, sir, I lost my camel, and while I was searching for it, I met these three brothers along the road. I asked them if they had seen my camel, and they gave exact descriptions of my camel. The oldest asked, in one eye?'

the middle brother asked, 'Was your camel loaded on one with honey and on the other with butter?' That was exactly how my camel was loaded. Then the youngest brother asked, 'Was there a pregnant woman riding on your camel? And did your camel in some way lose its tail?' He too was correct, for there was in fact a pregnant woman riding on my camel, and

## Story

the beast has been tailless for some time. But then these three brothers said that they did not have my camel, and they even claimed that they had not so much as seen my camel. Sir, I am sure that they must know something concerning the whereabouts of my camel.

After listening attentively to this complaint of the horseman, the sheik turned to the brothers and asked the oldest of them, "Son, how did you know that the camel was blind in one eye?"

The oldest brother responded, "Sir, the camel cropped grass steadily from the left side of the road but never touched any on the right. I concluded from this evidence that it must blind in its right eye."

Turning now to the middle brother, the sheik asked, "Tell me, son, how did you know that the camel was loaded on one side with honey and on the other side with butter?"

"I saw that on the left side of the trail there was a long row of ants, and ants are drawn to sweet foods. On the other side was a long row of flies, and flies can always smell butter."

sheik then asked the youngest brother, "How did you know that the camel carried a pregnant woman and that the camel lacked a tail?"

at several points along the way the camel left

Story 844

the main trail for four or five steps, folded its legs, and lay on its belly on the ground. Each time it did this, someone climbed down from its back and urinated. When that person arose from urinating, that person's hands were pressed deeply into the sand, as if the person were very heavy. From these observations, I concluded that the passenger on the camel must have been a pregnant woman. The evidence about the taillessness of the camel also lay on the ground. I noticed that when the camel defecated, all the droppings were in one heap. If the camel had had a tail, which would be switching back and forth all the time, the droppings would have been scattered."<sup>4</sup>

The sheik then said to the horseman, "These fellows are telling the truth. They do not have your camel." And so he sent the horseman on his way. Then he asked the three brothers, "Now let us come to your problem. What is it that brings you here?"

The eldest brother said, "We are the sons of such-and-such a sheik. On his deathbed our father called us and our mother to his presence and told us his will. He said, 'I am leaving my property to Mohammed and Mohammed but not Mohammed. Although our mother asked him to speak more clearly about his

<sup>4</sup>At this point the narrator interpolated the following observation: "I know that this is true, because for some time I was a camel driver."

## Story 844

will, he died without saying another word. All three of us are named Mohammed, and so we do not know to whom the property should go and to whom it should not go. That is what we have come to consult you about.

For three or five days the sheik puzzled over this problem without being able to find a solution. This sheik had a very intelligent daughter. One day when she saw her father deep in thought about the inheritance of the three brothers, she asked, "Father, what are you thinking about so intently?"

"My guests asked me to resolve a problem for them, and I have been contemplating their case

"What is their problem, Father?" After she had learned the details of their inheritance, she said, "Father, when you arise tomorrow morning, continue entertaining your guests as usual. Offer them tea and coffee, and I shall come into the room with your breakfasts. When I do so, let me do as I wish, and you observe what happens."

In the morning when the sheik was sitting with his visitors, his daughter entered the room dressed in her finest clothes and wearing all of her jewelry. The three brothers were seated in a row. Going to the oldest brother and stretching out her hand, as if to shake hands, she said, "Welcome!" As she did so, she looked him the face, but the oldest brother looked down, not so much as raising an eyebrow. She then went

## Story

to the middle brother and said, "Welcome!" but he too did nothing but cast his eyes downward. When she went to the youngest son and repeated this welcome, he seized her hand, held it tightly, and gazed deep into her eyes. The girl withdrew her hand and left the room quickly.

Observing all of this, the sheik concluded at once that the two elder sons were legitimate and the youngest was illegitimate. He said to them, "Remain another day as my guests, and I shall give you my decision about your inheritance."

Later that day, when dinner was being served, pilav<sup>5</sup> covered with roast lamb was set before the three brothers. There was also a bottle of wine. As they began to eat, the oldest brother asked, "Are you aware that the meat we are eating smells like <sup>153, 154</sup> dog's flesh?"

"Yes," the other two answered.

53-  
the middle brother asked, "Are you aware that the wine we are drinking smells like the flesh of dead human beings?"

"Yes," the others answered.

Then the youngest asked, "Are you aware that the pilav

<sup>5</sup>Pilav (or pilaf) is made with rice and more or less meat, usually lamb. The meat content may be limited to tiny flecks, or it may be in somewhat larger pieces. Pilav sometimes also has cooked in it pine nuts and/or small currants.

Story 844

we are eating was cooked by a <sup>154, 55 156</sup>bastard?"

"Yes," the others answered.

As this was going on, neither the sheik nor his daughter was in the room with the brothers. But just outside the door, the daughter was listening to their conversation. After the sheik had given his judgment that the two older brothers should inherit their father's estate and the youngest should not, he bade them farewell. But as they were preparing to leave, the sheik's daughter reentered the room and said, "Before you leave, I have three questions for you

"Very well," they said.

To the oldest brother she said, "What made you think that the lamb you were served smelled like dog's flesh?"

"I don't know. It simply smelled of dog--that's all "

The girl then called their shepherd and asked him why the lamb smelled of dog flesh. He said, "That lamb lost its mother right after it was born. It had to be suckled, and so I let it suck from one of my female dogs that had just had a litter of pups. The lamb was nourished for some time with dog milk. That must be the reason its flesh smells of dog.

Turning then to the middle brother, the girl asked, "What made you think that the wine you were drinking smelled like the flesh of human beings?"

"Because it did smell that way. My brothers thought so, too."

Story 844

The girl then sent for the vintner and asked him should the wine you sold me smell like the flesh of dead human beings?"

The vintner said, "The grapes used for that batch of wine grew in a field that had formerly been a cemetery. may be the reason."

Turning finally to the youngest brother, the girl asked, "Why did you say that the person who had cooked the pilav was a bastard?"

"I said that because I somehow sensed that to be the case. My brothers had that same sensation."<sup>6</sup>

Disturbed by this, for she herself had cooked the pilav, the girl went to her mother and asked, "Mother, whose daughter am I?"

"You are the daughter of a wise sheik from whom everyone gets advice," said her mother

"Tell me the truth, or I shall have your head chopped off!"

"That is the truth." But when the girl insisted, she finally told her the facts of her parentage. "There was formerly a slave in our household who assaulted me one night. As a wife,

<sup>6</sup>The sensitivity to the smell of the meat and the wine may seem fantastic, but Turkish people often have great acuteness of smell and taste. It is claimed by many that they can take one taste of a lamb roast and tell the part of Turkey from which the sheep came. "Feeling" the presence of a bastard is utterly fanciful. In most variants of this tale, it is the father, not the daughter, who is alleged to be a bastard. The reason for that allegation is quite rational: the father had shown bad breeding when he failed to eat with his guests.

## Story 844

I was ashamed to speak of it, for it would have been very damaging to the reputation of the sheik. You are the child of that slave."

"Very well, Mother," she said. She then returned to the guest room and gave permission to the three brothers to leave. /