

Story 891 (1964 Tape 2)

Narrator: Sürgit ----- (last name not recorded), retired taxi driver

Location: Vezirköprü, a kaza town in Samsun Province; but taped at Ünye, Ordu Province

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Stratagems to Frustrate Questioning Angels

86.88
Last year I had an ulcer that hemorrhaged. I lost a great deal of blood from it. I said to my wife, "When I do not tell anyone about it. This condition I have made part of my will. When I die, you are to wrap me in a tattered old black shroud and have me buried in a very old cemetery--1,000 or 2,000 years old--after sunset. You will bury me quickly without the reciting of any prayers

My wife asked me, "Why don't you want us to say any prayers?"

I said, "Because if you did, then they [Munkur and Nekir, the two questioning angels who quiz the newly dead corpses ^{shrouded} on Moslem catechism] would know that I was a new corpse. If you did not recite prayers, and if you buried me after sunset, it would be easier for me. If they then should come and ask me questions as these [narrator asks a couple of questions in Arabic], I would answer 'Peace be with you I am an old

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corpse.'"¹

wouldn't they recognize your real identity?
Wouldn't they say, 'You are a new corpse. You have just
come here.'?"

I said to my wife, "No, they would have no way of
knowing that, for I should be in a dark and old shroud."

wouldn't they say, 'But you have not decomposed
any.'?"

I answered, "Well, if they should ask that, I'd say, 'Of course I haven't decomposed any, for I am a saint.'² *Living Corpse*
You have no business bothering me at all!"

My wife then wanted to know, "Wouldn't they ask you where
you had been before, if you were really an old corpse?"

"If they did, I'd say, 'I must have been taking a walk
when you called before. Apparently that is why you have not
seen me until now.

My wife then said, "Come, now, let us leave such things
and talk about something else."

¹ The narrator is indicating in this dialogue that he is not a very good Moslem and that he does not know how to answer questions about the basic principles of Islam. If the questioning angels discover this and send a report to Allah, then the individual will be sentenced to severe punishment when he comes before the bar of Judgment.

² Both in Turkish lore and in the lore of many other peoples, it is believed that saints do not decompose after death. There are numerous stories in ATON of saints' tombs or graves revealing, when opened by accident or intent, fresh, undamaged, and still beautiful bodies.

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Then I told my wife the story about a Georgian³ who had died and who, when asked, "Who is your God, and who is Prophet?" [in Arabic], had answered [in Georgian], "Rasçovi."⁴

"What does that mean?" my wife asked.

"The Georgian was saying, 'I don't know what you are talking about.' Well, after that, the questioning angels reported to God, 'They brought a new corpse to the cemetery today. When we asked him, "Ben rabbike?" he responded, "Rasçovi." We wonder who this person can be.

"God replied, 'I have no such creature who says, "Rasçovi. But--just in case--you might ask the Prophet.'^{ms}
He may know

"The angels then went and asked the Prophet, 'Do you know any such man as would say, "Rasçovi," when, as a new corpse, he was asked, "Ben rabbike?"

"The Prophet said, 'No, I don't know any such person, but you might ask the Devil.'^{ds-dg}

"Then the angels went to the Devil and asked the same question of him. The Devil said, 'Where is the body?"

³ Georgians were a people who lived south of the Caucasus, bordering on the Black Sea. Many of them were Christian, but those who migrated to Turkey usually became Moslem. In folktales both their loyalty and their religious convictions are questionable.

⁴ Both what is purportedly Arabic and what is purportedly Georgian language in this tale have not been authenticated. They are probably erzatz expressions.

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"They took him to where the body lay and again asked it, 'Ben rabbike?'

"The Georgian again answered, 'Rasçovi.'

"When the Devil heard this, he burst out laughing. angels asked him, 'Why are you laughing? What does it mean?

"'That dishonest fellow down there is a Georgian. Georgian's book was rather dark.⁵ As the Devil knew, he would soon be beaten by the angels

"Then the Georgian said to the Devil, 'Tell these angels not to beat me much, because there are many other people could follow me here. If all those people hear that harsh things were done to me, well, by God, they won't come It was only in this way that the Georgian saved himself being beaten."

I told all this to my wife, and then I added, "I might do just the same thing that Georgian did!"

⁵ An idiomatic way of saying, "He was illiterate and unfamiliar with the Koran."