

Story 2202 (1996 Tape 2)

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Location: İstanbul, capital
city of İstanbul Province

Date: April 8, 1996

Deli Dumrul Fights Azrail¹

Long ago in the land of the Oghuz there lived a bully named Deli Dumrul. This Deli Dumrul was not only bold and strong, but he was also at times quite mad.

One day he built a bridge over a small creek and began to demand thirty akçes² from each person who crossed on it. If someone went to the end of the creek to avoid crossing the bridge, Deli Dumrul pursued him, beat him badly, and charged forty akçes

Not far from this bridge there was a large nomad camp. One day the most courageous and admired young man in that camp changed worlds, causing the rest of the nomads to weep and tear their hair in grief.

Deli Dumrul, busy collecting akçes, heard the sound of mourning and became angry because of the noise. Leaving his

¹This is a folk variant of Legend V of The Book of Dede Korkut, a 10th century Oghuz (Oğuz) epic.

²A small silver coin dating from medieval times

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bridge, he strode to the camp and shouted, "Hey, you! You are disturbing my business with all this crying. Are you trying to flood the creek with your tears and thus destroy my business? Tell me!"

The mother of the dead young man said, "What better reason in the world do we have for weeping? If we did not who would? My son, the best-loved and most courageous youth in our camp, died today."

Deli Dumrul became even angrier. Looking from one nomad to another, he said, "Which one of you killed this brave young man? Show me!"

The mother answered, "Oh, sir, who would dare to take his life but Azrail? It was Azrail who took my brave young son's soul."

"Azrail! Azrail!" raged Deli Dumrul. "Who is Azrail to take the life of a noble young man? Bring him here to me. I shall punish him so severely that he will never take another life!"

The Creator God heard Deli Dumrul's shouting, and He not like what He heard. He called for Azrail, and in the blink of an eye Azrail was there. "Consider Deli Dumrul, My Azrail," said God. "This Deli Dumrul is becoming even bolder than before. He walks, eats, and enjoys earthly pleasures in the old Turkish ways, and he should be thankful for what he has. Instead, he is now questioning My will your mission. Go and appear before Deli Dumrul. He must

see who Azrail truly is.

One day soon after that, as Deli Dumrul and his forty were feasting, Azrail appeared at Deli Dumrul's side. Deli Dumrul was astonished at the angel's appearance--yes, even afraid--but he was determined not to reveal his fear to Azrail. Deli Dumrul shouted, "Who are you? How dare you come so close to me?"

When Azrail heard these brave words, he said, "Do not be deceived by my appearance. I may have gray hair and old-looking wings, but I am the one who takes the souls all humans when their written time has arrived."

Amazed, Deli Dumrul asked, "Are you then the one who is called Azrail?"

"Yes, Deli Dumrul, I am Azrail

In response, Deli Dumrul roared, "Oh, you foolish one! I was searching for you in the sky, but here you are on the ground next to me! So you are the one who took the life of that noble, courageous young nomad. You are his murderer! How could you have done such a thing? How could you take his life and leave his family and friends in grief?"

Deli Dumrul leaped from his seat, drew his sword, and shouted, "Let me kill you right now and stop your murderous deeds!"

But Azrail, suddenly becoming a pigeon, flew away well beyond the reach of his challenger. Sheathing his sword, Deli

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Dumrul rejoiced in his victory. To his men he boasted, "You saw what happened here. I frightened Azrail so much that instead of leaving by the door, he fled by way of the chimney!"

Then, determined to destroy Azrail in his new form, Deli Dumrul leaped upon his horse Doğan and rode over hills and mountains and through valleys, killing every pigeon he could find. Surely one of those pigeons must be Azrail.

On Deli Dumrul's return from killing pigeons, Azrail appeared before Doğan,³ unseen by his bold master. Doğan reared in fright, throwing Deli Dumrul to the ground. When he came to his senses, the bully saw Azrail right there before him.

"Oh, Azrail, I now understand your importance. Please forgive me. I was ignorant of your wisdom and greatness, but I now know your power and your mission. Please forgive my foolishness and erase my bold words

Azrail said quietly to Deli Dumrul, "By the order of God I have now come to take your soul. I am merely God's servant, and I follow the orders He has given me. God is all-powerful. He gives us our lives and He takes away our lives as He chooses

"If that is true, Azrail," said Deli Dumrul, "please

³This is an example of Motif B733--Animals are spirit-sighted (Thompson, Stith, Motif Index of Folk Literature, I, 472).

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step to one side so that I can speak to God Himself. Thank you."

Then Deli Dumrul spoke directly to God. "You are great and merciful, O God. Nobody knows what You look like, but I am filled with Your holy light. Wherever I look, O God, you are there. In whatever I touch, I can feel You. You are in everything, O God, and You are everywhere. You are my dearest love, O God, O my God. I have faith that You alone are God. I trust You. Please kill my selfishness and greed so that I can be truly happy and at peace."

After a moment's pause, Deli Dumrul spoke again directly to God. "O God, You have not given me enough time to spend on Your good earth. I am still very young. Please forgive me for my faults and my misdeeds. O God, if You will only forgive me and let me live longer, none of Your greatness and mercy will be lost."

God then turned aside and spoke to Azrail, saying, "Hey, Azrail! Deli Dumrul is now sane and has confessed his belief in My power. Tell him that if he can find somebody willing to die in his place, Deli Dumrul may live."⁴

Azrail repeated to Deli Dumrul what God had said. Deli Dumrul was at first happy and then sad. "I am grateful to God for His mercy, but I do not know anyone who would give

⁴This potential means of delaying death is Motif D1855.2 --Death postponed if substitute can be found (Thompson, Motif Index of Folk Literature, II, 343).

his life for me, unless perhaps my father or mother would be willing to do so. I'll ask my father first

Mounting his horse Doğan, Deli Dumrul rode at a gallop to his father's house. He told his father the whole story beginning with the death at the nomads' camp. Then, "Father," he said, "would you be willing to surrender your soul to Azrail in exchange for mine, or would you choose instead to grieve for your son's death?"

His father answered, "Son, when you were born, I sacrificed nine of my camels to show how much I loved you. But, my son, life itself is too sweet to give up. I would give all of my wealth and my land, but not my life. That is the truth. I am sorry. Perhaps your mother, who has a stronger bond with you, would be willing to give Azrail her life for yours. You can ask her about it."

Hearing this, Azrail said to Deli Dumrul, "If you wish, you may go to ask your mother."

Again Deli Dumrul mounted Doğan and rode with the speed of the wind to his mother's house. He told his mother the same story, from beginning to end, and then he asked, "Mother, would you be willing to give your life to Azrail in my place or would you rather cry at my grave?"

"Son," said his mother, "I remember how your father and I rejoiced when you were born. He even sacrificed nine camels in your honor. But what you ask now I cannot give. Life is

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too sweet for me to give it up, even for my own son. I am sorry."

Azrail, there at Deli Dumrul's side, said, "I, too, am sorry that neither your father nor your mother is willing to take your place so that you may live."

"It is true, that old saying, 'In this world, the right eye is not willing to help the left eye,'⁵ Father Azrail. You may take my life, but before I draw my last breath, please give me one more day, for I have a wife and little children. Let me see and hug them one more time.

With Azrail's consent, Deli Dumrul mounted Doğan and went to see his family. He told his wife the whole story from first to last, saying finally, "My father and my mother both refused to take my place, so Azrail will take my soul tomorrow. I wanted to see you all one more time and place our children in your care. All my land and all my wealth are now yours. Though this is hard to say--my tongue stumbles as I say it--after I am gone, if you find someone who will love you and care for you and our children, do not hesitate to marry."

After hearing these words, Deli Dumrul's wife wept. Then she said, "Do not worry, my dear husband. Tell Azrail that I will give my life for you."⁶

⁵Not listed in A Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs (Yurtbaşı, 1993).

⁶Type 899--Alcestis (Aarne, Antti and Stith Thompson, The Types of the Folktale, 1961, 309); also Type 113--Das Haus Azrails (Eberhard, Wolfram and Pertev N. Boratav, Typen Türkischer Volksmärchen, 133-134).

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Deli Dumrul turned to Azrail, with tears like rivers flowing from his cheeks. "You are a compassionate person, O Azrail. How can you take this poor woman's life? Please forgive both of us and let us live together. What would you lose in doing that?"

Then perhaps because He knew that Deli Dumrul had become a sane man, a man of faith, or perhaps because He felt sorry for him, God said to Azrail, "I forgive them both, and I grant them a long life of 140 years together. Now, before the sun sets, go and take the souls of Deli Dumrul's father and mother."

Azrail said then to Deli Dumrul and his wife, "God has forgiven you and He has granted you a long life together.

Deli Dumrul and his wife were overjoyed by God's mercy. And from that time onward, Deli Dumrul could not bear to hurt even ants. He fed the starving; he clothed the poor; and he did everything in his power to aid the homeless