

Story 890 (1964 Tape 2)

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

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

Date: August 1964

Adventures in Turkey with a Model-T Ford

One day I was sitting in a coffeehouse in Havza<sup>1</sup> when a man came up to me and asked if I would drive him to the Kat Evliyası village<sup>2</sup> in Tokat Province. We bargained for a while, and I finally agreed to take him there for seventy liras. That was in 1925.

A mattress was spread out in the back of my car, they placed the patient on that. He was accompanied by his ten-year-old son. We reached Amasya without any difficulty, but about halfway between Amasya and Turhal<sup>3</sup> we had a flat tire. I repaired it, but after going for only another meters, it was flat again. In those days there were no "hot patches" for repairing tires; we used just a piece of rubber

<sup>1</sup> A kaza town in the southern part of Samsun Province.

<sup>2</sup> A village named after a Moslem saint. A shrine is located there to which the sick are brought for miraculous cures. It is comparable to the Christian shrine at Lourdes, France.

<sup>3</sup> Amasya is the capital city of Amasya Province. Turhal is a kaza town located about thirty kilometers to the south-east of Amasya.

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and some cement. I repaired it again, and again it lasted for only a few meters. I kept on repairing it in this way until I ran out of both patches and cement.

This was a very bad situation to be in, and I was afraid that we might be stranded there. Then I remembered hearing once about someone who had managed to reach his destination by filling a tire with straw. I looked around us, but there was nowhere for me to get straw; there wasn't even any grass on the ground that I might use. I noticed that my passenger was wearing a nice overcoat. I said to him, "Master, give me your overcoat."

"What will you do with it?" he asked.

"I'll put it in the tire, and you can have it back when we reach Turhal."

I didn't know whether it would work, but I hoped that it would. I thought I'd have the coat pressed afterwards for 100 paras--two and a half kuruş.<sup>4</sup> Well, I rolled up the coat giving it a circular shape, and stuffed it into the tire--which in those days was only about the size of a motorcycle tire. It was a 1925 Ford, the kind of car you never see any more except in a museum. After stuffing the tire with the

<sup>4</sup> There were forty paras to the kuruş, and there were 100 kuruş to the lira. With the lira devaluated to 1/7 or 1/8 of a U.S. penny, the kuruş has become meaningless. The para had become meaningless before mid-century.

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coat, I tried running the car on it, but it was not filled sufficiently. I stuffed my jacket in, too, but still it was not enough. I added my trousers and my vest, and this time it was really stuffed enough to support the weight of the car.

From there to Turhal I drove very slowly. Time did not really matter in those days anyway, for we were never in a hurry. I removed the tire from the wheel at Turhal so that I could take the clothes out of it. When I put my hand into the tire, however, I could not feel either overcoat or jacket or trousers there. The clothes we had stuffed into the tire had all been torn to shreds!

Before we started the trip I had received twenty liras in advance from my passenger. He was to pay me the balance of fifty liras on the way back, but I discovered that I needed it before that. I said, "Uncle Hasan, will you pay me the rest of the fare now?"

"What would you do with the money?"

"I would buy a spare tire as a reserve."

"I thought you were to receive the rest of the fare on the return trip, but it is all right. Son, you pay him." The boy took fifty liras from his father's pocketbook and gave them to me. I bought an inner tube for two and a half liras and a pair of trousers for myself for seventy-five kuruş. Then I returned and dumped out the contents of the

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tire--just rags by now. Uncle Hasan asked for his overcoat, and I said, "Here you are," handing him all the pieces of his coat that I could find.

*Language  
but we*  
"You bastards!" he said, "you have shredded my coat into bits!"

We quarreled about it for a few minutes. Of course, when people heard this loud discussion, they flocked around us to listen. Well, it was a deed already done, and there was nothing that could be achieved by words. As soon as we could get ready, we set out from Turhal.

In those days there was no automatic lubrication system in an automobile engine. It was all done by means of a fly-wheel.<sup>5</sup> When a car went up a steep hill, all of the oil would run to the back of the engine, and the front part, without any lubrication at all, would often burn out. We came to a hill that did not seem steep enough to cause any lubrication trouble, but as we reached the top, I heard a tak, tak, tak sound, and I knew that the No. 1 bearing had burned out. I said, "Oh, my God, Uncle Hasan!"

"What happened?"

<sup>5</sup> The narrator is describing in his own way the old gravity-feed lubrication of early autos as opposed to oil-pressure systems of modern cars.

"The 'bed'<sup>6</sup> is burnt!"

"~~You bastard~~ You destroyed my overcoat first, and you have your eyes on my bed [mattress]!" Saying this, he began to beat the car with his cane. "Drive! Drive! You received your fare!"

When I explained to him what had happened, however, he understood the difficulty. We hired an ox-cart at a neighboring village to take him on to his destination in Tokat Province--some thirty or forty miles away--and bring him back. I would stay with the car and have it repaired. Then I would wait there for him and return him to Havza.

After I was left alone with the car, I began thinking and thinking about what to do. Suddenly I remembered having heard once that it was possible to pack a bearing with and thus enable it to run for thirty kilometers or so. I was wearing a fez<sup>7</sup> and I decided to cut that up and use it this purpose. I cut a piece of this felt and forced it

<sup>6</sup> In Turkish the word yatak means both bed and bearing, and so the confusion here is both understandable and realistic.

<sup>7</sup> If the narrator's memory is correct and this tale is based on events of 1925, it must have been before September 1. In late August 1925 Atatürk, in an important speech delivered at Kastamonu, initiated the dress reform with condemnatory comments against the fez, the clerical gown, and şalvar (baggy trousers). These garments were soon thereafter outlawed by legislative action.

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between the burned bearing and the piston rod. Then I tightened the nuts and poured oil on the exposed parts of the felt. After I had closed up the engine again and started it running, I could still hear a faint tak, tak, tak, but after the felt had absorbed more oil, the engine ran smoothly. I turned the engine off again and spent the night there in the car.

The following day Uncle Hasan came along in the ox-cart and asked me, "What did you do?"

"I repaired it."

"You rascal, I wonder whose bed you have stolen to repair it with!"

"Be quiet!" I said. "This is not the kind of bed know anything about."

They lifted him from the ox-cart into my car. He then said to those peasants standing around, "They call me Hasan Ağa<sup>8</sup> of Havza. Even the smallest child there knows who I am. This driver has stolen someone's bed for tonight."

The peasants asked me, "Is that true?"

"No, no!" I said, and then I explained to them that the

<sup>8</sup> Ağa means a rural landowner, usually wealthy, often powerful. The word may also be used as an honorific for a distinguished person who may not own any land or be a bit wealthy. It is probably the latter use of the word that Uncle Hasan applies to himself.

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old man had confused yatak for bed with yatak for bearing.

some time after we had started back to Havza Uncle Hasan kept saying to me, "Tell me the truth! Whose bed did you steal?"

When I could not stand his chatter any longer, I said, "You talk too much! I have had all of you I can tolerate! Do you know what I am looking for now?"

"What?"

"A precipice to roll this car down. I'm through!"

"Don't you dare do such a thing! I'll be quiet, and you drive carefully."