

Story #554 (1974 Tape #12)

Narrator: Hasan Solak, small business-  
man

Location: Kaza town of Akdağmadeni,  
Province of Yozgat

Date: August 1974

Vehbi<sup>1</sup> Solves a Riddle

The padişah's secretary, Vehbi, had behaved badly, and the padişah had ordered that he be executed. His friends slaughtered an animal and dipped Vehbi's shirt in it as evidence of his execution. *Bloody garment*

But actually Vehbi had gone to Van in disguise. There he had become an apprentice in a coffeehouse so that nobody would know that he had once been the padişah's secretary. He remained there for many years.

One day a padişah in another land left some water in a glass jug on a table. When he awoke in the morning, he found that the water in the jug was frozen. He gathered his men and said, "I saw a strange object in which water was imprisoned. Who can tell me what it is?" This question was also sent from that land to Turkey,<sup>2</sup> but no one could provide an answer. The Turkish padişah said, "If Vehbi were only alive, he could have solved the problem. He could have solved any such question we might receive from England, America, or Russia."

Someone said that Vehbi was alive, but how could the padişah locate him? He decided to send an order to all of the governors saying this: "Whoever can answer this question is to be arrested and sent to Istanbul where he will be rewarded with 1,000 golden liras by the padişah."

<sup>1</sup> Although Vehbi seems in this tale to be a distinct personality, we have no biographical information about him.

<sup>2</sup> In many tales when such a riddle or puzzle is sent from abroad, the Turkish court must provide the correct answer within a specified time or the foreign power will declare war on Turkey. Here there is no such threat.

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The coffeehouse apprentice asked, "What is the question?"

The owner of the coffeehouse asked him, "How could you possibly understand such a question?"

just find the exact wording of that question for me." When the owner brought the text to him, the apprentice said, "What is difficult about that?" He wrote beneath the question, "If it is struck it will be destroyed."

governor of Van reported this to Istanbul at once. An order came from Istanbul to the governor saying, "You could not possibly have discovered this in your own head. Arrest and send to Istanbul whoever it was who told you this." The governor informed Istanbul that he had not discovered the meaning of the sentence but that it had been discovered by a coffeehouse apprentice.

The governor and the coffeehouse apprentice arrived at the imperial palace. When the padişah looked, whom should he see but Vehbi standing in front of him, dressed very shabbily. He asked, "Vehbi, did you run away and save yourself?"

What could Vehbi say? In order to save himself, he said,

"Vehbi was bored.

He wants to see this world.

There is no fixed boundary for an idle dog.

Your majesty, he goes and visits Van."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Sıkıldı Vehbi'nin canı.  
Gezmek ister şu cihanı.  
Boş ite menzil olmaz.  
[Şevketlim] dolanır gelir Vanı.

As a rhymed quatrain, this response is obviously more effective in the Turkish original.