

Story #291 (Tape #8, 1970)

Narrator: Ibrahim Gürsoy

Location: Çamlıdere, kaza  
town in Ankara  
Province

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The Sovereignty of the Head

Once upon a time in an Indian city, there was a padishah who had a son. One day while this boy was hunting, he entered the territory of another padishah. His journey took him to a church\* where he saw a girl, the daughter of the padishah of that land. The young prince said, "If I could just marry that girl, I should be willing to sacrifice myself for this church."

After he had finished hunting, he returned to his own land and said to his father, "The padishah of such-and-such a city has a daughter whom I saw in a church. I want you to make arrangements to get that girl as a wife for me."

The padishah could hardly refuse his son's request, and so he sent a party of matchmakers to that other land. They

\*Uneducated people of almost any faith have distorted views quite often, of other religions, their rituals and forms of worship. Medieval Christians, for example, thought that Jewish ritual often required human sacrifices. We do not know just what kind of "church" the narrator had in mind--no identifying symbols or signs are given--but the terms church and priest suggest Christianity. The continuously moving knife is a popular motif in Turkish tales. There is such a knife in the Book of Dede Korkut in the Tepegöz legend.

finally agreed on the <sup>head price</sup> terms of the marriage, and the wedding was held in the girl's land. After the wedding was completed, the local padishah loaded their pack animals and saw them off to the land of the young prince, his son-in-law.

On the way, they stopped at a church, where the prince and princess each went to his own section of the church [i.e., men and women were kept separate, as in Moslem culture] In that church there was something like a pastirma knife which moved continuously back and forth. The prince remembered what he had promised before his marriage, that he would sacrifice his life to that church if he could win the daughter of the padishah of that land. Now that he had married the girl he determined to keep his promise. A girl held his neck in front of the knife, and soon his head lay in a trough on one side and his body in a trough on the other side. *Bebediy*

The priest of that church saw the padishah's son lying dead, with his head cut off. The priest was greatly disturbed by this, for he feared that he would be accused of the crime. It would be assumed, he thought, that he had killed the prince in order to take his wife from him. He was convinced that he would never be able to save himself from the hands of both padishahs, and so he decided to have his own head cut off in the same way. His head fell to one side, and his body fell to the other.

When the padishah's daughter returned to the main part of the church, she saw her husband and the priest lying there with their heads cut off. "See what has befallen on account of me!

## Story #291

What an unlucky girl I am! I might as well have my head cut off too now and be like these two.

But at that moment she heard a voice speaking from the World of the Unknown. It said, "O girl, do not kill yourself. Take the heads from the troughs below the knife and place them once more on the bodies, and the men will then revive."

She pulled the heads and bodies from the troughs and started to do as she had been directed. In her excitement, however, she mixed the parts, placing the prince's head on the priest's body and the priest's head on the prince's body.

The two men soon came back to life, but their heads had been exchanged. The priest with the prince's head now said, "The girl is mine." And the prince with the priest's head said, "No, the girl is mine."

*Delirium*  
*terminal* *brief*

Narrator to audience: "Which one of them should have the girl?"

Abdurrahman Erkaya: "The young man's head on the priest's body should have the girl."

Narrator: "That is right. The body is not important. It is the head that counts."