

Story 1792 (1991 Tape 5)

Narrator: Eşref Hakan
Özcan, 26

Location: Arhavi, kaza town
in Artvin Province

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Levels of Liquor

Neyzen Tevfik¹ was known to be a very heavy drinker. Despite frequent criticism from those around him, he continued drinking whenever he wished to do so. He was afraid of no one except Mazhar Osman,² the chief physician at the Bakırköy [İstanbul hospital for mental diseases.

One day Neyzen Tevfik and Mazhar Osman happened to meet at the pier in the Karaköy district.³ Neyzen Tevfik

¹Neyzen Tevfik was born near Bodrum in 1878 and died at İstanbul in 1953. He was called Neyzen because he played the ney, a deep-toned wind instrument. After surnames were required by the Kemalist Reforms of the 1920s, his family took the name Kolaylı. However, he continued to be known only as Neyzen Tevfik--even in the Turkish encyclopaedias. An alcoholic in real life as well as in folktales, he was a poet who produced several volumes, among them Hiç (1919) and Azâb-ı Mukaddes (1949).

²While this may well have been a historical person, we have not at this point been able to document his existence.

³This is near the famous Galata Bridge over the Golden Horn, a long inlet from the Bosphorus.

Story

was carrying beneath his arm a bottle of liquor wrapped in newspaper. Suspecting what it was, Mazhar Osman asked him sharply, "What are you carrying under your arm?"

Neyzen Tevfik answered, "Sir, this is a bottle of rakı."⁴

"Well, pour it into the sea!" said Mazhar Osman angrily.

Neyzen Tevfik answered, "Sir, I cannot do that."

not?" demanded Mazhar Osman.

"Because a friend of mine and I bought this bottle of rakı together. We shared the cost and we are each to have half of the rakı, but my half is in the bottom part of the bottle."

⁴The favorite Turkish distilled liquor, it is known as arak in Arab lands and as ouzo in the Balkans. It is a transparent, anise-flavored liquid.