

Story #427 (Tape #1, 1968)

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The Miser from Baghdad and the Miser from Bokhara

Once there were two misers, one of whom lived in Baghdad and the other in Bokhara. The Baghdad miser was a millionaire, an extremely rich man. He had a very high income, but he spent almost nothing. He did not even eat or drink well but always saved money.

His wife one day said to him, "I want you to look for a more miserly man than you are."

He answered, "Woman, I have heard that there is a man in Bokhara who is an even greater miser than I am. Let us join a caravan and go to Bokhara to find him."

He traveled by caravan for many days, and finally reached Bokhara. When he asked for directions to the home of Ali the Miser, he was told that he lived in a three-storey apartment¹ in such-and-such a section. He found this house and noticed that through its doors great dishes of pilav, meat, and stewed fruit were being carried away. He said to himself, "Good God, they must have given me the wrong address. If the owner of this house were a miser, he would not be sending out food in this

¹The Turkish peasant of the twentieth century does not envision luxury and splendor in terms of palace life. For him the acme of good living is to be found in urban apartment houses. The whole building, containing many apartments, is called not apartment house but simply apartment.

I am looking for a miser!"

"Were you not seeking a man named Ali such-and-such?" they asked him.

"Yes."

"Well, this is his house."

"Then he certainly is not a miser!" said the miser from Baghdad, even though the people with whom he spoke insisted that Ali was a miser.

He entered the yard of this building and saw there a grave on which was lying a club. He could not understand the meaning of this. Then a beautiful young woman came from the building and said, "Come in, elder brother. Go upstairs and become our guest. My husband is on duty right now, but he will return this evening. You may be our guest."

The miser from Baghdad went upstairs, reached the third floor, where the curtains were drawn, and sat down. The master of the house came home in the evening, and his wife told him of their guest. The husband said, "Let me do my duty here first and then go and speak to our guest." He picked up the club and started beating the grave with it just as hard as he could. He struck the grave ten times with this club, and each time he struck it his wife laughed. The harder he struck it, the harder she laughed. The guest above heard the noise but could not understand why the club was struck and why the lady laughed. What could be the reason for the woman's laughter?

Well, let us not make too long a tale of this. The master of the house went upstairs and met the guest, saying to him, "Welcome

They sat down to eat, but the guest did not eat anything. Instead he said, "As my host, you may be willing to discuss a matter which concerns me."

"Of course," said the master of the house. "What is it?"

"If it is not rude of me to mention it, I noticed that as you were beating, your wife was laughing. As soon as you struck with a club, burst into laughter. Is she mad?"

"Oh, I was not beating my wife," said the master of the house

"Then what were you beating?"

"Well, there was once a man who lived here by the name of Ali. He was such a miser that he refused to spend money even for food or drink. Before he died, he called his wife to him, saying, 'Come, I wish to make my will!'

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"What is your will?' he was asked.

"I cannot save myself from dying. There is something about it that bothers me, however. They say that the city charges very high prices for graves in its cemetery. When I die, do not waste money on such a grave. Just bury me here in the back yard

"His wife said, 'I am sick of this miserliness. It was a trick of Fate that a woman as beautiful as I should be married to a miser like you. I hope that you do indeed die. Then I shall marry a younger man, and together we shall squander your wealth. I shall have your grave beaten ten times every night, and I shall enjoy myself.'

"Well, it was this woman who married me, and I became an internal bridegroom.² Every evening when I come home, my first duty is to take

²When a man does not take his wife to his own (or his father's) house but goes to live in his wife's (or her father's) house, he is called in Turkey an "internal bridegroom." This happens usually because the woman (or her family) is wealthy while the bridegroom is not in a position to maintain her in the manner to which she has been accustomed. In the simplest sense, it refers to a man who has married for money.

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