

Story #431 (Tape #1, 1968)

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Province of Ankara

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The Adventures of Yanık Ibrahim

I once had a friend named Ibrahim. He had worked in this village for five or six years as a shepherd. He used to be called Yanık [burnt] Ibrahim. He always had his head and face bandaged because they were covered with blisters, and the fingers on his hands were turned backwards. He was quite an odd man, and he could write the old script perfectly.¹

One evening some of us went to his house to talk with him for a while. Someone said to him, "Ibrahim, tell us about some of the adventures you have had in your life."

He said, "I shall tell these to you on these conditions: No one will leave or enter the room while I am talking, and no one will move from his present position. Only under these conditions will I tell my adventures."

"All right," we all agreed. We all sat down, and he started talking.

"I used to be a driver back in the years when the automobile had just been invented. I even had a driver's license. My employer lived in Ankara, and I drove one of his trucks between Ankara and Ayash.² In those days gasoline used to come in cans, not in barrels. One day my employer said to me, 'I have some people who want to go to Ayash. Take them there, and on

¹ He refers to the pre-Republican Arabic script. To be able to write was then, as it is now, an asset to a peasant worker.

² Ayash is a kaza of Ankara Province, about 50 kilometers west of the city of Ankara.

the way back bring a load of cans of gasoline.'

"After I had gone to Ayash, I loaded on cans of gasoline on the way back. I filled the whole truck with them except for about enough space for one or two people. When I had almost reached Ankara I saw a peasant on the road who signalled to me, and so I stopped.

"'I have no money, but can you take me to Ankara?' he said.

"'Climb on,' I said.

"He sat among the cans of gasoline in the back of the truck. of these cans must have leaked a little. Apparently he struck a match to light a cigarette, for all of a sudden, we were in flames -gurp!³ flames enveloped everything as far as the cab of the truck. By the time I had stopped the truck, opened the door, and jumped out, my hands and face were burned badly. The truck was completely burned and reduced to nothing but a heap of steel. I could not discover where the man had gone I did not know whether he was dead or alive, I was so concerned with saving myself. I then went to the coffeehouse where my employer used to sit.

"'What do you mean you just got back?' he asked me. 'Who are you?' He could not even recognize me, and he kept asking, 'Who are you?'

"'The matter is such-and-such,' I said. 'I am your driver Ibrahim.'

"'What happened to you?'

"'Well, it was thus and so. On the return trip I was involved in a terrible accident. I picked up a peasant along the road, a poor man with no money. On the way he must have lighted a cigarette and set the gasoline

³ This is an onomatopoeic sound.

on fire. The truck is at such-and-such a place.'

"He said, 'Good God!' and so forth.

"I was taken to a hospital in Ankara. Later my former employer sued. The court revoked my driver's license and dismissed me.

"Formerly in Ankara there was an area called Tahtakale [wooden castle].⁴

It is the place where the fire department is now located. Laborers used to gather at the square there to wait to be hired. While I waited there one

I heard someone say, 'Let us go to Mahaliç to the clay works where the daily pay is one lira.

"It was winter time when we went there. When I got there, they said to me, 'What can you do?'

"I said, 'Well, I shall work as much as I can.

"We started work at the clay yards at Mahaliç, and we received one lira a day and a loaf of bread as wages. We slept under tents. It rained and rained and rained."⁵

⁴ In some cities the name Tahtakale is applied to a district of small businesses.

⁵ This abortive narrative is too realistic to be a tale yet too humdrum to be a vital piece of autobiographical adventure. Sometimes there is a fine line between what might, realistically, have happened and what is the fabrication of a tall-tale yarnspinner. It is transcribed here with the thought that it may possibly contain motifs that do belong to the folktale tradition.