

Story #536 (1969 | Tape #12)

Narrator: Mehmet Tekçe, green grocer, hence called Manav

Location: Aliçerçi village, kaza of Bozkır, Province of Konya. This is narrator's home, but tale was told at nearby village of Akça Pınar.

Date: October 1969

Battal Ağa Guards the Corpse of Hacı Ağa

Hacı Ağa was a rich Kurd who died. His two sons said, "Let us hire someone to wait by our father's grave so that he will not be afraid there alone." They asked several people to do this, and they offered fifty golden liras to anyone who would accept the job. Many people refused this offer. There was one Koca<sup>1</sup> Battal. They said to him, "If you would stay with our father's corpse, we would pay you fifty golden liras."

"By Allah," he said, "I cannot do anything without first consulting Fato."<sup>2</sup> He went home and shouted, "Fato! They want me to wait by the grave of Hacı Ağa, and for this they will give me fifty golden liras. Can we do it?"

"Well, Battal Ağa, if you are not afraid, you could do it, and then we should all be rich."

"Why should I be afraid? Give me my kepenek<sup>3</sup> and stick." He put the kepenek over his shoulders and went to the side of the grave.

<sup>1</sup> As a noun the word means husband, great one, or old one, but as an adjective it means great, famous, or large.

<sup>2</sup> Kurdish dialect for Fatma. This tale is, throughout, a dialect story.

<sup>3</sup> The very heavy felt coat (almost an inch thick) worn by shepherds in Turkey during cold weather.

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They had erected a meter-long piece of pipe above Hacı Ağa's head to let him breathe.<sup>4</sup> Battal Ağa shouted down the pipe, "Hacı Ağa, I am up here. Just let me know if anyone comes to you."

While he was walking around the grave, the questioning angels<sup>5</sup> arrived. They looked and said, "Oh, there are both a corpse and a living person here. The corpse is ours anyway. We can question him any time we wish, but let us question the live one now." They caught Battal Ağa and asked him, "Battal Ağa, what are you doing here?"

"I am guarding Hacı Ağa's corpse. When did you come? If I had seen you coming, I would have knocked each of you down."

"You had a bob-tailed donkey."

"How do you know about my bob-tailed donkey?" Battal Ağa asked in surprise.

"You used to get on that donkey, go a distance of three or five *Distance in hours 8 hrs* hours,<sup>6</sup> and then just push him into the stable, not caring whether the donkey needed hay or fodder or water. What was the donkey's fault that you treated him so, Battal Ağa?"

<sup>4</sup> This may be a precaution against premature burial or against attacks of ghouls, both of which are concerns of Turkish peasants.

<sup>5</sup> In Moslem mythology there are two questioning angels that visit every corpse shortly after its burial. They both shrive and catechise the dead person, forcing him to account for his sins and testing him on the basic articles of Islamic faith. Supposedly the corpse is beaten in physical penance for his failings, a kind of instant Purgatory.

<sup>6</sup> Turkish peasants, sans speedometers, measure distances in terms of time, usually walking time. Thus a village that is "two hours away" is within two hours' walking distance.

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"Fato took care of him properly," said Battal Ağa.

"Bring that topuz<sup>7</sup>," one of them said. The topuz was brought, and with it they gave Battal Ağa a terrific blow on the head. It was so violent that the kepenek flew in one direction, the stick in another, and *musai* was left sprawled across Hacı Ağa's grave.

When he revived, some time later, Battal Ağa looked around, but he saw nothing but the pipe from the grave. He jumped up and said, "I am burning! I am burning!"<sup>8</sup> He went home and knocked on the door, tak, tak, tak. "Fato, open the door!"

From within, his wife asked, "Battal Ağa, what happened? What happened?"

"Oh, I am dying!"<sup>9</sup> They have ruined me. Go find the sons of Hacı Ağa. Take the money back to them and tell them to go themselves to their father's grave."

When she took the money back, the sons of Hacı Ağa asked, "Fato, where is Battal Ağa?"

"Battal Ağa is at home lying like one dead," said Fato.

They decided to go and ask him why he had left their father's grave. They came and said, "Battal Ağa! Battal Ağa!"

<sup>7</sup> Topuz can mean mace or a heavy rope with a knot at the end. It is the latter weapon which the angels traditionally wield.

<sup>8</sup> This is a figurative expression to indicate injury or extreme physical distress.

<sup>9</sup> Again, this is figurative language, not literal.

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Half-conscious, Battal Ağa said, "Huh?"

"Battal Ağa, why did you leave our father's grave and come home?"

"Oh, I am almost dead! I could not even account for my bob-tailed ass! How then could I tell how your father fared?"