

Story #547 (1974 Tape #9)

Narrator: Talibî Coşkun, 76, folk poet and former heavyweight wrestler

Location: Taped in Ankara but narrator is from Tonus village, kaza of Şarkısla, Province of Sivas

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The Grave-Robber (Thief) Cursed by (Mohammed)

Controversy
Grave

During the time of Mohammed there was a grave-robber who dug up newly buried bodies and stripped them of their burial shrouds. A woman who had heard about him begged him not to rob her in this way when she was buried. She said, "Here is the price of my shroud. Please do not rob me and make me ashamed among the dead

He took an oath that he would not rob her. The woman paid him the value of a shroud, one or two golden liras--whatever it was.

One day the woman died and was buried. The grave robber dug up her grave, whether knowingly or unknowingly, and began robbing her shroud. When he had unwrapped her as far down as her vagina, she grabbed his hand and held it. She said, "What an inconsiderate man who has no respect for commitments of the past! I paid you earlier the value of my shroud, but now you place me in such a shameful situation in the presence of so many dead. May Allah have the same thing done to you!

After she had finished speaking, the grave started trembling so violently that he was hardly able to get out of it. He decided to go to the Prophet Mohammed, prostrate himself, and kiss his [Mohammed's] hand. "If the dead bodies can talk, what else in the world may I learn? Let me go to Mohammed and have my sins absolved so that I may die a clean person."

They told Mohammed that there was someone at the door of his house

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crying. Mohammed asked a servant to go and find out who he was and why he had come. They [the servant] asked the man, "What do you want?"

"To kiss Mohammed's hand and make a request of him. I have come from a distant land. Please ask him to admit me into his presence."

The Prophet finally consented, saying, "Let him come." Then he said to the man, "Father, what is your trouble? But speak the truth!"

"Very well. I used to be a shroud thief, and I stole many shrouds."

"What did you do with them--sell them for one or five akces¹, or for flour or butter?"

"A woman who had heard about me persuaded me not to rob her grave when she died, and she actually paid me the value of her shroud. She begged me not to steal her shroud and thus shame her before so many dead in the cemetery. I took the money and said, 'All right.' In time the woman died, and one night my self² overcame me, and I went to her grave and robbed it. While I was doing this, I was addressed by the woman, and, in fact, I even cut off one of the woman's arms when she tried to stop me. She cursed me, saying, 'May Allah have you put in this same awkward position. You have stolen my shroud, and may Allah place you in these same shameful circumstances.' Saying this, she wept." The robber then added, "Now I have come to Your Holiness with the hope that you will pray for me and have my sins forgiven."

Mohammed was very angry with him and berated him: "Get out of my sight! May you go to the very bottom of Hell!" He both berated and chased him, ordering his men to stone him. "How can I pray for you? The woman paid you the value of a shroud, but you went and stole hers. Shall I ever be able to pray for you? May Allah damn you!"

¹ The akçe was a small copper coin of the Ottoman period.

² This concept is not common in Turkish folktales. It sounds almost like a type of analytical psychology.

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The thief left and went up into the mountains to pray to Allah.
He spent the rest of his life there praying for forgiveness.