

Story #638 (1974, Tape #50)

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#638

Flight to Heaven Aborted

Once long ago there was a desperately poor man. He came to a certain village and saw that everyone in the village was pre-occupied with a recent death in the village. He promptly presented himself to the hoca, and said, "Efendi, I am a well-known body washer. I'd like to prepare your dead for the holy journey."¹

The hoca told him he could get the body ready, and the man asked to have the body brought to the edge of the river. And so he was. Since the man had no idea about how to wash the body, he waited until everyone had left and then grabbed it by the two ankels and dipped it head first into the river. He proceeded to wash it by pulling the body up and down. Suddenly the corpse became heavy for him and slipped out of his grasp. He tried to retrieve the body, but the current carried it away and it was soon out of sight.

Meanwhile, the villagers and the hoca waited for the man to come back with the shrouded body, so they could proceed with the burial before sunset. Finally, they became impatient with waiting

¹The washing of the corpse is more than a sanitary act to Moslems. It is a ritual ablution.

so long and went to see what had happened. They found the man sitting by the edge of the river, lost in contemplation, his hands supporting his chin. They asked him where the body was, and why he had not brought it back to be buried. The man replied, "The strangest thing happened. A host of angels came down from heaven and took the dead man up to heaven."

The villagers marvelled for a while about this miracle. After some time, however, they dispersed, each going his own way.

A week later the same body was discovered on the river bank much farther downstream. The villagers quickly went to find the man who had come to their village as a body washer and asked him how it could be that the body had reappeared on the river bank. The man replied, "Oh, that. On their way to heaven the angels discovered that the dead man had ^{pickpocket} picked their pockets and stolen their money. They became very angry with him and decided to teach him a lesson, and so they dumped him into the river!"