

Story 848 (1969 Tape 10)

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Location: Iskenderun, Hatay
Province

Date: 1969

The Kurdish¹ Bird

Once many years ago there was a church located in a mountain village in a very desolate area of the country. The priest of that church was an elderly and very conservative man

There used to be a bird that would come to that church and perch on the Cross that stood on the roof. This bird would sometimes let its droppings fall upon the Cross. Whenever this happened, the priest would send his servants up to the roof to clean the Cross. They would climb to the roof with great difficulty, and then it was even more difficult to reach to the top of the Cross. No matter how often they cleaned the Cross, the bird would always return to befoul it again. The priest did not have the heart to have the bird killed. Because of his religious faith, he had great compassion for all living creatures.

¹The Kurds constitute the largest ethnic minority group in modern Turkey, as well as proportionately smaller ethnic minority groups in Iraq and Iran. Some Kurds are sedentary but more are nomadic. Although they have long enjoyed all rights and privileges of Turkish citizenship, they have resisted assimilation and have aspired to national independence. Most Turkish Kurds live in the extreme eastern provinces.

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One day one of his servants said to the priest, "I have a solution to the problem we have with this bird. We can catch that bird without harming him."

"How?" asked the priest. "We cannot very well set a trap on the Cross to catch it. We couldn't do anything like that."

"I know a way, sir."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Don't worry about that, sir. Just leave it to me."

The servant then left the church for a while, but when he returned, he brought with him the lid of a large kettle.

82 -83 Filling a cup with rakı,² he placed it on one corner of the lid.

In another corner he put some meat. Not far from it he placed a small heap of salt. Then, with some difficulty, he carried the lid up to the roof of the church and put it at the base of the Cross.

The bird returned the next day, and after a short while it was attracted by the smell of the meat. Because it was a carnivorous bird--perhaps it was an owl or a hawk--it attacked the meat on the lid. It also dipped its beak several times into the salt, which, of course, made it thirsty. As a result it began to drink the rakı. Since the rakı was a perfectly

²Rakı can be said to be the national liquor of Turkey. Not only is it the most popular drink, but it is also manufactured by a government monopoly. It is anise flavored. It turns white when mixed with water, hence its nickname: lion's milk.

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clear liquid, it looked just like water to the bird. As a result, the bird soon fell down from the roof, completely intoxicated

The servant had been waiting for this to happen, and so when the bird fell to the ground, he was there to pick it up.

Taking it to the priest, he said, "Here is that bird, sir. caught it for you."

The priest took the bird in his hands and examined it, but he could not determine just what species of bird it was. Turning it over in his hands several times, he finally said, "You rascal, if you were Jewish, you wouldn't have eaten meat that was slaughtered by Christian hands. If you were Moslem, you would not have drunk any rakı, which is forbidden in Islam. You can't be a Christian, for if you were, you wouldn't desecrate the Cross, as you have so often done. I think that at the very best, you must be Kurdish."