

Story 909 (1964 Tape  
erased on  
field trip  
after contents  
transcribed)

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Location: Aşağ Emerce village,  
kaza of Taşköprü,  
Kastamonu Province

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A Shi'ite<sup>1</sup> Legend

A padişah once said to his vizier, "Bring me someone who can give us information about strange things. Let us see if there is anything that we can learn from such a person."

The vizier did not know exactly where to find such a person, and so he began walking the streets of Istanbul in search of one. An old woman who saw him walking along quite aimlessly said to him, "Where are you going, my son?"

"I am trying to find a man who can inform our padişah about some of the strange things in this world.

"Well, then, look over there," said the old woman, pointing. "In that corner there is a fellow without hand or foot, without either eye or ear, but he is the one who can give you the information that you want.

"But, as you say, he has neither hand nor foot, neither eye nor ear!"

"Never mind that. Just take him to the palace. The

<sup>1</sup>The Shi'ite faction of Islam believes that Ali should have been the immediate successor of Mohammed, thus the First Caliph instead of the Fourth.

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padişah is not interested in hands or feet, in eyes or ears. You said that he was interested in getting information, and this is the man who can answer his questions."

The vizier had this man placed in a (porter's) basket<sup>2</sup> and carried to the palace. When he was brought into the presence of the padişah, the ruler asked him, "Were you born without limbs, or did you lose them some time after you were born?"

"Your Majesty, when I was born, I had my hands and my feet, as well as my eyes and my ears. I was even rich, and as a young man, I owned ocean-going vessels, several apartment houses, and all kinds of other property. One day as I was sailing in one of my ships, we were caught in a bad storm. The storm continued to grow worse until it sank the ship. All of the passengers were drowned, and I should have been, too, if I had not been able to grasp a board floating past. Clinging to that board, I was tossed here and there for a long while before I was finally washed ashore.

"How long I lay there I do not know, but when I finally came to my senses, I found myself on a narrow strip of shore

<sup>2</sup>The Turkish porter (hamal) is capable of carrying unbelievably heavy loads, such as washing machines and grand pianos. Some have huge wickerware baskets, larger than a barrel, attached to their backs, in which they can carry many smaller objects.

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that lay between the sea and some mountains. After walking along the shore for some distance, I came to a cave. I entered this very large cave, and after walking inside it for a short way, I came to a pool over which there was a large dome. There was a man hanging upside down from a ring in the middle of this dome. When this man saw me approaching, he cried out, 'Oh, brother, give me some water to drink!' His lungs were burning with thirst, but he could not reach the water below.<sup>3</sup>

"When I was about to give him a cup of water from the pool, I heard a loud voice say, 'Get away from there!' At the sound of this voice, I withdrew from there and continued walking into the cave. A little farther on, I came upon a well from which flowers were continually rising, but as they did so, they were accompanied by terrible shrieks. I could not understand the meaning of either the flowers or the terrible shrieks that came from the well.

"Going along a little farther, I came to a garden. Upon entering this garden, I discovered it to be an exceptionally beautiful place. There were hyacinth kiosks<sup>4</sup> there among which there moved back and forth so many beautiful young men

The Tantalus image from classical mythology is suggested here

<sup>4</sup>A kiosk is a small summerhouse often of light construction.

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and women that my eyes were dazzled by the sight

"When I left the garden and started walking again, I discovered that the path circled back to the pool which I had seen earlier. Above the pool the thirsty man still hung upside down from the ring in the ceiling of the dome. When he saw me coming, he again called to me, 'Oh, brother, give me some water to drink!'

"Again I tried to reach some water up to him, but again the loud voice cried out, 'Get away from there Do you wish to give water to a God-cursed traitor?'

"When I put the cup down and stepped back, the hanging man said to me, 'For the sake of the Prophet, give me a cup of water!'

"When I heard him plead in the name of Mohammed, I could not resist any longer. Taking up the cup again, I said, 'I shall do so, no matter what happens!' I filled the cup with water, but when I was holding it up to the hanging man, I was struck down so violently that I do not know how long I lay unconscious where I fell. When I recovered, the same loud voice said to me, 'O Son of Man, would you prefer the punishment of Domsday, or would you rather be as you are now?'

"I said, 'I do not want the punishment of Domsday! I should rather be without hand or foot, without eye or ear, than to be given the punishment of the Day of Judgment. But

*Dubna  
revised now  
lites*

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I should like to learn just who that person is who hangs upside down over there.'

"Then the great voice answered. 'That person hanging by his heels is Şmir,<sup>5</sup> who killed Hasan and Huseyin.<sup>6</sup> He caused them to die of thirst in Kerbelâ,<sup>7</sup> and so we hang him there helpless over the water, and we shall keep him in this position until the Day of Judgment!'

"I then asked my second question: 'What was that well

<sup>5</sup>Legendary figure.

<sup>6</sup>Hasan and Huseyin were the sons of Ali, Fourth Caliph, and Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed. When Ali was killed in 661, Hasan, the elder son, became the Fifth Caliph. A weak ruler, he was forced from the throne by the Umayyad, who enthroned Muawiya. Hasan then retired to Medina, where he died, 669, reputedly of poison. The more active Huseyin then took up the Alid cause in an effort to make good his claim as Sixth Caliph. Leading an insurrection, he, along with his band of supporters, were massacred in 680 at Karbala (Kerbelâ in Turkish). Shi'ite mythology sometimes pictures both Hasan and Huseyin as having been martyred at Karbala.

It was on October 10, 680, that Huseyin was slain, and October 10 has since then become the great holy day of the Shi'ite faction of Islam. It is a day of elaborate mourning culminating in the passion play known as Ashora.

<sup>7</sup>Karbala is a provincial capital of about 90,000 people, in Central Iraq. For Shi'ite Moslems it is a sacred place second only to Mecca. Iranian Shi'ites en route to Mecca often start their pilgrimage at Karbala at the tomb of Huseyin, with its gilded dome and three minarets. Some pious Shi'ites even bring the bones of their dead to be buried at Karbala.

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I saw over there?'

voice replied, 'Into that well are thrown to suffer severely all those who do not treat their fathers and mothers with kindness, all those who are not good neighbors, and all those who do not pray to God five times daily.' *Very far*

"Then I asked my third question: 'And what was that garden I saw a little farther away?'

"The voice replied, 'That is a garden which represents paradise.'

"I left that place by rolling over and over upon the ground. After I had rolled out of the mouth of the cave, I was picked up by people who took pity on me, and it was they who brought me here. I have lived through the strange experience about which I have told you