

Story 952 (1977 Tape 29)

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Sahmeran Sacrificed to Cure Padisah's Illness

There was once a man named Camesap. One day as this Camesap was hunting along the shore of a lake, a mule caravan came along. Camesap called out to the people of the caravan and asked, "Where are you going?"

They answered by asking, "Why are you asking us such a question?"

no reason in particular," said Camesap. "I just wondered where you were going.

But the mule drivers and others in the caravan became suspicious about Camesap's intentions. Talking among themselves secretly, they said, "This man might do something harmful to us. He might make some report on us that would cause us to be arrested by the police. We should take some kind of action to eliminate this possibility." Turning again to Camesap, they said, "Hey, son, come along with us."

Being quite naive, Camesap went along with them without questioning their motives. As they traveled along, the caravan crew decided to get rid of Camesap by throwing him

Story 952

into a well.¹ *world* They threw Camesap into the very first well they came to. It took Camesap three days and three nights to descend the well and reach its bottom. When the bottom of the well finally came into view, Camesap fainted from fatigue.

Camesap lay on the bottom of the well for a whole day. When he opened his eyes, he saw a light gleaming in one corner of the base of the well. Camesap began walking toward the light, and when he reached it, he saw Şahmeran, King of the Snakes, lying there on his golden throne. Şahmeran asked him, "Why are you here, and how did you manage to get here?"

"As I was hunting, I saw a mule caravan passing along. When I asked the people of that caravan where they were going, they seemed to take offense at my question, but they invited me to go along with them. I joined them, but as soon as we came to a well, they threw me into it. It must be a very deep well, for it took me three days and three nights to reach the bottom. When I saw a light over here I walked toward it. What will happen to me now?"

¹ In Turkish folktales the word well does not always indicate a source for water. Just as often it refers to a deep, dry hole in the ground. Quite often, though not in this tale, it is an entrance to the underworld.

Story 952

Şahmeran said, "Come, young man; let us become friends. Remain here with me. Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. What more could you possibly want?"

Camesap accepted Şahmeran's invitation and remained there with him for seven years. Then one day when Şahmeran returned from a trip outside the well, he discovered Camesap in tears. He asked, "Camesap, why are you crying? Has anything happened to you during my absence?"

Camesap answered, "What happened was that I suddenly remembered my father and my mother."

"If you are very lonely without your father and your mother, I shall show you the way out of this place. I really feel pity for you. But you must never tell anyone the location of my dwelling place. I have learned my lesson about human beings and what they may do! You must never reveal my whereabouts to anyone. If you will promise me that, I shall take you out of this well.

After Camesap had made a very definite promise to that effect, he was led out of the well by Şahmeran. The young man then said to the King of Snakes, "May God allow all your efforts to succeed!"

Şahmeran said to Camesap, "Go now, but remember your promise!"

Story 952

After Comesap left the well, he returned to his own home. There he was reunited with his father and his mother after an absence of seven years. They embraced each other at length, for they had missed each other much during that long period of time. When his parents asked Comesap where he had been all that time, he made up a story about where he had been and what he had done, but he did not mention Şahmeran.

Time passed, and after he had been home for a while, news began to spread concerning the serious illness of the padişah of that country. Doctors had visited the padişah but for some time none of them was able to find a cure for his disease. One day, however, a doctor said to him, "Your Majesty, if you want to get well, there is just one thing that will enable you to do so. You must drink broth made from the middle section of the body of Şahmeran. It is the only cure for your sickness; without it, you will die." This was the first time that the padişah had been given any hope of a cure, but there was still the problem of finding Şahmeran.

"How can anyone ever find Şahmeran?" asked the padişah.

That same doctor said, "There must be someone in your land who has seen Şahmeran and can tell you where he lives. You can identify anyone who has seen Şahmeran by the

Cure
143-14

Story

condition of that person's skin. For some reason, anyone who looks upon Şahmeran has flaky skin thereafter

After learning that, the padişah issued orders requiring all of his subjects to report to a certain public bath to be examined. Every person in the land appeared at the bath, removed his clothing, and was examined by the padişah's soldiers, but no one was discovered to have flaky skin. The soldiers began questioning people as to whether they knew of anyone who had been overlooked during the examination at the bath. At first no one could think of anyone who had been overlooked, but then a man said, "There is a person living on the mountainside who might not have heard the padişah's orders to report to the bath. He is a young man named Comesap. I know him, but I did not see him at the bath."

As soon as this was known, the soldiers went to Comesap's house and led the young man to the bath to be examined. When he removed his clothes, it was seen at once that he had very flaky skin. They then said to Comesap, "You know where Şahmeran lives! You will tell us where that is. You must tell us where that is!"

Comesap denied that he knew where the King of Snakes lived. He said, "I do not know anything about Şahmeran."

Story 952

He was then taken before the padişah, who said to Comesap, "If you do not tell us where Şahmeran is to be found, you will be executed upon the gallows!"

Helpless, Comesap began to cry. He thought to himself, "How can I reveal to them where Şahmeran lives? He helped me much and did many a favor for me. But now I shall have to tell them where he is in order to avoid being hanged!" He then turned to the padişah and said, "Wait Don't send me to the gallows! I shall tell you where Şahmeran can be found." He then described the well in which Şahmeran lived.

The padişah's men got a large wooden box with a tight lid and a good quantity of milk, and they took these things to the well in which Şahmeran lived. At the well mouth, they took the top off the box and poured the milk into it. When Şahmeran smelled that milk, he immediately rose to the surface, crawled into the box, and began drinking the milk.² At just the right moment, the padişah's men slammed down the top of the box and thus captured Şahmeran. They then took him to the palace.

When Şahmeran saw Comesap, he said to him, "Did I ever give you permission to tell anyone where I lived?"

² Whether or not snakes in real life like milk, snakes in Turkish folktales often seem to have a strong craving for it.

Story 952

Camesap was very sad. Crying very hard, he said, "Please, Şahmeran, forgive me for this. I would not have told them where you were if they hadn't threatened to hang me. I had to tell them.

Şahmeran said, "Yes, I can forgive you, Camesap." After all of the others had gone, Şahmeran said to Camesap, "I shall now do one last favor for you. Listen to me very carefully now. They will cut me open and then divide my body into three parts. The head part and the tail part are very poisonous, but the middle part is not. They will boil the three parts of my body in three separate kettles of water, and they will give the broth to you and to the padişah. The first container of broth will be from my head and the third will be from my tail, and both will be poisonous. The second container will hold the broth from my middle part. They will give you the first container and order you to drink it, and then they will give the second to the padişah. When no one is looking, you must switch the first and the second containers. If you don't, you will be poisoned."

Just as Şahmeran had predicted, the padişah's men cut his body into three parts and then boiled these parts in three separate kettles of water. They then poured off the broth into three glasses. As they were busy pouring the

Story

broth into the third glass, Camesap switched the first and second glasses without being noticed. The padişah's men then gave the first glass to Camesap and the middle glass to their ruler. After the two glasses had been drunk, Camesap remained unharmed, but the padişah was dead. That is the way this story ends