

Story 1113 (1966 Tape 5)

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Divorce and the Internal Bridegroom¹

There was a woman once in a certain village who accepted an internal bridegroom[?] for her daughter. They got along well together until one day something unfortunate happened. While the bride was milking the family cow, she accidentally farted.² She went immediately in alarm to her mother and said, "Mother, I farted¹³⁸⁻⁴⁰ while I was milking the cow.¹³⁸⁻⁴⁰ Suppose the cow tells this to the bridegroom. What will happen then?"

Alarmed also, the mother said, "Well, girl, the best thing we can do now is to persuade the cow not to speak about this."

They went to the cowshed and begged the cow not to tell anyone about the bride's accident. All that the cow would say, however, was "Moo!"

¹ Normally when a young man marries in Turkey, he and his bride either establish their own home or move in with the groom's father's family. The extended-family arrangement is common. If neither of the usual options is possible, then the newlyweds may move into the home of the bride's family. In such a case the groom is known as an "internal bridegroom." One loses some status if he is forced by circumstances to become an "internal bridegroom." The label is mildly pejorative.

² Breaking wind in public is a serious offense in many Moslem countries. As recently as the summer of 1986 a shepherd who broke wind in a coffeehouse at Çanakkale was arrested and jailed for a day for his offense.

Story 1113

By no means satisfied with this response, the mother went to her room and got all of her jewelry. Taking these to the cowshed, she hung the various pieces on the cow and said "Please do not tell!"

cow looked at her and said only, "Moo!"

The mother then told her daughter to bring her jewelry also to the cowshed. After they had hung the bride's jewelry on the cow, the animal said nothing at all. It just wandered away. Greatly disturbed by the whole experience, the mother and daughter sat frowning and looking very sad.

When the bridegroom came home and saw them in this condition he asked, "What is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

The bride broke down and answered, "Oh, I wish that we were and that that was the only problem.

Her mother then explained. "My daughter farted while she was milking the cow. We begged the cow not to tell you this but she wouldn't listen to us. We therefore thought that it would be better to tell you about it ourselves before the cow told you."

bride answered, "We put all of my jewelry and all of my mother's jewelry on the cow, but it still would not promise to keep the secret about my accident. When it refused to say anything but 'Moo!' we let it go. I do not know where it went."

Story 1113

The bridegroom thought to himself, "How can I possibly live with such crazy women?" Without saying anything further, he left the house.

The groom left that village and started walking down the road. When darkness came, he saw a light in the distance ahead. He knocked on the door of the house in which the light was shining, and when a woman came to the door, he asked, "Will you accept me as a guest of God for the night?"

"You are welcome, but we have only one room, and every evening there are seven of us divorcées who gather here and tell each other about our problems."

"That is all right as far as I am concerned. It will not bother me."

So they gave him food to eat and then separated with a curtain a part of the room where he was to sleep. Later in the evening the other divorcées arrived, and he listened to their conversation. The women began talking about the various causes for their respective divorces.

One of them said, "Some time after I had been married, I wanted my husband to buy me some cloth with which I could make some new clothes for myself. My man brought home from a fabric shop about ten bolts of cloth so that I could choose the color I wanted for my clothes. I wanted to know if all these materials

France Story

Lab. with 1000

Story 1113

had permanent dyes in them, and so I put all ten bolts in a large cauldron and boiled them for a while. Just as I suspected, the dyes were not permanent, and the colors all got mixed together. I then hung all the material in the garden to dry

"When my husband came home, he looked at the hundreds of meters of material hanging in the garden and asked, 'What is this?'

"I said, 'Well, I tested all of the bolts of fabric you brought to me to see if their dyes were permanent. Not a one of them was any good. As you can see, all of their colors ran together.'

"My husband grew furious. He beat me severely and then divorced me. Am I in any way to blame for that?"

Another divorcée then spoke up and said, "But you had at least some responsibility for what happened. I was not in any way to blame for my divorce."

"Why were you divorced?" several of the women asked her.

"Well, one day we were eating lunch. All of a sudden my husband asked me to bring him some pekmez,³ We used most of the grapes from our vineyard to make pekmez, and we stored

³ Pekmez is a syrup made from grape juice which is slowly boiled down until it thickens. It is often eaten on bread and it is a favorite dish in Turkey.

Story 1113

this syrup in a large earthenware vat. Going to this vat, I leaned over it to get some pekmez, but as I did so, I saw a woman in the vat. I was later told that this was my own reflection that I saw, but I did not know that at the time. I thought that my husband had hidden another lover in the vat and that this was his way of telling me about it. I was so angry that I kicked the vat. This tipped the vat over, and the pekmez flowed everywhere. I shouted at my husband, 'You hid your lover in the pekmez vat and then you sent me there on purpose!'

"My husband beat me and divorced me. Do you think that I am in any way to blame for our divorce?"

A third divorcée spoke up then and said, "Well, you were somewhat at fault for your divorce, but I was not in any way at fault

"Why were you divorced?" the others all asked this third person

"One day I asked my husband to bring home from the market some ¹⁷²⁻⁴³ henna⁴ for me. Instead of bringing me the usual amount, he brought me a whole sackful. I put some henna on my hands

⁴ A reddish-brown dye made from the leaves of the henna plant and used for cosmetic purposes in the Middle East-- usually to color the hands and hair. It is traditional for Turkish brides to have their hands hennaed during their wedding ceremonies.

Story 1113

and on my feet, but there was still a great amount of henna left. I decided to put henna all over my body, and after I had done this, I walked down to my husband's shop. My husband seemed amazed to see me coming.

"'What is the matter with you? How dare you come here without any clothing on?'

"'Well, I asked you to bring me some henna. You brought me much more than I needed, and there was still a great amount left after I had dyed my hands and feet. I decided to cover my entire body with the rest. I did that, and now I have walked out into the fresh air to let it all dry.

"My husband was almost speechless. He beat me all the way back home, and then he divorced me

A fourth divorcée said to her, "Well, you were partly at fault for your divorce, but I was in no way at fault for my divorce."

"Why were you divorced?" the others asked.

"One day my husband sent home to me some tail fat.⁵ We already had plenty of fat on hand. Looking at the tail fat

⁵ There is a coarse-woolled sheep usually raised for its meat. On either side of its tailbone there accumulates an unusually large amount of fine, tallowy fat. The tails become so out of proportion with the rest of the sheep's body that the animal looks a bit grotesque. Many such sheep are bred in Turkey, especially eastern Turkey.

Story 1113

my husband had sent, I became aware of how white and pure it looked. I decided to flake it and use the flakes to fill some new pillows that were still unstuffed. On a very hot

a couple of weeks later, my husband came home to take a and when he lay down, he put his head upon one of those pillows. But by then the fat had rotted, and worms crawled out of the pillow and onto my husband. Jumping up, my husband exclaimed, 'What is this?'

"I explained the matter to him. 'Remember, you sent home some tail fat several days ago. We had plenty of other fat on hand then, and so I used the tail fat to stuff my new pillows.

"Without saying a word, my husband beat me and later divorced me. Did I do anything wrong that caused this divorce?"

A fifth woman said, "You would have to be considered partly to blame for your divorce, but I don't believe that I was even partly responsible for mine."

"Why were you divorced?" several asked.

"Ramazan⁶ was approaching, and my husband filled the house with groceries. These included such things as sugar, shortening, macaroni, and flour. 'These are for Ramazan,' he said.

⁶ Ramazan is a month during which faithful Moslems fast. Between sunrise and sunset nothing--not even a drop of water--passes their lips. They do, however, break the fast after sunset and eat plentifully during the night. Stores are not open at night, and so most families stock supplies ahead.

144 ←

Story 1113

day shortly after that a man came along our street shouting, 'The month for good deeds has come! Ramazan has come! Please Ramazan Father, and God will look with favor upon you!'

"I called this man to our house and said to him, 'My husband has been waiting for your arrival. He prepared for it some time ago.' Then I gave him all of the groceries that my husband had brought home. The man took them and left.

"When my husband arrived home that day, I said to him, 'Good news! You have been waiting for the arrival of Ramazan. Well, he came today, and I gave him all of the groceries you had bought for him. He seemed to be very pleased with these things when he left

"Instead of being happy upon receiving this news, my husband became very angry. He beat me and then he divorced me. Was I in any way to blame for this divorce?"

A sixth divorcée said, "Well, it could perhaps be said that you were somewhat at fault for what had happened, but I was absolutely blameless for my divorce."

"Why were you divorced?" several women asked her

"My husband was preparing to have a Mevlüt⁷ performance

⁷ A cantata rehearsing the birth and life of Mohammed. Written in Bursa by Süleyman Çelebi in 1409, Mevlüt (Mevlit, Mevlid) is said to be the most important piece of sacred music produced during the Ottoman era in Turkey. It involves both singing and instrumental music; it is a Moslem requiem performed

Story

for the souls of his relatives who had died. It was in the middle of the summer, and the weather was extremely hot. My husband decided that he would serve lemonade to all of the performers and to all of the audience. He brought home a bag of lemons and a bag of sugar for that purpose. A great amount of water would be required to make enough lemonade for the crowd he expected. I started to draw water from a well behind our house, but then I thought of a better way to make the lemonade required. I decided to squeeze all of the lemons and then throw both the lemon juice and the sugar into the well. I then took a long pole and began to stir the water into the well. I kept tasting the contents of the well as I stirred, but there was no flavor to the water. So I kept stirring.

"When the Mevlüt service had ended, I was still stirring. My husband came and asked, 'Isn't the lemonade ready yet?'

How did you ever have enough patience to wait in your mother's womb for nine months?' I asked him.

the guests are about to leave!' he said.

"I realized later that the water in the well would never have tasted like lemonade even if I had added ten bags of lemons and ten bags of sugar. My husband grew furious.

40 days after the death of a person and subsequently at any time that one wishes (and can afford) such a memorial service Assembling all the necessary singers and musicians, plus providing the required sweetmeats for the audience, is rather expensive, and so sponsoring a Mevlüt is not a matter undertaken lightly.

Story 1113

'You have disgraced me before my guests!' he shouted. Then he began to beat me. Soon afterwards he divorced me.

The owner of the cow listened to these accounts given by the divorcées. He thought, "There are women who are even more stupid than my women!" He spent the night there, but in the morning he returned home to see what his women were doing. He discovered that the mother and daughter had filled room of the house with water. They had put a boat in the water, and now they were rowing about in that boat. "What you doing?" he asked them.

"We are looking for you," they answered.

Convinced now that they were quite mad, the internal bridegroom left once more. He never returned again.