

Story 1217 (1990 Tape 8)

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My father was a pharmacist by profession, and when he was serving his required military duty,¹ he was assigned to a hospital in the Taksim section of İstanbul. It was a French hospital, but it had a contract to provide medical services for all of the branches of the Turkish military forces.

Besides the problems caused by the use of the French language in the hospital, there was the further difficulty caused by the many dialects of Turkish spoken both by patients and by some of the employees of the hospital. Back in those days²--and it is still true to a certain degree--everyone spoke the dialect of his own part of Turkey.

My father, who was a lieutenant, had a military aide assigned to his service, and this aide happened to be a Kurd.

¹At some time before they are forty years of age, all able-bodied Turkish males are required to complete a tour of duty in one of the military services. At mid-century most tours were of eighteen months' duration. Since then the length of tours has varied according to the individual's profession and according to the need for military forces.

²"Those days" referred to here were in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

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That poor man did not know even the Turkish³ names of drugs used in prescriptions, let alone the French names. One day a prescription called for a drug which my father did not have among his supplies, and so he inquired of his senior officer, a captain, if such a drug was available. My father sent his Kurdish aide to ask the captain about this, and he repeated the name of the drug to the aide several times before he departed.

Just what the Kurd said to the captain my father did not know. He wondered if his aide had remembered the name of the needed drug, and he wondered how the man had pronounced the name of that drug. He was curious about these matters especially because of the way that the Kurd behaved when he returned. He said nothing at all to my father but retired to a corner of the pharmacy, where he stood looking very shrunken and shriveled. My father finally asked him, "Well happened?"

"By Allah, all that the captain said was 'Donkey and son of a donkey!'⁴ but I don't know whether he was talking about you or about me!"

³Turkish is a second language for Kurds. Those Kurds who live in the heavily Kurdish areas of far eastern Turkey often have only a limited amount of Turkish, and that limited amount is spoken with a heavy Kurdish accent.

⁴The only Turkish slur expression worse than donkey is son of a donkey. These two terms are so offensive that one

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