

Story 1464 (1969 Tape 4)

Narrator: Dursun Çelik

Location: Alacaat village,
Kelkit kaza,
Gümüşhane Province

Date: September 1969

The Suffering of the Padishah and His Family

Time within time and time within the sieve.¹ Back in those days there was a wealthy padishah. One day while he and his wife were traveling for pleasure, they stopped alongside a stream to eat some bread. As they were eating, a dervish came along and asked, "Oh, my padishah, what are you doing here?"

The padishah asked the dervish the same question: "Oh, dervish father, what are you doing here?" Then he also asked, "How did you know that I was a padishah?"

This time the dervish turned the question back on the padishah. "How did you know that I was a dervish?" After some further talk, the dervish asked the padishah, "If at the end of your trip Allah should decide to impose some great suffering upon you, would you prefer to endure it at your present age or in your old age?"

"Oh, any problem is probably more endurable in youth than in old age. I should not want something dreadful to happen when I have grown old."

¹The narrator is apparently not very well acquainted with the Turkish storytelling tradition. His first line is a confused scrap from a traditional opening formula for the Turkish tales: "Once there was and once there was not. Time within time, when the sieve was in the straw..."

Story 1464

Shortly after they had returned from their journey, the padishah fell from power and lost his entire fortune. He could not find work in his own village, not even a job as shepherd, and so he and his wife, along with their two sons, moved to another village. They left Alacaat and moved to Kılıçcı. There the padishah got a job as a shepherd, and his wife earned some money by washing clothes.

One day a merchant stopped at that village. He said to some idle young men in the street, "I am looking for a washer-woman. During my travels my clothes have become very dirty."

The young idlers told him about the former padishah's. They said, "She does laundry work very well in order to earn a few kuruş."²

The merchant took his clothes to the padishah's wife and left them there to be cleaned. She had been a padishah's wife, and she was an experienced person. She not only washed the clothes very thoroughly but she also folded them very neatly after they had dried. When the merchant returned to get his clothes, he was not only pleased with the way she had treated them, but he was also attracted to the woman herself.

²A kuruş was worth 1/100 of a Turkish lira. This small coin was in use into the 1960s, but it became worthless when the lira was devaluated so much that several thousand of them were required to equal the value of one U.S. dollar.

Story 1464

Later that day he said to the same young idlers, "Is there any way in which I could possess that woman?"

 said, "Of course there is. We can manage that for you right away. You give us some money, and we shall bring that woman to you." He gave the idlers two gold coins. They then went to the woman's home and said, "Come along with us. We are to take you to the merchant's room at the inn so that he can pay you personally for the laundering you did for him." They took her to the merchant, who packed her in his caravan and departed.

 Now let me give you some information about the woman's husband, the former padishah who was now a shepherd. Every day before this, the woman had gone to the outskirts of the village at dusk to meet her husband as he was bringing back his flock from pasture. They would then walk the rest of the way back to the village together. On this occasion the shepherd waited and waited at the place where his wife usually met him, but she did not come. Very worried, he delivered the flock to its various owners and then started toward his own house. Along the way he encountered the young street idlers, who said to him, "Have you discovered yet what kind of a wife you had? She ran away with a merchant who had stopped here in our village.

 Greatly saddened by the loss of his wife, the former

Story 1464

padishah decided to leave that village and seek work elsewhere. He and his two small sons had walked some distance when they came to a wide river. He left one child on the bank, and, placing the other on his back, he began wading across the river. As he was doing so, he heard some farmers shouting behind him, "Come back! Come back! A wolf is carrying off the child you left here!" Startled, the padishah turned around and started rushing back to drive off the wolf, but in doing so, he dropped into the river the child he had been carrying. In the end he lost both of his sons. The one was carried off by the wolf the other was swept away in the waters of the river. The former padishah exclaimed, "Oh Allah! Who could have known that I would see this too!" He then left that place in an opposite direction from the one by which he had come.

Now let us have some news about the two sons. The one who was carried off by a wolf was rescued by a farmer. Because the farmer and the farmer's wife did not have any children of their own, they gladly adopted this boy and took care of him until he was grown. The other boy, who had been swept away by the water, was washed to a mill along the river. There he was found by the miller and adopted by the miller and his wife. The two sons of the former padishah lived with the farmer and the miller until they were both young men. Then both of them entered the army.

Story

In the meantime the former padishah worked at several different jobs until one day his fortune changed. In the old days, people used to select a new padishah by means of bird election.³ A bird of good fortune was released above a crowd. Then the person on whose head he landed was elected padishah. The former padishah wandered into a town where they were selecting a new padishah by means of the bird of fortune. When the bird was released, it flew around the crowd of people and then landed on the head of the former padishah. All of the townspeople gathered there were disturbed by this. They said, "This cannot be! This ragged stranger cannot be our new padishah." The bird was released a second time, and again it landed on the head of the former padishah. When this happened a third and a fourth time, the people said, "We do not have any choice. We must accept this man as our new padishah." They did not know, of course, that he had formerly been a padishah.

Now let us get some news about the merchant. After a while he and the former padishah's wife arrived at the very town where her husband was again a padishah. The merchant thought

³The landing of birds upon the heads of people involves two main traditions in Turkey. If one had good luck, it was often thought that it was because the talih kuşu (bird of fortune), an imaginary bird, had landed on his/her head. It was apparently from this tradition that a second tradition evolved. The devlet kuşu (government bird) was a small, real

Story 1464

have heard that the padishah of this city is a very intelligent man who makes very wise decisions. I shall go to him and explain the problem I have with this woman who has been with me three, seven, ten years but still does not like me I shall tell all of this to the padishah and see what kind of solution he can provide."

The merchant went to the padishah's palace, but he was halted at the door by guards. Of course, they did not permit him to enter the palace until they had permission to do so. One of the guards asked the padishah for permission to admit the merchant into his presence. The padishah said, "Let him come."

The merchant went to the padishah's room, greeted the ruler respectfully, and explained his problem to him. He said "I have been married to this woman for ten years now. My wife eats and drinks with me, but she has never shown me affection."

After thinking about this for a minute, the padishah said "Don't go back to your tent tonight but find some place to sleep here in town. In the meantime, I shall send two good soldiers to observe your wife and see what she will do."

bird set loose in a crowd. Supposedly it would land on somebody's head, and then supposedly that person was declared the new ruler. This is a very common motif in Turkish folktales. Although apparently believed by many narrators and listeners, this second tradition was probably as imaginary and fantastic as the first.

Story 1464

soldiers were sent to guard the tent, and for some time they performed without speaking to each other. After a while, however, they became bored and they began to talk. One of them said, "In order to pass the time, let us tell each other our life stories."

right," said the second soldier. "I shall start was one of two sons of a padishah who lost his fortune and his position. He then became a shepherd in a different village but while he was with his flock one day, my mother was stolen by a traveling merchant. I was carried off by a wolf, but was then rescued by a farmer, who reared me in his own home."

first soldier said, "Oh, my father was also a padishah, but he too later became very poor. My mother was also stolen by a merchant."

The woman inside the tent was silently listening to all that these two soldiers said. She said to herself, "Aman!"⁴ These two soldiers are my sons They are my sons!" She then called them into the tent and explained everything about their early lives. They all embraced and hugged each other for some time.

⁴Aman is a common exclamation in Turkish. It may (negatively) mean alas! or oh, dear! Used more positively, it may suggest, oh, my goodness! or the equivalent of wow! or golly!

Story 1464

When the merchant went to the tent the next morning, he found the woman and the two soldiers all sleeping in a row inside. He said to himself angrily, "She did not allow me to get close to her for all of those years, but here she is sleeping with these two soldiers!" He hurried to the palace and told the padishah what he had just seen

The padishah said to one of his guards, "Take ten soldiers with you and bring to me all three of the people in that tent!" When the woman and the two boys were brought into his presence, the padishah said to his executioners, "Behead them at once!"

But the woman spoke up and said, "My padishah, do you kill people in this country without even listening to their evidence?"

The padishah answered, "Very well, then. I shall listen to your account

The woman then quickly told the padishah much of the story that I have been telling you more slowly.⁵ When the padishah heard her account, he was greatly surprised but overjoyed. He exclaimed, "O great Allah, you have restored my happiness!" Then, embracing his wife and sons, he said, "You are my family! You are my family!"

⁵To truncate the tale in this way is atypical of Turkish narration. Traditionally, audiences enjoy repetition, partly because they know the lines by then and can, as it were, participate in the telling. Sometimes one can actually see them silently mouthing the words.--Quite often in tales of this type the denouement is a much bigger "production." Often

Story 1464

After all of their excitement had calmed down, the padishah said to the merchant, "Oh, you unscrupulous man! You stole my wife and separated us for years. Which do you prefer-- forty mules or forty cleavers?"⁶ When he chose forty mules, they tied him to forty mules. When the mules were whipped, they ran off in different directions and tore the merchant into forty pieces.

All the rest of them ate and drank and lived happily. May you too eat and drink and live happily.

there are several villains (not just one merchant) who have abused the family, and these villains are all brought together and all, one by one, exposed.

⁶In Turkish folktales this is a formulaic question asked of criminals about to be executed for some heinous crime. It is, however, meant quite literally.