

Story 1795 (1991 Tape 5)

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Özcan, 26

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The Fairer Choice for Azrail¹

There was once a man who was very ill. He was so ill, in fact, that his doctor advised him that his disease might very well kill him. One day this sick man said to his wife, "Woman, go and dress in your very finest clothes. Also put on your most attractive jewels. After you have done these things, come back here again."

The wife was confused by these orders. She asked, "Efendi,² why should I do these things?"

¹In Judaic and Moslem mythology Azrail is the Angel of Death. When a human being's allotted time on earth has expired, the Deity sends Azrail to take back that person's soul. There are many tales of attempts to prevent Azrail from completing his assigned mission. Sometimes the condemned mortal is able, by trickery, to postpone by a few, occasionally even many, years. Azrail is sometimes (quite understandably) pictured as a huge, hideous creature with more sets of wings than anyone except the Archangel Michael.

²Efendi is a term of respect, like sir. During Ottoman times it could signal considerable respect, but its force has been so eroded in the twentieth century that now it is usually applied only to children and servants.

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"I have a very definite reason for telling you to do these things. When Azrail comes here after me, he will find you far more attractive than I am. As a result, he may take you and forget about me.