

Story 2200 (1962 Tape 75)

Narrator: Kemal Yıldız

Location: Adana, capital of  
Adana Province

Date: Spring 1962

The Ağa<sup>1</sup> As Cruel in Death As in Life

In a certain village there once lived an ağa who unkind and oppressive to all of the people who worked him. Those villagers suffered not only from his actions but also from his words, for he constantly spoke ill of them.

After this abuse had continued for many years, the ağa one day fell ill. It was not a minor illness that he had but one which could be fatal. As that illness worsened, the ağa became convinced that he would soon die. He thought, "I have mistreated the people of this village quite badly much of my life. Although they may never forgive me entirely, I should at least call them here and make what peace I can with them."

<sup>1</sup>An ağa is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy and occasionally powerful. Most farm workers are employees of ağas. The term ağa is not an official title, nor is it heritable. It is more a sign of economic status. In both rural and urban areas ağa has a derived and somewhat different meaning. It may be used as a mild honorific to flatter or show respect to a man more distinguished or simply older than the speaker. It is often added to the honoree's first name: Ahmet ağa.

## Story 2200

When the villagers all crowded around his bed, the informed them, "I shall very soon die."

"No, no! You will not die for a long while."

"Yes, I shall soon die, and I want all of you to take vengeance against my unkindness to you by urinating and defecating on my grave."

They all responded, "No, ağa! How could we ever do such a thing?"

"Yes, you could do that. But if you should prefer could hang my body someplace for three days where passersby could strike it in any way they wished."

"No, no, ağa! We could not do that either."

"Yes, do it! That is my last order."

The ağa lived for two more days and died on the third day. The villagers reminded each other of the ağa's final order: "It was his wish that we hang his body somewhere for three whole days so that those who saw it could beat it." The ağa's dead body was hung in a prominent place, and people beat it for three days. Early in the morning of the fourth day some gendarmes<sup>2</sup> arrived there and

<sup>2</sup>Turkish cities and towns have their own police forces, but rural areas usually do not. There law and order are supposed to be maintained by army troops assigned to the

Story 2200

ordered all of the men of that village to gather near the corpse of the ağa.

When all of the male residents were present, the gendarme leader asked, "What has been going on here?" When the matter had been explained, the gendarmes threw all of the men into jail. On the following day they were taken to a court, where the judge punished the villagers with jail sentences ranging from 15 to 20 years

The imprisoned men were so surprised and so shocked that they were momentarily speechless. One of them finally said, "That ağa caused all of us suffering while he was alive. Now that he is dead, he continues to cause us to suffer."

Ministry of Interior. Those troops in that context are called gendarmes. This loan word reflects the period of French influence on Turkish culture.