Story 1000 (1975 Tape I)  

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**Proving a Woman an Infidel**

There were two friends who graduated at the same time from a medrese1 in İstanbul. They were both very capable men, and eventually one of them became Müfti2 of Egypt and the other became the Şeyhülislam3 of Istanbul.

One day the Müfti of Egypt made a religious pronouncement. He said, "Women are by nature infidels and yet a Moslem man needs one of these creatures." This pronouncement was talked about by many people, and before long it became a subject of discussion among the residents of Istanbul.

1 A medrese was a seminary, often part of a mosque complex in pre-Republican Turkey.
2 A senior Moslem priest who is appointed to be an interpreter of Moslem religious law.
3 The highest religious official in the government, at one time a powerful political as well as religious figure. Today in Turkey he is the only religious official in the government, and his role is not political. Today he has jurisdiction over such religious matters as the precise hours for prayer services, schedules for religious holidays, etc.
When the wife of the Seyhülislam heard about this pronouncement by the Mûfti of Egypt, she was disturbed by it. She asked her husband, "Why should your friend say that women are infidels? What is his reason for this? I want you to find out his reason for thinking that, and unless you do, I shall not live with you any longer."

A message was sent to Egypt asking the Mûfti to come to Istanbul. After the two old friends had talked for a while, the Seyhülislam said, "My wife is very upset about your pronouncement that women are infidels. How can I prove the truth of your statement to her?"

The Mûfti thought for a minute, and then asked, "How much money is spent here for a gift to a woman at the time of her engagement ceremony?"

"About this much," said the Seyhülislam, naming a figure.

"Well, then, let us make up two gift packets

4 Engagement between a prospective bride and groom is a much more formal and elaborate thing in Turkey than it is in most Western countries. It involves ceremony, special dress, and a large feast attended by all members of both families involved. An engagement gift may be as important as a wedding gift.
worth that much apiece. In them we shall put earrings, other kinds of jewelry, and some gold. You will take both packets home and place them on a table. Then you will call your wife and point at these gift packets. When she opens one of these packets and finds the earrings and jewelry and gold, she will say, 'This must be for me, but for whom is the other package?'

"You will then say, 'In my youth, before I was engaged to you, I was in love with another woman, and she was in love with me. As it turned out, we were unable to get married, for you were my kismet, and I married you. She was married to some other man. Now, however, her husband is dead, and her friends have insisted that she marry again. They have come to me saying, 'By the will of God and the recommendation of the Prophet, we ask that you marry this woman.' This other packet is an engagement gift for her.'"

5 When a matchmaker tenders a marriage proposal, he or she always opens the discussion with the formulaic statement "I have come by the will of Allah and the consent or approval or recommendation of the Prophet [Mohammed] to ask for the hand of X for Y."
"Your wife will probably reject this proposal, and then you should say, 'Anyone who rejects the will of God and the recommendation of the Prophet is an infidel!'"