

Sale of Saltanat

Published in the January 1964 issue of Short Story International with the following introduction:: "The custom of demanding payment for a bride by the girl's family is outmoded in most so-called civilized countries but it does exist and the people who practice it may have some sound arguments on their side. This story from Turkey treats of such a situation. When you finish it, you might have a different attitude toward the idea. Sale of Saltanat was first published in Turk Edebiyatcilar Birligi Yilligi In 1962. It was specially translated for SSI by the author's daughter. Esin Bilbasar."

SALTANAT, the miller's daughter, was twelve at the end of threshing time. Although her peers were still as lean as a branch whose leaves had fallen, the concealed-femininity of her body had suddenly sprouted. The girl had blossomed like an Autumn flower.

Hasso, as he watched the sacks of wheat being piled higher than ever before, thought that this must have been a prosperous year. Had the two young men not fought over Saltanat, Hasso would not have recognized his daughter's matured form. One of the young men had seen Saltanat's fresh, rounded body tight as a bow, as she was washing her father's sweaty shirt in the water flowing through the mill wheel. Entranced by her beauty, he had attempted to drag her away by her braided hair as though he had been in a delirium. The other, while loading his donkey with sacks of ground wheat, had seen this and had tried to save the girl. Thus, the two had started to fight.

Hearing the panting and the swearing of the young men, Saltanat's screams and the cries of the dog, Karakurt, straining at his leash, Hasso and the villagers who were waiting for their wheat to be ground, ran into the courtyard. At one glance Hasso grasped the situation. The cause of the fight was apparent. Saltanat was standing with her hands pressed upon her cheeks, framing her sparkling coal-black eyes, opened wide with fear. A rip in her blouse revealed a soft, round shoulder.

The deep furrow between Hasso's bushy eyebrows gradually vanished. A smile flitted across his face. Hmn . . . She's come of age to be sold! At this age, to make her young father a father-in-law !... He eyed his daughter from head to toe. A joy began to rise in him. He had brought her up to this age without the help of a mother.

Look at those eyes, brows, that build! D'ya get that pep with the ones brought up by both parents?

Then one of the young men threw the other into the mill-stream, and the soaring joy in his chest turned into a flood of laughter. Hasso's mirth infected the others. This revelry slowed down the fight and the two young finally stepped aside. One was wiping the blood off his nose. Saltanat fled into the house because of a shyness she could not understand.

"You dogs," said Hasso finally. He was not laughing anymore. You hounds, you! Ain't she got a father? You've completely forgotten the custom ... Why did you try to break your necks instead of asking me to sell her?"

The two young men bowed their heads guiltily. As Hasso continued a fury began to rise in his chest. .. "By God, both of you need a good beating! Or did ya think I'd ask too much? Ain't it clear that I wouldn't charge a brave man money ? If Saltanat's come to the age of sale, well, jus' gimme an ear and let everyone hear this : Whoever wants to get Saltanat should be ready to show his bravery at Karga plains on the first day of snow!"

Such situations expand rapidly. By sundown the young men of three neighboring villages fell madly in love with the coal-black-eyed daughter of the miller. Deep inside of all these men a suspicion was slowly beginning to brew. What kind of bravery will Hasso want for his daughter? This question became the topic of conversation in all the village coffee houses. Everyday new suggestions were made about the kind of bravery Hasso would want from the candidates who wished to become his son-in-law. Most of these guesses centered on robbery. It seemed to them highly probable that Hasso would have them steal horses from neighboring tribes. The one who stole the horse would clip the mane and the tail of the animal in such a way that the owner would not recognize it after trailing the hoofmarks to their village. Hasso, they reasoned, would then sell the horse and make enough money for the sale of Saltanat.

Or perhaps, he would have the gold teeth of a newly buried rich man brought to him from the city cemetery.

As the days went by, the kind and the degree of bravery they predicted changed. Now the bravery of the characters in fairy tales was expected. One of those who remembered the lack of water the mill faced during the summer days introduced the idea that Hasso would have water brought from the mountains, and so these guesses reached a peak.

And as yet, Hasso had not moved a finger. Whether day or night, he kept grinding the wheat and the barley, sharpening the stones once every three days, and ignoring the coming competition. On the other hand, he had increased the food fed to Karakurt, the dog. At each meal, he cut up a loaf of bread and soaked the pieces in a bucket of milk and fed it to the animal. As Karakurt grew fatter, his black fur began to glow, he barked with greater ferocity at the villagers who came to the mill, the donkeys and the mules, and as he attempted to attack the people, he tried to break the chains that were holding him.

When the Suphan mountain became hazy and the snow came down to its skirts in a bluish whiteness, the wolf howlings covered the Karga plains. For three days the villagers had to give an intermission to their daily duties. One morning they woke to a white gleam. The children were happy because they could go sleigh riding and the older ones because the

contest day had arrived. The sun was barely up when a voice echoed over the roofs: "The Hassos are comin'"

Leaving their unfinished milk and tarhanas women, men, the old and the young ran outside. Hasso appeared in the mill's path. Wrapped in his sheepskin coat, he had perched on his donkey. As he smoked his pipe, he looked satisfied. Behind him walked Saltanat. She wore knee-breeches and, on her shoulders, a wolf skin as a robe. She had wrapped around her head and neck long, red wool scarves and her wrists and arms were covered with bands of felt. She was holding Karakurt by a thorny wolf leash looped around his neck. He was walking rapidly, as if he were trying to drag Saltanat along. Over his spiky teeth a red tongue hung and vapor gushed forth.

They stopped in the village square. Hasso scanned the crowds of people who were clustered in front of the doors and on top of the roofs. He put his hand next to his cheek and yelled:

"Listen, you men! I'm taking my daughter up to Karga plains. Whoever is sure of his bravery can come over and get her!" Without waiting for any replies: they left the village square and went toward the Karga plains, their feet crushing the snow in their path.

They had finally found out the thing about which they were so curious. Whoever could take Hasso's daughter away from Karakurt, could have her. Suddenly, the fever of competition seized Karga plains. The young men who were sure of their dogs began to wrap themselves in felts and nags. Those who had finished their preparations put thorny wolf-leash: on their dogs and trod proudly toward the contest ground. Each one was followed by his coterie of friends and relatives.

Towards noon, the green, yellow, red knee-breeches and the baggy trousers slowed down their pace and the spectators formed lines to watch the competition. While holding the dog's chains in a clearing void of snow. Saltanat was waiting for the brave man who could fight to win her. Karakurt lifted his head up and pointed his ears. He was pawing the ground with his hind legs impatiently. The brave men who would be fighting squatted under the trees which covered a part of the plain. So that their dogs would not brawl and bite each other, they were situated apart.

The young men were going to Saltanat one by one. Many, before having the chance to encourage his dog to attack, realized that he had lost the fight. Not so much from Karakurt's wild attacks but once the dogs smelled the wolf skin on Saltanat, they tucked their tails between their legs and folded back their ears, and began backing off. In spite of

the insulting outcries of the villagers, the young men were withdrawing from the contest ground. Neither the owner of the dairy farm, Ali Agha's son, nor his bloody-eyed, pierced eared, tailless sheepdog, Kuyruksuz, who had fought with real wolves numerous times, could take Saltanat from Karakurt. Kuyruksuz, bleeding from his throat and bleeding from his feet, left the contest field. Hasso laughed at the Agha's son and in his roaring voice that shook the plains shouted at all of the defeated young men:

"You dogs, you! Shame! You've left this girl without a husband. There mustn't've been any brave ones on Karga plains!" The audience was listening silently to Hasso's roaring laughter and boasting words. The relatives of the defeated men set their jaws and swore under their breaths at those who were withdrawing.

The people moved slightly, getting ready to go away. Suddenly, a whinnying and a growling echoed from the grove of Bitim trees on the right of the Karga plain. The noise and the restless moving ceased. Everyone looked at the direction from which the sounds came. A little later, Ali Agha's underservant, Memo of Van, appeared dragging a female wolf by a chain.

When Memo had discovered the type of contest it was to be, he jumped on his horse and rode into the forest where the howlings of the wolves could be heard. He had frightened a pack of wolves with his gun, separated a female wolf from the pack and chased her until she had collapsed. He then looped a chain about her neck and dragged her to Karga plains. Hasso stopped his laughing and fixed his eyes on Memo. The way the young man climbed off the horse in one jump and the firm control he had of the wolf, using its chain as a whip, made Hasso envious. This man didn't resemble any of the others.

Seeing Memo drag the wolf into the contest ground, Saltanat's eyes opened wide with fear. Karakurt pointed his ears as if he were seeing something unusual. Curiosity instead of malice was in his eyes. The wolf saw Karakurt with his black fur and sparkling eyes. She began to growl and showed her teeth while blue lights flashed in her eyes. Most of the audience wanted to see the wolf run away. Not because they favored Karakurt but because they did not want to let both the girl and the reputation for bravery be snatched away by a man from Van. They started to goad the dog on. As if he understood what was being said, Karakurt began to paw the ground with his hind legs and bark. However, he was not showing his teeth while barking. He was slowly approaching the wolf in the manner in which a male shows off to a female, rather than to scare her off. Unwilling to bow to this determination, the wolf showed alarm mixed with fear. As if she were aware of the fact that there was no one on her side, that she was alone and a stranger, she hunched up her body. But she stood her ground, not taking a step backward.

Saltanat and Memo were looking into each other's eyes. Memo's fiery dark pupils had made Saltanat's heart beat with a thrilling fear, something she had never felt before. She

had a sudden urge to run away from him but at the same moment, she felt like leaning on his broad chest and crying. A self-confident smile had softened Memo's face.

Karakurt, as he came near the wolf, began to sniff her while wiggling his tail slightly. The wolf understood that the dog had no malicious intentions. She was not showing her teeth anymore. She let him smell her body while she growled softly. The two animals continued to smell each other in spite of the children's shouts:

"C'mon Kara, c'mon! Get er" Her tail, still between her legs showed that the wolf was afraid. The grown-ups were watching the animals breathlessly. No one even thought of urging Saltanat to goad the dog on.

Memo and Saltanat kept studying each other. Memo's eyes now looked softer. Saltanat felt first a calmness, then a wild joy replacing the fear in her heart. Both let go of the animals' chains unconsciously. As soon as she felt free, the wolf dashed forward; made strange sounds as she ran towards the Bitim grove. Her head was turned back. She looked as if she wanted the dog to follow her. Karakurt was trailing his female leaping now on her right, now on her left.

Memo and Saltanat looked after the animals for a second, then smiled at each other. Then, Momo grabbed the girl by her wrist and led her, willingly, toward the whinnying horse.

Transcribed by Lola Oling, grand daughter of the translator