

The teacher and the woman

This is the story of a school-teacher and a woman.

“Tell me, teacher,” said the woman, “what takes you further: a woman’s wisdom, or that of a cleric?”

“All existing knowledge,” he replied, “belongs exclusively to Allah and his clerics.”

“We women,” replied the woman, “we possess knowledge that can kill you and bring you back to life.”

“Blasphemy!” exclaimed the cleric. “Only Allah can kill and bring back to life.”

“Fine,” she said. “That’s understood. But don’t doubt that I will make you understand the power of woman’s wisdom.”

“Spare no effort,” the cleric replied. “Everything that is in your power to do, go ahead and do it.”

The woman let a certain amount of time pass, until the schoolmaster had forgotten this conversation. She waited until it was her turn to carry his meal to him. Then she made herself beautiful and went to take him his food. Arriving at the edge of the water cistern, which held six metres of water, she called to the cleric.

“Yes?” he called.

“Here’s your dinner!” she said.

The schoolmaster came to look for his meal.

When he arrived, she grabbed him and started to scream. “Help! Help!”

“What are you doing?” exclaimed the cleric.

“I’m going to make you die...” she said. Then she asked him, “Do you want me to bring you back to life?”

“Yes!” he said.

“Then let yourself fall into the cistern,” she told him. The unhappy cleric let himself fall into the cistern.

When people heard the woman’s cries, they came running. When they came close to her, they demanded, “What happened?”

“I brought the schoolteacher his meal,” she replied. “I called him, he came to look for his food and then he was taken by a dizzy spell and he fell in the cistern.”

The people came closer and pulled the cleric out of the water. When he had dried his clothes, he told the woman that he was taking her to court.

“Oh, go on,” she told him. “You have better things to do.”

“Oh, no,” he said stubbornly. “To court.”

“Well then, I would like you at least to give me something to cover myself with,” she told him. “I’m embarrassed to go out in public in this outfit.”

The cleric gave her the piece of fabric in which he usually draped himself, and he wore a djellaba himself.

When they arrived at the caid’s house, the woman said to the caid, “As God is my witness, Judge, this man is mad.”

“OK,” said the caid, “Explain yourself.”

“For the love of heaven, Judge!” cried the schoolteacher. “You have to decide on my dispute with this woman. She called me, saying ‘Here is your lunch.’ I went to find it; she grabbed me and started screaming. I asked her, ‘Why are you doing this?’ and she told me, ‘I’m going to make you die.’ Then, just as people were arriving, she said, ‘Do you want me to make you live again?’ I said ‘OK’ and she ordered me to fall into the cistern.”

Then the woman told the caid, “I had brought the schoolteacher his lunch and there I found him: he had fallen into the cistern.”

The caid asked the woman, “What happened to you that made you make him fall in the cistern?”

“I beg you, Judge,” she said. “It’s like I told you.”

“What did you tell me?” said the caid.

“The schoolteacher: don’t believe a word he says because he’s crazy.”

“Not at all!” the cleric cried. “I’m not at all crazy!”

“Yes, Judge,” the woman insisted, “he is crazy. In fact, before long, he’s going to tell you that the cloth I’m wearing belongs to him.”

“Of course it does!” exclaimed the cleric. “Who else would it belong to?”

“You see?” said the woman.

“You’re right,” said the caid. “The schoolteacher has lost his mind.”

“Please, sir,” said the woman, “you have to give me someone to help me bring him back and care for him with herbs for medicine until he is cured.”

“Tie him,” ordered the caid, “and help this woman take him back.”

“As God is my witness,” cried the schoolteacher, “this is pure injustice! Since when did I lose my reason?!”

They took the cleric back to the village. “I beg you,” said the woman, “put him down in the silo, and no matter what, be sure he doesn’t break those ropes and come to kill me.”

They made the cleric go down into the silo and the woman herself placed the hand mill over the mouth of the silo. So then every time she turned the grindstone, she sent a bucket of water over the schoolteacher. And he would moan, “Aie aie aie, it’s the end of the world, this deluge!”

Every time the people came to take a look at the cleric, they would call, “Teacher!”

“Yes?” he would say.

“How are you?” they would ask.

“No, what about you, how are you?” he would reply. “Weren’t you almost carried away by a tornado, with that huge storm last night?”

And the people said to each other, “That poor schoolteacher, his madness just keeps getting worse!” And they left him there.

One day, the woman called to him: “Mr. Mohamed?”

“Yes?” he said.

“Is that enough, or shall I add to your experience of women’s wisdom?”

“I beg of you!” he said. “It’s enough!”

So she called the people; they took him out of the silo and he went back to his mosque.

At the end of a certain period of time, he said to the woman, "I must absolutely pay you some rent for my stay in your place."

"Very well, sir," she replied. "But instead of rent, I'd like you to dig me a small vegetable garden."

"Fine," said the schoolteacher and he went to get a plow to dig the garden.

When she took him his lunch, the woman filled the hem of her garment with fish. When she had put the lunch before the cleric and he had started to eat, she went a little way away and made it look as if she were picking up the fish. Then she asked him, "Why are you just plowing without picking up these fish in the furrow?"

"What on earth?" exclaimed the cleric.

"Come, take a look," said the woman.

He got up and saw the fish. "Ok," he said, "why don't you take them home and tonight you can cook them for my dinner?"

When the schoolteacher came back in the evening, she served him some bread.

"And where are those fish from this afternoon?" he asked.

"That's not going anywhere," she told him. "Do you want to repeat what happened to you lately?"

He threw himself at her and began to beat her. She screamed.

People came running and asked them what was happening.

"Save me, I beg you," said the woman. "Don't ask any questions of either one of us until you've tied him up. His insanity has come back again."

They tied him up.

"All right," said the woman, "now ask him what came over him and why he was hitting me."

They interrogated him. "Mr. Mohamed, what came over you that you started to hit this woman?"

"Just now I was out plowing. When she brought me my lunch, she gathered up some fish from the furrow I was plowing. I told her to go cook them for our dinner. But instead she ate them all."

"The poor schoolteacher, his mental illness still hasn't gone away," the people said. "Make him go back down into the silo."

And the cleric repeated: "But I swear there were fish, as true as if you saw them with your own eyes."

"Oh, you poor man," they replied, "wait until you get better." And they made him go back down into the silo.

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