

Electric Piracy

by **Armagan Tekdoner**

"We have entered the villa. An apparently poisoned body lies on the floor. On his desk, there are hints indicating the body was busy with writing probably just before dying. I also see an empty microwave oven still hum. Over."

"Captain speaking. Unplug the oven right away. How many times should I tell you not to say, "Body died," sort of things? Bring me all the writings. Over."

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My deceased manager warned: "Beware of those unbelievers tapping on the state's supply. Do not ever be tempted by the unlawful, otherwise you will be warped and will be burnt. The devil will ceaselessly be attempting to grease your palm."

"Don't even mention it, my big brother," I said. Pointing at the ceiling and the floor, "There's Allah in the sky, and the hell below us," I shouted in accordance with my demonstration. While was bawling, "The state's electricity equals to my honour," I struck my chest with my fist, giving my voice a rest in the middle of each word.

As a positive person, I swore on my blood to take the Allah's side when I started to work as an ambitious electricity meter reader, at the age of 22.

I first acquired a well-detailed map of the quarter the day I was appointed to the Cihangir district. Dividing all the inhabitants into two categories by the codes "-" and "+", took me only one month. The sign "-" denoted the state's generous clients; those preferring to use the power supply legally. The "+" sign stood for the rest: my personal price-conscious clients, who either did not feel like

paying at all or paid just a fraction of what they should for the power, to the state. "Be positive no matter what they say," my ancestors said.

A voice from the skies was ordering me to enrich myself then. Naturally, I was fulfilling the duty of charging commissions during my visits to plus signs in the name of Allah, in return for ignoring their cost minimisation efforts. Yet, even because of that simple cabriolet I bought for myself the year after, the late manager criticised me. According to him, I was not supposed to afford such a car... Unfortunately, my manager used to be the number one enemy of a prosperous and a humane society.

That was the third year of my war against poverty. In her Don't-ask-enter Street apartment, transvestite Gonca was too ecstatic during my visit to her. (That overpopulated building that entirely belongs to her is, registered as uninhabited in the state's records. Therefore, the power inlet has no meter. She sells the electricity to the rest of the apartments in the building, and the neighbours pay her a fixed amount each month for that. There, despite broken windows and inactive chimneys, everybody is around only dressed with an underwear in the middle of the winter. And I visit her monthly, to have my share.) While polishing her toenails, she was shitting jokes, and I was suspecting that she might be selling even more electricity, perhaps to the nearby buildings. Although the state continuously increased all power supplies' prices, both the billed and the unbilled payments were going down in the region.

The declining revenue problems in my mind, Gonca's stout leather-like legs under my left hand, the arabesque song "There is no mortal without fault, Love me with my faults," on the cassette player, a can of beer in my right hand. During this holly month of Ramadan at least, people could have been honest mercantile instead of cheating like her. I murmured:

"Hey Gonca, have you got any friends in any of these buildings?"

"Wait, I'll be boiling an awful nice plant for you, since you are not fasting..."

As Gonca hastened to the kitchen, I saw a corner of a title deed among the papers on the table. I can identify any legal document from any inch of it, take its digital picture if I am interested, can replace it without changing the other objects' positions, and act very quickly.

I was back in my car as Gonca was suspending a basket from her window to the grocer. I thanked her via honking several times for the envelope she gave to me. When the grocer started to load Gonca's basket with loaves of bread, kilograms of onion and boxes of depilatory, he noticed my car. I skidded and escaped, as a precaution to the grocer's possible invitation to a backgammon party. The sound and the smoke of my tires burning on the asphalt accompanied the muezzin's call for breaking fast. The cannon fired at last: an audible signal to make sure that one can safely eat. Those positioned on their window pillows all day long, hurried inside simultaneously, to break fast. Everybody disappeared. I said "Amen," and bit a piece of bread.

Boiled trumpet creeper is a must drink for any driver in this Istanbul traffic: I felt as if my airbag embraced me while pumping the accelerator and the brake alternately, and zigzagging down the evacuated streets. No, I could not fast that day; a cursed wet dream has already broken my fast in the morning.

When I opened the picture on my PC at home, I saw the title deed of a luxurious villa, registered under the name of Abdullah Uzun, whom everybody knows as transvestite Gonca. The cash inside the envelope Gonca gave to me was sufficient only to cover up the cost of a dinner in that villa's quarter. Suddenly an angel appeared, whispered the word "electricity" to my ears, and disappeared.

I studied all my files for hours only to find out even the total revenue generated by the whole district, was far below the amount needed for the acquisition of such a villa. The same angel was there again and was yelling this time:

"Corporate electricity meters, idiot. Broaden your horizon, break your chains!"

Of course! Taksim, the city centre, was just a cable long away! No more exploitation of

the electricity labourer!

The angel left behind a glowing aura; I remained hypnotised until the Ramadan drummer arrived to wake us up at 3 a.m., so that we should eat enough before the sunrise, and be able to stand the starvation that awaits us all day long.

The next day at the office, having thoroughly examined the relevant files, I noticed a significant decrease in the sums of the power bills of five star hotels in the Taksim area, in time. A professional power piracy network seemed to be prevalent. I should be visiting Gonca soon.

The very same day, my deceased manager announced the so-called good news that, I would no longer be wasted around to read electricity meters but would stay in the office, because of my promotion.

"Sir, staying in the office is not for me, I should be moving," I begged.

I tried to persuade him for hours but he was determined.

"I am already very tense, don't further raise my temper as I am fasting," he said and added it was up to him to decide where to appoint his employees.

It is up to Allah to decide when to end we mortals' lives; whatever happens is what Allah wants.

My manager's destiny proved to be to die of electric shock one week later. I read the details from the papers. The sudden death of a man at his weight because of a poorly insulated shaving machine, which immediately afterwards exploded, attracted suspicions of the police department. They questioned his wife: whether the machine was a gift, if he used that machine before, what kind of a strange machine was that... And lots of much other nonsense leading nowhere. His son, a computer games maniac, was actually incapable of calculating the area of a rectangle; I knew the police would

give up inquiring witnesses eventually, since they hated complications while fasting. After all, this was only another death incident, nobody published books or read poems; there was no threat to the state's security.

I also knew my manager bought that machine at one tenth of its regular price, from a door-to-door salesperson that came into our office those days once. Anyway, the police were not fortunetellers to know the deceased's inclination towards very cheaply priced things, and I never visited any police stations voluntarily.

Now I own a neighbouring villa to that of Gonca, on my 29th birthday. As I have constantly increased the rate of my commissions I get from her, the amount has skyrocketed; those small envelopes are but souvenirs of nostalgia for me. Gonca has not had any objections to this obligatory partnership yet: almost certainly, she is in love with me. (Flirtation during the office hours increases productivity, according to some recent studies.) Today, she has brought a microwave oven she has bought for me as a birthday present. As expected, I have examined it with care by a neon tester for half an hour, to avoid a possible electric shock. It is best not to trust one's own father nowadays. The oven has passed my test: it is a perfectly insulated device. However, I guess its quality is a bit questionable, since it is faintly noisy even when turned off. I have just started to feel a strange stomach ache; I have better take an aspirin, and