There was once a large village which had no muhtar. The people of the village searched and searched to find a suitable person for this job, but they never found a really satisfactory candidate. Finally they decided to elect a köse muhtar, thinking that he would make the village prosperous. So they elected him.

Soon after the köse became muhtar, he ordered that every day an ox should be slaughtered and its meat sold cheaply to the villagers. Each day somebody's ox was slaughtered and its meat sold. Those who lost their oxen in this way became very angry, and finally they banded together and went to the köse's barn and slaughtered his pair of oxen in retaliation. When the köse discovered his dead oxen, he did not show any anger. He just skinned the animals and decided to barter the skins for some other goods.

That evening he went to a neighboring village and knocked on the door of the first house he came to. When a woman came to the door, the köse said to her, "I have some fine hide here for making cariks. Would you like to buy some?"

"My husband is at the mill and so not home now, and I do not wear cariks."¹

The köse saw that the woman was quite pretty and he said many flattering things to her. Finally she agreed to buy some hide for cariks. She did not pay for the hide with money but with wheat. As the woman was pouring the wheat into the köse's bag, he deliberately jerked the bag aside and allowed some

¹Cariks were the taper-toed sandals worn by peasants before modern shoes were available. Ordinarily they were not worn by women. They were often made of donkey hide, since oxen were far too valuable to slaughter. Peasants now buy rubber shoes made from old automobile tires that have been melted down and poured into shoe molds.
of the wheat to fall on the floor. He did this to stall for time. Slowly he started to pick the wheat up, one grain at a time.

"Leave it there on the floor," said the woman. "I'll pour some other wheat into your bag."

"No, no, it was my fault that it was spilled," said the köse, "and so it is my duty to pick it up for you."

By the time that the köse had finished picking up the wheat it had become quite late, and darkness had fallen. The woman felt obliged to make up a bed for the köse in one of the rooms of the house, and then she went to her own room and went to bed, propping something against her door.

Shortly after this, the woman's lover came to call on her. She got up and visited with him, and after a while she decided to cook some eggs for him. She put some fat in a frying pan and placed it on the stove, and as there were no eggs in the house, she went out to the henhouse to get some. Her lover was lying in bed in the meantime, half asleep. The köse got up quietly when the woman went out, and he took the frying pan of hot fat and poured it down the throat of the unsuspecting lover. The lover died choking "Kuk! Kuk! Kuk!.." Then the köse went back to bed.

When the woman returned and saw the empty frying pan, she thought that the cat had tipped over the fat. She put more fat in the pan and broke eggs into it. When they were ready, she said, "Come! Get up and eat!"

Her lover did not come, and so she went to the bedroom and there discovered that he was dead. She called out to the köse to come and see what had happened. "Please do come and see what has happened. There is a dead man in my room."

"No, no!" said the köse, "I did not come here to see dead men. My own troubles are enough for me." But when the woman continued to plead with
him to come and help her, he said, "I'll come and help you get rid of the
dead body only if you will pay me a thousand liras."  

The woman was afraid that her husband would come home and find the dead lover in her bed, and so she agreed to pay the köse this amount if he would help her. He took the corpse and started to dump it into the latrine, but before he could finish this job, the husband arrived home, and so the köse rushed back to his own bed.

The husband said to his wife, "Here, hold my donkey. I must go to the latrine." When he went into the latrine, he stumbled over the corpse and shouted, "What are you doing here? If you were a decent fellow, you wouldn't be found here!" Saying this, he clubbed the corpse.

The husband returned to the house and said to his wife, "I think I have killed a man that I found in our latrine. What shall we do with the body?"

"Let us go and consult the guest who is sleeping next door," suggested his wife.

When they told the köse their problem, he said, "I do not want anything to do with a dead body." But the woman understood the köse, and she went and got some more money and gave it to him, and the köse agreed to dispose of the body.

Before sunrise he loaded the corpse on his donkey and left that village. Along the way he stopped at a field of watermelons and allowed his donkey to graze among the watermelons. When the owner of the field saw this, he shouted at the köse, "Hey! Stop that donkey from eating my watermelon vines!"

But the köse did nothing but sit delousing his shirt. He did not heed the warning at all. The owner of the field got a gun and fired it at the donkey. When the köse heard the shot, he jumped up and started crying, "You have killed my dear brother! You have killed my dear brother! He was ill and I was taking him to a doctor."
The farmer came and begged the köse's pardon and said it was an accident. But the köse said, "No! No! I do not want to hear such nonsense. I am going to court to sue you." As they walked toward the nearest town, they reached an agreement. The farmer paid the köse a thousand liras, and the köse forgave him. Later he threw the dead body into the sea.

After making a great amount of money in these ways, the köse returned to the village where he was muhtar. He built a fine house for himself and a good coffeehouse for the village. He gave a generous amount of pocket money to his children, and so everyone knew that he was rich. The villagers asked him, "Where did you get all this money, muhtar?"

"Oh, if I had only split my ox hides into thinner layers, I could have made even more money," he answered.

"What do you mean?" they asked.

"There is a great shortage of cariks in the village by the sea," the köse said. "If everyone kills his ox, splits the hide thin enough to make many cariks, he can become rich, too."

The people were all very excited when they heard this, and they went home at once and killed their oxen for their skins. They split these skins until they were very thin and then they made cariks from them. But when they took to the village the köse told them about, they could not sell any of them there.

Returning home with their loads of cariks, the men decided to get rid of that terrible köse by putting him in a box and throwing him into the sea. They made a box of wood and put the köse in it. They put a cover on it and nailed it down, and at night they carried the box to the seaside. But as they were about to throw the box into the sea, one of the men said, "Let us wait until the morning to throw him in so that we can have the pleasure of watching him drown." They all agreed to this, and so they left the box
by the sea that night.

Early the next morning a shepherd came along the shore with his flock. When he saw the box on the beach, he approached it and kicked it. The köse inside cried out loudly.

"What are you in there?" asked the shepherd.

"Oh, friend, do you know what trouble I am in?" asked the köse.

"No," said the shepherd. "What is the matter?"

"They wanted to give me to the daughter of the pagan. When I refused to marry her, they put me in this box to carry me to her."

"Why did you refuse her?" asked the shepherd. "I'd have married her if I had been you. Could there be anything better than that?"

"Well, if you would really like that," said the köse, "just trade places with me."

The shepherd quickly took the cover off the box and let the köse out. Then he climbed inside, and the köse closed the lid again. The köse then took the flock of sheep and started for the village in a very roundabout way.

The men of the village, in the meantime, went to the shore and threw the box into the water. After it had sunk, they started back to the village, but on the way they encountered the köse with his flock of sheep. They were amazed to see him, and they said to him, "How did you get those sheep?"

"You thought you did me a disservice when you threw me into the sea," he answered, "but you can see with your own eyes what I got. every time I dived. Kirk! Kirk!"

The villagers rushed back to the seashore and they all jumped in at the place where they had thrown the box. All of them drowned, and as they
sank, the last noises that they made were gurgling sounds that said,

"Kırk! Kırk! Kırk!"\(^2\)

\(^2\)The nub of this story depends upon a play on words in Turkish. Kırk means forty. The gurgling noise in the throat of a drowning person, "kuk! kuk! kuk!" is here made to sound like "kırk! kırk! kırk!" as it is told orally. In some versions, the köse interprets the gurgling noises for bystanders, who might otherwise rescue the drowning men, "Forty! Forty! They are saying forty sheep!"