

#394 (Tape #3, 1972)

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The Miser Ebul Kasım Tamburi and His Infamous Shoes<sup>1</sup>

Once there lived in Baghdad a man called Ebul Kasım Tamburi who was very rich but extremely miserly. He was famous for his shoes. They were so old and had been repaired so many times that they looked more like patchwork than like shoes.

One of the merchants in the city wanted to become partners with Ebul in the business of manufacturing rose oil. Before he undertook the business transaction, Ebul asked the man, "What percentage will I draw from the profit?"

Knowing Ebul well and not wanting to miss the chance to establish a new business, the merchant said, "You'll have sixty-five per cent of it, and I'll have the rest."

Ebul accepted the offer. The rose oil business proved to be successful. One day Ebul's partner said to him, "Now that you have become a successful businessman, you need to do something about your appearance. Go to the bath, get shaved, buy yourself some new clothes, above all, get rid of your old shoes."

<sup>1</sup>At the outset the narrator notes that this tale has two levels of meaning: the literal and the symbolic. This unusual announcement plus the fact that this is a well known story (published in a picture book for children) makes one cautious about the authenticity of this story as a folk tale. See Notes.

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So Ebul went to the public bath. When he was ready to leave, he noticed that his shoes were missing. Since he was already tired of his old shoes, he did not attempt to find them. Instead, he wore the pair of shoes that he found where he had left his own shoes.

When the owner of these shoes discovered that his shoes had been exchanged with another pair, he knew who the thief was. Anybody could recognize Ebul's old shoes. The man sued Ebul for stealing his shoes. He threw them in the lake. Unfortunately, a neighboring farmer found the shoes and returned them to Ebul. By now he was so tired of his old shoes that he threw them on the roof of his house. However, being wet, the shoes slipped down the roof, fell upon some bottles of rose oil that were stacked in the garden, and broke these bottles. Ebul picked up his shoes and threw them in his neighbor's garden.

His neighbor was very proud of the flowers and vegetables in his garden. When he discovered that the shoes had smashed the plants, he sued Ebul, who had to pay for the damage and serve another prison sentence.

Realizing that he could not easily escape his famous shoes, Ebul applied to court for help. He secured a court order saying that he had legally disowned his notorious shoes and was not responsible for any further damage caused by them.

<sup>2</sup>At the end of the tale the narrator comments on the fact that Ebul Kasım Tamburi's shoes had become part of the language. When two people disagreed about the weight of anything, one might say, "Well, at most it can weigh no more than the shoes of Ebul Kasım Tamburi." His shoes, having received patch upon patch, had come to be very bulky, very heavy.