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Story #411 (Tape #4, 1972)

Narrator: Fahri \_\_\_\_\_ [is it Erk?  
It is a very brief last  
name which narrator swal-  
lows so that we are unable  
to hear it clearly], 20 or 21

Location: Narlı Köyü, Silifke kaza,  
Province of İçel

Date: 1972

The Unwilling Grave Robber

In days past there was no road between this village and Mersin. Many Jews lived at Mersin then. One day a man from this village loaded several camels with wheat and took it to Mersin to sell. He sold his wheat and was to be paid in gold. Shortly after selling his wheat, this man was approached by three men who invited him to a meal in a restaurant. While they were eating, they explained to him that they had a small matter to attend to. They asked the peasant to go along with them, and they then proceeded to a cemetery outside Mersin.

It used to be a Jewish custom to bury their dead wearing all their jewelry. I suppose we can call these three men grave robbers. They had levers and pliers and all the equipment necessary for the job. The Jewish graves were covered with thick lids, and these grave robbers would pry up the lids with their levers. They would open a grave by prying up a lid and then hold it open with a stone, just far enough to let a man crawl inside.

They told the peasant to enter the grave through this narrow opening. At first he refused, but they insisted, and they hit him several times and,

drawing their pistols, threatened to shoot him. Fearing for his life, the man finally agreed to go down into the grave. These robbers knew exactly what valuable objects were on the body. They said, "She has two bracelets. Get them. She has seven gold teeth. Pull them out."

The peasant did as he was ordered. But after he had pulled out the seven gold teeth, he tried to hide one of them by putting it in his pocket. They said to him, "There should be seven gold teeth, not six. Give us the other one. Also, get her two earrings for us." After he had handed up to them everything, the robbers took the rock from under the lid and let the lid fall in place once again.

The peasant was terrified. He was walking upon a dead body which had begun to decay, and because it was summertime, the stench was terrible. He did not know what to do, and he thought it likely that he would die down there. After an hour or an hour and a half, however, he heard some voices above the grave. He heard footsteps approaching, and from these footsteps he concluded that there must be four or five people up there.

These people lifted the lid with a lever and placed a stone under it to hold it up. One of the voices above said, "I shall not go down. You go down."

Another voice said, "No, I will not go. You go down." They were arguing with each other in this way.

The peasant below was terrified. As they were arguing, he shouted loudly, "Hey! I am down here!"

Hearing this voice from the grave, the men above fled in fear. The peasant was then able to climb out of the grave unharmed. These latest arrivals were apparently a second group of grave robbers.