

Story #596 (1968, Tape #2)

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Location: Narrators from Hınıs, kaza town in Erzurum Province. Tales taped at Kadıköy, İstanbul

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The Qualified Stupidity of a Kurd #596

Beyond Erzurum lies the district of Hınıs. In one of the towns of this district, a shoemaker was sitting at a street corner mending shoes. While this shoemaker was working, a Kurd arrived in the town.

This Kurd had come from a small village and he didn't know much about the life in towns and cities. Because he was very hungry when he arrived, he bought some bread, and he started walking in the streets with a loaf of bread. He was passing by the shoemaker, who was hard at work. He noticed a tin can that was sitting beside the shoemaker. The shoemakers in those days used to have tin cans or buckets filled with water in which to soak their thick sole-leather.

When the Kurd saw this tin can full of water, he thought that it was full of pekmez.¹

He asked the shoemaker, "Hey, fellow, if I crumbled my bread into your pekmez, how much do I pay?"

The shoemaker looked at the Kurd. He was a Kurd himself but he was a townsman. The shoemaker looked at the Kurd again to determine whether the man was joking or not. He realized that the man was Kurdish and a stranger in town. He also realized that the man was

¹ Pekmez is a sweet, very thick syrup made by boiling down grape juice. It is very popular among Turkish peasants.

serious about buying the dark-colored water as pekmez, and so decided to take advantage of his ignorance.

"Give me forty paras."²

"All right."

The Kurd sat down. He crumbled his bread into the water. He took out his spoon and started eating. When he had had enough to eat, he paid the shoemaker and said, "Say, you! Don't think that a Kurd is an ass. I am well aware that your pekmez was mixed with water."

²No longer existing as a unit of money, the para was 1/40 of a kurus; the kurus was 1/100 of a lira. In 1983 the lira was worth only 1/2 of a U.S. cent.