

Story #637 (1974, Tape #50)

Narrator: Bayram Şahin

Location: Limonlu village, kaza of
Mersin, Province of İçel

Date: January 8, 1974

Two Misers

There once were two misers who were always at odds with each other. They could hear each other, but they would rarely speak to one another. One day one of them hired a camel caravan, and told the owner that he wanted to transport a load and make a deal with the other miser. The caravan owner asked him what they should transport, and the miser told him to fill up the sacks with ^{dung -- of camel} camel dung and put raisins of top of the sacks, so that it would look like a full load of raisins.

The other miser happened to hear this transaction, and said to himself, "We shall see about this." He went out and hired a caravan himself. He told the owner to fill the sacks up with camel dung and on top of the sacks to put dates, so that it would look like a full load of dates.

The two misers together with their caravans, met at the head of a bridge. One of them spoke out and said, "Where to, friend?"

The other said, "I've heard there is a miser on the other side. I'm going to see him."

The miser then said, "Well, I am he."

They greeted each other and decided to trade their loads and return. And so they did. On his way back, one of them calculated

the cost and value of his load versus the one he had traded with, and realized that he had been over paid by ten para.¹ He said, "Before I can claim this ten para for myself, I will die."

Meanwhile, the other miser went home and when he calculated the cost and value of his load versus the one he had traded, he realized he had been short changed by ten para. He decided to go after his ten para, saying, "Why should I let him have my ten para? I'll kill him before I do!"

The miser who had made the ten para profit saw the other one coming his way, and said, "Now I am dead." And he lay down and died. The cheated miser dismounted by the other miser and said, "Has my friend died?" And when the others replied that indeed his friend had died, the cheated miser said, "Well, the least I can do is bury him with my own two hands."

He then proceeded with the preparations for the burial. He got a huge pot, filled it with water, gathered wood and lighted a fire under the pot of water. When the water was bubbling, he placed the dead miser's body on the scrubbing stone² and said, "You pay me the ten para, or I'll burn you with the boiling water."

¹The para was the 40th part of a kuruş, which, in turn, was the 100th part of a lira. By the 1980s the lira was worth only half an American cent. Inflation and devaluation of the Turkish lira had long since made the para meaningless, as the kuruş has more recently become.

²Outside some mosques is a raised marble slab where such washing is done.

Story #637

The dead miser did not reply, so the other one proceeded scrubbing him with the boiling water. He then asked the observers to bring him the shroud, and they did. He once again addressed the dead miser, and said, "You either pay me my ten para , or I shall sew you tightly into the shroud."

Once again the other miser made no sound. So the cheated miser sewed the other miser into the shroud, and they buried him. After everyone else had left, the cheated miser stayed behind and dug up the new grave. He looked down at the other miser and once again said, "Either you will pay me my ten para . or I will you while no one is here." And again there was no response from the other miser. The cheated miser repeated his threat over and over, but still could get no response from the dead miser. This continued until midnight.

Meanwhile, a band of thieves had just stolen a large amount of money. They wondered where they could sit down and divide division - of money their loot. They thought about doing it at the mountain, but decided there might be people on the mountain who could observe them. Then they decided to go to the cemetery where they could be sure of privacy. They came close to the cemetery and unloaded their money. When the miser who was lying down, sewn in his shroud, heard the sound of money, he said to the other miser, "me out!"

He got up and the two together went toward the sound of money.

Story #637

When the thieves saw two men, one wrapped in a shroud, they became so frightened that they fled as fast as they could. So the two misers shouldered the sacks of money and brought them to the open grave and divided the contents of the sack into two.

One of the thieves, however, found a bit of courage to return. He traced the two misers to the open grave and watched them from atop a small hill. When the two misers had finally divided the loot into two, one said to the other, "Now, that this business is taken care of, give me the ten para you owe me." And they started squabbling over the ten para once again.

The thief who was watching them from above got so tired and disgusted with their argument that he finally flung his fez³ to them and said, "Have my fez and be done with your quarelling!" He ran back to the other thieves and said, "Let us not tarry here, friends. As if all that money was not enough, they even got my ten-para fez!"

³The fez had long been appropriate head wear for Turks, but after the founding of the Republic, it was outlawed as a symbol of the Islamic past.