

Story 897 (1964 Tape
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field trip
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Narrator: Ismail Doğan, pistol-
packing muhtar

Location: Çetme village,
Taşköprü kaza,
Kastamonu Province

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Nasreddin Hoca as Witness in Court

Once there was and once there was not a day when a certain peasant arrived in town late. He was hungry, but he had only a loaf of bread. While passing a grocery store, he saw in the window a jar of boiled eggs. Although he had no money with which to buy eggs, he entered the shop and said to the shopkeeper, "Give me two boiled eggs. I have no money with me now, but the next time I come into town I shall pay you

"All right," said the grocer, giving the peasant two boiled eggs

The villager found a quiet corner, where he sat down and ate his eggs and his loaf of bread. Then, after finishing his business in town, he returned to his village.

It was quite a long while before this villager had any occasion to travel to the town again. As a matter of fact, it was two years later before he went to town. As soon as he got there, he went to the grocer to pay him two kuruş,¹ the

¹The kuruş was a small copper coin worth 1/100 of a lira. Until the late 1960s the kuruş was still an acceptable monetary unit. By the late 1980s, however, devaluation of Turkish

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price of two boiled eggs at that time. He said to the grocer, "Sir, here are two kuruş that I owe you. Two years ago I bought two boiled eggs from you, but I did not have any money to pay for them at that time. It was on a Thursday. It was impossible for me to come to town again sooner than this, and I am sorry I have been so long in paying you."

But the grocer refused to accept the money. "See here," he said, "I'd have gotten two chickens from those eggs. After they had grown a year, each would have laid many eggs, and each could have sat upon twenty-four eggs and hatched out twenty-four baby chickens apiece. By now I should have had fifty chickens from those eggs. Chickens are now worth half a lira apiece, and so instead of owing me two kuruş, you now owe me twenty-five liras.

When the peasant insisted that all he owed the grocer was two kuruş, the grocer went to a Kadı^{2 107-109} and filed a complaint against him. A trial date was set, and the peasant was notified to appear in court at that time. This peasant was a poor man, and the payment of twenty-five liras would ruin him. Not money had reduced the lira to the value of 1/700 or 1/800 of a U.S. dollar and thereby made the kuruş meaningless. But the kuruş was once a very respectable monetary unit, as testified by the fact that it was worth 40 paras, the next lower monetary unit.

²A kadı was a judge of canonical law in Ottoman times.

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knowing what to do about his desperate situation, he went from friend to friend in his village asking, "Can you help me to win my case in court?" None of his friends knew how to help him.

As the trial drew near, the peasant decided to visit Nasreddin Hoca,³ who lived in a nearby village. Going to the Hoca, he said, "Hoca Efendi,⁴ I am in serious trouble and I beg you for your help."

"What is the trouble?" asked Nasreddin Hoca.

"Well, the trouble is such and such," and he explained the whole matter.

"He wants you to pay twenty-five liras for two boiled eggs you ate two years ago?" asked the Hoca.

"Yes

"Such a scoundrel!" said the Hoca. "Do not worry about it. On the day of the trial I shall appear in court as your witness and win the case for you." He later went to the kadı's clerk and stated his wish to be a witness in behalf of the peasant

On the day of the trial the grocer and the peasant appeared in court, but there was no sign of Nasreddin Hoca. The

³A hoca is a Moslem priest. Nasreddin was the name of this particular hoca.

⁴Efendi was a complimentary or honorific epithet added to the name of a distinguished person in the past. In recent times the prestige of the epithet has become so devaluated that it is now applied only to servants and children.

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kadı sent a message with a boy to Nasreddin Hoca, ordering him to appear in court at once. While the boy was gone, the kadı asked the grocer and the peasant to state their sides of the case. When their testimony had been recorded, the boy returned and said, "Kadı Efendi, I gave him your message, but he said that he could not come until he had finished boiling wheat to plant tomorrow."

Annoyed at this response of Nasreddin Hoca, the kadı ordered his clerk, "You go this time and bring that hoca back with you at once!"

When Nasreddin Hoca was brought into the court by the clerk, the kadı asked him, "Hoca; what is the meaning of your delaying the court proceedings in this way?"

"I am sorry, Kadı Efendi, but I could not help it. Tomorrow is the last day of the season for planting wheat, and I had to boil enough today to plant tomorrow."

"What kind of nonsense is this, Hoca? You cannot plant boiled wheat! It would not grow!"

"Excuse me, Kadı Efendi, but wouldn't it grow as well as boiled eggs would grow into chickens?"

The kadı stared in silence at the Hoca for a minute. Then, understanding the wisdom of his remark, he dismissed the case against the peasant.