The Three Tricksters and the Robbers

There were once three tricksters who thought of a plan to make some money. One of them would pretend to be dead. The other two would pretend that they had found a dead man and were trying to raise money to have him buried. They went along the street stopping everyone that they met and saying, "We are going to bury this poor dead man whom we found. Will you please give us some money to help cover his funeral expenses?"

As they were moving along gathering money in this way, they met a hoca. The hoca said, "I shall provide the religious services for this dead man." The hoca had just come from the market where for five paras he had bought some figs, which he hung in the mosque window as he made preparations to wash the corpse on the stone slab in the

1 A Moslem preacher-teacher akin to a priest.

2 A para was 1/40 of a kuruş, and a kuruş was 1/100 of a lira. By the middle of the 20th century devaluation of all Turkish money had reduced the para to worthlessness. Between that time and the late 1980s the lira was devaluated to 1/150 of a U.S. dollar or 1/150 of an American cent, and so the kuruş also became meaningless.

3 The washing of the corpse is a special ritual. In rural Turkey there are no undertakers, and so, on one level, this cleansing is just part of the preparation for burial. But because the washing is done in a prescribed way, it is a ritual.
mosque yard. When he went to heat some water for the washing of the corpse, the supposedly dead man got up and ate the figs. Then he went back and lay down on the slab again.

When the water was hot, the hocā brought it to the slab and began to wash the corpse. When he poured some hot water on the corpse, the dead man ground his teeth to keep from crying out. As he did so, some fig seeds fell out of his mouth. Although the hocā observed this, he said nothing.

After the hocā had finished washing the dead man, he laid him out neatly again on the slab. Then he and the two friends of the deceased decided to watch by the side of the dead man for a while as a sign of respect. While they sat in a dark part of the mosque, three robbers entered with a large amount of gold that they had just stolen from the padişah's treasury. They said to each other, "This will be a good place for us to divide the gold." They shared the gold and other stolen goods in three equal parts until there was nothing left of their loot but a sword. Not knowing how to allot the sword, one of the robbers finally

---

4 Many mosque yards have a stone or marble slab, raised about 30 inches above the ground, expressly for this purpose.

5 In Turkish folktales robbers and bandits often meet in cemeteries or mosques, especially at night, when those places are normally deserted.
Story 1068

said, "I'll tell you which of us will get this sword
Whichever of us can cut farthest through this corpse with it will win the sword."

The three robbers approached the corpse, but when the first lifted the sword to strike at it, the dead man sat up and shouted, "Help!" This so terrified the three robbers that they rushed from the mosque, leaving behind them all of the gold.

When the robbers had gone, the hoca and the trickster sat down and divided the treasure. When it was all divided, however, the hoca said to the man who had pretended to be dead, "You still owe me five paras for those figs of mine that you ate!"

By this time one of the robbers had found courage to return to the mosque. After he and his companions had fled in terror, they finally recovered their senses. One of them said, "Let me go back and take a look at what the situation is there." He arrived at the mosque and stuck his head in through a window just as the hoca said, "You still owe me five paras for those figs of mine that you ate!"

Looking around, the supposedly dead man saw the robber's head in the window. He quickly walked over, snatched the fez from the robber's head, and said to the hoca, "Here!
Story 1068

this! It is worth even more than the five paras you for the figs!"

When the robber had rushed back to his friends, they asked him, "Well, what happened?"

He answered, "Quick! Let us flee past seven mountains, and then I shall tell you what happened."

They walked and walked until they had passed seven mountains. Then the robber who had returned to the mosque said, "All of our gold was not enough to satisfy that dead He took my fez, too!"