

Story 1218 (1990 Tape 8)

Narrator: Beyhan Kavasoğulları, 54

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İzmir Province

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Donkeys Identified

One day my older brother and I went to a marketplace at Yenimahalle in Ankara Province. We liked what we found there, and so we continued to go there several more times on the weekly market day there. We often bought our vegetables from the same greengrocer. This man had no way of knowing that we were siblings. We were four years apart in age, and we could simply have been two friends

On the day about which I want to tell you, we wanted to buy some potatoes, but the potatoes for sale by our favorite merchant were somewhat greenish. (You know how potatoes are sometimes slightly green just below the skin. My brother said, "I shall buy some of these."

"No, I shall not buy them. They are still green

So my brother bought just a few potatoes there, but I did not. We then walked through the entire market looking for riper potatoes, but by the time we had completed our circling of the market, we had found none any better. We therefore went back to our favorite greengrocer, and without even wondering whether or not he would remember us, I said, "Give me three kilos of potatoes"--or maybe I asked for five kilos, but that makes no difference.

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The greengrocer said to me, "Your brother told you that these were the best potatoes in this marketplace today, but you did not believe him!"

It struck me as being very strange that this man knew that we were siblings. Had I, quite unaware, called my brother "brother" in the presence of this man? I could not remember having done so. After I had bought the potatoes and we had moved away a few meters, I asked my brother, "How did that greengrocer know that we are siblings?"

My brother answered, "He is a charming and perceptive man who can make a joke without a moment's hesitation." He then told me of an amusing incident in which that man had been involved. "One day two men were walking along together past his vegetable stall. One of them carelessly jostled the greengrocer, who responded by saying, 'Donkey and son of a donkey!'¹ The first stranger asked the second, 'Was he speaking to you or to me? Does he know who you are?' The second man answered, 'As you can see, he not only knows who I am, but he also knows who my father is!'"

¹The only more offensive slur expression than donkey in Turkey is donkey and son of a donkey. Donkey is such an offensive word that even if one uses it in reference to the animal of that name, one says, "Excuse me!" lest any listener interpret it as a covert insult to himself or herself.