

Story 1832 (1970 Tape 16)

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The Burglar and the Pickpocket

This is a story about two thieves who once lived in Istanbul. One of them was a burglar and the other was a pickpocket. They sometimes helped each other in their thieving activities, and they both managed to make a good living. One day the burglar said to the pickpocket, "Friend, there is becoming less and less opportunity us to gain good income here, for too many people here know too much about us. Why don't we go together to some other country and carry on our trade there? Let us meet at such and such a dock at such and such a time and take the ship that is scheduled to leave then. Each of us should take along a supply of food for the voyage." The pickpocket accepted this proposal.

At the time agreed upon, they boarded a ship and departed from Istanbul. After they had been sailing for a while, they grew hungry and decided to eat. They found a comfortable place on deck, where the burglar took from his

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pack half a tray of böreks.<sup>1</sup> When the pickpocket also took out half a tray of böreks, they suddenly realized that the two strips of böreks were very similar to each other. In fact, they were so similar that the two men could not help wondering if they had been cooked in the same tray. The burglar said, "These böreks are remarkably similar. What is the name of your wife?"

name is Fatma."

"What a coincidence! My wife's name is also Fatma."

live on the same street, but what is the number of your house?"

"I live in house number 35," said the burglar.

"That is the number of my house too!" exclaimed the pickpocket

"One woman was using both of us, but neither of us knew that!"

They decided to return home as soon as possible. They disembarked at the first port where the ship landed. Then they boarded the first ship leaving that port for Istanbul. Each rushed toward his own home, but they both went to the same building. There they found Fatma and said to her, "You

<sup>1</sup>Deep-fried pastry containing thin layers of cheese, meat, or vegetables. The shell is made up of several layers of extremely thin dough.

must decide which of us you love more, and from then on, you must live with that man."

Fatma answered, "I love both of you equally. Otherwise I should not live this way."

The two men then decided to go to a judge to have determined which of them should have this woman. After they were admitted into the court, they were asked several questions by the judge. He asked the one man, "What is your occupation?"

"I am a burglar."

When the second man was asked the same question, he answered, "I am a pickpocket."

After thinking about the matter for a few moments, the judge said, "The one of you who proves to be the more skillful will be the one who will possess the woman."

The burglar and the pickpocket accepted this decision. They said, "Very well, your honor."

The pickpocket was the first to demonstrate his skills. The burglar had taken Fatma's jeweled necklace, put it around his neck, and started toward a jewelry store, where he intended to exchange it for money. But the pickpocket managed to remove it from the burglar's neck and return it to Fatma. The burglar stole the necklace again, and this

time he wrapped it around his waist, but again the pickpocket took it away from him and returned it to Fatma.

After his third theft of the necklace, the burglar wrapped it around his testicles. This time the pickpocket was at first unable to filch it so easily. He quickly put on a gown and a turban to disguise himself as a hoca<sup>2</sup> Along the way to the jewelry shop the pickpocket tossed turban onto the roof of a low shed. When the burglar came along, the pickpocket asked him for help in recovering his turban. He said, "You are short and I am very tall. Will you please sit upon my shoulders and get my turban off this roof to which it was blown?" While the burglar was on his shoulders, the pickpocket easily snatched the necklace, and as soon as the two men had parted, he returned it to Fatma.

When the two men met again, the pickpocket said, "My friend, I have demonstrated my skills. Now it is your turn to demonstrate yours."

"All right. Prepare to go with me tomorrow night, when we shall rob the padishah's treasury, taking from it all the things that are light in weight but heavy in value."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>A hoca is a preacher and religious leader. Until the twentieth century the turban and the gown were emblems of their profession.

<sup>3</sup>A common idiomatic expression in Turkish.

On the following day they took a sack of nails and a hammer and went to the padishah's palace. There was a high wall surrounding that palace, but the two thieves got over it by driving nails into it and then using those nails as steps. In the palace yard was a flock of geese. They killed one of those geese and, after building a small fire, began to roast it. The burglar said to the pickpocket, "You stay here and cook this goose, and I shall go to the padishah's quarters and get whatever I can find there that is light in weight but heavy in value."

When the burglar reached the padishah's private quarters, he saw the ruler napping in a hammock, which his lala<sup>4</sup> kept rocking. Oddly, the padishah's lala was a woman. She was bored with the work she was doing, and the only that she could stay awake was by chewing a large piece of gum. The burglar sneaked up behind her and stuck the tips of her long hair into her mouth. When the hair became

<sup>4</sup>A lala is a combination of tutor, valet, and adviser to a prince or to the son of a wealthy family. After the child has become an adult, the lala sometimes continues to be his former pupil's valet and adviser. Up to this point in the Archive narratives, this is the first lala who is female. Living arrangements would make it almost impossible for a lala to be female, but perhaps the narrator here thought that a female lala could be easily overcome, as the lala of this tale must be quickly and easily overcome.

entangled in the gum, the burglar pulled the hair gently and thus removed the gum from the lala's mouth. Without the gum, the lala quickly fell sound asleep. The burglar then put the lala in a porter's bag and hung that bag from the ceiling.

The burglar then nudged the padishah gently and asked "My padishah, would you listen to me if I told you a story?"

Thinking that it was the lala speaking, the padishah answered, "Yes, I would."

"There were a burglar and a pickpocket who had become friends. While they were traveling, they discovered that they had both been sleeping with the same woman. They returned home at once to determine which of them should marry this woman. They were told that the one of them who proved to be the more skillful as a thief would win the woman. The pickpocket showed his skill first. [Let us cut this short! You already know how the pickpocket demonstrated his skill. Well, at this point in the story the burglar was telling the padishah, he gave an account of the pickpocket's three thefts of the jeweled necklace.

"Then the burglar began to demonstrate his skills. He went to the palace of the padishah, where he slaughtered a goose in the yard and told the pickpocket to cook it

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(Pickpocket! Turn the goose well! Our padishah keeps falling back to sleep. [Here he was actually shouting to the pickpocket down below in the yard, and the pickpocket heard him. ]

"The burglar then entered the palace and went up into the padishah's quarters, where he saw a lala rocking the padishah's hammock. The lala was bored with her work, and so she kept chewing gum to stay awake. The burglar put the end of her long hair into her mouth, where it became entangled in the gum. The burglar then slowly and carefully pulled on the hair and in that way removed the gum from the lala's mouth. As soon as her gum was gone, the lala fell asleep. The burglar put the lala in the porter's bag and hung her from the ceiling. --Now tell me, my padishah, who deserves the woman more? Should she belong to the pickpocket or to the burglar?"

The padishah answered, "The burglar is the more skillful. Anyone who could enter a padishah's presence the way he did must have unsurpassed skill!"

To the pickpocket the burglar said, "You heard that! Keep turning the goose so that it does not burn!" Then after the padishah had fallen asleep again, the burglar took some valuable objects and went down to the yard, where he and the pickpocket ate the goose.

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When the padishah awakened again, he called, "Lala!  
Lala!"

"Oh-h-h-h!" answered the lala, but the padishah could not see her anywhere

"Where are you, lala?"

"I am up here on the ceiling.

"Ha Then the person who told me that last story was the burglar! Well, he really deserves the woman!"

In this way the burglar defeated the pickpocket and married the woman. May we all be as successful in our endeavors as he was!