

Story 1886 (1970 Tape 17

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Location: Kumyaka (formerly
Siği) village,
Mudanya kaza,
Bursa Province

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The Trickster Sındıcak

There was once a boy named Sındıcak whose mother died while he was still quite young. After awhile his father married again, but the woman he married did not like Sındıcak. She often mistreated him, and sometimes she went farther and abused him. One day this woman baked a pastry and then said to Sındıcak, "Take this to your father for lunch in the field where he is plowing.

When Sındıcak got close to the place where his father was working, he shouted, "My dear father, how should I proceed to you from here--down the middle of the field or along the side of it?"

"Along the side," his father answered

When Sındıcak heard that, he ate the outer edge of the pastry on all four sides. When he got still closer to his father, he again shouted, "My dear father, how should I come now--down the middle of the field or along the side?"

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"Come now right down the middle of the field."

When Sındıcak heard that instruction, he ate the center of the pastry. By the time he reached his father, there was none of the pastry left

"Where is the pastry you were supposed to bring me for my lunch?" his father demanded.

asked you whether I should move along the side or middle, and you said the side. Therefore, I ate the side of the pastry. Then later you told me to go through the middle, and so I ate the middle of the pastry. That is why there is none left for you."¹ Knowing that his father was angry and would punish him, Sındıcak thought quickly of some way in which he might escape. He was a very clever boy. Pointing at some hunters approaching on horseback, Sındıcak said, "My dear father, do you see those men approaching? They are arresting people who whipped their donkeys this morning."

As it happened, that very morning the father had whipped his donkey, and he was now frightened by the news

¹This episode of the son's deliberately misinterpreting his father's instructions on the route he should take is a favorite routine of Turkish storytellers. In ATON it appears several times in Finger Child (Tom Thumb) tales.

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that Sındıcak had just given him. He asked his son, "Well, then, what should I do now?"

"Do you see that fox cave over there?" Sındıcak asked. "Go quickly and hide in it before all of those horsemen arrive here." His father ran swiftly and in that cave.

When the hunters arrived, they said nothing at first to Sındıcak, but getting their attention, the boy kept pointing toward the cave. By then the hunters' dogs had picked up the scent of a human being in the cave, and they entered it, barking loudly. Sındıcak's father was afraid of dogs, and so he rushed out of the cave. He shouted at the astounded hunters, "Yes, I whip my donkey this morning, but that donkey is mine, and you have no right to interfere in this matter!"

The hunters did not understand what the man was talking about, and they thought him mad. Not knowing that he was Sındıcak's father, they decided to take that clever boy with them. One of the hunters became his foster father. That man had two wives, and Sındıcak called the older woman Old Mother and the other one Young Mother.

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Sındıcak's foster father hunted only for pleasure. real occupation was that of a farrier. When he went to his shop one morning to shoe a neighbor's horse, the farrier realized that he had left at home the set of horseshoes that he needed. Calling Sındıcak to him, he said, "Go home and get the set of horseshoes I left there."

Sındıcak hurried home and said to the senior wife, "Old Mother, Father wants you to give me all the money you have on hand." She was surprised to hear him say this, but she gave him all the money that she kept there. Sındıcak then went to the other wife and said, "Young Mother, give me all of the money that you have." The younger woman refused to do this, and they began arguing about the matter.

In the meantime the farrier was annoyed that Sındıcak had not yet returned with the horseshoes. He called his shop, "Sındıcak, what is delaying you?"

The boy called back, "Old Mother gave me what you asked for, but Young Mother will not agree to that

The farrier shouted back, "I want both of my wives to give Sındıcak what he has asked for!" Hearing that, the younger wife also gave the boy what money she had.

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With the household money in his pocket and the horseshoes in his hand, Sındıcak returned to his foster father. Unnoticed while his foster father was shoeing the horse, Sındıcak left that village and escaped into the nearby forest.

When the farrier returned home, he asked, "What has become of Sındıcak? I have not seen him since early this morning."

Both his wives said, "Earlier today Sındıcak came back here and told us to give him the money you requested. He left with that money and some horseshoes, and we have not seen him since then."

"What money are you talking about?" asked the farrier. I did not ask for any money!" He realized then that Sındıcak had tricked them. Quickly saddling his horse, he mounted and rode off in search of the boy.

When Sındıcak discovered that he was being pursued, he began running in order to stay ahead of the farrier. He soon came upon a shepherd tending his flock. He could see that the man was bald, but he asked him anyway, "Shepherd, are you bald?"

"Yes, I am," answered the shepherd.

"That is most unfortunate."

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"Why?" asked the shepherd.

"Do you see that horseman approaching? He has been sent out to skin the heads of bald men."

Frightened by this information, the shepherd said "Alas What can I do to avoid such treatment?"

"Let us exchange our clothes," said Sındıcak. "I shall pretend that I am the shepherd. Then you can climb to the top of this tree where the horseman will probably not see you." After hastily exchanging clothes, Sındıcak began tending the sheep, and the real shepherd climbed up into the top of the tree.

When the farrier rode up to the pasture, he could not recognize Sındıcak in his disguise. He called to Sındıcak, "Shepherd, have you seen a young boy around here?" Sındıcak said nothing but pointed to the man in the top of the tree. Shouting up toward the treetop, the farrier said, "Come down, Sındıcak!"

"I swear in the name of Allah that I shall never come down!"

Sındıcak then said quietly to his foster father, "It seems that he will not be brought down easily. You will have to climb the tree and catch him."

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The farrier took off his salvar,² his jacket, and also his boots, because such clothes would make climbing the tree difficult. As the farrier was climbing the tree, Sındıcak called up to him, saying, "Hey, gentleman, permit me to wear your clothes for a couple of minutes, for I have never in all my life had such beautiful clothes. When the farrier approved of this, Sındıcak dressed in his clothes. A minute or two later, he again called to the farrier, saying, "Hey, gentleman, may I ride your horse around the base of the tree a couple of times? I have never had the opportunity to ride such a fine horse before." When the farrier gave him permission, Sındıcak mounted the horse and rode away swiftly.

When the farrier reached the treetop, he felt sure that he had then captured Sındıcak. He said, "Very well! Come down with me now!"

But the shepherd replied, "No! I shall not go down with you, for if I do, you will skin my head!"

² Baggy trousers with a knee-level crotch. These were traditional Turkish pants, and a small percentage of rural Turks still wear them. Those worn by men are usually black, brown, or gray. Those worn by women are made of brightly colored cloth and tend to be more bloomery and voluminous.

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There in the top of the tree the farrier now looked very closely at the person he was pursuing and realized suddenly that it was not Sındıcak at all. "What are you talking about? Who is going to skin your head? I think that we have both been tricked

Looking down, the farrier discovered that Sındıcak had departed, leaving him without clothes or his horse. There was nothing for him to do but to walk home completely naked.

Sındıcak rode back to his home village on a fine horse, and he did so dressed in very respectable clothes. People there wondered about the changed condition of his life. They were curious about how his fortune had changed so much in such a short time

Back there in his own village, he realized one day very attractive was the wife of the hoca.³ He decided he wanted to marry that woman. He therefore went to

³A hoca is a Muslim preacher and religious leader of a community. In pre-Republican times a hoca was also a teacher, for the education of children was then the responsibility of the clergy. Even though now teachers are secular personnel, they are still sometimes alluded to (both on the grade-school/high-school level and in the university) as hoca. In this latter-day context it is more a term of sentiment than of reality.

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his mother and said, "Mother, go to the wife of the hoca and tell her that I want to marry her."

His mother replied, "That is impossible She is a married woman. I cannot do such a thing."

But Sındıcak was very stubborn, and he now threatened his mother. He said, "If you will not go and tell her what I just said, I shall kill you!"

This angered his mother, but she had no choice but to do as he had directed. She went to the hoca's home and talked with his wife. She said, "My daughter, do you know why I have come here?"

"No, aunt,⁴ I do not know.

Sındıcak's mother then said, "My son, Sındıcak, sent me here because he wants to marry you. That is the reason for my coming to visit you."

"That is all well enough," answered the hoca's wife, "but go and ask Sındıcak whether he is an enlightened man or an ignorant one.

Returning home, the mother said to Sındıcak, "I

⁴As in some other cultures, aunt and uncle are used in Turkey as terms of respect for an older person. It need not indicate any really familial connection.

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managed to visit the wife of the hoca and pass along to her your words. She told me to return and ask you if you were an enlightened man or an ignorant one."

"Go and tell her that I am both enlightened and ignorant," said Sındıcak.

When the mother returned with this answer, the hoca's wife said to her, "Have Sındıcak come and visit me at such and such a time, and we shall talk." But that clever woman also arranged to have her husband come home at about the same time the next day

On the following day the wife of the hoca prepared dough for several loaves of bread. While the dough was still rising, Sındıcak arrived at her house. After they had been talking for just a few minutes, the hoca also arrived back home. "Oh, my good Allah!" exclaimed the woman. "The hoca is at the door! Why don't you hide in the oven⁵ for awhile until I can let you out the back

⁵It is necessary to understand the nature of ovens in most rural Turkish homes in order to appreciate this situation. Turkish chimneys may be five or six feet wide at the top. But they taper outward sharply as they descend until they may be twelve to fifteen feet wide at ground level. Within that broad base will be a fireplace (used both for cooking and heating) and a very large built-in oven. Some rural homes have an outdoor oven, one constructed of stone below ground level.

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door?" Sındıcak went immediately to the oven and climbed into it.

The woman then opened the door and welcomed the hoca. Then she said to him, "I have several loaves of bread ready to bake. Will you please light the oven for me?"

When the hoca opened the oven door to light the oven, he heard coming from it these words: "No, it is not two meters It is three meters!"

When the hoca saw Sındıcak, he asked in amazement, "What are you doing in there?"

Sındıcak answered, "At the coffeehouse I made a bet with a friend about the size of your oven. He said, 'It must be a two-meter oven,' but I felt that it must be a three-meter oven."

The hoca answered, "Well, measure it and see which of you was correct."

That was the way in which Sındıcak escaped from the difficult situation he had gotten himself into.