

Story 2044 (Transcribed from  
Atatürk İlkokulu tape.)

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12

Location: Karacabey, kaza  
town of Bursa  
Province

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Timid Mehmet Ağa<sup>1</sup>

Once there was and once there wasn't a timid man named Mehmet Ağa. He was so afraid of leaving the security of his home that for a long while he did not dare to take a job. He had only the food that he could raise in his garden, and after awhile he became so hungry that he was forced to seek work.

He set out one day to find a job. After he had walked for some time, he came to a creek. On the opposite bank of that creek there was a giant who shouted to Mehmet Ağa, "Help me to cross this creek!"<sup>2</sup>

Mehmet Ağa shouted back, "You help me to cross the creek!"

This angered the giant, and he shouted to Mehmet

<sup>1</sup>There is an irony in the title of this tale. An ağa is a rural landowner, often wealthy, and sometimes powerful. The peasants who work the land of ağas have stereotyped them as harsh, demanding, and sometimes oppressive. No one thinks of an ağa as being timid or fearful.

<sup>2</sup>There is a widespread folk belief that giants, witches, and some other supernatural creatures are unable to cross running water, even if there is a bridge over that water.

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Ağa, "If I can get over to that side of the creek, I shall smash you into particles as fine as flour!" But when the giant had calmed down, he helped Mehmet Ağa to reach his own side of the creek. He then said, "Come now to our home, where six brothers and I live.

Alarmed by this information, Mehmet Ağa said, "I hope that you will prevent your brothers from eating me."

They then proceeded to the home of the giants, where Mehmet Ağa was hosted and served for a day, five days, ten days.

Then one morning the giants said, "Come, Mehmet Ağa! Let us go and get some water."

But when Mehmet Ağa looked at the size of their huge water pitchers, he realized that he could not carry one of them. He therefore answered, "Don't be stupid enough to carry water. I can dig a well right here and let the water come to us."

The giants responded, "Never mind. Forget about it. We can easily carry what water we need." On the morning of the following day the giants said, "Come, Mehmet Ağa! Let us go to the forest and gather some firewood."

Mehmet Ağa answered, "Look here! Just give me an ox

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to carry the logs, and I can cut down trees right here for firewood."

Later the giants talked among themselves about Mehmet Ağa. They said, "Let us no longer serve him. Let us get rid of him by sticking skewers into him tonight while he is sleeping."

But Mehmet Ağa had heard everything that they had said. That evening he placed a small log in his bed and covered it with a quilt. Then he himself went to the attic and slept there. The giants heated skewers in the fire until they were red-hot. Then they plunged the skewers through the quilt into the log. "Mehmet Ağa is dead," they all said.

On the following morning, however, the giants were amazed to see Mehmet Ağa at the breakfast table. They then made another plan for getting rid of him. They put him in a sack and hung the sack from a bridge at the edge of a river. Then they went to get sticks with which to beat him to death.

When Mehmet Ağa heard a flock of sheep crossing the bridge, he began shouting, "I don't want that! I don't want that!"

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When the shepherd heard Mehmet Ağa saying this, he asked, "What is it that you don't want?"

"I do not want to marry the sister<sup>3</sup> of the giants!" answered Mehmet Ağa.

"In that case, let me get into that bag. I should like very much to marry their sister. If you will allow me to replace you in that bag, you may have my flock of sheep." After Mehmet Ağa had been released, he placed the shepherd in the bag and tied it shut. Then he took the flock of sheep and set out for his own village.

When the giants returned, they beat the sack with large clubs for an hour. Feeling sure then that the body in the sack was dead, they threw the sack into the river. "That was the best way to get rid of Mehmet Ağa," they said to each other.

<sup>3</sup>Is the sister simply a desperate invention of Mehmet Ağa as a means of escape? No mention was made of a sister of the giants during Mehmet Ağa's stay at their home. However, the combination of seven brothers and a sister is a very widely used folkloric motif.

<sup>4</sup>This tale is apparently the child narrator's simplification of a very popular long and complex tale listed by Aarne and Thompson as Type 1535 and by Eberhard and Boratav as Type 351. There are in ATON sixteen variants of this longer narrative.