

Story 2112 (Miscellaneous
Tape 16, 5th item--1971)

Narrator: Faruk Gözeler

Location: Hasankale (since
then renamed
Pasinler), kaza
town of Erzurum
Province

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Two Minor Tricksters

There were two poor and unemployed friends named Ahmet and Mehmet. They decided to leave their small village and travel together to search for their fortunes. They walked and walked, and at the end of the first day they arrived at a village near Erzincan. By then they were tired and very hungry. While they were seeking a place to stay for the night, they saw an old woman who was baking a special kind of pastry called kete¹ in an outdoor oven.² Those kete biscuits smelled so delicious that Ahmet and Mehmet decided to steal them.

Ahmet said to Mehmet, "Listen to me carefully. Let us pretend to be fighting, and let us do that so noisily that the old woman will overhear us. She will come over

¹A kete is a muffin made with rice flour. It is often filled with cheese.

²An indoor oven (often built into the chimney) is called a fırın. An outdoor oven, called tandır, is a hole in the earth in the backyard. It may or may not be lined with bricks or stones.

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here to see what is the matter. I shall get her attention and keep her occupied here while you go and steal her ketes."

Attracted by the noise, the old woman went to the place where the two men pretended to be fighting. "What is going on here?" she asked. "Stop fighting with each other."

Taking the old woman's hand, Ahmet started crying and giving her an account of the hard life he had led. While this conversation was going on, Mehmet went to get the ketes. He did not find them right away, however, for it had been Ahmet, not he, who had observed the exact location of the tandır. Pretending to be still angry, Mehmet shouted back to Ahmet, "In what location would a good-for-nothing son of a dog like you come from?"

Realizing that Mehmet was asking him for directions, Ahmet answered, "I lived under the shade of a poplar tree, where it was cool even in the summer."

Finding the tandır, and taking out the ketes, Mehmet shouted back, still pretending to be angry, "If I had a sack, I should put your head in it!"

"You coward, you do not dare to come back here! That is just an excuse. If you needed a sack in which to put

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my head, you could take off your şalvar,³ tie up the ends of the legs, and carry my head in that!"

Mehmet understood this message. Taking off his şalvar, he tied shut the legs, and used that garment as a container for the ketes. He shouted back, "You may stay where you are, you son of a dog! I am leaving you!"

"No, you cannot do that! I shall catch you and beat you severely!" Saying this, Ahmet left the old woman and set out in pursuit of Mehmet. When Ahmet had overtaken his friend, the two of them sat down together and had a good meal of ketes.

The two friends then continued on their journey, and after many days, they reached İstanbul. There they spent what little money they had to rent a room for a couple of days. They realized that they now would have to use any means possible to earn some money. As they were walking

³The şalvar is a pair of baggy trousers with the crotch at about the level of the knees. Until after the middle of the 20th century both male and female villagers wore şalvar. Male şalvar are usually black, brown, or gray. Female şalvar (always more bloomerish) are almost always made of brightly colored and patterned cloth.

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down a street in Istanbul, they saw some children playing a game that involved their exchanging hats with each other. Ahmet joined that game, and when a boy threw his hat to Ahmet, the man ran away with it and sold it at a market-place. He then said to Mehmet, "Now it is your turn to make some money for us."

"I can make even more money than you did if you will help me," answered Mehmet. They went to the courtyard of a mosque while the prayer service was in progress inside. Mehmet lay down in the courtyard and pretended to be dead. When the worshipers came forth from the mosque, they saw a dead man stretched out in the courtyard with a second man (Ahmet) sitting beside the body and weeping.

A wealthy man approached Ahmet and asked, "May I help you by paying for a funeral service for this poor man?"

"Of course you may," said Ahmet. "If you give me the necessary money, I shall make all of the funeral arrangements."

As the wealthy man was handing Ahmet a good sum of money, the imam,⁴ just emerging from the mosque, observed

⁴An imam is a mosque official who conducts the organized part of a prayer service. The service may subsequently include unorganized prayers made by individual members of the congregation as part of their own private devotion.

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this and wanted some of that money for himself. Without having been asked to perform the ritual washing of the corpse, the imam at once started to heat a caldron of water for that purpose ⁵

As he was lying there awaiting the ritual washing, Mehmet was concerned about how hot the water was getting. He was also aware of being very hungry. Noticing that the imam had with him a plate of simits,⁶ Mehmet began taking simit after simit when no one was observing him. When the imam looked around and saw that there were no simits on the plate, he accused bystanders of having stolen them. "Who ate my simits?" he asked. When no one responded to this question, the imam asked, "Am I to suppose that this dead body ate my simits?"

Mehmet was taken to the cemetery in a funeral procession. After Mehmet's body had been laid in the open grave, all of the participants in the funeral except Ahmet left the cemetery. Ahmet remained to protect the body until the time it was supposed to be covered with earth. He sat

⁵Muslim burial must be preceded by ritual washing of the corpse. A fee is always paid to the person administering this cleansing.

⁶A simit is a crisp ring of pastry about 5 or 6 inches in diameter. Usually sesame seeds are sprinkled on the tops of simits.

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quietly behind a gravestone and soon fell asleep.

In the meantime five thieves slipped silently into the cemetery where they could, they thought, be alone to divide the booty taken during several robberies. The leader of these criminals began to dole out the ill-gained loot: "This is your share. This is your share," and so on.

When Mehmet had heard all five thieves receive their respective shares, he called loudly from the grave, "But where is my share?"

This question from the grave terrorized the thieves so completely that they dropped everything and fled wildly. Ahmet and Mehmet took all of the plunder which the thieves had acquired, and they lived upon it very comfortably for the rest of their days on earth.