

Story #577 (Tape erased)

Narrator: Mehmet Genişgen  
("Dımbır" Mehmet)

Location: Taşköprü, kaza town  
of Kastamonu Province

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Lying and Dividing Eggs for Sultan Mahmut IV

Sultan Mahmut<sup>1</sup> once wanted to hear the biggest lie that could be told in the country. He had had made a golden sphere weighing sphere -- of gold nine kilos, and he had had this hung from the ceiling of his chamber.

of the famous liars were invited to participate in a lying contest [to win the golden sphere].

Zeki, son of Ahmet Riza<sup>2</sup>, Pasha of Edirne, rode to the palace one day and was brought into the presence of Sultan Mahmut to tell his lie. He told his lie, and Sultan Mahmut was so pleased with the performance that he gave him the golden ball.

Zeki returned to Edirne, and on the way, near the outskirts of Edirne, he met a shepherd. He asked the shepherd, "Why do you not win a ball like this by going to the palace and telling a lie?"

"I am just a simple shepherd. I am not capable of doing anything but take care of my flock."

But when the shepherd went home and told his wife about this, she sent him to the palace of the padişah with a large pot -- earthenware earthenware pot. When he arrived there, the viziers asked him, "What will you do with this empty pot in the presence of the padişah?"

<sup>1</sup> Many Turkish comic tales are set in the reign of Sultan Murad IV (1623-1640) and Sultan Mahmut IV (1648-1687). Peasant narrators have only the vaguest ideas about the characters or dates of such sultans but simply follow folktale tradition in naming these rulers.

<sup>2</sup> In the Ottoman period there were more than a dozen Ahmet Pashas of distinction, though none was named Ahmet Riza Pasha. The reference here is probably the result of mere name dropping by the illiterate narrator.

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The shepherd did not answer, but when he appeared before the sultan, he said, "Efendi, my father once gave your father, the late Sultan, a pot full of gold. I have come to take it back."

The pot was measured, and it was found to hold twelve petrol cans<sup>3</sup> of gold. "Why did you not come before now?" asked the sultan.

"Because I did not need it back until now," said the shepherd.

The sultan consulted with his viziers, and they came to the conclusion that this was not so. "What you are claiming is not true!" said Mahmut.

As soon as the shepherd heard the sultan say that, he said, "I claim the golden sphere!"

Mahmut said, "If your wife comes and answers a question I shall put to her, I shall present her with a farm and a mansion." The woman was instructed on how to behave in the presence of the sultan. When she arrived, the padişah said again, "If you can answer the following question, I shall present you with a farm and a mansion. --If I give you five eggs to divide evenly among yourself, your husband, and me, how would you do this?"

*Division -- of five eggs -- among  
three people  
Eggs -- five -- to be divided  
among three people*

"I would give you one egg, your majesty, and this (excuse me) with the two between your legs would make a total of three for you. I would give my husband one egg, and this (excuse me) with the two between his legs would make a total of three for him. Then, since I have no eggs between my legs, I would take the remaining three. Thus each of us would have three eggs."

<sup>3</sup> Used five-gallon British petrol cans are favorite containers for many purposes in rural Turkey. It is obviously an anachronism to introduce petrol cans into the court of Sultan Mahmut IV.

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The Sultan agreed that the woman had answered the question correctly, and he awarded her a farm and a mansion with it.