



The Seller of Sesame Rings

1 It is early morning in Istanbul as Saif sets out with his tray of sesame seed rings. If he is lucky, he will sell them all by midday, granting him the entire afternoon to himself.

Taking the tray from his head, he sets up his stool near the beggar, Hafiz, who lies in his handcart, hand stretched out, begging alms.

Saif takes a walnut from his pocket, and gives it to Hafiz in a gesture of friendship. And a sesame seed ring. It is this way every day, as it has been for many years - the seller and the beggar. Together, they watch the world passing by.

2 The Festival of Eid ul-Adha has begun: four days of sacrifice. Already some people walk past, holding the pieces of lamb they have bought from the markets. This will be cooked for the feast on the Festival's last night. Elsewhere, sheep and goats have been tethered on vacant land, ready for slaughter.

Saif tells Hafiz how his neighbours borrowed a car to bring two sheep from the country, but the sheep refused to jump from the boot. So one was dragged by the horns, the other tugged by its fleece.

3 A cat slinks past, stops and comes over to Saif, hoping for food. "Be off with you!" he

hisses. "I have nothing to give you. Go beg at the alleyways where they cut up meat." The cat runs off.

4 Now a man stops on the corner. He wears fine clothes and on his wrist sits a falcon, secured by a cord. Magnificent bird; on its head a leather hood hides its eyes from sighting prey. Saif runs up to the man and persuades him to buy two rings.

Soon, the yoghurt seller stops to talk, and not long after, the seller of halva. Saif sells them two sesame rings.

5 Then comes an old man down the street, carrying a fish by the tail. Lamb and goat are luxuries only some can afford, but fish are for all to share. He tells how he caught it from the bridge that spans the Bosphorus. This one he is taking home for his supper, and to go with it, yes, a sesame ring.

"Thank you." Saif pockets the money. "Take care not to drop your fish. The tail may be slippery."

Other eyes watch the fish passing. The cat from its doorway; thin and hungry. It knows to avoid the boots of the crowd, but with the crowd gone, it will slink from the shadows, hoping for something — anything.

7 "Perhaps I should try to sell postcards," says Hafiz. "Or dishes of birdseed for the pigeons."

Their conversation plays out in this manner each day. Every time, Saif tells his friend that he is already doing the job that he is best at — keeping the sesame ring seller company.



8 Here comes Tariq, the albino, on his way to market. His small brother Yusuf leads him by the hand, for the sun is fierce on Tariq's pale eyes and he squints to avoid it. At the market, they load the tables with cheap shoes and clothes that the merchants pay little for. They greet Hafiz and Saif as they pass.

9 Today, the first time in Saif's memory, a poet walks through the banks of stalls. His beard is neatly trimmed, he is clothed all in green. Hafiz asks the man to sing a tale for him. Saif sees the reaction the poet's words have on the beggar's face, and smiles. He gives him a sesame ring for his beautiful talent.

10 The poet leaves and it seems as if the street has lost some of its colour. Hafiz draws his blanket around his shoulders. Already the

nights are becoming colder and longer. Piles of wood and straw are stacked on the balconies of flats, for the coming winter.

A door opens and a woman empties a pail of dirty water from her scrubbed floor. It trickles down the pavement, collecting in pools where the marble slabs are broken. Hafiz's handcart sits in water until Saif pulls him to a new dry spot beside his stall.

11 It is growing cooler. A wind has sprung up, stirring the dirt of the road, causing Saif and Hafiz to shield their eyes. In the market,

merchants have packed up and covered their stalls.

Saif has sold his last sesame ring. He offers to take Hafiz home and he accepts, gladly. Saif pushes the handcart along the pavement, and talks of their morning. No great riches, but a little, enough. One must work for his bread, the other accepts what others may give him.

Questions

1 How does Saif carry his goods?

- a on a tray
- b in a basket
- c in his pocket

2 How many days does the Festival of Eid ul-Adha last?

- a two
- b three
- c four

3 What is not a luxury that only some people can afford?

- a lamb
- b fish
- c goat

4 Why did Tariq's brother have to lead him to market?

- a He has weak legs.
- b He has cheap shoes and clothes.
- c He has to squint in the sunlight.

5 Who has a beautiful talent?

- a the poet
- b the yoghurt seller
- c the man with the magnificent bird

6 How do we know it can be unpleasant on the streets?

- a They are always noisy.
- b There are many animals there.
- c The streets are dirty and waste is thrown on them.

Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- 7 Roped or chained an animal to one spot (2)
- 8 Food made from milk (4)
- 9 Creep or sneak (5)
- 10 People who trade and sell goods (8)
- 11 How a small amount of water moves (10)

Grammar

The words in **BLUE** appear in the text. Match them by writing the correct antonym shown in **RED**.

E.g. **under** / **over**

- 12 **early** **first**
- 13 **last** **buy**
- 14 **old** **late**
- 15 **sell** **young**

Back To The Text

- 16 What part of speech is the word *leather* in section 4?
a noun b adjective
- 17 What would be a good sub-heading for section 5?
a The Fish b The Cat

- 18 The purpose of this text is
a to persuade you to try sesame rings.
b to recount a day in Saif's life.

Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happened first. Choose **a** or **b**.

- 19 a Saif gives his friend a walnut.
b The cat makes its first appearance.
- 20 a The fisherman visits.
b The man with the falcon stops.
- 21 a The woman throws the water out.
b The halva seller stops to buy rings.

Think About This

- 22 The Bosphorus in section 5 is likely to be
a a bridge.
b a stretch of water.
c the name of a large boat.
- 23 Study the image on the front of the card carefully. Who do we see?
a Saif and Tariq.
b Tariq and Hafiz.
c Saif and Hafiz.

Challenge Option

Drawing: Do a sketch of the hungry cat from the main text.

