

Story #153 (Tape 1969-1)

Narrator: Mehmet Seyyar, circa 55

Location: Culluk Köy  
Haymana kaza  
Ankara vilayet

Date: Spring 1969

My Return from World War I

During World War I I was a soldier, but I deserted from the army [and started walking home]. I came to a village where I got a job as a farm hand. I stayed there for some time. My salary was two golden liras a month. I slept on a bench in the horse stable. It was a bench built especially for me, a high bench.

My first job on that farm was to get in the harvest, and after that I went to the forest with two donkeys to bring back firewood. I gathered wood and put it together in bundles, and then I went in search of the donkeys [which he had left to graze] in order to load the wood on them and bring it back. I noticed then some camels there. I said to myself, "Let me take a look at these camels before I get my donkeys." I saw that a number of camel drivers had stopped there and that they were cooking pilav. They invited me to join them, and we ate pilav and meat. Then I arose and took leave of them.

They said, "Very well. You may leave if you wish."

Because my donkeys had tried to run away, I had tied their necks together with a long rope and allowed them to graze. When the donkeys were some distance apart, one of the camels had come between them. When the camel had stood up straight and raised its head, the rope was lifted up by its neck, and this had strangled the two donkeys. When I saw what had happened, I ran forward, took out my knife, and cut the rope. But, alas, when I did this, the two donkeys dropped down dead on either side of the camel. I was

completely at a loss as to what to do now, for I had hoped to be able to save at least one of the donkeys. I took the saddles from the backs of the donkeys and the ropes from the bundles of wood, and putting these things on my back, I returned with them to the village.

When I rang the doorbell [obvious anachronism and evidence of acculturation], my master's wife looked out at me from an upper window. She saw that I had two saddles on my back. She came down and let me in and asked, "Oh, Mehmet Ağa! What have you done?"

I told her what had happened, except that I did not tell her I had seen the camel drivers and had eaten pilav with them. I told her that I had tied the donkeys together because that was what she had told me to do, but that a camel had come between them and, raising its neck, had strangled both of them.

She looked at me with a sour expression, but as I was on especially good terms with this woman, she agreed not to report this to her husband, who was, in fact, an "internal bridegroom."\* She said, "It is all right. May your and my souls live long [i.e., he is a good fellow]. "Such things do happen at times. He can buy other donkeys. Come, let us eat."

While we were eating, the Ağa, my master, returned. He asked, "Oh, Mehmet, are you back?" Then he added, "I was invited to a wedding at such-and-such a village, and there I absent-mindedly left my fur lined coat. Go to that village and bring the coat back."

"Yes, Master," I said. I went to that village, which is about the same

\* "An internal bridegroom" is a man whose family is too poor to take him and his bride into its home. The wife's people take bridegroom in or provide him with a separate house & furniture etc. Such a man is looked down upon, and is often accorded little respect by his wife.

distance from here as Kadiköy is. There I found the fur-lined coat hanging on a wall. I took the coat down, put it over my shoulder, and started walking back. Along the way 8 or 10 dogs surrounded me. They were sheep dogs. When they started to charge at me, I had no stick in my hand, and so I tried to drive them off by swinging the coat at them. The dogs kept biting the coat as I swung it around, and they were biting pieces out of it. By the time I reached home, half of the coat was gone. Finally, I was rescued by the shepherds who, having cooked pilav and meat, invited me to eat with them. After eating, I started for home again. Looking at the fur coat, I saw many shreds hanging down from the front of it.

My master's wife asked, "Well, did you bring it back?"

"Yes, I did, but the situation is such-and-such."\*\* The dogs tore pieces out of it because I had no stick to drive them off and protect myself. I decided to sacrifice the coat rather than my own life."

She said nothing. She just threw it aside and took another fur coat from a closet and hung it on the wall.

When the aya came, he said, "Welcome!" [Hoşgeldiniz]

"I feel welcomed." [Hoş bulduk]

"Did you bring my fur coat back?"

"Yes."

"Oh, but this is not the fur coat I wore."

His wife interrupted here and said, "No, but that one was a bit soiled,

\*\*In the summer of 1970 we noted frequent telescoping of tales we collected by the use of the expressions filan, filan, and böyle, böyle. Such-and-such a place, such-and-such a person, such-and-such a situation. While it is true that these were often economical expressions, the listeners being fully aware of the reference, this is a departure from the practice of many good raconteurs of folktales. They usually repeat the whole element; though audience knows the formula, it enjoys the repetition.

and so I got out this one. Wear this one until I can wash the mud from the other." In that way I got past this problem.

As I said earlier, I used to sleep in the stable where the agá kept a pair of oxen and a riding horse. I took care of these animals and I slept in the same stable. I had a small oil lamp for light, and I had a box of matches. After a while, one of the oxen became ill.

My master's wife said, "Mehmet, keep this knife with you. If the ox becomes worse, you can slaughter it to prevent it from dying without being properly bled [otherwise the meat would be haram], so we can distribute its flesh among our poor neighbors."

"All right," I said. That night I returned to the stable rather late, for I had been visiting here and there. I went straight to bed after putting the lamp and match box somewhere near me. During the night I suddenly heard some noises and some kicking. I supposed that the ox was dying. Trying to find the lamp, I knocked it down and lost it in the dark. I looked for it but couldn't find it anywhere. In the meantime, the noises grew louder, and I felt sure that the ox was dying. Deciding to slaughter it, I took out the knife and cut its throat. Then I returned to bed and went back to sleep.

In the morning the master's wife came. When she went to the stable and looked, we saw that I had slaughtered the horse, not the ox. "Mehmet, why did you do this? You killed the horse instead of the ox."

"No, lady, I killed the ox," I said, but when I looked, I saw that it was the horse I had killed. Although the woman said nothing harsh--I was on very good terms with her, and since her husband was an "internal bridegroom," he couldn't say anything either--I decided to leave. I waited for the night to leave. I had worked there for two months, and they owed me four golden liras, but never mind that. I just took my knapsack and ran away.

It was almost dawn by the time I reached the outskirts of another village, and I was hungry. I said to myself, "Let me go to one of those houses and ask for some bread." But I noticed that the woman from one house was going to the village fountain to get water, and so I decided to enter her house while she was away and steal some bread. But the woman saw me going to her house, and she returned. When I saw her returning, I got into the flour bin and hid myself there. But the woman would not return to the fountain. I thought I would wait, then, until she went to bed, and then I would be able to get out and escape. But she did not go away from the bin. Her husband had gone to the flour mill. About midnight, someone came and knocked on the door. The woman admitted him, and sometime later someone else knocked, and she admitted him, too, and put the first man in the wheat bin next <sup>to</sup> bin I was in. She talked for a while with this second man very amorously.

Shortly after this her husband arrived home from the mill with 7 or 8 donkeys to which he kept saying, "Chush, mush," and other things one says to donkeys. She admitted him into another grain room. Neither of the two men [her lovers, i.e.] had any knowledge of me or of each other. The husband unloaded the donkeys and tied them up in the stable.

"Come, my man," the woman said, "and have something to eat."

"No, woman, I must first put the flour in the flour bin. Then we shall eat."

Although the woman urged him to eat first, the man refused, saying he had to tend to the flour first. He untied the mouth of a sack and poured the flour into the bin, right on top of me, filling my ears and eyes with flour when it went "Pouf!" and spilled into the bin. I tried to keep

rising with the level of the flour, but by the time the bin was almost filled, I was almost suffocated. I noticed through an open door a new building nearby that was under construction. I decided to escape and hide in that new building. When they went for another sack of flour, I got out of the bin, ran out the door, and decided to climb to the roof of the house under construction. But the man, who had seen me, ran after me to try to catch and beat me. I ran, turning this way and that. I saw a (pardon the word) donkey saddle hanging of the wall. I grabbed this and lifted it up to throw it at him, but the girth strap got around my neck, and when I threw the saddle, it pulled me forward and I fell. The man caught me and hit me several times, but finally I managed to get away.

"You God-damned man," I said, "I am a poor soldier in need of bread." While he was dealing with me, the other two men had escaped.

I started walking again and reached another village. It was raining rope" [i.e. very hard, streaks of rain looking like continuous strings rather than like drops]. I noticed at the bottom of the village a house from which a light shone. "Let me go there and ask for some bread," I said to myself. When I got there, I found a lone woman in the house, pregnant, and having labor pains

She said, "Brother, I can't give you any bread. Go to that other house there. Ask the old woman who lives there for bread, and tell her to come to help me bear this child."

I went to that house and told the old woman to come, but she was too feeble even to stand up. She said, "I am too old, and my eyes are too to see to go there."

I said, "I'll carry you."

"All right," she said

The rain kept falling in ropes. I carried the old woman for some distance when my collar button began to pinch my neck because she kept pulling back on my shoulders. It was pitch dark and the rain was coming down in ropes. I said, "Grandmother, I'll put you down a minute and unbutton my collar, if you do not mind." There was a deep pit full of water there which I could not see, and when I put her down, she disappeared in that pool of water. I tried hard to pull her up, but I couldn't. The village watchman approached blowing his whistle. As I kept trying to recover the woman, she sank deeper and deeper, until finally I could not even reach her. When I saw the bekçi coming, I ran from the place as quickly as I could, and finally I reached my own village safely.