Story #401 (Tape #4, 1972)

Narrator: Ziyci Uğurlu, Muhtar of the village, which was actually of nahiye status

Location: Karkın Yenice nahiye, kaza of Kaman, Province of Kırşehir

Date: May 21, 1972

A Thief’s Single Virtue Is Rewarded

Ahmet Uysal: "Where did you hear this tale?"

Narrator: "I heard it from a friend at Kayseri. It is about the subject of virtue, something the whole nation must have if it is to be an upright nation."

Once upon a time there was a thief. There was not a single person who had not been swindled by him. He tried to steal from anyone he happened to meet. After stealing so much, he came to be known widely in the country. There was no one who had not heard of him. Whoever he approached put himself on guard, so that in time he could not steal anything from anybody. No one would let himself be swindled by him. He finally decided, "This country has now become haram to me. Let me go to some other area."

He went to a big province like Ankara, where he checked into a hotel. He said to the hotel manager, "I’ll stay in your hotel and eat in your

The Moslem concepts of helal and haram have been discussed at greater length in earlier tales. Briefly, helal is that which is blessed, something for which one owes no debt, even of gratitude. That which is haram is something which is forbidden to a person, something to which he does not have a clear right."
He left his suitcase in the hotel, and every day he lived there. He was planning to steal all the furniture in the hotel, and for this reason he was studying the roads [For his getaway]. Thinking, "Which route will be the best to take when I loot the hotel?" he learned all the streets in the area. He noticed that some stores had two flags stuck on the front, whereas some had four. He came back to the hotel.

The hotel manager thought him a wealthy businessman. "How do you like our province, sir?" he asked.

"I like it very much, but I cannot understand one thing about it."

"What is that?"

"Some shops have two yellow flags and one white flag, whereas some stores have two yellow and two white flags. What do these flags mean?"

"Sir, they show the wealth of the owner of the shop. For example, if a shop has five red flags, it means that the owner is indicating the fact that he is a lord [Loan word = lord]."

The reason that the swindler was curious about the number of flags was that he thought perhaps they might stand for the number of guards each store keeper had to protect himself, and he thought perhaps they might catch him when he was carrying goods away. He...
let his wits work a little and said to himself, "I shall hang up
ten yellow and ten white flags on the front of this hotel," so that
the entire province would worship him as if he were a lord. As he
had not even 5 kurush, he requested from the motel manager 10 yellow
and 10 white flags. He nailed the flags on the upper part of the
hotel where he had taken a room.

The news was spread in the Province of Ankara that a gentleman
had checked into a hotel and that he had nailed ten yellow and ten
white flags on his hotel. "Oh!" they said. "Was there ever such
a wealthy man in this country?" The Governor and the pashas of the
province said, "Well, such a wealthy man has come to our city! Let
us go and pay him a visit. Let us go and talk with him and pay
him our respects." They sent him word, saying, "The Governor, the
Pasha, the general, and the kaymakam will visit you on such and
such a day."\(^2\)

He told the restaurant manager, "You see I'm having guests on
such and such a day. You make your preparations accordingly. Let
me see you show whatever you have—food, drinks. You will be paid
at the beginning of next month."

\(^2\)There is a duplication in functions here. In older times pasha
meant general, but often one who was the military governor of an
area. Here we also have a governor and a general—general here
being a loan word in Turkish, pronounced with a hard ğ. Modern
generals are still sometimes called pasha, but there is an anachro-

nism here in having a governor, a pasha, and a general on the
scene together.
When the restaurant manager heard this, he made his preparations and prepared everything. His visitors arrived in the evening. "Selâmünaleyküm," "Aleyküm selâm," they greeted each other. After the usual palaver ḥos bes, they questioned each other on the welfare of their respective "countries" haş̲e melekotler and they ate and drank and talked. Finally, they took leave and said goodbye.

On reaching the salon of the hotel, the Governor, who had a single daughter, asked his attendant whether their host was married or not. "Go and ask," he said.

The attendant said, "Very well, my Pasha, I shall find out for you."

"The Governor-Bey wants to know whether you are married or single," the attendant said to the host.

The host replied, "Brother, I am a bachelor."

The attendant returned to the Governor and said, "My Pasha, he says he is a bachelor."

"Then," the Governor said to his attendant, "you quietly let him know that the Governor has a single daughter worthy of him. 'Of course, you are an important man,' you should say, 'and so is the Governor-Bey, and he wants to have you as a son-in-law. What do you think about this?'

When the Governor's attendant put this question to the host, he first hesitated and then said, "Give me a day to think it over."

3Here the governor is called pasha, a sign of respect.
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The next morning, the Governor's attendant called to get his decision.

"right," the man said, "I shall marry her."

They discussed the details of the wedding, and they agreed finally on having the wedding in a month's time.

In the meantime, an infidel had died, leaving a large block of apartments. This infidel had no heir. There was a war, and many infidels were thrown into the sea and their property was going to be sold by the state at an auction. The Governor suggested to the prospective bridegroom, "I am the Governor of this province, and you are a wealthy man around here. It wouldn't look quite right if my daughter went to a hotel as a bride. The community would look down on us for doing such a thing. There is an apartment house that is being sold by public auction. Let us buy that apartment for you. Thus I shall be relieved, and it will also be very good for you."

The man bid for the apartment, and, with a little help by the Governor, he showed some favoritism to his son-in-law, the building went to him as the highest bidder for 18,000 red gold liras, but on the condition that it be paid at the first of the next month. The Governor's son-in-law moved into this apartment.

Any member of a minority group might be called an infidel. There is no indication here as to whether it was a Christian, a Jew, or someone of another faith.
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When it was near the end of the month, the Governor sent word to his son-in-law, saying, "After all, this apartment house is government property. It has been already paid for by state funds, and when the first of the month comes, all the state officials will be expecting their salaries. Therefore, please send the money for the apartment house." He sent his attendant with this message to the son-in-law.

The attendant came to him and delivered the message.

He said, "All right. I shall do it."

He thought of fleeing, for he did not have the money. That province was not far from the sea, and he went to the seaside. The Governor's attendant came to him again. In the meantime, his wife complained to her father about her husband, saying, "Although we were married yesterday, this man would not come near me until the morning. He kept walking back and forth all the time. All the time he was 'zero up and zero down.' I think he was calculating the cost of the apartment and as soon as he finishes his calculations, we'll pay for the apartment house."

The man was thinking very deeply all this time, saying to

5. The new location of the thief was called at first a large province, like Ankara. Subsequently it was referred to as Ankara. Ankara is deep in the central part of Turkey, and there is no sea within 100 miles in any direction.

6. The Turkish here is sıfır yük, sıfır ağacı—zero high and zero low, an idiom signifying that one's efforts are fruitless. English slang expressions that might be equivalents are getting nowhere fast, and spinning one's wheels.
himself, "I have swindled so many people in so many places in his own
mehmleket/ and "burnt" so many people literally, but I haven't
prospered at all. If I sleep with the daughter of such a Pasha today,
I'll never prosper in the future at all. Let me run away without
touching this girl."

When the Governor's attendant arrived and told her the Governor-
Bey wanted the money for the apartment, the Governor's daughter told
him that the bridegroom had gone to the seaside. When the girl was
sweeping the apartment, she noticed that there were three cases down
below, in the basement. She opened one of them and found it was full
of red gold liras, which had actually been left by the infidel owner
of the building. As the infidel had suffered "having his fireplace
sunk into the earth," the state had sealed up the property. No one,
therefore, knew anything about the cases of money. The bride thought
that the money in the cases was her husband's money, and she thought
that the reason he stayed away from her all this time was probably
that he was making calculations in his mind about his business. What
a rich man he must be!

The girl said to her father's attendant, "Take my greetings to

7To have the fire of one's hearth extinguished is a very old meta-
phor for having been vanquished or destroyed. It has been used in
Turkish stories from very ancient times. It is used at the end of
the first legend of The Book of Dede Korkut, p. 22 of the Sümé-
my father, and tell him I shall pay his money, but ask him to invite
his son-in-law and also tell him not to criticize me."

"Very well, Madam," said the attendant.

The bride counted 18,000 gold liras into the hand of the atten-
dant. "Please tell my father to ask his son-in-law to visit him,
for he might criticize me and put me in an awkward situation."

The attendant took the money to the Governor and said, "My
Pasha, I have brought you the greetings of your daughter. She re-
quests you to ask your son-in-law to visit you and to tell him that
you have received the money so that her husband ought not to cri-
ticize her."

In the meantime, a ship appeared, and the swindler was getting
ready to board it. He knew nothing of the money in the cases. He
had only one thought, and that was to get away from the place.
Before he boarded the ship, the Governor's attendant arrived. "Sir,
the Governor would like to see you," he said.

The swindler wondered why the Governor should want to see him.
He wondered if he wanted to give him some pocket money.

The Governor, on the other hand, had piled up on his desk the
gold sent by his daughter. The swindler came to the Governor's
office hastily and saw the pile of gold coins on his desk. Making
up his mind that he would take a couple hundred gold liras from the
pile, he sat down and asked, "What is your wish, Father?"

"Son, this money from the case, 18,000 gold liras, is what
you have paid for the apartment house. This is the 29th day of the month. On the first day of the month, all the state officials get their salaries. My daughter, your wife, has sent me the money, but please do not rebuke her too harshly for this."

"No, no—of course not. What difference is there between her money and mine? We own everything jointly."

"Thank you. May you live long," said the Governor.

He walked out of the Governor's office. The ship was about to sail, but he wanted to discover where and how his wife had managed to get that money. He returned quickly and asked his wife, "Where did you get that money?"

"From the case," she answered.

"Which case?"

She showed him where the case was, but he didn't know how to open it. The Governor's daughter knew how to open it. She opened it, and there were millions of gold liras in it. "Open that next one," he said. It, too, was full of red gold liras.

He called the restaurant manager and the hotel manager and paid

\[\text{This is the second time that the governor says that the state officials will not receive their salaries unless the thief pays for the apartment house he has bought. Peasants in Turkey have very vague notions about the operation of the government, including its financing. It is, of course, ridiculous to think that the state payroll will not be funded unless heirless property is impounded by the state and sold at a high price.}\]
them all his debts. Then he was united with his wife, and they lived very happily.

You see, straightforwardness is the best policy in life. If he had contacted the Governor's daughter that night, he would never have been able to prosper.  

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9 It is ironic that a notorious thief should eventually come into a fortune and be held up as an example of virtue. He realizes the fortune because he does not sleep with his legal bride, which causes her to search the house, find the gold, and account for his neglect of her as a result of his preoccupation with business concerns. The peasant mind cherishes the trickster type—which the thief is until almost the end; it also cherishes virtue. Usually, however, the two elements are kept separate, in different tales.