Story #533 (1969 Tape #12)  

**Narrator:** Mehmet Tekçe, a green grocer, and thus often called Manav Mehmet

**Location:** Aliçerçi village; kaza of Bozkır, Province of Konya. Taping was done at nearby village of Akpanar, in the same kaza.

**Date:** October 1969

The Woes of a Military Recruit from a Village

This is what happened to me in the army after I was called up for military service. At that time I still did not know how many days there were in a week. One day two officers—one was a lieutenant and the other a staff officer—came out and stood in the center of a group of recruits, questioning them about the days in the week. "How many days are there in a week?" they asked.

Those who knew the answer were counting, "Çarşamba, persembe, turgamba," and so on, and they were getting all of the days correctly. There were two men ahead of me to be questioned, and I was terrified, for I did not know what to do. The lieutenant said, "I do not know all of your names and so when I point at you and whistle, you will stand up. Keep looking me in the eye all of the time." He pointed at the fellow next to me, and he stood up. The lieutenant stood right in front of me, but I was looking at his boots. He finally whistled at me and said, "Hey!" No noise came from me. I was quieter than a corpse. He then said to a man next to me, "Get him up!" This man grabbed me under the chin and pulled me to my feet.

The lieutenant asked, "How many days are there in a week?"

"Nine days, sir," I said. When I said that, the staff officer

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1 Wednesday, Thursday, but there is no day of the week named turgamba.
disappeared, and the lieutenant turned away and held a handkerchief over
his mouth [to suppress his laughter].

Then the lieutenant turned back to me and said, "All right. Name
them."

I started, "Cuma pazari, cumartesi pazari, Hoca Koy pazari, Ahirli
pazari, Giveri pazari, Giveri, Giveri eresi," and then I was stuck. ² Both
officers had now disappeared. I discovered later that they had both hidden
behind a column to laugh. When they came back, I was still standing there,
like a milkman's horse.

"You damned fool, sit down!" the lieutenant said.

There were two fellow-citizens of mine there from Konya, and I was
very much ashamed, for I had disgraced the name of Konya. But apparently
there was someone even more stupid than I who thought that there were
twelve days in the week.

"Ahmet of Bolvadin." ³

"Yes, sir," he said. "At your command, sir." He was a tall fellow,

"How many days are there in a week?"

"Twelve days, sir."

"Count them out."

² The village boy here confuses pazari (market) and pazari days with
Pazartesi (Monday). City districts and adjacent villages have market days
on different days of the week, thus Monday will be one village's pazari or
bazaar day (its open market day, when farmers bring their produce for sale),
and another village will have Tuesday as its market day, and so on. The nar-
rator here names the various village pazars as if they were days of the week,
days on the calendar. Hoca Koy is a village, as is Ahirli. Cuma and Cumartesi
are Friday and Saturday, but then he adds market (pazari) to each.

³ Bolvadin is a kaza in the Province of Afyon Karahisar

⁴ Zomari is listed neither in the dictionary of standard Turkish nor in
the three-volume dialect dictionary published by the Dil Kurumu between
1939 and 1947.
"Ishaklı Pazarı, Kula Gidimi, Kula Gelimi, Afyon Derneği, Çay Pazarı, Akşehir Pazarı."5

"You lack two," said the lieutenant. "Are there not two more market days?"

"No, sir."

lieutenant made him sit down. Then the staff officer came out. He said, "Children, I shall not make a great issue of your ignorance of the days of the week, for I know that your parents neglected your education, and there were no schools in your villages. But pay good attention to your lessons here, for you must make a good impression on your day of inspection. If you fail on that day, I shall burn you all."

When the officers were leaving, a sergeant shouted, "Attention!" and all of the soldiers stood up. Well, now that the officers have gone, let us see what the sergeant will do to us. I was made to stand up.

"Did we ever teach you such a lesson as that? Saying cuma pazarı, cumartesi pazarı, like that? Where did you learn all of that?"

"Well--may she rest in peace--my mother used to count the days of the week like that," I said.

"May donkeys rape your mother!" said the sergeant. "You son of a donkey! What good is your mother's week here?" They gave me a severe beating upon that occasion, so severe that I would kiss the ground and arise again.

5 These supposed names of days of the week are equally spurious. Most of them also refer to market days at specific towns. Çay Pazarı means simply Tea Market.

6 This is one of the most offensive epithets used in verbal abuse in Turkey.
They then passed on to the Bolvadin man. "Stand up," said the sergeant. "We understand about the kaza town of Ishakli [The recruit had given Ishakli Pazari] as a day of the week, but what about Saplı?" Is there such a place as Saplı?" They gave him a good beating too, saying, "Where did you learn this?"

"My grandmother counted days of the week this way."

"Well, may donkeys rape both your mother and your grandmother!" As they said this, they sent him sprawling on the ground again.

The next day Ahmet and I talked about this in the barracks. I said, "Ahmet, our weeks are no good here. By Allah, they will kill us on account of these weeks!"

"That is the only way I know it [The week]" he said.

They gave us many more beatings. One day our captain saw the regimental commander, and he said to him, "Sir, if we allow these fools to appear on inspection day, they will ruin us. What can we do with them?"

"Send one of them to Fikrit Bey as his orderly, and have the other tend a stable."

Since the Bolvadin man was a tall fellow, they took him to a stable containing forty French mules which had already kicked to death three or four soldiers. One day when the regimental commander was inspecting that stable, he saw Ahmet of Bolvadin with a can of manure in one hand and a broom in the other. The officer signaled to him to stand at attention and report his duties. When Ahmet of Bolvadin

7 The word saplı here would seem to be a contracted form of sabahları, meaning in the morning or the next day. Peasants often take one day to go to a nearby market and sell their produce or wares, and then they will return on the next day. Thus a market session is for them a two-day venture. Ahmet did not give the names of two days for the Ishakli market session, but he did for the one at Kula—Go-to-Kula day and Come-from-Kula day.
did nothing of the sort, the regimental commander asked him, "Hey, who am I?"

"Yes, you are Ali Baba, sir."

The colonel slapped him hard. "You do not even know my name!"

"Well, sir, they called you Ali Baba, and so that was what I learned."

Although they beat him many times there in the stable, they were unable to train him properly. They took me to an officer to be his orderly. He had a wife and a child, and when I reached their home, I found the lady making lace. She dumped a great many spoons and forks before me and told me to polish them with oak wood ashes, wash them in soapy water, dry them with a towel, and then pack them in a suitcase. I was just nodding at what she said. When she returned to making lace, the baby in the cradle cried. She left her lace, went to the cradle, and started to sing a lullaby.

"May you become a lieutenant, my son--

Nin-nin-i.

May you become a captain, my child--

Nin-nin-i.

May you become a major, my son--

Nin-nin-i.

May you become a marshall, my son--

Nin-nin-i.

My Ali!

Nin-nin-i.

My lamb!

Nin-nin-i."
Nin-nin-i.

While I was polishing the spoons, I was watching her with my mouth open. "Your ladies do this--don't they?" she asked.

"What ladies are you talking about? We have no ladies," I said.

"Well, what have you got?"

"Just wives."

"How are your wives?"

"They are not bare-legged, as you are. They wear baggy trousers and are completely covered all around.

She had a good laugh over this. She used to send me to do her shopping. I used to buy two of the things she would order but forget two other things. Her husband, Fikret Bey, said to her, when he had come home, "Let us send this fellow back. Why should we bother with him? Let us get someone else."

"No, leave it to me," she said. "I shall not send Mehmet away."

reason for saying this was that she liked my talk. She would me, "Mehmet!"

I would never appear before she had called three times.

After the third call, I would answer, "What's the matter? I have just gotten down to the basement!" I never used Efendim when I spoke to her.

8 Janitors and other attendants often live in the basements of the apartment buildings where they work.

9 Efendim is a word of deference, My sir or My Madam.
She said to her husband, "I shall get him used to our way of living. We have a grocer and a green-grocer to whom I can write notes about what I want, and he can carry the goods back." One day she said to me, "Go and fetch two cans of clean water."

I took the cans and went to the fountain, expecting that it would be like the one in my village where the water runs continuously. I saw there something red, like a cock's comb, but I did not know how to turn it on. I was not even sure that that was the fountain, and so I walked past it several times. Some officers came from the other direction as I was standing by the fountain, and, as you know, I was terrified by officers.

"Why are you standing here?" one of them asked.

"I am supposed to get some clean water."

"Well, why don't you get it?"

"I can't find the water," I said.

"You bear," he said, pulling me by the ear and putting my head beneath the faucet. He turned on the faucet, and, by Allah, there was fush-sh-sh, and all my face and my hands were covered with foam.

"Oh," I said, "then this is what clean water is." When I pulled can away, all of the whiteness disappeared, and I concluded that this was clean water, all right.

The officer said, "When you finish filling the cans, turn off the faucet."
"I shall," I said.

He kept watching me as he walked away. I thought I would turn it just as he had, but the faucet stuck. When I tried to stop the water with my hands, it gushed out all over me, water flying in all directions. Water was running over me from my belly to my head.

The captain returned and looked at me. He pulled me aside and slapped me so hard that I really counted the stars. I thought I deserved it, however. I took the cans and left, and the captain turned off the water.

"Where have you been?" asked Fikret Bey's wife. "Did you go to market in order to get water?"

"No, I just had trouble finding water."

"Good God, why are you so wet?"

"When I was closing it, it started gushing out."

The lady had invited all of the officers' wives to come to the house later in the day. I had overheard her telling one of them, "We have a film at home that you can never see at a cinema." Well, they started arriving late in the morning, all dressed in different colors and looking like opium poppies. They filled the house completely. I wondered if they had a plan to do something there. When they had stopped coming, my lady came out and called me three times. At the third call, I asked, "What is the matter? Why are you shouting so? I have just gotten down here."

"Come up here!"

I opened the door and looked inside. "Oh, my mother, all reds

10 A common ejaculation to indicate surprise.
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and greens."

She asked me, "Do you know why these ladies, these sisters-in-law, have come?"

"No. Why have they come?"

"They have heard that you sing a lullaby, and they want to hear you sing it."

Oh, she once had gotten me to sing a lullaby of the kind our wives [in the village] sang. "I wish you had not told them about this. What am I to do now?"

They placed a cradle before me and had me sing the lullaby that our village women sing:

Shoo, shoo--the monster is coming.

[Imitation of infant's crying here.]

In the village we frighten our children to sleep.

Hush, hush--the mad one is coming. 11

When I lifted up my head and looked around, I saw that all of the ladies had almost fallen to the floor in laughter. Thanks to this, I was able to get away without being beaten.

11 What the narrator says here is that abdal is coming. Abdal means silly person or imbecile. It is also an epithet sometimes applied to gypsies, and so the term here could be meant as gypsy or bogey man.