The Persecuted Wife of the Pilgrim

What I am going to tell occurred before the time of the Ottoman Empire, back in the time of His Holiness, the Prophet Mohammed—or perhaps even earlier.² It was not in the time of the caliphate. What do you call that earlier time? I cannot remember its name. Anyway, in that time—even before money was coined and in circulation. If there were 1,000 poor in one quarter and 1,000 rich in another quarter, the latter would collect whatever the former needed—such charitable people—and send it to them.

At the time when things were like that, there was a man who decided to go on the pilgrimage [to Mecca]. When he was about to go, he left his wife in the care of his brother, saying, "My brother would be the most proper person to guard my honor."

The brother agreed, saying, "Let her stay in my house. She can help care for all of us, for, after all, she is my brother's wife."

It was in such cases that real kinship would be revealed. "You go cheerfully on your pilgrimage."

¹ The narrator, questioned on the matter, acknowledged that he had once read a version of this tale in a book called Ahmediye, by one Ahmed Mūsir. He referred to a second book, called Muhammadiye, that contained such tales. Inasmuch as the narrator was barely literate, it is not very likely that he had read such a book. Whether or not he did the tale is very common in the Turkish oral tradition.

² The narrator is obviously confused here. There were no Moslem pilgrimages before the time of Mohammed!
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The man took his travel money and set out on his pilgrimage, leaving his wife in the care of his brother. But this happened in the time of the early Caliphate. In those days the death penalty was a matter of tit-for-tat [an age of revenge?]. Well, let him go on with his journey.

His wife slept in his brother's house. He was, after all, her brother-in-law. As the books will confirm, she was a very beautiful woman, and soon the brother-in-law started making advances toward her. These she rejected, saying, "You are my brother-in-law. We are like flesh and nail [flesh and fingernail]. How could we be of Islamic faith and do such things?"

Although he said he had done nothing wrong, his advances to the woman continued. When the woman refused to respond favorably, he went to His Holiness Mohammed and reported: "There is a woman in my house who is committing adultery."

"Have you any witnesses to this?"

"Yes," he said. He then went and found some false witnesses, though how much he paid them I do not know. When he returned to the presence of the Prophet with them, these witnesses testified that they had observed the woman committing adultery.

His Holiness the Prophet issued a firman ordering the woman's...
death. At that time death penalties used to be carried out by burying the condemned person in the earth up to his navel and then throwing stones at him. Each passerby would throw a stone, and thus eventually the person would be killed. This is how executions were performed, Ahmet Bey. They took this woman to a cemetery and there buried her up to her navel. After throwing many stones at her, they abandoned her there, thinking that she was dead. In fact, however, she was not dead but only badly injured.

There was a road near the cemetery. One of the agents of the day happened to pass along that road and hear a moaning. Looking, he saw a woman in a terrible state and crying aloud: "Oh, I am dying! Oh, I am dead! Oh, Allah, what was my sin? See what has befallen me!"

The man reined in his horse and spoke to her. "Who are you? What is your trouble, woman? Why are you crying?"

"Oh, brother! They had false witnesses testify that I had committed adultery, and His Holiness the Prophet had me buried alive and stoned. My whole body is crushed and bruised by stones thrown at me."

"Are your wounds many?" he asked.
"Yes," she said.

He dismounted, tied his horse to a tombstone, and examined the woman. Then he said, "I am a wealthy man. Would you like to come home with me? I have houses and flocks, and I could have your condition treated."

"Is there anything in the world sweeter than life? Of course I would. I am an innocent person, and perhaps because of that, Allah has sent you to my aid."
He grasped her and lifted her to the back of the horse. "You wait until I also mount." The horse was well trained. Mounting, the ağa said to the woman, "Hold fast to me or you may fall off, for you are injured."

"But if I do, your clothes will be smeared with my blood."

"Never mind," he said. "Let them be." When they finally reached home, his servants and neighbors gathered around them. When she was taken from the horse some of them wept at the sight of her terrible condition. She was placed in a room in the house. When a surgeon was brought, he had her wrapped in a sheepskin and started her treatment. The ağa had her completely healed.

This ağa was a wealthy and respected man. With his wife and children the ağa had in his household many servants and slaves. One Arab slave started making advances to the woman. She rejected these advances, saying, "I was reduced to this condition for the sake of my honor and chastity, and I shall never sacrifice them for anyone."

One night the Arab killed the children of the ağa, sprinkled their blood through the roof onto the bed of the woman, and left the bloody knife by her room. In the morning the wife of the ağa awakened and started tearing her hair and singing laments. She shouted at her husband, "You brought this woman to our home! Now see what she has done to us!"

Everyone came and saw that the children were indeed killed. Someone said, "This woman could not have done this. If she had, she would not have

6 Among Turkish peasants it was a custom to wrap badly injured people in freshly killed animal hides. Several of our older informants reported having witnessed this old practice still in use in their own time.
left the knife here. This crime must have been committed by someone else."

The ağa's wife, crying, said to him, "You were in love with this woman you brought home, and now she has done this to us."

Considering this, the ağa realized that the situation was heading toward further disaster. They questioned the woman, but she denied knowledge of the crime. "But one of your servants made advances to me and I refused him." They concluded that he must have committed the crime.

The ağa finally said to the woman [the wife of the pilgrim], "My daughter, it is not easy to deal with women. I can hardly manage one wife, and I cannot continue this situation any longer. Make it [their relationship] helal to me. I had you brought here and healed, but I did not guess that it would all end like this. Here are ten golden liras for you, cash for your purse. May Allah aid you in all your undertakings. Farewell!"

After the woman left the home of the ağa, she traveled a great distance. She came upon a place near a town where she saw a man hanging by his feet, head downward. There was a crowd of people there, as numerous as if it were Judgment Day. Some of them cried; some expressed pity. She asked, "What is the trouble here?"

They said, "This man owed ten golden liras which he was unable to pay. The ağa of the village has hanged him up there." (There was no

All those obligations for which a Moslem has not been absolved before he dies, and before his creditor dies, will be offenses held against him on Judgment Day. Parting Moslems who may not see each other again are careful to absolve one another, to make all obligations helal (permitted, lawful, morally acceptable). Such obligations include the food a child receives from his parents—even his mother's milk.
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strong government [to prevent such things] in those days of the ağa.

"What will happen to him?" she asked.

"Eventually he will die," they said.

"If I were to pay the ağa ten golden liras, would he then free this man?"

"Yes, he would," they said, and they called the ağa to that place.

"I shall pay the ten golden liras," she said to the ağa.

"Very well," he said, and he had the man released.

The man who was thus saved kissed the hands and the feet of the woman in gratitude, but then he fainted and collapsed. When he had recovered, he asked, "Who saved me?"

"A woman came along and paid ten golden liras, and the ağa then you free."

"Where did she go?" he asked.

"She went in that direction," they said, pointing.

After some time he found the woman. "Allah bless you, lady! You saved my life, my blood, my soul. I am very grateful to you for this, and I am praying for you. Be my sister, and let us travel together so that I may be of service to you."

When the woman accepted this offer, they traveled together for some distance. At last they came to the seashore, where they ate something. He said, "You stay here while I go and talk to the sailors. We be able to get passage on a ship for the rest of our journey." He went to the captain and said, "I have a beautiful woman whom I am willing to sell. Would you like to have her?"

"All right. Bring her here."
"I am bringing her as my sister."

"As long as you bring her," said the captain, "do so in whatever way you wish."

He took the woman and delivered her to the captain. She realized what was going on, and she said, "I am no prostitute but a woman who values her chastity above all else. My husband went on a pilgrimage, and such-and-such things have befallen me, until finally, along the way, I saved this 'Arab'\(^8\) by paying ten golden liras. Now he is doing this to me."

They explained to her that he had told them nothing of all this, but she was taken on board anyway. The man who had sold her went on board, where there were many men, including the captain, who were desirous of her. She said,

"No, please do not curse us!" they said.

Nevertheless, she did do just that, and the ship was almost buried in the sea. The sailors begged, "Please pray and save us from the storm or the ship will sink." Finally, the woman prayed, and the storm ceased. But the sailors again made advances toward her. This time she brought about a hard curse, and another storm arose, so fierce that it tore the ship apart. She saved herself by clutching a piece of plank on which she was washed ashore at a place near a house.

The padişah of that land was watching from the shore. When he saw a woman floating on a board, he shouted, "Catch her and bring her over

\(^8\) Although they have Islam in common, there are strong ethnic and cultural differences between Turks and Arabs. In Turkey the word Arab can be a slur word if spoken with emphasis.
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here." When she was brought to him, he asked the woman, "What happened to you?"

"By Allah, my testimony is very long. I cannot give it here in my bad condition."

"Let us take you to my palace, then," said the padişah.

She was taken to the palace of the padişah, where she spent some time among the palace women. The padişah liked her. "What a wise woman," he said, and he appointed her to the position of vizier. She served the padişah in this position for a long time. When the padişah died, they wanted her as chief vizier, and they said that they would even accept her as padişah. But she said, "I am a woman and cannot be the padişah." However, they made her padişah anyway.

She became very famous. All the lame, the blind, and the crippled were treated by her through prayer, provided that they told her the truth about themselves. Her reputation as a healer spread throughout the land.

Now let us return to her husband. When he had returned from his pilgrimage, he asked his brother, "What has happened to my wife?"

"Well, she committed adultery, and then such-and-such occurred. His Holiness the Prophet condemned her to death. She was stoned, and I do not know what became of her afterwards."

"Eyvah!" he said, weeping and moaning. Then he began to discover as much as he could about her, starting at the spot where she had been buried and stoned. Finally he came to the place where the Arab had smeared blood on her bed.

9 This is a common expression to indicate grief or despair in Turkish.
But along the way, he went blind from so much weeping. At the same time, his brother contracted some illness which forced him to walk on all fours—like a dog. By now the husband had discovered what had really happened to his wife, for he knew that she was chaste. When he came to the place where the "Arab" had been hanging by his foot, the husband found him ill too, and he too began to accompany the husband. Furthermore, all of the sailors who had made improper advances toward the woman had also become ill. All of these ailing ones assembled and decided to visit the padişah who could cure them, and finally they arrived in her presence.

She recognized all of them—seven or eight people in all. One was her husband. One was the hanged man. The others were people from aboard the ship. She wept a little at first. But then she said, "You must all tell me the truth from the very beginning. Tell the truth. Then I shall for you, and you will recover. Your vision will be restored, and you [all] will be as healthy as before, and then you will pray for me."

"Very well, my padişah," they said.

She then said to her husband, "You tell us from the beginning what happened to you."

"I had a wife. When I went on the pilgrimage, I left her in the care of my brother. I do not know what she did, but my brother, saying that she had committed adultery, complained of this to His Holiness the Prophet. False witnesses testified to this, and she was condemned to die. I do not know what became of her."

"You have told the truth," the woman said. "May Allah restore your sight." Then she asked her brother-in-law, "Where did you get this illness? Do not lie!"

"I am ashamed to speak of this before my brother, but that brother..."
entrusted his wife to me. Misled by Satan, I could not control myself and reached out for her with my hand, even though she said, 'It is a mistake, a sin. Such things cannot be done, for we are related.' Angry I found false witnesses. She was condemned, [partially] buried, and stoned. And after that I became like this from continuous aging." (He did not know that it was that woman who had become padişah.)

When she turned to the Arab, she asked, "How did you come to have this illness?"

The Arab responded. "My ağa brought home an injured woman one day. He had found her stoned in a cemetery alongside a road. recovered, and she was a beautiful woman. I made advances to her, but she did not respond to them. Then I killed my ağa's children and left the bloody knife in her room. For this the ağa turned her out of his house, giving her ten golden liras. Later I became like this, for it was I who had killed the children, and I deserved what I got."

"You told the truth, and you will (Inshallah) become well." And then she prayed for him. Next she turned to the hanged man.

He explained that one day a woman had paid his debt and thus saved his life. "I did not know the woman because I was hanging. Later I asked people what she looked like. Well, they described her features, saying that she was tall, and so forth. I followed her and found her. I suggested to her that we live together like sister and brother, and that I serve her, for she had saved me from the gallows. We lived as friends for some time, but one day I made advances to her. She refused. Then I sold her to some sailors as a woman of loose morals, and I accepted money for her. She stayed aboard that ship for some time.

10 This was the real Arab, the slave or servant in the home of the ağa, and not the hanged man whom she had in disgust dubbed "Arab."
I caught this illness, but what happened to her I do not know."

"You also have told the truth. Who was the sailor to whom you sold her?"

was the Captain Bey."

Of course, the captain also had a disease. He spoke in the same manner, explaining the woman's curse, the storm that followed, burying the ship. "But before it could sink, I was afraid. 'Pray well and save me,' I said. She prayed, and the storm stopped. But then again we made advances to the woman after the storm had stopped. When she prayed again for a curse, the ship sank that time. Every piece of it went in a different direction, and I do not know what became of the woman. Finally, I was encumbered by these diseases."

"Well done," she said. "You have told the truth." Turning then to her brother-in-law, she said, "Now tell the truth!" 11

"I made advances to my brother's wife. I misbehaved myself and followed Satan. I then maligned her, and she was then condemned by His Holiness the Prophet for being an adulterous woman. Now I am ashamed in the presence of my brother." Saying this, he wept.

"Well done," she said. "You have told the truth. I shall pray to Allah that he make you well too."

then spoke to her husband: "Why did you leave your wife in such a situation?"

"I left her in the care of my brother. How could I have known that this would befall her?" And he too began to weep.

11 The two subsequent paragraphs are repetitive. We are not certain whether this was a slip in the narrator's memory or whether he knowingly repeated the confession of the brother-in-law for emphasis.
She said to her husband, "What did your wife look like?"

looked like you in word and speech, in cheek and eye. She looked exactly like you." At that, there was much weeping.

When she revealed her identity, they all embraced, and there was a great deal of weeping. One rumor has it that they lived there together for a long while as husband and wife. Another rumor has it that she performed a namaz, asking Allah to take back their souls, and that they both died.

is how I heard it, Ahmet Bey. This happened, and it has also been written down. It happened at the time of the Prophet.

[Ahmet Uysal: Did you hear this from someone?]

Talib Coğgun: I read it in Ahmediye.

Uysal: Are there other tales like this in that book?

Coğgun: Ahmediye and Mohammadiye. I read this in Ahmediye but I also heard it told by someone. It is a good tale, with a moral. It is good for peasants, and so I read it and learned it. I have also told the tale to many people in villages. In fact, thanks to this tale, I have often been feasted--given a whole lamb!

A namaz is a Moslem ritual prayer or prayer service, one of the five performed every day. It is more than just an occasional or incidental prayer.