

Story #568 (1969 Tape #11)

Narrator: Mehmet Tekçe, green grocer,
50

Location: Home of narrator is Aliçerçi
village, Bozkır kaza, Konya
Province, but tale was taped
at nearby village of Akça
Pınar.

Wedding ceremony

Date: August 1969

The Twice-Wed Gypsy Couple

There is a nahiye¹ of Bucak in this district [i.e., in the kaza of Bozkır]. The son of a gypsy and the daughter of a gypsy went to get married at Bucak. They had taken along twenty-five Turkish liras to pay for the marriage, and now they were on their way home, and they happened to pass by my house. The girl had a loaf of bread under her arm. The young man said to me, "Hey, aga,^{135, 136} how about plucking a watermelon for us from your garden so that this girl and I can eat it with our bread?" They sat down and ate, and they were about to leave.

"Come now," I said. "Where are you from?"

"We just had our marriage made official at the Bucak municipality."

"Oh, you fools!" I said. "How could the municipality know how to perform your wedding? Did not the sons of Murtazar tell you that I take care of all the weddings around here? Why did you go and pay twenty-five Turkish liras at the municipality?"

"Oh, I screw their mothers in that municipality!"² And furthermore, it was not a good wedding!" They were getting ready to leave, but before they started out, he said, "Oh, aga, can you not yet make this job firm?"

¹ A nahiye is a large village which has some of the government services usually found in the kaza town to which the village is attached. Among a cluster of villages remote from their kaza town, the largest may be made a nahiye.

² A common expression of dislike or derision among Turkish peasants.

Story #568

"It is up to you," I said. "If you wish, I can straighten out your wedding for you."

"Of course we would, ağa," they said, and they came and sat down on the doorstep.

My wife was standing there by the entrance of the house. I went inside for a short while, and while there, I said to my wife, "If you should ever laugh, I will have you screwed to death by a donkey!" I pushed her farther inside, for if she should laugh, the gypsies would recognize the fact that they were being ridiculed.

The three of us sat down on the ground. I asked the girl, "My girl, what is your name?"

"Zarife [gracious]."

"And your family name?"

"Kopur [financially broke]."

Then I turned to the young man and asked, "What is your name?"

"Hüseyin," he answered.

"Whose son are you?"

"I am the son of Haydan Ağa." [Here the narrator imitated gypsy dialectal pronunciation of Turkish.]

I then instructed them, "Whatever I say, you will repeat it after me three times." I then turned to the girl and said, "Zarife, you will now say, 'Do you accept him with his old clothes and property, and with his rod sticking out in front of him?'"

She exclaimed, "Ush!" and jumped up and down several times.

I said, "But no jumping is allowed during the wedding or it may spoil the ceremony." Now it was the young man's turn. "Hüseyin, you will now say, 'Do you accept her with her sandals, and with her slit in front of her?'"

He also exclaimed in joy, "Ush!" and jumped up and down.

Story #568

It was the girl's turn again. I said, "Now you will repeat this: 'His bread will be on my neck. His tobacco will be on my neck.'³ Dark son, enter my bosom.'"

Now it was the young man's turn. "You will say, 'Below me there is a stable. (No, you will pronounce stable as is it had three a's: sta-a-a-ble.⁴) Above me there is Da-a-amascus.⁵ (That's it!) A vagina weighing one okka⁶ and 250 grams. Do you take and accept it?'"

The gypsy said, "Ush!" and jumped up and down.

"Do not keep jumping up and down," I said, "or your wedding will again be spoiled."

The gypsy groom said, "With your permission, let me stamp upon her and trample her."⁷

"Oh, no," I said, "you cannot do such things during the wedding ceremony. Keep quiet! May this wedding now be blessed by the will of (Allah) and the permission of Hacı Bektaş Veli.⁸ Then I asked them, "Have you two taken

³ This is a metaphor for indicating where the responsibility lies or by whom the work will be done. The reference is probably to a yoke, which rests on the neck and shoulders.

⁴ It is the letter a in dam, a Turkish word for stable, which the narrator wishes to have protracted in the Turkish original.

⁵ It is the a in Şam, the Turkish word for Damascus, which the narrator wishes to have protracted in the original. Dam and Şam rhyme and thus add verbal heightening to the phony and ridiculous wedding ceremony. Since Şam makes no sense here, it may have been used both for nonsense and for its rhyming effect.

⁶ An okka, an old Turkish unit of weight, was 2.8 pounds. Mixing this earlier measuring system with the metric system here adds just one more soupçon of the nonsensical.

⁷ At a certain point in Turkish weddings, the bride and groom each try to stamp on the foot of the other. The one who succeeds is supposed, then, to be the dominant partner in the marriage. The gypsy here takes this too literally.

⁸ Gypsies are often of the Alevi (mystic and semi-Shiite) persuasion. So too are Bektaşis, followers of the thirteenth-century Hacı Bektaş Veli. An additional dimension of humor here comes from the parody of the traditional matchmaker's opening formulaic speech: "I have come by the will of Allah and the permission of the Prophet to ask for the hand of X [girl] for Y, the son of so-and-so."

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Story #568

and accepted each other with the permission of Hacı Bektaş Veli and Yağmuroğlu?"⁹

They said, "We have taken and accepted [one another]."

I said, "May Allah bless you and make it all honorable. Do you also accept these trees and rocks as witnesses?"

"Yes, let them be our witnesses." Then they took out five Turkish liras and paid me, saying, "You deserve twenty-five Turkish liras because you worked so hard, but this is as much as we can offer you."

As they were getting ready to leave, my wife came out and said to me, "Give back their money. By Allah, it is haram."¹⁰

"Get away! I have been working hard here for an hour. Why should I return it? I shall buy tobacco with it. That money was probably haram already anyway [i.e., it was probably stolen money in the first place]. And besides, it is none of your business!"

They left. About a week later some gypsies came to our village for a circumcision,¹¹ I asked them, "Are the Kopurs' Zarife and the Haydans' Hüseyin getting along well as husband and wife?"

⁹ Yağmuroğlu means son of rain. While there may well be someone with that name, it seems more likely that the name was invented and thrown in for comic purposes.

¹⁰ Haram refers to anything forbidden, unlawful, for which one will be held accountable at the final Judgment.

¹¹ Estimates indicate that there may be 250,000 gypsies living in Turkey. They can be divided roughly into two groups, sedentary and nomadic. From very early times the more sedentary gypsies have performed circumcision surgery in Turkish villages. Nomadic gypsies can be subdivided into four groups, according to their trades and occupations: (1) basket makers, (2) blacksmiths, (3) tin-coaters (who tin the interiors of copper cooking vessels to prevent their users from the effects of copper poisoning), and (4) musicians. Gypsy musicians are hired for most village weddings.

Story #568

They said, "Huh! Was it you who performed their wedding ceremony--you green grocer whose wife we have screwed? You must have made some mistake in their wedding, for the girl has eloped with some other man.'

"No, my wedding was correct," I said. "It must have been the earlier one, the municipality's wedding, that was in error."