

Story 2106 (1999 Tape 2)

Narrator: Metin Ekici, 36

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How a Rascal from Çal Cheated
an İstanbul Business

The account which I just finished telling you [ATON 2105] is one of the many stories told about the cleverness of the people who live in Kayseri Province. It is a folktale with probably little if any historicity. But I want to tell you now a similar account that is historical; it concerns an actual event in which my grandfather played a minor role. He told me about this in 1971 or 1972 while I was a student at a middle school.

There lived in Çal a man named Süleyman Topuz. He was a good-for-nothing fellow who used to spent his time carousing with five or six friends. They were often drunk and gave no thought to anything important. Whenever there was a wedding celebration or a festival of some kind, Süleyman Topuz would inevitably be there. Everyone called him simply Topuz, completely ignoring his first name.

From time to time Topuz engaged briefly in one or another business venture. When he could find some wholesale

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supplier who would sell him merchandise on credit, he would peddle these goods in Çal. But none of the money he received from such sales went to his supplier. It was all spent on parties that he gave for his friends.

On one occasion Topuz and his worthless friends went to a large warehouse in İstanbul and bought expensive fabrics which cost between 2,000 and 3,000 Turkish liras, a sum which they paid in cash. They took that fabric to İzmir, where they set up a temporary shop and sold that cloth for less than it had cost them. So they lost about 500 liras in this transaction. They then returned to the same warehouse in İstanbul and this time they bought 5,000 liras' worth of fabric, again paying cash for it. This load of fabric they peddled in Aydın, again selling it for less than it had cost them in order to get rid of it quickly. Their purpose in buying and selling those two batches of fabric was not to establish a business but to establish enough credibility and credit so that they could make a fortune by investing relatively little money.

When they went to İstanbul for the third time, they said to the manager of the warehouse, "We want to buy

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several thousand meters of such and such fine fabrics." Altinyıldız and Bossa were two of the very highest-quality fabrics of those times, and these were the brands that Topuz and his friends ordered. When they were told that such a quantity would cost them 100,000 liras,¹ they said, "We shall give you now a down payment of 10,000 liras, and then we should like to sign a contract to pay the other 90,000 liras later

The manager accepted this arrangement, but he was also a competent businessman and he wanted some evidence of collateral for the unpaid bill. He said, "Tell me what property you own in Çal. You can give us a mortgage on that property, just in case you are unable to pay the rest of your bill

Topuz answered, "Don't worry. I shall pay the rest of the bill. But if you wish, you can take my land under mortgage. I own a valuable farm that is worth several hundred thousand liras. One field covers hundreds of square

¹This was at the time a considerable amount of money. It would be roughly equivalent to a billion of today's Turkish liras, now (1999) that the lira has been so devaluated that it takes 430,000 liras to equal one American dollar.

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meters, a special field which everyone in Çal calls Koru." The manager was satisfied with this agreement, and he wrote it all into the contract, which Topuz signed. (The manager trusted Topuz, but he simply wanted some form of security for what amounted almost to a loan.)

Topuz and his friends loaded their purchase of fabric on a truck and departed. They sold quantities of fabric in İzmir, Aydın, Denizli, and finally in Çal, their (and my) hometown. In order to profit quickly from their deal, they again sold their fabrics cheaply. Fabric which elsewhere would have sold for 6 or 7 liras a meter they sold for 2 or 3 liras a meter. On some sales they even reduced the price to one quarter of the fabric's real value. Women in cities, towns, and villages bought this fabric eagerly, for at such prices they could buy enough cloth for several garments instead of just one. My grandfather, who was mayor of Çal at that time, was suspicious about what was going on, but at that point he had no evidence of anything illegal. But to his friends he said, "There is something wrong about this new fabric business. Its scent will some day be detected. Let us wait and see what happens."

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Topuz and his friends sold all of their fabric. Nobody knew what they did with all the money they accumulated that way. They just disappeared and were not seen again for some time.

One day three or four months later two well-dressed strangers arrived at Çal and went at once to the town hall to see the mayor, my grandfather. I learned later about the conversation that my grandfather had with these two men from İstanbul. They told him about the two purchases of fabric for which Topuz had paid cash and about the third purchase for which he had made only a down payment but had signed a contract agreeing to pay the rest of bill. "That man was named Süleyman Topuz, and he claimed to be a resident and property owner here. Do you know him, sir?"

"Don't tell me that you sold him something! I don't want to hear such bad news," said my grandfather.

"Yes, we sold him a large quantity of very expensive fabrics."

"Did he pay you for them?"

"Only partly--the down payment that we just mentioned," answered the manager of the warehouse. "But he signed a contract to pay the remaining 90 percent later."

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"Besides signing a piece of paper, what assurance did he provide to guarantee his payment to you?" asked my grandfather. Then he added, "That worthless fellow owns nothing."

"How can that be, sir? He said that he owned a valuable farm that included one very choice field of several hundred square meters, a field known to everyone in Çal as Koru."

"Where is that field?" asked my grandfather.

"Surely you must be teasing us, sir. He said that it was an excellent field on which grapes were grown."

My grandfather now knew the extent of Topuz's latest rascality. He said to the two men from İstanbul, "Do you see that hillside over there? That is Koru. Do you see any vineyards on it? Of course not, for that piece of land is the community pasture. Topuz does not own it, and consequently he could not sell it or use it as collateral. No one could do that, for that pasture belongs to the township. You are not the first to be swindled in this way by Topuz. The only consolation I can offer is my hope that you have learned now not to trust utter strangers.

The two men from the İstanbul fabric warehouse remained in Çal for some time trying to locate Topuz. They

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wanted to have him arrested and prosecuted for theft. As they searched in vain for the thief, they filed complaints with several government agencies. But nothing came of all their efforts, for both Topuz and his companions seemed to have vanished. I was told that he returned a year or so later, but no one knew what his next scheme would be.