

Story #599 (1968, Tape #2)

Narrator: Hasan Güzeloglu

Location: The village of Danerası,
kaza of Andırın, in the
province of Maraş.

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My Journey as a Young Man

This fikra is about myself. It is a simple anecdote.

We were two friends. We set out on a journey. On our way, we came across a man who asked, "Do you play music at weddings?"

We were exhausted from travelling, and we were very hungry. We also had been looking for a job, and therefore we agreed to play music at this wedding.

They found us a drum and a zurna.¹ We played some music at the wedding. We had bargained for thirty liras and we got paid what we had bargained for. Shortly before we were to leave, they served us some food. They brought some honey to my partner, and they served me a dish of cooked meat. My friend grabbed my dish, and he gave me the honey. I became very angry, and we got into an argument over it. We left the wedding arguing.

The thirty liras they had paid us were in my friend's pocket. On our way, he left me and went into the bushes, he said, to relieve himself. He left and never came back. From there on, I set out by

¹The drum and the zurna are the usual instruments played at Turkish village weddings. The zurna is a double-reed wind instrument, similar to the oboe but making a more open, "breathy" sound.

myself. My money was taken by my friend, and I was exhausted and disgusted.

On my way, I came across a man who had loaded his horse much too heavily. The horse was so tired and weak that it had no strength left to carry its load. The man asked me to support one side of his horse so that it wouldn't collapse. I was as tired as that horse, and I had no strength left in my knees.² I collapsed when I was trying to help the man's horse. The horse collapsed with me because it had no support. The man's load that was packed on the horse was scattered on the ground. When it scattered about like that, I discovered that it was pekmez.³ I was surprised because I didn't have the slightest idea that he would be carrying anything like that.

The man was furious. He picked me up from the ground and slapped me on my face a couple of times. I wanted to run away, but I had no strength left in my body to get up and run. I stayed there lying on the ground until the man had left. After he disappeared, I got up and continued my journey. I walked for a long time. It was still dark, but the sun was beginning to rise in the horizon. The weather was cold. I could feel the frost. I started walking on the slopes of a mountain. I saw a mountain village and decided to go to the house of the richest man in that village. I walked around in the

²This is a Turkish expression indicating complete exhaustion: dizlerimde takat kalmanıstı.

³Pekmez is a thick, sweet syrup made by boiling down grape juice. It is the commonest sweetmeat among Turkish rural folk.

village and found myself standing in front of a tall building. I knocked on the door. Someone answered the door, and they invited me in. They showed me a place to sit, and I sat waiting to meet the owner. He came in, and I was shocked to see that it was the same man whose load of pekmez I had allowed to fall off the horse. He was not very pleased to see me. He cursed me for a while and even tried to beat me, but an old lady, his mother, spoke sharply to him and rescued me from his hands.

After things settled down, they told me that I could stay around, and that I didn't have to leave. They said that there was a wedding in the village and asked me to go with them. I accepted the offer. Before we left, they gave me a couple of things to eat. I ate until I was full.

When we were ready to leave, they mounted the landlord's mother on my back. She was too old to walk on her own. We left the house and started walking. The ground was covered with snow, and we walked for a long time.

I didn't know these mountainous areas. I didn't know that there were a number of wells in that area. I happened to walk right alongside one of these wells. They tried to warn me, but I didn't understand what they were telling me. People living in those areas had a different dialect. Instead of saying, "kuyu var!", they were saying "koy-ver!"⁴ I didn't know what they were talking about, and so I set the lady down in order to go and ask them, but I set her right into the well I was near. Suddenly they were all attacking me, and I had

⁴ "Kuyu var" means "There is a well!"

to flee for my life.

I went a long way before I found a place where I could spend the night as a guest. The people who had accepted me as their guest did not offer me any food as they themselves were eating. As they were eating, I noticed that on one side of the room they had a large kūp⁵ filled with butter. I noted exactly where they kept it.

After they had retired, I got out of the bed which they had made up for me, and I found the kūp and the sofra.⁶ I took them both outside in order to have a good meal. I put my hand into the kūp in order to get some butter, but it stuck in the butter, and I couldn't get it out. I decided to knock the kūp against a rock in order to get my hand loose. I was making quite some noise doing this, forgetting all about the people in the house. And I didn't know that the owner of the house had not gone to bed but was sitting out in the yard. Looking for a rock to strike, I saw a shining object, and I swung the kūp at that. As the kūp struck, I realized that the shining object was the ~~head~~^{head-- bald} head of the owner. At his loud cry, all the people in the house awakened and rushed out at me. They wanted to beat me, which did not surprise me. The owner's wife was the only one who felt sorry for me. She made up a bed for me on the roof, and they told me to sleep there in the cold.⁷

I was so tired and weak that I was unable to resist this plan

⁵Kūp: a large earthenware vase usually used to store water or oil.

⁶Sofra: a very short-legged (6-8 inches) canvas table used by peasants sitting on the floor to eat.

⁷Country people sometimes sleep on their flat roofs during extremely hot weather in order to enjoy the fresh air. They never do so in the winter, however.

of theirs. I climbed up to the roof, but I said to myself, "I'll kill this man!" [the home owner]. There they were all sleeping downstairs in their warm beds, and I was sleeping up here on the roof, right out in the open, exposed to the cold weather and the frost. It just wasn't right! There on the roof I found a saddle, and I thought

I might get under it for protection from the weather. As I tried to put it on, some straps got stuck around my neck. Losing my balance, I fell from the roof and started thrashing about noisily on the ground. This awakened the owner and his family again, and they came from the house and drove me away into the night.

After a while I came to a straw barn, and this looked like a perfect place to hide. Just as I was about to enter the barn, I saw approaching a young man and a girl, hugging and kissing each other. The girl was carrying a bundle of clothes,⁸ and they were both carrying several other packages. It was not difficult to see that the two had run away from home and that they were as afraid of being caught as I was. Somehow I gathered enough strength and courage to chase them away. When they saw me rushing out of nowhere at them, they were terrified and ran away. They dropped their bundles and never came back for them. I opened one package after another until I had found enough food to fill me up. I also found some money, and I used this to complete my journey to Adana. That is the end of my story.

⁸The term used here is bohça, a bundle of clothes wrapped in a large square cloth. Women going to a public bath ordinarily carry their towels and personal belongings in such a bohça.