

Story 860 1964 Tape 3)

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Location: Informant's address  
not given. Taped at  
Sinop Penitentiary

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Bekri Mustafa<sup>1</sup> as Sultan

One day the sultan decided that he would like to take a journey of forty days' length, and he wanted to find a likely companion for that trip. He ordered his men to go out and search for a traveling companion.

There was then a bar in Istanbul owned by an Armenian named Agop. When the sultan's men were searching for a traveling companion, they looked into Agop's bar and there they found Bekri Mustafa getting drunk. They immediately decided that he was the man they were looking for, and so they went immediately to the sultan and reported: "Your Majesty, we have found a man very much like yourself."

The sultan sent his men to Agop's bar to have Bekri Mustafa transported to the palace. He did not wish anyone to know that the traveling companion for his journey was an alcoholic. The attendants therefore carried Bekri Mustafa to the palace and placed him in the sultan's bed.

<sup>1</sup> Bekri Mustafa was a bully boy and alcoholic, supposedly a real person who lived in Istanbul in the seventeenth century during the sultanate of either Murat IV or Mahmut IV. His name, whenever used, connotes alcoholism.

*Alex / above*

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When Bekri Mustafa awoke a few hours later, he found that there were several female slaves waiting in attendance at his bedside. Bekri began talking to himself in this manner: "I was in Agop's bar, and I must have died there. These women that I see must be angels in heaven."

"my Sultan, you are not a bit dead. You had simply fallen asleep," said the slave girls. For forty days Bekri slept in the sultan's bed, ate at the sultan's table, and rode in the royal coach. He was so much like the real sultan that even the palace servants did not know the difference.

For the Friday noon services<sup>2</sup> the sultan and Bekri Mustafa always went to different mosques. As Bekri Mustafa was riding along in the royal carriage one Friday, he saw along the way an old, tumbledown house, and he asked, "Whose house is that?"

His attendants answered, "That is the home of a famous drunk named Bekri Mustafa, Your Majesty."

Bekri said, "I want that house completely rebuilt by next Friday's noon service. Furthermore, whatever furniture I have in the palace is to be duplicated in this house."

<sup>2</sup> The Moslem sabbath was traditionally on Friday, and the Friday noon service was the religious high point of the week. Although Sunday is now the Sabbath in Turkey, as a result of Westernization, the Friday noon service retains its importance.

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After that noon service, Bekri Mustafa returned to the palace and decided to take a nap. While he was sleeping, the sultan returned, and he ordered that Bekri be very gently picked up and returned to Agop's bar. After he had awakened and was perfectly sober, Bekri said to Agop, "What do you think? I was your sultan for forty days

Agop smiled and asked him, "How could you possibly have been sultan for forty days?"

Bekri Mustafa then went home and knocked on his own door, but his wife refused to let him in. She asked him, "Where have you been all this time? While you were gone, the sultan had our house rebuilt."

"I was the one who had this house rebuilt and refurnished while I was the sultan for forty days!" Bekri shouted.

His wife refused to believe him. Several other people overheard him insisting that he had been sultan for forty days, and they reported this claim by Bekri to the sultan. When the sultan heard this, he had Bekri thrown into a lunatic asylum. Even there, Bekri continued to claim that he had been sultan. Finally the sultan felt some compassion for Bekri. He sent his vizier to the lunatic asylum with this order: "Tell Bekri to deny his claim of having been sultan and I shall have him released.

Bekri denied his previous claim, and he was duly released

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He never made that claim again except to Agop, his friend for forty years, and to his wife. Neither of them ever believed him.