

Story 862 (1964 Tape erased on field trip after contents transcribed)

Narrator: Ismail Doğan, pistol-packing muhtar

Location: Çetme village, kaza of Taşköprü, Kastamonu Province

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Bekri Mustafa¹ as Sultan

There was once a sultan who retained Bekri Mustafa as a counselor. When he first engaged him for this purpose, the sultan took Bekri Mustafa to the bar of an Armenian named Agop and said, "You may eat and drink here, but whenever I need you, you must come to the palace at once."

Alcohol abuse

Bekri Mustafa drank a great deal at that bar, and he was often drunk by the time evening came. When he was drinking, he used to say occasionally, "I wish that the sultan would make me sultan--just for three days." Finally one of people who heard him speaking this way reported his remarks to the sultan: "Your Majesty, Bekri Mustafa keeps saying that he wishes that you would let him be sultan for three days."

This Bekri Mustafa had a wife and two children.

¹ Bekri Mustafa was a colorful Istanbul figure of the seventeenth century during the sultanate of either Murat IV or Mahmut IV. Reports vary. Whether he had any historicity is a moot point. Whether or not he did, most of his adventures certainly did not; they are too fanciful or absurd to have occurred in real life. Bekri Mustafa became a name for the alcoholic type, for the legendary Bekri was a notorious drunk.

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were not very well provided for, and they lived in a miserable house. Everything went well enough when Bekri was there, but once he left home, he might not return for many days at a time. At such times his family was utterly neglected, and the house became a tumbledown sort of place.

When the sultan was informed about Bekri's wish to be sultan for three days, he summoned this counselor into his presence. When Bekri arrived at the palace, the sultan said to him, "It has been reported to me that you would like to become sultan for three days. Well, your wish is granted. I am leaving the rule of the country to you for three days."

real sultan moved out of the palace for three days and left Bekri Mustafa in command.

When Friday arrived, and it was time for the sultan to go to the noon service at the mosque,² Bekri Mustafa put on his fur coat and climbed into the royal coach.¹²⁶⁻⁷ The driver asked, "Which mosque do you wish to go to, Your Majesty?"

Inasmuch as the road to the old mosque passed his own house, Bekri answered, "The former sultan used to attend the new mosque, but I shall go to the old mosque." When the

² In pre-Republican Turkey the Sabbath fell on Friday, and the Friday noon service at the mosque was the high point of the religious week. As a result of Westernization, the Sabbath is now officially Sunday, but the Friday noon service is still important. It is the service, for example, which always has a sermon; most other services--there are 35 services per week--do not.

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coach reached his own house, Bekri ordered the driver to stop. Bekri got out of the coach, along with two viziers, one on either side of him. Pointing to his own tumbledown house, Bekri asked them, "Do you see that house?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," said the viziers.

"Well, I want work started on that house at once--right after the noon prayer service ends. Assemble all of the masons and all of the carpenters in the city, and have that house completely rebuilt in two days. It is to be made even more magnificent than the palace of the sultan!"

After the prayer service was over, the viziers gathered together all of the masons and carpenters, and by working continuously, day and night, they converted Bekri's old house into a mansion even more magnificent than the sultan's palace within the required time

Bekri's wife was so happy with this unexpected improvement that she was filled with gratitude to the sultan. She prayed to God that he would prosper in his reign. She did not know, of course, that it was Bekri Mustafa who had caused this change in her living conditions.

The next time that Bekri passed his home on the way to the mosque, he stopped again. This time he ordered his viziers, "Right after the prayer service, I want you to furnish this house even more expensively than the royal

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palace is furnished. Also, I want you to see to it that the woman who lives there is given a bagful of gold from the royal treasury.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Right after the prayer service, the viziers set their men to work laying carpets, bringing such furniture as tables and armchairs, buying glasses, plates, forks, and spoons-- everything that could be found in the palace, but of even better quality.

When the three days had ended, the real sultan returned and asked, "Well, Bekri Mustafa, what have you accomplished during my absence?"

"I know what I have been doing."

"What was it?"

"You would not understand what I have been doing, but I have done it."

The sultan repeated his question three times without receiving a satisfactory answer. Bekri bade farewell to the sultan and left. He went first to Agop's bar and drank quite a bit. Then he went home, where he knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" his wife asked.

"It is I--Bekri Mustafa."

"You can go to hell! I do not want a man like you
Long live the sultan who had this new home built for us!"

Long live

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"I was the sultan, and it was I who had this house rebuilt!"

His wife then started shouting, "Help! Help! My husband has gone out of his mind!" *In Sanity / m. b. n. e. n*

The authorities had Bekri Mustafa caught and tied hand and foot. He was then carried to an asylum. Doctors there examined him, asking him whether he still thought that it had been he who had had his house rebuilt. "Of course it was I! I was the sultan then!" Hearing him talking in this way, the doctors there concluded that he really was mad, and so they locked him in a room.

A few days later his wife came to visit him at the asylum. She wanted to see if he had recovered his sanity yet. She asked, "Bekri, what have you been doing?"

He said at once, "By God, it was I who had that house rebuilt!"

"Alas, he has not recovered a bit!" his wife said and departed.

When she returned a few days later, he said to her, "I asked the sultan to rebuild our house."

"Well, why didn't you say that?" she demanded. "You just kept saying, 'I built it! I built it!'"

As soon as he said that it was the sultan who had rebuilt the house, they released him from the asylum. He went home

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and explained the matter to his wife. "The sultan permitted me to serve as sultan for three days. Would the sultan ever suppose that you would throw me in the asylum for reporting that fact?"

Bekri and his wife were reconciled and have been living together happily ever since. As a matter of fact, I received a greeting from them just the other day