

Story 1031 (1974 Tape 17) Narrator: Ali Yaver

Location: Olgunlar village,
kaza of Refayık
(Refahiye), Yozgat
Province

Date: August 10, 1974

How Bekri Mustafa¹ Got Himself Thrown into
Jail and out Again

Bekri Mustafa was drinking as he walked toward bridge.² He carried a bottle in his pocket as he walked along. As you know, he used to drink a great deal, and so there was nothing unusual about his drinking at that time. It was what he was shouting that was unusual. He was shouting, "I sold it I sold it! I sold it!"

Some people who heard him asked each other, "What is he talking about?"

Others called to him, "Hey, you, what did you sell? What are you selling?"

There was so much disturbance caused in that area that secret police were attracted to the scene. (I pose that nowadays we would call such police detectives

¹Bekri Mustafa represents the alcoholic in Turkish folk tradition. As with other type characters, narrators often try to establish some historical identity for him. In some other tales (though not here) he is associated with the reign of Sultan Murat IV (1623-1640).

²This may well refer to Galata Bridge, the most important in İstanbul before the bridges were built across the Bosphorus in the late 20th century.

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or plainclothesmen.

These policemen said, "Oho, Bekri! What are you doing?"

"What should I be doing? I am celebrating because I sold it!"

"What did you sell?"

"I have been selling İstanbul

"Selling what?" they demanded. "Are you crazy?"

But Bekri Mustafa just went on shouting, "I sold it! I sold it! I sold it!"

The police arrested Bekri and took him before the padişah. They said, "Our Padişah, this man just keeps yelling, 'I sold it! I sold it I sold it!' And when we ask him what he sold, he says, 'İstanbul. What shall we do with him?'"

The padişah recognized Bekri Mustafa at once, and he said,

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They did just what the padişah had ordered. They threw Bekri Mustafa into the dungeon, and in the same room

³Rakı is a liquor with anise flavor. Undoubtedly the most popular distilled drink in Turkey, it is manufactured under a government monopoly. Known as "Lion's Milk," it turns white when water is added to it.

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with him they placed three kegs of rakı. After a few days passed, the palace people decided to go down to the basement to see what Bekri's condition was. To their surprise, they found that Bekri had not drunk any of the rakı at all. Instead, he was lying on the floor with his head under one of the kegs. Allowing just an occasional drop to ooze from the spigot onto the floor, he was sniffing, sniffing, sniffing the fumes of the rakı. Apparently this was the way in which he had passed all of his time in the dungeon.

They said to him, "Oh, Bekri Mustafa, we have given you your favorite beverage, rakı, to drink--as much of it as you could possibly wish. Why haven't you been drinking

He responded, "I do not have any meze⁴ to eat with it. I have no meat, such as pirzola,⁵ or salad. If I drank this much rakı without food, I know that it would be like poison to me, but I have nevertheless been enjoying myself by sniffing the fumes of the rakı. As a result, I am quite unharmed."

The padişah was so taken aback by this unexpected

⁴Appetizers or hors d'oeuvres.

⁵Lamb rib chops, often grilled.

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turn of events that he said angrily, "Throw him out of here!"