

Story 2187 (1999 Tape 15)

Narrator: Metin Ekici, 37

Location: Akkent town, Çal  
kaza, Denizli  
Province

Date: May 22, 1999

Bekri Mustafa<sup>1</sup> Outflanks a  
Janissary<sup>2</sup> Commander

On another occasion Bekri Mustafa and his friends were apprehended for violating Sultan Murat's decree against drinking, smoking, and gambling. This time it was the Janissary Corps which arrested them while they were drinking. The Corps commander took them to the nearest police station, and there he proceeded to question them. He asked one of the captives, "What kind of work do you do?"

"I work in the tinning business," the man answered.

The Janissary commander responded, "Well, I am the master of all tinsmiths." Then to his troops he said, "Strike this man!" The alcoholic tinsmith was severely beaten.

<sup>1</sup>Bekri Mustafa was a legendary alcoholic. In folktales he is usually associated with an Ottoman sultan named Murat, though which Sultan Murat is not always indicated. When there is an attempt to identify the ruler, he is sometimes said to be Sultan Murat IV (1623-1640).

<sup>2</sup>The Janissary Corps was an elite military unit, some of whose members often constituted the palace guard. The Janissary Corps was the best-known and ultimately the most oppressive and notorious military organization in Turkish history.

Story 2187

The Janissary commander then asked another man, what do you do for a living?"

"I am a salep<sup>3</sup> vendor."

"The commander answered, "Well, I am the chief salep seller for the whole land." Turning then to his troops, he said, "Strike this man too!" The alcoholic salep vendor was also badly beaten.

As Bekri Mustafa observed this procedure, he thought, "This Janissary leader will claim to outrank me too in order to have me beaten. If I say that I am Bekri Mustafa, he will have me beaten. If I should claim to be a laborer or sailor, he would also have me beaten. So, what should I say?" He then thought of a stratagem to restrain the commander. "If I should state that I am the Grand Vizier, the only person that could be my superior and beat me would be the sultan himself."

When it came time for Bekri Mustafa to be questioned, the Janissary leader asked, "Who are you?"

"I am the Grand Vizier."

Now it was the turn of the commander to wonder what he should say. He knew that only the padishah himself could take action against the Grand Vizier. He also knew that

<sup>3</sup>A hot drink made from the roots of orchids.

Story 2187

if he falsely claimed to be Sultan Murat, a complaint could be filed against him. He therefore said nothing more and, as a result, Bekri Mustafa was released