

Story 679 (1973, Tape 3)

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The Authority of a Host

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Once there was and once there was not a padişah called Sultan Murad.<sup>1</sup> When he and his grand vizier were about to go traveling in the mountains one day, the sultan said,

"Just for a change, let us go to Rabbit Mountain this time."<sup>2</sup>

This was agreeable to the grand vizier, and so they prepared to set out. A crowd of people at İstanbul saw them off on their journey. After traveling for a few days, they arrived at Rabbit Mountain one evening as darkness was approaching. While they were asking each other, "Where shall we stay tonight?" and "Where shall we sleep?" they saw a shepherd a short distance from them. They called to him, "O Shepherd Ağa!"<sup>3</sup>

vizier -- grand  
age -- as term of flattery or deference  
 rather than as accurate title: "O Shepherd Ağa"

"What is it that you want of me, O you guests in this area?"

<sup>1</sup>Although many Turkish peasants have very vague ideas of history, they often strive for verisimilitude by including the name of a real person. In some instances they may actually be repeating legends about that person. There were many legends about the private life and behavior of Sultan Murad IV (1623-1640), and, without any other evidence, we may assume Murad IV is the sultan referred to here.

<sup>2</sup>We have not identified such a mountain.

<sup>3</sup>Inasmuch as they need his help, the travelers are being overly courteous to the shepherd. "Shepherd Ağa" is a paradoxical title, for shepherds are among the very poorest and lowliest of people, while ağas are wealthy landowners.

Murad,

"Would you be willing to be our host for tonight?"

"I should be glad to be your host, my ağas, but I have no beds or blankets. I have a small shepherd hut here in this yayla,<sup>4</sup> and if you would be willing to sleep there on a piece of haircloth, as I do, you would be most welcome."

"We should be willing to sleep even in a small mill shed! What else can we do? There is neither village nor inn here," said the sultan

Saying, "Well, then, come along with me," he invited them to stay with him. "My

it for our guests."

The son brought a sheep, and after it was sacrificed and cooked, they ate plentifully of its meat. The sultan and his grand vizier slept there that night in the shepherd's hut.

*Ağa -- a term of flattery or deference -- rather than as an actual title* The next morning they arose and said to the shepherd, "Well, Mehmet Ağa, please see us off now." (They had discovered that the real name of the shepherd was Mehmet.)

"O my son!" the shepherd called, "find a sheep or a goat which can be slaughtered to provide food to be taken along by these travelers."

<sup>4</sup>A yayla is a summer pasture in the mountains.

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When Sultan Murad heard this, he said, "What are you talking about, Mehmet Ağa? We could not eat even one fourth of a sheep or goat."

Mehmet Ağa slapped Sultan Murad's mouth and said, "Be quiet! You should not interfere with the head of a household about such matters!" The shepherd did not know, of course, that this guest was Sultan Murad, and so he asked him, "What is your name?" *slapping -- of mouth -- of sultan*  
*household -- head of*

"They called me 'Steward Murad with the Big Mansion of İstanbul Village.

After his guests had departed, the shepherd committed to memory the name "Steward Murad with the Big Mansion of İstanbul Village," *-- pseudonym used by Sultan Murad IV (Saesim)* but he still did not know the real identity of that Murad. When the next spring arrived, the shepherd decided to pay a return visit to his guest. He selected a choice hennaed ram and cut off its heavy wool with shears. *s. shearing -- of sheep* *hennaed* *Sandals -- rawhide (Gazik)* On his own feet he put rawhide sandals and on his shoulder a stick to which a packet of provisions was attached. In approximately how many days would he arrive at İstanbul? He reached that city in ten or twelve days.

<sup>5</sup>Henna is a reddish dye used to mark sheep with their owners' names or emblems so that the animals can be readily identified. The long wool of sheep makes branding impractical. Identifying marks are especially necessary for villagers, for most livestock is grazed in community herds, a shepherd or cowherd picking up each morning one or more animals from a number of owners and then returning them at the end of the day.

In İstanbul he said to one person after another "Point out to me the big mansion of Murad the Steward."

"I do not know where it is--I do not know where it is--I do not know where it is," these people kept saying. Finally, someone advised him, "Enter a place which has guards around it."

After he had walked around for some time, he saw a very large mansion with guards around it, and he tried to enter this house. But the guards shouted at him, "Hey! Where do you think you are going? This is the palace of the Sultan."

"Murad the Steward called upon me."

"No, no, you cannot enter this building," they said, and several of them seized him.

Finally, Sultan Murad learned of this incident and came out. He said to the guards, "Release him! Release him! Do not touch him! Let him come in! He is our Mehmet Ağa." To the grand vizier the sultan said, "Our Mehmet Ağa has come!"

"Let him come! Let him come! He is welcome!"

"O Murad the Steward, did you have this palace built, or did you inherit it?" asked the shepherd after they had gone upstairs.

"No, I inherited it from my father," said Sultan Murad.

"Yes, that must be so, for this is something bigger than

you would be able to accomplish."

"Take him to the bath," said the Sultan, "and afterwards get him a suit of clothes from the closet for ready-made clothes. Then we shall drink coffee and tea." Clothes read. 40

While Mehmet was being bathed and fitted with a new suit of clothes, the Sultan said to the vizier, "How shall we get even with him for slapping me?" ty - of

"That is easy, my Sultan.

lates (dishes) -  
golden

throw it out of an open window into the sea. Mehmet will golden plates not be able to stand this, of course, and sooner or later and golden spoons he will say, 'That was made of gold! Why did you do that?' spoons -- thrown out window into sea -- after being Then you can slap him and say, 'Never interfere with the things that are the business of the head of a household!' used -- to

"Yes, that will be good. We have found a way," provoked comment said plates (dishes) -- golden -- and golden spoons -- Murad.

Now let us come to Mehmet Ağa. He sat down with the same a plate Sultan and the grand vizier and began eating. He just kept eating without saying a single word.

dish had been emptied, the Sultan threw it out the window golden spoon -- and golden plates -- thrown out window and into sea -- to provoked comment

<sup>6</sup>A flakey pastry made of many layers of extremely thin dough, filled with cheese or meat, and cooked in deep fat. spoons -- golden -- same a plate

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into the sea. And after each of the dishes containing thirty-nine other kinds of food was emptied, he threw it out in the same way. When Mehmet Ağa did not say a word as all these golden dishes, one after another were thrown into the sea, the grand vizier became impatient said, "O Mehmet Ağa, why do you not speak about what you have seen? Is the Sultan mad? Everything that he has throwing into the sea has been made of gold!"

"See, here, you!" said Mehmet Ağa, "Murad made that same kind of mistake in my home!" and he gave the vizier a slap in the mouth, too. Then he said to the vizier, can do anything he wishes in his own house! He can even throw both you and me out the window too, if he wants to do so! He is the owner of this house and the head of this household!"

After Mehmet Ağa had said that, they stopped talking about it. The matter had ended, just as our story has ended.