



Kara Mustafa the Hero

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Turkish

Intermediate

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There was once a woman who had a husband who was so timid that he never dared to go out alone. On one occasion the woman was invited to a party, and as she was about to set out her husband implored her to make haste back, as he would be forced to remain in the house until her return. She promised to do so; and had hardly been with her friends half an hour when she got up to take leave. “Why must you go home so soon?” asked her hosts. She answered that her husband was at home waiting for her. “Why does he wait?” they asked.

“He dare not go out without me,” was the reply. “That is strange,” observed the women, and prevailed upon her to remain a little longer. They advised her that next time she went out with her husband after dark, she should slip away from him, and leave him alone in the darkness. By that means he would be cured.

The woman followed this advice, and on the first opportunity that offered, she left her husband alone in the darkness. The man cried out in his terror until at last he fell asleep where he waited. At daybreak he awoke, and went angrily into the house.

Among his possessions was a rusty old knife bequeathed him by his father. He took it up and while cleaning it uttered a resolution not to live with his wife any more. He accordingly set out and came to a place where honey had been spilt, on which a swarm of flies were regaling themselves. Drawing his knife across the sticky mass, he found that he had killed sixty of the flies. He drew it across a second time and counted seventy victims.

Immediately he went to a cutler and ordered him to engrave on the knife: “At a single stroke Kara Mustafa, the

great hero, has killed sixty, and at the second stroke seventy.” The inscription finished, the knife was returned to its owner, who went his way.

Presently he came to a wilderness, and when night fell he lay down and slept, sticking his knife into the earth. Now in this locality dwelt forty Dews, one of whom took an early walk every morning. The Dew saw the sleeping man and the knife, and as he read the inscription upon the latter he was seized with terror. Seeing that Mustafa was now waking up, the Dew, with a view to appeasing this redoubtable person, begged him to join his brothers’ company. “Who are you?” asked the hero. “We are Dews to the number of forty, and if you will deign to join us we shall be forty one.” “I am willing,” said Mustafa; “go and tell the others.” Hearing this the Dew hastened to his fellows and said: “My brothers, a hero desires to join us. His immense strength may be gathered from the inscription on his knife: ‘At a single stroke Kara Mustafa, the great hero, has killed sixty, and at the second stroke seventy.’ Let us put everything in order, for he will be here directly.”

But the Dews hastened to meet Mustafa, who when he saw them felt his courage sink. However, he managed to address them. “God greet you, comrades!” he exclaimed. The Dews modestly returned his greeting and offered him a place among them. By and by he inquired: “Is there among you any fellow like me?” The Dews assured him that there was not. Thus satisfied, Mustafa proceeded: “Because, if so, let him step forth and try his strength with me.” “Where shall his equal be found?” exclaimed the Dews, as they walked home.

The Dews were obliged to carry their water from a long distance, and this duty was performed in turn by each of their number. Being of gigantic stature and strength, they were of course able to carry a quantity impossible for a mere mortal. On the following day one of the Dews accosted Mustafa: “It is your turn to fetch the water, and we are sorry to say the well is far away.” Being afraid of the hero, the Dews naturally addressed him somewhat apologetically. Mustafa reflected, and then asked for a rope. It was given him, and he proceeded with it to the well. The Dews, full of curiosity to know what he intended to do with the rope, looked on from a distance, and saw him attach it to the stonework of the well. Astonished, they ran up and shouted to him to know what he was about.

“Oh,” he answered, “I am only going to put the well on my back and bring it home, so that none of us need go so far for water again!” They begged him for Allah’s sake to desist, and he promised to do so on the understanding that they would not trouble him again with the duty of water-carrying.

A few days afterwards it was Mustafa’s turn to fetch wood from the forest. Again he asked for the rope, and

went. The Dews hid themselves and watched him. On the edge of the forest they saw him drive a peg into the ground and fix the rope, which he then drew round the trees. By chance the wind rose and shook the trees to and fro. "What are you doing, Mustafa?" shouted one of the Dews. "Oh, I am only going to take home the forest all at once instead of piecemeal, to save trouble." "Don't shake the trees!" cried all the Dews. "You will destroy the whole forest. We would rather fetch the wood ourselves."

The Dews were now more afraid of Mustafa than ever, and they called a council to deliberate on the best means of getting rid of their formidable associate. It was eventually decided to pour boiling water upon him during the night while he slept, and thus kill him. Fortunately for himself, however, he overheard the conversation, and prepared accordingly. When evening came he went to bed as usual. The Dews heated the water and poured it through the roof of his dwelling. But Mustafa had laid a bolster in the place where he should have been; on the bolster he had placed his fez, and he had drawn up the bedcover. Then he betook himself to a corner of the room, where he lay down and slept soundly out of harm's way. When morning broke the Dews came in the belief that he was dead, and knocked at the door. "Who's there?" came a voice from the inside. The astonished and affrighted Dews called to him to get up, as it was already nearly midday. "It was very hot last night," he observed; "I lay bathed in perspiration." The astonishment of the Dews that boiling water had no further effect upon him than to make him perspire may be imagined.

The Dews next resolved to drop forty iron balls upon Mustafa while he slept: those would surely kill him. This plan also our hero overheard. When bedtime came he entered his room and arranged the bolster as before, putting his fez upon it and drawing up the cover, after which he retired to his corner to await developments. The Dews mounted the roof, and lifting some of the tiles, looked down upon what appeared to be their sleeping companion. "Look, there is his chest; there is his head," they whispered, and thud came the balls one after the other.

Next morning the Dews went to Mustafa's house and knocked at the door. This time no answer came, and they began to congratulate themselves that the hero would trouble them no more. But as a measure of precaution they knocked again and also uttered loud shouts. Then they found their rejoicing had been premature, for Mustafa's voice was heard: "I couldn't sleep last night for the mice gambolling over me; let me rest a little longer." The Dews were now nearly crazy. What manner of man was this, who thought heavy iron balls were mice?

Few days afterwards the Dews said to Mustafa: "In the adjoining country we have a Dew-brother: will you fight

a duel with him?" Mustafa inquired whether the Dew were a strong fellow. "Very," was the reply. "Then he may come." In saying this, however, our hero was ready to die of fright. When the gigantic Dew appeared on the scene, he proposed to preface the duel by a wrestling bout. This being agreed to, they repaired to the field. The Dew caught Mustafa by the throat and held him in such a mighty grasp that his eyes started from their sockets.

"What are you staring at?" demanded the Dew, as he relaxed his grip on Mustafa's neck. "I was looking to see how high I should have to throw you so that all your limbs would be broken by your fall," answered our hero in well-simulated contempt. Hearing this, all the Dews fell upon their knees before him and begged him to spare their brother. Mustafa accordingly graciously pardoned his adversary; and the Dews further entreated him to accept a large number of gold-pieces and go home. Secretly rejoicing, he accepted the proffered money and expressed his willingness to go. Taking a cordial farewell of them all, he set out in the company of a Dew, who had been deputed to act as his escort.

When he arrived in sight of his home Mustafa saw his wife looking out of the window; and as her gaze rested upon him she cried, "Here comes my coward of a husband with a Dew!" Mustafa made a sign to her, behind the Dew's back, to say nothing, and then began to run toward the house. "Where are you going in such a hurry?" demanded the Dew. "Into the house to get a bow and arrow to shoot you," was the answer of the flying hero. On hearing this the Dew made off back again to rejoin his brothers.

Mustafa had hardly had time to rest in his home when news was brought of a fierce bear that was playing havoc in the district.

The inhabitants went to the vali and begged him to order the hero to slay the depredator. "He has already encountered forty Dews," they said. "It is a pity that the bear should kill so many poor people."

The vali sent for Mustafa and informed him that it was unseemly that the people should be terrorized by a bear while the province held such a valorous man as himself. Then spake Mustafa: "Show me the place where the bear is, and let forty horsemen go with me." His request was granted. Mustafa went into the stable took a handful of small pebbles, and flung them among the horses. The creatures all with the exception of one began to rear. This Mustafa himself took. When the horsemen saw what he did, they remarked to the vali that the man was mad and they were not disposed to help him to hunt the bear. The vali advised them: "As soon as you hear the bear, go away and leave him to it, to do what he will."

So the cavalcade set out, and when presently they came to the bearhiding-place the mounted escort left our

hero in the lurch and rode back. Mustafa spurred his steed, but the animal would not move, and the bear came at him with ungainly strides. Seeing a tree close at hand, our hero sprang on to the back of his horse, clutched at the overhanging branches, and pulled himself up. The bear came underneath the tree and was preparing to ascend when Mustafa, letting go his hold, alighted on its back, and boxed bruin's ears so severely that he set off in the direction the horsemen had taken. Catching sight of them, he yelled: "Kara Mustafa, the hero, is coming!" Whereon they all wheeled round, and, understanding the situation, dispatched the bear with their lances.

After this the fame of Kara Mustafa spread far and wide. The vali conferred upon him various marks of honour, and he enjoyed the respect of his neighbours to his long life's end.

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