

Story 750 (Tape destroyed)

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of Kastamonu Province

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Incili Çavuş and the Distant Fire

One day Sultan Mahmut¹ asked Incili Çavuş² to come into his presence. When he arrived, the sultan said, "You will climb up the minaret, you will remain there until tomorrow morning, and then you will report to me whatever you have observed."

"But, your majesty, it is winter," said Incili Çavuş.
"I shall be frozen up there."

"I cannot help that. I want you to report to me in the morning what you have seen from the minaret during the night."

There was nothing for Incili Çavuş to do but obey this

¹Probably Sultan Mahmut I, who ruled from 1730-1745.

²Incili Çavuş means, literally, Pearl Sergeant. Supposedly he was member of that elite military organization known as the Corps of Janissaries. In Turkish folktales this legendary figure represented individually the same bravery and impudence that the Corps as a whole became known for. The Corps took great liberties with the citizens of Istanbul (then Constantinople) and even with the sultanate. They burned the city many times and caused several sultans to sit uneasily on their thrones. Incili Çavuş dares to taunt the absolute monarch but retains his head because of his great wit and the devil-may-care attitude that amused as much as it annoyed the rulers.

Story 750

command, and so he dressed as warmly as he could and then climbed the minaret. It was a cold night, and the wind was blowing hard, and so Incili Çavuş walked round and round balcony of the minaret to keep warm. Toward morning he observed a fire burning at a great distance, but he did not know what caused it. Finally morning arrived, and Incili, half frozen, climbed down from the minaret and went to the presence of the sultan.

"What did you observe from the minaret last night?" the sultan asked.

"I was very cold and almost froze to death up there, your majesty. All I saw during the whole night was a great fire in the distance, but it was so far away that I could not tell what caused it."

"Aren't you ashamed to say that you were cold when you had a great fire like that to warm yourself?"

Incili Çavuş said nothing, but he put the sultan's comment in his pocket.³ Sometime later, after the warm weather had returned, Incili Çavuş invited Sultan Mahmut his viziers to his house for a feast, and the sultan accepted the invitation.

When the day of the feast arrived, Sultan Mahmut and all his viziers made a procession to Incili Çavuş's house, where

³A Turkish expression meaning "he remembered it."

Story 750

they were received with great respect. Incili Çavuş led them to the garden, where they all sat talking. They sat there for two or three hours, and the company began to grow more and more hungry. Finally one of the viziers asked Incili Çavuş, "Are we not going to eat tonight?"

"Yes," said Incili Çavuş. "The cook is preparing dinner but he says it is not ready yet"

They talked further and walked about the garden until it was very late. By this time everyone was extremely hungry, and the same vizier said to Incili Çavuş, "Let us go to the kitchen and see how the dinner is being made ready."

"Very well," said Incili Çavuş, and he led the vizier to the kitchen. There the vizier was amazed at what he saw. Incili Çavuş had ordered his cook to place the food to be cooked in a large cauldron, to hoist the cauldron up to the ceiling, and then to place a lighted candle beneath it on the floor

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the vizier. "How will the dinner ever get cooked in that way?"

"You wouldn't understand this," said Incili Çavuş, "but Sultan Mahmut would."

The vizier went to Sultan Mahmut and told him what he had seen and what Incili Çavuş had said. "What does he mean by this, your majesty?"

about
dinner
fiş

Story 750

"I don't know," said the sultan, and he called Incili Çavuş to him. "How can a candle ever cook a cauldron of food several meters away?"

"Why, I thought you would understand this, your majesty. It can be done as easily as I could warm myself by the distant fire during the night I spent on the minaret."