

Story 1342 (1988 Tape 15)

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İncili Çavuş¹ Outwitted by His Successor

There was once a man named İncili Çavuş who lived, I have been told, during the reign of Sultan Mahmut.² He was a gentleman in waiting in the court of the sultan. To be a courtier at the palace of the sultan, one had to be educated and able to keep up a lively conversation with the ruler. Sultan Mahmut liked İncili Çavuş especially for the interesting stories he was able to tell.

After many years of serving in this capacity in the court, İncili Çavuş began to show signs of his age, and he felt the time had come when he could no longer carry out his duties adequately. His hearing was especially impaired. Therefore, one day when he was in the sultan's presence, he

¹İncili (pearl) Çavuş (sergeant) was a member of the famous and infamous Janissary Corps, an elite military organization in Ottoman Turkey. More a folk type than a historical personage, he was both the braggart soldier and a quick-witted conversationalist with sufficient expertise to be able to chide and satirize his superiors--even the sultan--with impunity.

²Peasant narrators often associate İncili with Sultan Mahmut, seemingly unaware that there were six Ottoman sultans of that name. When a specific Mahmut is mentioned, it is usually Mahmut IV (reigned 1623-1640).

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said, "Oh, my great padişah, please give me permission to retire and retreat into a corner somewhere. I can no longer hear very well, and I often talk incoherently. I know that I more often bore you than I entertain you."

no! You have been with me for many years, and I have become accustomed to having you with me. But if you really wish to retire, I shall give you permission to do so upon one condition, and that is that you will find a replacement as clever as yourself."

İncili Çavuş was from Kayseri, a town known for its shrewd and clever people.³ It was only natural, therefore, that İncili Çavuş would go to his hometown to seek a successor. The road between İstanbul and Kayseri at that time was not one on which anyone could travel in absolute safety. There were known to be thieves and bandits along the whole length of that road, and an affluent person like İncili Çavuş might well be robbed on that road. Although he knew this İncili Çavuş hired a muleteer with several mules and started out toward Kayseri

The muleteer warned him, "This road is not secured. As

³Kayseri people are legendary for their cleverness and sharp dealing, as attested to by scores of folk anecdotes. Although İncili Çavuş was very clever, he was not usually said to be of Kayseri origin.

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we travel along, we may suddenly be confronted by bandits
İncili said nothing, and since it was a cold day in winter,
he kept his hands in his pockets all of the time. He happened
to have a cold at the time, and his nose was running. He
called out several times, "Muleteer, come and wipe my nose!"
This annoyed the muleteer greatly, but he said nothing, for
he knew well that İncili Çavuş was a close friend of the sultan

As they were passing through some wooded hills, several
bandits suddenly appeared before them on horseback. "Halt!"
they shouted at the muleteer.

Trembling with fear, the muleteer said to İncili Çavuş
"Didn't I tell you that there were bandits along this road?"

"Wipe my nose," said İncili Çavuş. When the muleteer
done that, İncili ordered, "Take my bow off my back!"

When that was done, he said, "Give me my quiver of arrows."
Fitting an arrow in his bow, he then asked, "Muleteer, do you
see the lead bandit approaching? Watch him!" As the muleteer
watched, an arrow pierced the forehead of the lead bandit
Two of the bandits that followed were struck in the belly with
arrows. The rest of the bandits then scattered like a covey
of partridges. The muleteer was amazed at what he had just
witnessed.

When they reached a village later that day, İncili Çavuş

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asked some people on the street, "Who are the prominent
idents here?"

After giving him the names of several leading citizens,
they added, "Besides these people, the imam⁴ of our village
is a very hospitable person."

İncili Çavuş went to the home of the imam, where he
accepted as a guest for the night. He liked his host very
much, for the imam had a good sense of humor. When İncili
first entered the imam's house, he said, "I have only one
special request, and that is that I sleep in a bed which will
never hear the sound of artillery or smell the odor of gun-
powder."

"Very well," answered the imam.

They ate dinner together, and after the meal the imam
told some interesting stories and carried on a witty conver-
sation. When it was time to retire, the host took his guest
to the room where he was to sleep. It was a very clean room,
and on one side of it a long reed stood leaning against
wall. Looking curiously at this reed, İncili Çavuş asked
"What is that for, İmam Efendi?"

⁴The prayer leader at a mosque

⁵A mild honorific, comparable to Sir, it usually follows
a first name: Hasan Efendi. At one time it was used to show
respect to distinguished people, but it has become so devalu-
ated in the twentieth century that it now is used only for
servants and children.

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The imam answered, "Did you not ask to sleep in a bed that would never hear the sound of artillery or smell the odor of gunpowder? Well, if you shove this reed into the muzzle of a cannon, the bed will neither hear the sound of artillery nor smell the odor of gunpowder." İncili was impressed with the cleverness of this man.

Around midnight İncili Çavuş woke up and went down to the stable where several donkeys were kept. There he cut the lips off one of the donkeys and then returned to his room. In the morning after they had eaten their breakfast, the host and his guest went to the stable together. There İncili Çavuş asked, "Why is that one donkey smiling?"

"Because its tail has been cut off," answered the imam. Then he cut off the donkey's

Thinking now that this imam would be a likely successor, İncili Çavuş now spoke privately with that man about that matter. "I am a courtier in the palace of the sultan, but I am planning to retire very soon. I have been asked to name my successor. I like you, and I should like to have you replace me at the palace, but I have one condition for naming you to that position. When I introduce you to the sultan, he will talk with you for a while, and if he likes you, he will probably offer you some valuable gift. My condition is that you

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will give half of whatever gift he offers you."

The imam accepted this condition, and the two men went together to the palace. After the sultan had talked with the imam for a short while, he took a liking to that witty man and offered him a bag of gold. To the sultan's surprise, the imam responded, "No, thank you, my padişah. If you want to give me something, I would rather have a beating of a hundred lashes

The sultan thought, "There must be something behind such a request, for this imam is a very clever young man." But he complied with that young man's request and had one of his guards start beating him.

After the imam had been struck fifty blows, he called out, "Stop! I made a bargain with İncili Çavuş to give him half of whatever present my great padişah offered me. Therefore, the last fifty blows should go to him."