

Story #530 (1974 Tape #5)

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The Padişah Captures the Three Famous Thieves of İstanbul

Once there were three famous thieves in İstanbul. Their activity upset the entire city, but no one was able to capture them. Finally the padişah became very angry and said, "How is it possible that in spite of all my night watchmen, police, and gendarmes, these thieves cannot be captured?"

A night watchman offended by this remark of the padişah replied, "Your majesty, do you think that we are collaborators with these thieves? What can we do? We just cannot manage to catch them. If you have any skill at this sort of thing, show us how you can catch them."

Disguise "I shall show you how thieves are caught," said the padişah. He dressed himself shabbily, like a tramp. He thought to himself, "Where could they [the thieves] stay?" He decided that there would not be a better place for them to hide than in a cemetery, and so he went there. Soon after he arrived there, he saw three shadows appear. When he whistled to them, they whistled back. "What are you?" he asked them.

"We are thieves."

"O fellow-citizens, I too am a thief, but I cannot do much alone. May I join you?"

"Well, each of us has a specific talent. What talent do you have?"

"I too have a special talent."

"What is it? Tell us about your special ability."

"Well, you tell me your talents, and then I shall tell you mine

"You are right," they said.

Then one of them said, "This is my talent. When I see a black man in the thick black of night, I can distinguish him clearly, and after that I can pick him out of a crowd of 1,000 black men by daylight."

Another said, "If 1,000 dogs bark in a village or in the country, I can understand what each of the 1,000 is saying." } 4 B can hear the animal say.

The third said, "If an apartment or a house is locked in 1,000 places, I can unlock all those 1,000 places without touching them with my hands."

Then they all said, "Now, what is your special talent?"

The padişah said, "No matter how serious a crime a man¹ commits, when the gallows are set up and the oily loop¹ placed around his neck, I can save him by touching my moustache with my hand."

The three responded, "That is the one thing which we most fear. If you can save us from that [hanging], we could put all İstanbul through the sieve [that is, sift everything from the city]. Come along then and we shall have the one talent which we have lacked."

They all set out together. Along the way a dog rushed at them, barking. The others said to the dog-talker, "Friend, listen to the dog and tell us what he is saying."

"Well, by Allah! The dog is saying, 'The padişah is among you; the padişah is among you.'"

¹ Gypsy executioners who are hired to perform hangings in Turkey oil the rope they use so that it may fit more snugly around the criminal's neck. A gypsy is hired so that one Moslem will not have to take the life of another, even though he be a criminal. Some gypsies are, in fact, Moslems, but many are not.

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When the padişah heard this, he grew afraid, for he had no sword or gun to protect himself. "If the three of them should now catch me by the throat, what could I do?"

While the padişah was thus concerned for his safety, one of the others said, "Would the padişah ever leave his comfort to join us here? The dog must be lying."

The dog-talker replied, "Well, if you think that way about it, I shall no longer listen to dogs. Dogs do not lie. If you do not wish to take my word, then don't."

As they proceeded, the thieves asked one another, "What shall we steal now?"

One of them said, "Let us go to such-and-such a bank."

A second said, "Let us go to such-and-such a store."

The third said, "Let us break into so-and-so's safe."

The padişah said, "Sons, you do not know how to go about this. You should steal on one day but live on the profit for 1,000. We must go to where there is a great amount of money."

"Where shall we go?" asked one.

"To the padişah's treasury," 65-67

"No, no! We must not meddle in the padişah's affairs, for if we do, there is a great chance of our losing our heads or being hanged. From other people there are only beatings and imprisonment."

"Well, I am the one who can save you," said the padişah. "What are you afraid of?"

"Very well, then," they all said. "Let us go!"

"You wait here," the padişah said, "and let me go ahead and see if it is safe to go there and break in, for I am familiar with that place. Why get caught and have our names in everyone's mouth?"

"Yes, you are right," they said.

Leaving the other three men there, the padişah went toward the Treasury. As he approached it, he was stopped by guards. "Hey! Where are you going?" one said

Shave
language

"Quiet, you son of a donkey! I am bringing the thieves. Tell everyone to cover his head with a turban [so that they will not be recognized as guards]. When we enter the treasury, you fall upon us immediately or I shall have you all hanged."

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" they all said.

The padişah returned to the place where the three thieves waited. "They are all sound asleep," he told them, "like people who have just returned from a wedding. This is a great opportunity --the best!"

Fig
lay

They walked toward the Treasury. Along the way they saw the guards sleeping like onion stalks² on both sides of the road. "Well, here is the Treasury--not an ordinary place," said the padişah.

The lock-breaker said his prayers and ^{blowing}blew them through the keyhole of the Treasury door. Then was heard ^{onom}Cangır, cangır, cangır!³

² Tall onion stalks, when left in the field, finally topple over in a half-reclining position.

³ This is onomatopoeia for the breaking of something hard, like steel. Blowing prayers was once used as a religious practice in curing sick people. The healer was known as a üfürükçü or blower. Such sorcerers were outlawed after the founding of the Turkish Republic.

When the Treasury doors were finally opened, they all entered. Heaps of gold were piled inside, section by section, like grain sheaves in Hâlit Bey's⁴ harvesting place. Half-lira coins and quarter-lira pieces were piled separately.

The padişah said, "Sons, did you see this money? Well, take as much as you like."

When they took out bags and started filling them, the night watchmen, the police, and the gendarmes rushed into the room with a roar: Gr-r-r-r-r! They caught the three thieves and handcuffed them together, but the padişah disappeared.

One of the thieves said, "Where is our companion who joined us on the road?"

*Shine
figure* "You pimps!" said the dog-talker. "I told you that the padişah was among us, but you would not believe it. Now wait and see if he will save you tomorrow when you are put on the swing [gallows rope]."

They were taken to the main police station, and telegrams were sent everywhere saying that the famous thieves of İstanbul had been caught at midnight yesterday.⁵ "They will be hanged at nine o'clock tomorrow in front of Yıldız Palace.⁶ Those who want to watch are welcome to come."

⁴ Hâlit Bey was a real person, a local resident of the narrator's village.

⁵ This is an obvious anachronism, for when the term padişah was current, there was no telegraph.

⁶ Yıldız Palace was the residence of Sultan Abdul Hâmid and his successors.

Ağas, beys, pashas, and officials from many parts of the country came to watch their execution. There were thousands of people there. The ropes were being oiled and made ready to put around the thieves' necks.

One thief said to his companion, "O friend capable of distinguishing a black man in darkness, look at those people and see if you can recognize the man who joined us the other night."

"No, he is not here."

"Well, look into the ^{ap. house} apartments then."⁷

He looked at the apartments, and in one of them he saw the padişah sitting cross-legged on a golden chair, with his golden water-pipe beside him. He was wearing his crown and smoking his pipe, tokur, tokur.^{gurgling} The thief who first saw him said to the other thieves, "Do you see that man with a crown on his head and a water-pipe beside him? He is the one who joined us that night."

"Well," said one of the other two, "why don't you call to him? They are oiling the ropes, and the gallows are set up. They are about to put them [the ropes] around our necks. Let him keep his promise. It is about time that he raises his hand to his moustache."

The first thief shouted, "Hey, you, sitting on the balcony of

⁷ To Turkish peasants an urban apartment house is the acme of comfort and luxury. They therefore place sultans in apartments in their tales, even though there were no apartment houses at the time in which their tales are set.

⁸ This is onomatopoeia for a gurgling sound. The actual verbal combination that the narrator used here was tokur datmak.

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Yıldız Palace, wearing a crown, and smoking a water-pipe! Here we have been caught, and gallows have been set up. The oily ropes are about to be put around our necks. If you are a man, do not go back on the promise made last night. The time has come to raise your hand to your moustache!"

The padişah waved to his men and said, "Bring those fellows over here." The crowd parted to make room for them, and the three came, prostrated themselves, and kissed the padişah's hands and robes. "All right; sit down," the padişah said. "Sons, I have seen the work that the three of you have done. Last night I was dressed as a tramp, and now you have recognized me. The one who listened to the dog was also right, and you (turning to the lock-breaker) were able to open the doors without touching them. And I shall keep my promise too. But you have robbed enough of the subsistence of the poor. If you show penitence, I shall forgive you."

"Padişah," the first thief objected, "we have never, since we were boys, earned a lira by the sweat of our foreheads [i.e, honestly]. We steal other people's money. What shall we do if you force us to abandon our craft? Shall we starve to death? First show us a way in which we can earn our living, and then show us the way to be penitent."

A vizier said, "My padisāh, he is right."

The padişah said, "All right. Take each of them to the Treasury and give each a kilo of gold. Let one open a shop to buy and sell things. Let a second sell and buy what he wishes. Let the third eat whatever dung he wishes. But let them all give up this trade which they have had!"

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"We shall give it up this very minute. We promise seven times while facing Mecca that we shall never steal even an egg from now on."

The padişah forgave them and gave to each a kilo of gold. The three began to pursue other trades. They ate, drank, and grew happy. May you also eat, drink, and become happy. May you always be as happy as they.