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The Three Suitors and Their Magic Gifts

Daughter of Ruler

Once upon a time there was a Sultan who had a beautiful daughter. There were many men who wanted to marry this girl, but the Sultan always asked more money for her hand than the men were able to pay. In fact, there were very few men in the world who had as much money as he required.

Finally there were three men who had sufficient money to ask for her hand. One of these suitors, who lived in a faraway place, took the money that he had acquired and started for the town of the Sultan. On the way he came to a spot where there was a big crowd of people. By asking a bystander, he learned that a wonderful mirror was being sold there. The mirror would show to its owner what was going on in any part of the world. The young man pushed to the center of the crowd and bought the mirror, but he had to pay for it all the money that he had saved. He was convinced that the Sultan would give him his beautiful daughter because of the mirror

At about the same time in another part of the world another young suitor had acquired the necessary amount of money to ask for the hand of the Sultan's daughter. On his way to the Sultan's town he saw a carpet being sold. This was a magic carpet that could carry its owner over considerable distances, any place that he wanted to go. This second suitor gave all his money for the carpet because he hoped that he would be able to win the Sultan's daughter by having it.

Finally, there was a third suitor at this time who started for the Sultan's town with his money, and on the way he saw a lemon being sold. He asked what sort of lemon it was, and why so many people would be interested

in a single lemon. He was told that this was a special lemon which could cure any kind of illness. He gave all his money for this magic lemon. He also hoped to be able to marry the Sultan's daughter because of his possession of this lemon.

The three men were proceeding to the town of the Sultan when their paths crossed and they met at an inn one night. The first one was asked, "Where are you going?"

"I am going to ask the Sultan to give me his daughter in marriage," he said.

The second one said, "I am going there for this same purpose."

And the third suitor said, "That's what I am going there for, too. But there are three of us and only one girl. How are we going to divide her?"

The young man with the mirror said, "Let us see how this beautiful girl is faring at the present time." They all looked into the mirror and saw that the Sultan's daughter was lying in bed and writhing with pain because she was ill. It appeared that she had been stricken with some kind of incurable illness.

The owner of the carpet said, "Let us get on my carpet and go there to help the girl right away." They got on the magic carpet and they were carried to the Sultan's palace

When they arrived there the third suitor said, "I have a lemon which cure any illness. Let us go and squeeze it and have her drink some of the juice."

When they reached the palace, they saw the Sultan slapping his knees in scrow.¹ He looked and saw three strange people coming toward him and he

¹This is a proverbial expression in Turkey that describes graphically an anguished person seems to be doing.

asked them what their purpose was. They told him that they had come to treat his daughter with the lemon. The Sultan allowed them to try this treatment. They squeezed the lemon into a cup, and gave it to the girl to drink. The girl drank the juice, and became well in a very short time.

Now the three young men could not decide which of them had the right to claim the girl. The suitor with the mirror claimed that he should marry her because it was through his mirror that they first knew that the girl was ill. The suitor with the carpet claimed that he should marry her because it was by means of his magic carpet that the three of them were able to reach the girl in time. The third suitor claimed that she should be his bride because it was his lemon that actually cured her. They finally decided to go to a judge in order to have him settle their dispute. They asked the judge, "Which one of us, Efendi, should receive the girl as a bride?"

The judge pondered this question for a whole day. On the following day he gave his decision. This is what he said: "The man with the lemon should get the girl because only he, out of the three of you, used his money to buy something to help mankind. He bought the lemon because it would cure diseases. The other objects were bought for different reasons. I award the girl to the suitor with the magic lemon."²

²Various answers are given to this riddling question, and wherever this sort of dilemma is posed in a folk tale, there are different solutions suggested by members of the audience. The riddle is a very popular form in Turkey, and every Turk knows dozens; people often entertain themselves with riddling contests, and there are riddling teams that travel to neighboring towns to engage other teams. Sometimes, in a folk tale of this sort, the narrator will not state the claims of the suitors, but will simply ask the audience: "Which suitor deserves the girl?" A debate will ensue, various cases being presented for each suitor. The moralistic touch in this version of the tale (the concern with humanity) is not often present in the tale itself, though sometimes it is one of the reasons put forth by a listener. At the time this particular version was collected, many members of the audience thought that the third suitor should be awarded the girl because in squeezing the lemon he had spent his whole fortune on the girl to save her life. The mirror and the carpet had not been damaged but the lemon had been used up; there was nothing that said that the lemon could be squeezed indefinitely.