

Story 1347 (1969 Tape 5) Narrator: Ziya Özbek
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Justice in a Court of Mehmet II

Long ago there was a padişah who one day asked his viziers, "Is there any other padişah in this world like me?"

"No, our padişah," said the viziers, "there is no other padişah in this world like you

Then the padişah asked, "Is there any human being now alive who could wrest this country from my control?"

Again the viziers answered, "No, no, our padişah, there is no one who could do that.

One of the viziers then arose and said, "My padişah, there are in this country two very wise men who can tell what will happen in the future, when it will happen how it will happen. They seem to know everything

"If that is so, then I want to have those two wise men brought here to me," said the padişah. When the wise men were brought to the palace and shown into his presence, the padişah said to them, "Oh, priests,¹ I have

¹This is a variant of a tale set in the time of Mehmet the Conqueror and favorable to that Ottoman sultan who

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been told that you can predict the future. Cast your remil² now and tell me what my future will be. Is there anyone in this whole world who can take control of my country away from me?"

The priests said, "Our padişah, give us a signed statement saying that you guarantee our safety and well-being regardless of what our remil may reveal. Then we shall proceed with our prediction.

The padişah replied, "A ruler's word of honor is as good as any signed paper, and I am giving you my word of honor not to harm you in any way

The two priests cast remil and studied the results. They then said, "Our padişah, there is a man named Mehmet who will come and take control of this country away from you in a very short time from now.

When the padişah heard this prediction, he became furious. Forgetting all about his guarantee of safety to the priests, he ordered that these two men be thrown

captured Constantinople. (In this tale he is identified only as Mehmet, and the name of the city is not given.) Inasmuch as Mehmet's predecessor was a Byzantine emperor (and therefore Christian), it is likely that the two men thought to be most wise would be priests, for in that era the clergy were among the best-educated people.

²Remil is a form of numerology used for acquiring information, including information about the future. The

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immediately into a deep dungeon.

But the prediction of those two priests turned out to be true. Very soon a man named Mehmet did come and capture the country

Some time after the new ruler of the country had taken control, he began to visit different parts of the country and different units of the government. One day while he examining the prisons, he discovered the two priests in a dungeon. Mehmet asked them, "What was your crime? Why were you sent here?"

The two priests explained to the new padişah the event which had caused their imprisonment. They said, "The former padişah did not like our prediction about his future, and so he had us thrown into this dungeon despite his guarantee of our safety."

After ordering their release, Mehmet said to these two priests, "Now can you tell me what my future as ruler will be? Is it likely that I too shall lose control of this country?"

practice of remil involves the casting upon the ground of a number of small cubes (like dice). On each of the six sides of each cube there is a letter or number. Whatever letters and numbers face upward after a casting of the cubes supposedly provide coded information to adepts at this kind of numerology. In rural areas of Turkey, sheep knuckle-bones (aşıklar) are the ready-to-hand cubes which are marked and then used for remil.

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They replied, "Our padişah, give us forty days in which to study the new system of government that you have established throughout the land. Then we shall give you our prediction."

The padişah agreed to this arrangement, and the priests set out to investigate the new government. They were especially curious about the new system of justice, and so they visited many courtrooms and listened to the proceedings of many cases being tried.

At one point they observed a case in which a very poor man filed a complaint. This poor man had bought a horse which had become sick almost immediately after he had acquired it. He wished to return the horse to its previous owner and have his money refunded, but the previous owner rejected this request. He said, "I bought that horse from strangers at an open marketplace, and there would be no way in which I could get my own money back for the horse."

Not satisfied with that response, the poor man said, "Very well, then. I shall take the matter to court." He went to the nearest court and filed his complaint. After listening to this complaint, the court clerk set a date for the trial.

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When the day for the trial arrived, the poor man and the previous owner of the horse reported to the court, but judge for that trial did not appear. The clerk, therefore, set a new date for the trial.

In the meantime, however, the condition of the horse continued to grow worse and worse. It became so sick that it died before the new date set for the trial. When that date arrived, the judge appeared and listened to all of the evidence presented. When he learned that the horse had died between the time of the first date set for the trial and the time he was then hearing the case, he became very upset.

After considering the matter very seriously for several minutes, the judge announced, "This case should have been tried while the horse in question was still alive. It was my fault that it was not tried at that time, and therefore I shall myself pay the value of the horse to the man who filed the complaint."

After observing this case from beginning to end, the two priests returned to the new padişah and reported to him of the details of the legal case which they had just observed. They then said, "Our padişah, if your courts continue to dispense such justice, and if your judges remain that honest, there will be nobody able to take this country your control."