

Story #357 (Not on tape)

Informants: Children at Ayşe Abla İkoğulu

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The Hodja and the Candle

One day during a particularly bitter winter, the Hodja and his friends sat in the coffeehouse discussing the weather. Plain talk gave way to boasting, and before long the Hodja puffed out his chest importantly.

*Talk  
talk  
Exaggerates*

"You may think we are having a cold winter. As for me, I thrive on cold and snow. Why, when I was a boy, I used to go out in the middle of January and break the ice on the river so that I could have a good, brisk swim for myself. Pooh! This cold is nothing."

This claim was too exaggerated for the rest of them. Nudging a companion, the Hodja's best friend set out a fine challenge. "I say, Hodja. You like cold weather. I suppose you could stay out all night long in the cold without a coat or a blanket and nothing at all to warm yourself?"

"Of course," bragged the Hodja.

"No fire, no hot tea, no blanket, no coat?" The others seemed impressed.

"Well," said the ringleader, "we'll make a bargain with you. If tonight you can stay outside, with absolutely nothing extra to warm you, all night long, you'll be our guest at a fine dinner. Right, friends?"

"Right!" they chorused.

"On the other hand," the ringleader continued, "if you use any means at all of keeping yourself warm, you will entertain us for dinner. How

about that, Hodja effendi?"

"Fine, fine," agreed the Hodja.

That evening the Hodja's friends watched through the windows of their warm houses as the Hodja strolled here and there, studying the stars in the chill sky, and repenting a thousand times of his hasty boastful tongue. Just as he was about to concede defeat, he spied a candle set in a window perhaps a hundred meters away. Fixing his eye on the candle glow, the Hodja felt the blood flow back through his stiffening veins. Thus he was able to endure the long night.

The next morning his friends, stepping outside into the frosty air, were amazed to find the Hodja calm and smiling, none the worse for his chill vigil. "Well, Hodja effendi, are you sure you used no means at all of warming yourself?" persisted the ringleader.

"No means at all," the Hodja declared, "unless you can call a candle a hundred meters away a means! I did see a candle burning, and its glow kept me equal to the torments of the cold."

"Aha!" exclaimed the challenger. "Hodja effendi, you must be our host at dinner, for you warmed yourself by that candle." No protest on the part of the Hodja was sufficient to move the resolve of his friends on the matter, so they were invited that evening to dinner at the Hodja's house.

The group arrived in good time, and sat on bolsters in the Hodja's sparsely furnished living room, waiting for the delicious smells that must herald a fine meal. But, sniff as they would, they could detect not a hint of what was to be served for dinner. What's more, the Hodja kept excusing himself to go out to the kitchen and supervise the cooking,

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a most unusual procedure for him. As one hour succeeded another with still no sign of food, the men began to grumble among themselves, and at last the ringleader chaffed the Hodja about the delay.

"Ah, my friends, you can come and see for yourselves that your dinner is being made ready," declared their host, and he led the way to the kitchen. Following him, they were amazed to find a large caldron suspended from the ceiling. A meter below the caldron burned a single candle.

"But, Hodja effendi," spluttered the ringleader, "surely you don't expect to heat that caldron with a candle? Why, the dinner would never get done!"

"Oh, I'm not so sure," answered the Hodja calmly. "If a candle a hundred meters away can keep me warm all night long, surely a candle one meter away can heat a caldron!"