Fate Favors a Trickster

One day a ne'er-do-well fellow left his village and went to Istanbul in order to make some money. He decided to pretend to be either a hoca3 or a faith-healer. He put on a long robe and wrapped a long strip of cloth around his fez2 to make it look like a turban.3 He went to the Sahaflar section of Istanbul, where there are many secondhand book shops, and bought two old volumes.4 He hired a room for

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1 In pre-Republican Turkey there were many, many "con" men of this type. These were outlawed during the period of Kemalist Reforms in the 1920s.

2 The fez was for a long while the head covering of Turkish men. This was outlawed in the Republic because of its association with Islam. Men in several Islamic lands still wear the fez.

3 Before the era of the fez (mainly the 18th and 19th centuries) the turban was the headpiece for prominent men and religious men. For five centuries sultans were pictured wearing turbans--huge, billowing turbans, of course, to indicate their status.

4 These were simply for show--to give him the appearance of erudition.
himself in Vefa for one mecidiye and moved into it. This was fifty-five or sixty years ago. In those days there were groups of such men waiting on the street corners around Süleyman Mosque. Some were writing muskas, some were reciting prayers; and some were blowing healing breath at the faces of sick people. This villager that I am telling you about began learning by heart a few suras from the Koran and learning to pray. He then joined a group of men who engage in such business.

One day an old woman went to the mosque of Süleyman. Looking around there, she saw this false blowing-hoca and

5 A silver coin minted in the reign of Sultan Abdülmecit (ruled 1839-1861).

6 One of the three greatest mosques of Istanbul, this was one of the distinguished structures the architect Sinan built for his patron, Süleyman the Magnificent, during the first half of the sixteenth century.

7 Muska--a good-luck and healing charm. A prayer from the Koran is written on a piece of paper, folded small, breathed upon by a holy man, and enclosed in a triangular pouch of oilcloth. This triangular charm (2 or 3 inches to the side) is then attached to a thong and hung around the patient's neck.

8 A person who claimed to be able to heal people by his breath was called a blower. In Turkish it is üfürükçü--from the verb üfürmek--to blow. Breathing life or health into people has a long, long background, being part of both Biblical and classical traditions.
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concluded that he was the right man. She said to him, "I have a problem. Can you help me with"

"Yes, I think I can. Tell me the nature of your problem."

"Well, it is quite a long story. Let us go to your home, and I shall tell you there." The false hoca-blower agreed to this, and when they reached his room, she explained her problem. "I have a good-for-nothing son who went into the army seven years ago. In all that time I have heard nothing whatsoever from him. Can you tell me where he is and what he is doing?"

The "hoca"\textsuperscript{9} took down one of his heavy books and opened it. After pretending to read it very seriously, he said, "Lady, your son will return to you at a time when it is neither night nor day."

"That means nothing to me."

"Woman, be quiet!" said the "hoca." "Don't interrupt! Just listen to what I have to say!"

The woman apologized for interrupting him. She concluded that he must be a very learned man. She gave him two pieces and departed. That night after praying

\textsuperscript{9} A hoca is a Moslem priest. The protagonist of this tale is not really a hoca.
and counting her prayer beads, she fell asleep. During the night she heard a knocking at her door. She arose, went to the door, and opened it. She was amazed to see her young son standing there.

The next morning this woman went about visiting all of her neighbors and telling them what had happened during the night. Several of these neighbors asked her, "Will you take me to that wonderful hoca?"

"Yes, of course I will!"

One of them went with her to find that "hoca" near Süleyman Mosque. Then they went to his house in order to explain her problem. The neighbor woman said to him, "My story is a very long one."

"That is quite all right. Let us hear it."

"I have eight daughters already, and my husband has warned me, 'If your next child is a daughter, I shall cut you to pieces.' Now that my time for delivery is rapidly approaching, I am growing more and more worried. If my child is to be a male, then I shall stay at home. But if it is going to be another girl, then I had better run away before it is born. Can you tell me what my child will be?"

The "hoca" put on his glasses and took down one of his heavy books. Opening it, he pretended to be reading it, moving his lips and mumbling to himself as he did so. Then
he said, in a very solemn voice, "The child in your womb is both male and female, and it will arrive at a time that is neither night nor day."

The first woman whispered to the neighbor woman, "Don't say anything! The hoca becomes very angry if one makes any comments. Rest assured, however, that whatever he says will turn out to be true." The second woman left five mecediye pieces for the "hoca" and departed.

The neighbor woman returned to her home, where she lay down upon her bed. A few hours later she began to have labor pains, and the midwife, was sent for. The midwife had been there for only an hour or so when the woman delivered twins, one of which was a boy and one of which was a girl. They were born neither at night nor during the day, for they arrived just at dusk.

News of the "hoca's" great ability spread all over Istanbul. Among those who heard it was a very wealthy woman who invited the "hoca" to her home. After he had arrived there and been properly welcomed, the wealthy woman said, "Hoca, I have a problem, and if you can do anything to resolve it, I shall pay you twenty golden liras."

When the "hoca" heard this, his eyes opened very wide. Picking up his heavy book, he started to read it, although in
truth he could not read at all. He was from Kayseri. As he was doing this, the woman told him her problem.

"My dead father was Sultan Hâmit's purse bearer. Sultan Hâmit was fond of my father, and in return for my father's services, the Sultan gave him a very precious ring. That ring is now missing. I believe that its value would to hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of liras. If you can help me find out who stole that ring, I should be pleased to reward you very generously."

As the woman was explaining her problem, the "hoca" noticed that someone was standing outside the window listening. The "hoca" said loudly, "I shall solve your problem within twenty-four hours, and I shall see to it that the person who committed this crime is severely punished. I shall make him swell up like a balloon and continue swelling until he bursts."

10 No mention had been made earlier that the "hoca" was from Kayseri. All Kayseri residents are, supposedly, very shrewd people. There is a saying which goes, "He may not be able to read or write, but watch out for him, for he is from Kayseri!" The narrator may have had that saying in mind, for as soon as he says that the "hoca" cannot read, he says that he was from Kayseri. Kayseri is an ancient city at the center of Anatolia (Asian Turkey).

11 This would have been either Sultan Abdül Hâmit I or Abdül Hâmit II, both nineteenth-century sultans.
When the woman had paid the "hoca" and left, the person who had been standing outside the window entered and pleaded, "Oh, hoca, don't do that to me! I was a servant in this woman's house. One day when I was cleaning her room, I took the ring. Please save me from this situation."

"I am glad you came to me right now, for I had intended to inflate you tonight until you burst."

The servant gave the "hoca" the ring and several gold liras he had saved. Taking these, the "hoca" returned home and went to bed.

The name of the hoca was now in the mouth of everyone in Istanbul. Even the padişah had heard of his great reputation. Calling his vizier to him, the padişah asked, "Why didn't you inform me of the existence of such a learned man in our city? Have him brought into my presence at once."

The next day the "hoca" was taken to the royal palace and there brought into the presence of the padişah. When the padişah looked at this man, he was very impressed with his appearance--his size, his thick neck, his round beard, and his large turban. The padişah said, "I beg your pardon, Efendi. I should have invited you to the palace."

Efendi means Sir when it follows a proper name. It was once applied to the names of important men, but it is now used in this way only when speaking to servants and children.
sooner, but I am surrounded here by stupid men who do not keep me informed of what goes on outside. It was only today that I heard about you and invited you here. You are not the kind of man to be living in a single room with lattice windows in Vefa. You should have the most luxurious room in the palace. You must move right away to my palace, where you will have servants to attend to you, servants for whom your every request will be an order."

After thanking the padişah, the "hoca" returned home for his few belongings and later that day moved into the palace. There he began to lead a very luxurious life. One day he was called into the padişah's presence. The padişah asked him, "How are you, my hocşa?"

"Very well, thanks to your kindness, my Padişah."

"My hocşa, I want you to do something for me. I want you to conduct the

13 Yeni Mosque means New Mosque. Although it was built in the early 17th century, about 100 years after the Suleyman Mosque, it is still called New Mosque. It is located in a very busy part of old Istanbul, very close to the Galata Bridge, which passes over the Golden Horn.

14 Although Sunday is the sabbath now in Turkey, the traditional Islamic sabbath falls upon a Friday. The high point of the Moslem religious week is the noon service on Friday.
be a special event this week if you direct it."

There was nothing that the "hoca" could do but accept this request, but when he returned to his quarters in the palace, he was dismayed by the prospect. He had learned something about the regular services at the mosque, but he knew nothing about the Friday noon service, which was different from the others. He did not know how many rekats were performed for that service or what special prayers were said, for it had never occurred to him that he would be called upon to conduct the Friday noon service.

Leaving Yıldız Palace, the padişah, his viziers, and other officials made a long procession as they moved toward Yeni Mosque. As the royal coaches crossed the Galata Bridge, muezzins with the best voices in all Istanbul were chanting.

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15 A rekat is a complete series of the gestures and postures used in the Moslem prayer service. The number of rekats to be performed varies from one prayer service to another in a prescribed pattern.

16 One of the lesser palaces used by Ottoman sultans. The two great palaces were Topkapı Palace, construction of which was begun a few years after Mehmet II conquered Constantinople in 1453, and Dolmabahçe Palace, built in the mid-nineteenth century.

17 The muezzin is the singer-chanter who gives the call to prayer shortly before the beginning of a prayer service; there are five services per day. The call itself is called the ezan.
the ga for the Friday noon service. The mosque was packed with people—more than usually came—for it was known that the padişah would be there, and many people came just to get a glimpse of him.

The "hoca" took his position in the mimber and intoned, "Allahu ekber," with his thumbs and fingers pointed upward, after which he clasped his hands before him in silence. Then the "hoca" continued with the Elham prayer, but he could remember only the first line: "Elhamdülillâhirrahmanirrahim maliki yevmuddin." As soon as he had uttered these words, the "hoca" bent down, grabbed his shoes, and fled from the mosque as fast as he could.

The padişah, the şeyhüislâm, the viziers, and the

18 The mimber (also minber) is a high pulpit ascended to via a steep, ladder-like stairway. It is used for delivering the Friday noon sermon, often the only service of the week in which a sermon is delivered. Ordinarily the prayer service is not led from the mimber but from the front of the mosque, with both leader and congregation facing the mihrab (niche in front wall indicating the direction of Mecca).

19 "God is great

20 "I fly for refuge unto the Lord of daybreak, O God of daybreak."

21 Shoes must be removed in a mosque and either left outside the entrance door or carried with one.

22 The highest strictly religious figure in the government. The office exists to this day but with greatly reduced authority.
learned men who had accompanied the padişah concluded that there was something seriously wrong when they saw the "hoca" behave in that unusual way. They too rushed out of the mosque right behind the "hoca." When they reached the spot nearby where there is now a church, the dome of Yeni Mosque collapsed with a great crashing sound. Then the "hoca" ran to the padişah, embraced him, and said, "Thank God you have not been injured, your majesty I could not say during the prayer service, 'Let us run from the mosque!' for interrupting a prayer service is a great sin."

The padişah was very grateful to the "hoca" for having saved his life, and they returned together to Yıldız Palace. There the padişah rewarded the "hoca" very generously, asking the "hoca" to pray for him. The "hoca" himself now lived the life of a padişah.

While he was doing so, the month of Ramazan came along. In those days it was customary to distribute money among army troops during Ramazan. This money was given out as small gifts to the soldiers. A committee was appointed to attend to this matter, but when the members of the

Ramazan is a month on the lunar calendar set aside by Moslems as a period of religious fasting. Between sunrise and sunset Moslems eat no food whatever and drink not even a drop of water. It is also a time of special religious observances.
committee went to the Royal Treasury and opened the door to get money for this purpose, they discovered that the room was completely empty. They reported this to the padişah: "Your Majesty, we have opened the royal treasury and found nothing there--not a single kurus!"24

When the padişah heard this, he asked the "hoca": "Can you discover the reason for this situation?"

The "hoca" replied, "I don't know, but I shall try."

"You are the most knowledgeable man in the world. I am proud of you, but I must ask you to help me, for I am in a critical situation. My treasury has been robbed by traitors. I want you to discover where the money is and who the thieves are."

"Your majesty, this is no simple matter. I am going to invite the Tribe of Jinns25 to participate in this investigation, and after working with them for a while, I shall start collecting clues and evidence. This work, which will take forty days, must not be done here at the palace. I shall need another house for this purpose, but I shall keep you informed

24 A kurus is 1/100 of a lira, but with the lira now [January 1987] worth only 1/8 of an American cent, the kurus is meaningless and no longer is used as a monetary denomination.

25 A species of supernatural beings who make contact with human beings fairly frequently, usually with evil intentions but sometimes with benevolent aims.
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about the results."

The "hoca" had two plans in mind. If he could possibly solve the crime, he would do so, and this would add greatly to his reputation. If he could not solve it, he would disguise himself and just disappear.

The padişah ordered that a certain mansion be reserved solely for the use of the "hoca." The "hoca" went there and settled down. The chief cook from the palace followed him there and asked what he would like to eat. The "hoca" said, is not time to eat now, but here is what I want you to

You will bake eighty göreks.²⁶ I'll eat forty of them and my wife will eat the other forty. I want one of these brought to me every evening after the evening prayer service."

The cook went and baked the göreks and delivered them at the appropriate times. Then a woman who was the "hoca's" favorite concubine was to bring one of these göreks on a golden plate to the "hoca" after he had finished his evening prayers.

In the meantime, the forty thieves who had robbed the treasury had heard of the "hoca's" assignment to solve the crime. They were worried about this, for the "hoca" was

²⁶ A type of shortbread made in a ring shape--like a circular bun.
thought to be invincible. Their leader said to his followers "Who is the most clever among you?"

One of his men arose and said, "Our legless Murtaza is more clever than any of the rest of us."

Murtaza the Legless was brought to the leader, who said to him, "Go to the hocas mansion and see what means are being used to identify those who robbed the treasury. See if the hocas has any awareness that it was we who did it."

Murtaza the Legless was carried to the mansion of the hocas and left outside an open window. When he was placed there, the hocas had just finished counting his ninety-nine prayer beads and had signaled to the woman bearing the golden plate to bring his çörek. When he received the çörek, the hocas said, "Well, one of them has come. There are thirty-nine others."

When Murtaza the Legless heard this remark, he had no way of knowing that the hocas was referring to a çörek. He thought that the remark was made about him. When he heard this, he ordered himself carried home again. Going to the meeting place of the forty thieves, he told them the situation: "That hocas knows all about us. He somehow sensed"
immediately that I was there, and he said, 'Well, one of them has come. There are thirty-nine others.'"

But the leader of the forty thieves did not want to believe this report of Murtaza the Legless. He sent twenty-five of his men, one at a time, to the house of the "hoca" to find out whether or not he really knew about them. Every night the "hoca" ate another görek, and each night the thief assigned to spy on his house would report what the "hoca" had said that night: "Well, two of them have come. There are thirty-eight more." And so on, until the twenty-fifth one after Murtaza the Legless had arrived, when he said, "Well, that is the twenty-sixth one, and there are still fourteen more."

The leader of the thieves still could not believe that the "hoca" had really identified them as the ones who had robbed the treasury. He suspected that all of his men he had sent to spy on the "hoca" were actually collaborating with the "hoca" in order to cheat their chief. He decided to go himself to the "hoca's" house next night in order to determine the truth of the matter.

The following night the "hoca" had finished saying his prayers and counting his prayer beads when he signaled the woman to bring his görek. When he received it, he said, "Well, twenty-six are finished, and the twenty-seventh has
arrived. There are only thirteen left."

When the leader of the thieves heard this, he returned at once and said to his friends, "That hoca is certainly an amazing man from whom nothing can be hidden!" They talked about this matter for a while, and then they decided to go as a group to the house of the "hoca" and give him a bagful of gold.

In those days there were often mirrors placed by the windows of large houses to allow the people inside to see whoever might be coming along the street. When anyone knocked on the door, those inside could tell who it was simply by looking at the mirror. When there was a knocking on the door of the "hoca's" house the next day, the "hoca" glanced at the mirror and saw a group of dark men standing outside. The "hoca" said to his servant, "Don't keep these visitors waiting outside! Let them come in!"

They were admitted into the house and taken to a large room. The "hoca" was in another room where he pretended to be praying. Instead of finishing his prayer service in the usual fifteen minutes, he let it stretch on and on for a whole hour. Then, walking in a very dignified and impressive manner, he entered the room where the forty thieves were waiting.
The "hoca" told them to sit down, and then he said, "You prodigal children, you never come to see me unless you are in trouble and need my help. You came at the right time, but were you not afraid of the padişah?"

"Hoca Efendi," said the leader, "we did not know what we were doing. We thought that we were robbing the treasure hoard of a community of Jews. If we had known that it was the Royal Treasury, we would never have touched it at all. While speaking in this way, the leader signaled one of his men to bring forth the bag of gold. It was opened, and yellow coins poured forth on the floor.

The "hoca's" eyes were wide open when this happened. He said, "Inasmuch as you have come to me at the right time, I shall try to save you from this situation, because God Almighty has revealed that whoever saves another human being from trouble will surely find a good place in Heaven. I shall, therefore, try to save you."

He then demanded that the thieves bring all of the money that they had stolen and bury it at various points in Bayezid Square, covering it carefully afterwards. Having done this, they were to return to their caves. The thieves

A location in Istanbul not far from Istanbul University.
followed exactly these orders of the "hoca."

On the morning of the fortieth day that the "hoca" had been given to solve the crime, he was summoned to the palace by the padişah, who asked him, "Have you discovered the thieves and recovered the treasure?"

"Your Majesty," said the "hoca," "I have been working with the Tribe of Jinns for thirty-nine days without sleep. I have discovered those traitors, and I have discovered where they have buried the money. We should ride throughout all Istanbul in a horse-drawn carriage, and whenever we come to a place where this money is buried, I shall let you know."

The poor padişah believed all of this and ordered that his royal carriage be readied for the journey through the city. When the padişah and his retinue reached Bayezid Square, the "hoca" said, "It seems to me that the treasure must be here in this square, because one of the Tribe of Jinns just pulled my arm in this direction." The earth was dug into at the places where the "hoca" indicated, and large caches of treasure were discovered deposited there. Hundreds of hocas in the royal party were utterly amazed at this.

The padişah asked the "hoca," "Who stole all this money?"

The "hoca" answered, "Your Majesty, if you wish to have
me killed by the Tribe of Jinns within ten minutes, I shall answer that question. If you wish me to live, then please do not ask about that."

"Let it go, then," said the padişah, "but can you tell me how it was stolen?"

"It was able to be stolen because of the poor quality of the guards you had placed there. Until now your treasury has been watched over by men who did not even know how to say 'Bismillah' or how to pray to God, and so the Tribe of Jinns decided to remove your treasure from the Royal Treasury room to a place where they themselves could guard it. From now on, Your Majesty, you should hire as guards only religious men." The padişah accepted that piece of advice and thereafter employed only men of deep religious faith for such positions.

The padişah and Hoca Efendi returned to the palace together. In fact, the padişah had the "hocā" seated right next to his throne, where the "hocā" often pretended to be praying. The padişah asked him, "What do you wish in payment for all of the services you have performed for me?"

29 "I begin with the name of God." This is the shortened form of the expression and the one used most often in Turkey today. The full Arabic expression is Bismillahirrahmanirrahim. Devout Moslems utter this expression at the beginning of any undertaking, trivial or great.
"I wish only for your good health, Your Majesty."^{30}

"Because you have done me such a great service, I am going to let you have my royal yacht to go to Mecca on a pilgrimage."^{20,21}

The "hoca" thanked the padişah and left the palace. Taking with him the money he had saved and a few of his favorite women, he proceeded to where the royal yacht was anchored. After he had boarded the ship, he asked to have the captain come to him. The captain came to his quarters, saluted him, and awaited his orders. "What is your name?" asked the "hoca."

"Maslum."

"Where are you from?"

"Rize."^{31}

"How long have you been away from home?"

"Eight years."

"You haven't even visited your family in all that time?"

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{[^30] This is the traditional response required for such a question in folktales. Usually the person asked what he wishes makes this demurral three times before stating any actual wish.

[^31] Rize is in the extreme northeast corner of Turkey on the Black Sea. For centuries an unduly large proportion of Turkish sailors and seamen have come from the Black Sea coast, some of them Turkish but perhaps even more of them Laz. The Laz people have long been Turkish citizens, but they constitute an ethnic minority group.}
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asked the "hoca."

"No, sir."

The "hoca" called first the mates, then the officers, and finally the crew, saying to each group in turn the following: "The good I shall do for you not even your fathers could do, but it must all be kept a secret among us. Do what I tell you to do, and you will all become rich as well as see your families. Fail to do what I tell you to do, and I shall have you all skinned alive upon our return."

The captain first and then each group in turn said, "You just give us your commands, Hoca Efendi, and we shall carry them out.

"We are embarked for a pilgrimage today, a pilgrimage to Mecca which would require four and a half months going and returning. I am going to give each of you plenty of money. As the ship moves south, you will land me at a port on the Asian side. You will return to Istanbul four and a half months from now, visiting all your families in the meantime. When you return to Istanbul, you will say to the padişah, 'We took that good hoca to Mecca, but he died there while praying in the mosque. He must have been a man beloved by"
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God. We buried him on Mount Arafat."

This proposal was accepted by all of the seamen on the yacht. The "hoca" then ordered one of his servants to bring the smallest of his chests of gold, and he had its contents distributed among the members of the crew. He then paid the captain 100 gold liras, the mates seventy-five liras apiece, and the other officers generous sums.

The "hoca" was landed at the port he selected. Along with his servants and companions he made his way inland to a town and settled down there. He was very rich, and so he was able to lead a happy life there. Money can provide all the happiness there is in this world.

When the royal yacht returned to Istanbul four and a half months later, it brought news of the death of the "hoca" in Mecca. When the padişah was given this news, he was saddened. As he spoke in praise of the "hoca," a tear fell from each of his eyes.

33 Mount Arafat is not only located at Mecca but it is also integral to the ritual proceedings of the pilgrimage.