Once there was and once there was not a man and his wife. The husband had a sister who lived near them, and that sister had a son named Seven Calamities. The wife baked bread which was supposed to be white but which in fact contained numerous dark flecks in it. The husband asked the woman, "Why does your bread contain bits of bran?"

The wife answered, "Your sister lives close enough to us to pass by our house frequently, and when she does pass by, she stirs up so much breeze that I cannot keep the white flour separated from the bran."

Puzzled by this explanation, the husband went to visit his sister a few days later. The sister was not at home when he reached her house, but he sat down and waited until she returned. After they had been talking for awhile, the man told his sister how his wife had accounted for the bran flecks in her bread. The sister said, "How could you believe something like that? How could my walking past the outside of your house have any effect upon the flour within the house? Your wife is up to something and needs watching. Why don't you take..."
my son, Seven Calamities, with you to spy upon her, and then we can discover what she is doing in your absence?” She next packed up some walnuts, raisins, and other fruit for her brother to take home with him. The man then returned to his own house, taking with him his nephew and the food packet.

After they had arrived there, the wife opened the food package and saw what her sister-in-law had sent. Then she served dinner. A short while later the three of them retired for the night. In the morning the husband arose early and went to his fields to work. Seven Calamities was awakened by the noise of his uncle’s departure, but he remained in bed and pretended to be asleep. Shortly after that he heard the arrival of his aunt’s lover. The woman said to this man, “I do not have any food for you today, but I shall bring some to your field tomorrow for lunch. Which of your oxen will you be using—your black one or your red one?”

“The red one,” he answered, and then he left.

The next morning Seven Calamities said to his uncle, “I shall go to the field and work with you today.”

The uncle responded, “You are a guest in my house. I cannot put you to work. Remain here and rest.”

“Well, I shall rest for awhile, but later I shall come and help you.”
Story 2011

After the man had left, Seven Calamities went to the marketplace and bought some apples. He then put on a turban to look impressive and went to his uncle’s field. There he said, “Uncle, I want to borrow your ox for just a short while.”

“Why?” asked the uncle.

Winking his eye at his uncle, the boy said, “I have a special reason for doing that.” Seven Calamities knew that his aunt had cooked some fine food and would soon wish to take it to her lover. She had roasted a chicken and a duck, and she had cooked some rice and other dishes.

The aunt said to Seven Calamities, “I was getting ready to take some food over to your uncle’s field, and now that you have the ox, we can use it to carry his lunch over there.” The two of them led the ox to the husband’s field.

The husband was surprised to see what they had brought. She had never before taken such delicious food to the field for his lunch. Noticing her husband’s surprise, the wife said, “I thought that we should treat our guest well, and so I cooked this special food for all of us.” As they were preparing to eat, they saw another man in the field next to them. The woman now said, “Husband, there is a man working in the next field. Wouldn’t it be nice to invite him over here to eat lunch with us?”
“I shall go and invite him,” said Seven Calamities. But that was not what he actually did. Instead, he took to the lover the apples which he had bought at the marketplace earlier. When he returned, he said, “That fellow over there is not interested in eating with us.”

After the uncle and Seven Calamities had eaten a very good lunch, there was still food left. The woman then said, “Let me collect the leftovers and take them home with me.”

But knowing what would become of that food, Seven Calamities said, “Oh, aunt-in-law, I may become hungry again later this afternoon, and so you had better leave it here.”

The woman then returned without any food, but as soon as she reached home, she began cooking all over again. But because Seven Calamities was with him, the husband returned from the field earlier than usual. Seven Calamities knew why she was preparing more food, but he said only, “What a kind woman you are to cook still another large meal today!”

After they had eaten their second large meal that day, they went to bed, but Seven Calamities forced himself to stay awake. In the middle of the night the woman’s lover came and the two of them

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1In English an aunt is an aunt is an aunt, but there are distinctions among aunts in Turkish. A paternal aunt is called hala. A maternal aunt is called teyze. But the aunt who is one’s mother’s sister-in-law is called yenge. Turkish dictionaries define yenge as aunt-in-law.
Story 2011

talked at some length. Seven Calamities listened carefully to their conversation. His aunt-in-law said, “Our present difficulties are all caused by Seven Calamities. We must find some way of getting rid of him. You should find a hoca\(^2\) of the kind who can write a curse and enclose it in something that looks like an amulet.”\(^3\)

In the morning Seven Calamities went to a marketplace and bought clothes of the kind worn by hocas. After he returned, he talked for some time with his aunt-in-law. As the conversation continued, he mentioned a hoca who had special powers of enchantment. The woman became greatly interested in this information and asked where that hoca lived. “He lives over in such and such a part of the city. But he is very expensive. He charges 1,000 liras for his work.” Then after a few minutes, Seven Calamities said, “Give me the food for my uncle. I shall deliver it to him.” After receiving the food, he secretly took it and the hoca costume and went to the address he had given for the hoca

\(^2\)A hoca is a preacher and the leader of a Muslim religious community. In pre-Republican days, a hoca was also a teacher, for public education was then the responsibility of the clergy. Today Turkish teachers must have secular rather than religious training.

\(^3\)Some hocas pretend to cure ills by giving a patient a muska, a small triangular packet covered with oilcloth and containing a piece of paper on which has been written a prayer. These are sought by the patient, though a curse would not be. The narrator envisions a curse packaged in the same way that a blessing is.
Story 2011

 capable of producing enchantment. There he quickly changed into his hoca costume and began waiting.

   After Seven Calamities had left, his aunt-in-law took all of the money in the house and went at once to the place where the hoca had been said to live. As soon as she arrived there, she asked the hoca to put a curse upon Seven Calamities. The false hoca took the required money from the woman and said, “I shall place the spell upon Seven Calamities right now. May the eyes of Seven Calamities go blind!”

   “Amen,” said the woman.
   “And may the ears of Seven Calamities go deaf!”
   “Amen!”
   “And may the voice of Seven Calamities become mute!”
   “Amen!”
   “And may the bones of Seven Calamities all become crippled!”
   “Amen!”

   As soon as the woman had departed, Seven Calamities removed the hoca costume and dressed again in his own clothes. He then returned to his uncle’s house. When evening arrived, Seven Calamities pretended to be ill. He said, “Aunt-in-law, I am in such great pain that I can hardly speak. I cannot see much. Aunt-in-law, help me! My legs hurt, and I do not feel well. I want to go to bed.”

   The woman thought, “That hoca’s curse is really working!”
Story 2011

After her husband went to bed, Seven Calamities sneaked out of bed and hid in a place where he could see and hear whatever might happen in the house. Later at night the lover came. The woman said to him at once, “The hoca’s curse is working! Seven Calamities has become blind, and he cannot hear well. Come again tomorrow, and I shall have lunch prepared for you.” The lover agreed to this arrangement.

Seven Calamities quickly returned to his bed and covered himself, pretending to be sleeping. In the morning his aunt fixed breakfast for Seven Calamities, saying, “He cannot see, and he does not feel well.” Seven Calamities ate his breakfast in bed and then remained there. After her husband had gone to his fields to work, the woman began to prepare all sorts of food for her lover.

After the lover had eaten the lunch and had spent some time there, he lay down and fell asleep. As he slept, the woman went out to the public fountain to get some water. While she was gone, Seven Calamities got out of bed and went quietly to the kitchen. There he found a pan of hot oil still heating on the stove. Picking up this pan very carefully, he poured the boiling oil into the ear of the lover. Of course the man died at once.

When the woman returned and found her lover dead, she rushed to the bedroom of her nephew. There she said, “Wake up,
Story 2011

Seven Calamities! I have just found a dead man, a total stranger, dead in our house! Get up and help me!"

"Sweet coffee would be my best medicine," he said. "Make some for me, and after I have drunk it, I shall be able to help you. We can hide the body somewhere in the yard for now. Then tonight when it is dark, we can take it to the graveyard on Infidel Hill."

After Seven Calamities had drunk his sweet coffee, they placed the body in a large bag and hid it in the yard. The husband returned from his work at the usual time, and the three of them ate dinner. After the tired husband had gone to bed, Seven Calamities loaded the corpse on the wife's back and told her how to get to Infidel Hill. Then, after she had departed, he found a stout stick, and he himself went to Infidel Hill by a different route.

When the woman had almost reached Infidel Hill, Seven Calamities beat her with the stick, kūt! kūt! kūt! Before she could cry out, Seven Calamities said, "Aunt-in-law! I thought that you were a stranger. That's why I struck you. But let us continue now to the graveyard."

Seven Calamities walked faster than the heavily loaded woman and reached the graveyard first. When she arrived there, he again pretended to mistake her for a stranger and hit her again with the stick, kūt! kūt! kūt! Then he said to his aunt, "The dead people here say that
they will not accept this corpse because it has not received a ritual
washing." Seven Calamities again loaded the dead man upon her back
and directed her to take it to his mother’s house. But before she started
there, Seven Calamities secretly cut off the corpse’s hands and some of
his hair and stuffed them into his aunt’s pockets.

But before they could reach the home of Seven Calamities,
y they met the relatives of the lover, who had been searching for him.
When they discovered that he was dead, they cried and began to grieve
for him. Seeing this, Seven Calamities said to his aunt, “You should go
and offer your condolences to these people. Say, ‘Everyone grieves for
the loss of this man. Whoever looks in his face cries, and whoever
looks in my pocket cries.’” The woman went and did exactly as her
nephew had suggested. When the lover’s relatives saw some of his
remains in her pocket, they believed that she had murdered him. The
dead man’s brother drew a sword and killed her.

Seven Calamities then went to his uncle and gave him a full
account of all that had happened. He then promised to find a second
wife for his uncle, and after two weeks, he found a suitable person.

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4There is a cultural lapse here. For centuries Muslims required
that a corpse be given a ritual ablution before he/she was buried. Many
other religions do not require this ablution, and so it is unlikely that
residents of an infidel cemetery would reject an unwashed corpse.
Story 2011
Following the marriage of the couple, they moved into the home of Seven Calamities and his mother, where they all lived.

Seven Calamities bought seven apples: one for his mother, one for his uncle, one for the bride, one for himself, one for you [the collector], and two for me.5

5This is an adaptation of a popular terminal device for Turkish tales: “Three apples fell from heaven—one for you, one for me, and one for the teller of this tale.”