

Story 2201 (1962 Tape 75)

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Nasreddin Hoca<sup>1</sup> and Tamerlane's<sup>2</sup> Elephants

In older times people sometimes used elephants in warfare. They were such large and strong animals that they were frequently very effective in that role. But however practical elephants were in battle, their usefulness for that purpose was quite brief. When a conflict ended, the owners of these huge beasts might have to feed and maintain them for long periods of peace. Because of their size, they consumed great quantities of hay and grain. This problem became evident when Tamerlane's army camped for an extended period of time in the area around Akşehir. There the great conqueror quartered one elephant in each of several villages, holding the residents

<sup>1</sup>A hoca is the preacher and religious leader of a Muslim community. In pre-Republican times he was also a teacher, for education was then the responsibility of the clergy. In the modern era schoolteachers are required to have secular rather than religious training. For sentimental reasons, however, a teacher or professor may still be called hoca. For centuries Nasreddin Hoca has been Turkey's most beloved comic folk character. He is featured in countless folktales.

<sup>2</sup>Tamerlane (1336-1405) was a Turkic-Mongol leader who built an empire in central Asia. In English he is called Tamerlane or Tamburlaine; in Turkish (as in this tale) he is called Timur Lenk (Timur the Lame).

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responsible for its nourishment and welfare.

people of one poor village felt especially hard-pressed to support an elephant. They finally gathered to discuss this problem. One of the elders said, "We should go to Tamerlane and ask him to relieve us of this burden by assigning our elephant to some other village."

no!" replied another elder. "If we should do such a thing, Tamerlane might well decide to behead all of us. He could easily do that."

"What then can we do?" asked others

"Let us go to Nasreddin Hoca and ask for his help. He will take care of us."

Accordingly, ten of the villagers went to the Hoca. After Nasreddin Hoca had greeted them and chatted with them for awhile, he asked, "What is it that brings you here?"

"We have a great problem."

"What is it?"

"Tamerlane gave our village an elephant to take care of. We have been trying hard to do that, but this huge animal eats a great amount. We are growing poorer and poorer every day. We can hardly take care of ourselves

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any longer. What shall we do? You are the scholar in this area, and it is said that Tamerlane values your judgment. You are the only person who may be able to solve this problem. Ask Tamerlane to take back our elephant and send it to some other village now."

Nasreddin Hoca answered, "I cannot solve that problem alone. If you will all go with me to Tamerlane, I shall be the one who will explain your difficulty to him."

"All right!" they all said, and they fell in line behind the Hoca as he started out for the camp of Tamerlane. When they arrived there, the Hoca knocked on the door of the conqueror's tent. When the door was opened, Nasreddin Hoca entered the tent, but his followers were so terrified that they immediately fled.

Tamerlane said in a loud voice, "What have you come here for, Hoca?"

Nasreddin Hoca had prepared some remarks with which to address Tamerlane, but when he discovered that his followers had fled, he changed his speech. He said, "My great padishah, you sent our village an elephant, but she is lonely. This condition has affected her health, and we fear that she might die. Could you possibly send a male

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elephant to keep her company?"

right, Hoca. You may leave now, and I shall soon have that male elephant taken to your village."

As the Hoca approached that village, he was met by the ten cowards who had deserted him on the mission to see Tamerlane. They all asked eagerly, "What happened, Hoca?"

"I spoke to Tamerlane, and he has promised to do something about our elephant problem.

The villagers rejoiced all the rest of that day, but on the following day their happiness was shattered. Expecting to have an elephant removed from their village, they were shocked to discover that a second elephant had been added. The delegation of ten citizens hastened to the home of Nasreddin Hoca and asked, "What is going on here? What actually happened yesterday at the tent of Tamerlane?"

know well how you escaped from your commitment yesterday and left me all alone. That reminded me of the loneliness of our single elephant here, and so I asked Tamerlane to send it a companion