

Story 1888 (1971 Tapes 8-)

Narrator: Behçet Mahir, 62

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of Erzurum Province

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Wounded Mahmud and Mahbub

All the way back to Seljuk times poets and storytellers have often begun their presentations with special kinds of introductory devices which served as doorways through which one enters a poem or tale. I shall begin this tale with such an entryway.

Time within time,² when the sieve was in the straw,³ when the camel was a town crier and the rooster was a barber, when my mother

¹Formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales, this is known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run to several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a nonsense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce in English the rhyme scheme.

²“Time within Time” refers to the chronology of events in an interior world. A person may dream or fantasize at great length during only a few seconds of ordinary time. One may even seem to spend many years in that other world within; one may take a job, marry, have children, and see them grow to maturity. In Turkish this is called Zaman Zaman İçinde. It is elsewhere sometimes referred to as “Frozen Time” or “Moments of Eternity.”

³The humor here derives from the fact that the sieve is never in the straw; the straw is in the sieve. It refers to the threshing of grain on farms too small or too remote to have available modern threshing machines. On a dried clay threshing floor stalks of grain are thrown. They are chopped up into small pieces by a döven, a wooden rectangle

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was on the threshold and my father was in his cradle, I was a fine young man. My heart yearned to visit distant and exotic lands, and to satisfy my heart, I began to travel. I went little, I went for six months and an autumn across rivers, over hills, and along plains, but discovered then that I had gone no farther than the length of a needle. Like the crane that flies in the sky with spiraling wings, played both the drum and the zurna.⁴ I went to a public bath where I accidentally swallowed a bath dipper.⁵ Turn the spit so that the geese will not burn and the words will not be mistaken. May it be Allah's will that the collar of a brave man will never fall into the grasp of a coward. O

from the bottom of which protrude scores of sharp pieces of flint. When the chopped-up mass is winnowed, the chaff blows downwind, but there fall directly to the floor kernels of grain and small bits of the stem to which grain is still attached. Both the kernels and the small pieces of straw to which some kernels are still attached are then thrown into a sieve (about 30 inches in diameter). The kernels fall through onto a sheet of canvas, but the grain-laden straw remains in the sieve. The final threshing of these bits of straw is done by the fingers of the threshers.

⁴A high-pitched double-reed instrument. The drum and zurna are played throughout many different holidays and celebrations, especially during the days and evenings of protracted wedding ceremonies.

⁵Public baths in Turkey usually do not have showers. One rinses off soapsuds by throwing water over one's body with what is called a dipper but which is actually a saucepan 6-8 inches in diameter.

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Fate, show mercy to me, for I have already suffered enough! The kind of pain suffered by Job has afflicted me all too often.

Do not lose hope, O man! or part from the right path!

Observe how much I have suffered at the hands of the ignorant!

One must have some innate wisdom to be led by reason!

From day to day I fell victim to vicious gossip.

My suffering any given day might be exceeded by the pain of the next.

I dived into a little sea to teach the ignorant to swim,

But both fatigue and grief reduced my forward movement.

I have used varieties of wisdom, all my own,

To build protective walls around me on all sides.

Enough, Mahir! Bring to an end your flowing words.

Although your heart will die, your words may live in other men.

You may retreat, but words you spoke move forward endlessly.

O people, all endings produce regret, but it is continually necessary to leave the past and think of what is yet ahead. It is more important to think about your future than about your present situation. Many heroes, workers, and poets enter this world only to leave it

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again. We can take nothing from this world, though while we are here, we must comply with its demands. Among those demands is the necessity of working to sustain our lives here until our time has come to depart to another world.

Beneath the dome of heaven there was in a former time at the city of Gence⁶ in the land of Persia [Iran] a ruler named Emir Gurkan. They called him Emir Gurkan Şah. This ruler was rich, wise, and hardworking. As he was living out the days reflected for him in the Mirror of Fate, Emir Gurkan Şah in his reign over Persia had a royal advisory council. Since candles were the main source of artificial light in those days, Emir Gurkan Şah also had among his assistants a man with the title “candlestick keeper.” This candlestick keeper would replace candles that had burned down, and as he was doing so, he would clean the candlestick holders. This man would also take from their locked chest at evening two çamçırak stones⁷ and place them at the center of the Council Room. These çamçırak stones gleamed so powerfully that they would outshine all of the candles. As it grew dark, the intense light given off by these stones would spread in every

⁶Persian Ganja or Gandzha, this city is presently named Kirovabad. It is located in the northern Azerbaijani section of Iran.

⁷Çamçırak (also şamşırak or şemşırak) stones are mythical objects which supposedly give off intense light. For an entire Turkish folktale about these stones, see “Şemşırlak Taşları,” in Gümüşhane Masalları (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi, 1973), pp. 507-516.

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direction for an hour's distance.⁸ The light from the burning candles amounted to very little compared with that of the çamçırak stones.

Emir Gurkan Şah planned to hold an important evening meeting in his palace. He said to the candlestick keeper, "Clean the candles for a meeting in the Council Room this evening.

That day the candlestick keeper prepared that room for the meeting, replacing all of the candles. After sunset he reached into his pocket for the key to the chest in which the çamçırak stones were stored, but the key was not there. Surprised, he began to run here and there in search of the key. He thought that he might have left it at home. He rushed back to his house and asked his wife and children if they knew where the key was. They had not seen it, they said. While he was searching for the key, night had fallen, and members of the royal council had begun to gather for the meeting. The Council Room looked rather dingy. A short while later, Emir Gurkan Şah himself arrived, and he noticed immediately that the çamçırak stones were not in the room. "Where is the candlestick keeper?" he asked.

The other servants replied, "He lost the key to the chest containing the çamçırak stones, and he is searching everywhere for it.

⁸Among rural Turks distance is often measured in terms of the time it would take to traverse it on foot. A place ten kilometers away would be described as being located at a distance of approximately three hours.

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Upon hearing this, Emir Gurkan Şah became very angry. “Find that man and bring him here at once,” he ordered. The servants found the candlestick keeper still searching for the lost key, and they took him to the presence of the ruler. “Where are the çamçırak stones?” Emir Gurkan Şah demanded.

“My şah, the stones are still in their chest. I have misplaced the key to that chest, but I am searching for it.”

“What pity can there be for you? I gave you notice during daylight hours about our meeting, but now that it is dark, you have lost the key!” Growing even more angry, he called for his executioners.

The knees of the candlestick keeper trembled as two executioners appeared and stood on either side of him. But before the ruler could give his next command, several of his viziers arose. “O our şah!” they said, “both commands and firman⁹ are yours to give. Is it suitable, however, to shed a man’s blood for having lost a key? Have pity on his children, for he has not committed any great crime. He has misplaced a key, but surely he will find it again. Even if he does not find it, another key to the chest can be made. For the sake of justice, a ruler should avoid such harsh punishment.” With remarks like this, the viziers calmed the şah.

⁹A firman (or fermen) was an imperial decree issued by a Turkish sultan. In an absolute monarchy its contents were not in any way negotiable.

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“Very well,” said the ruler, “instead of having him executed, I am ordering that this man and his family must leave the land of Iran. Tomorrow they must depart into exile!” His council could not very well oppose this alternative order, but they had at least saved the man’s life.

Throughout the rest of that night, the candlestick keeper prepared his family for hasty departure. He also rushed about selling his valuables for far less than they were worth. When dawn arrived, the man and his family were surrounded by guards who escorted them across the border of Iran into Turkey. After the guards had withdrawn, the man asked his wife, “Woman, where should we go? Where should we settle?” (Our ancestors spoke wisely when they said, “If you have two or three options in any matter, consult your wife before choosing one of them.”)

Upon hearing her husband’s question, the woman replied: “You are a man and I am a woman. Emir Gurkan Şah has exiled us from all of the territory of Iran. However, if Iran has a şah, Turkey has a padişah. Go straight to the presence of the padişah and deliver a petition to him. He may give you a job at which you can work to earn our livelihood. You cannot simply be a porter henceforth, for you have

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no experience at such work.¹⁰ You have served councils of the great, and you are competent in that kind of work.”

The candlestick keeper appreciated this advice. “You have made a wise suggestion, my woman. It is true that I cannot undertake the job of a porter, for I have never carried anything on my back. Nor have I ever used a spade or an axe. I have served the councils of the great in a ruler’s palace. I value the shrewdness of your reminder that, “if Iran has a şah, Turkey has a padişah.” Traveling the same distance each day, this man and his family slowly crossed much of Turkey to Istanbul.

This occurred during the era of Sultan Murat I.¹¹ When they finally reached Istanbul, this man put his family in a rented house. He then wrote a petition, placing on it his name and address, and then proceeded to deliver it to the council of the padişah. Here is what he said in that petition:

O, my padişah, I came from Iran to live under your red flag in order to earn a living. (He did not say that he had been exiled, for that might damage his chances of being employed by the padişah.) A man must live

¹⁰Serving as a porter (hamal) is often the final desperate attempt of a Turkish male to find employment. Porters sometimes carry singlehandedly extremely heavy loads, such as a piano or a refrigerator.

¹¹He reigned from 1360 to 1389.

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wherever it is that he can earn a living. now live in a house at this address in Istanbul. In this petition I am requesting a job in your service. Give me employment in your palace so that I may have a way of supporting my family.

Because he had good manners, he did not try to deliver this petition directly to the padişah. Instead, he took it to the padişah's council, which in turn delivered it to the ruler. When Sultan Murat received this petition, he read it and then ordered a guard, "Bring this man to me." When the guard found the candlestick keeper and brought him before the throne, the man stood respectfully before the ruler with his hands folded before him. The padişah asked, "Son, is this petition yours?"

"Yes, my padişah."

"If you have come to live under my flag, it is desirable that I provide you with a job which will enable you to support your family. What sort of work can you do?"

Not only the padişah but also the members of his council liked both the man's humility and his maturity. He impressed them as a man of experience. There is a proverb which says, "Keen observation leads to understanding."

Ask not a man about his origin.

His sense of dignity will tell us that.

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The way he stands, the way he walks and talks
Provide for all a view into his past.

The exile responded to the padişah's question: "I was formerly the candlestick keeper in the palace of Emir Gurkan Şah in Iran. I stand before you now because I could not live on the money I earned as an assistant of that ruler."

"I shall also make you a candlestick keeper," said the padişah. "Your duties will be the same. Will you accept this job?"

"With great pleasure," the man answered, and as he did so he bent his neck to one side.¹²

"How much money did the şah of Iran pay you each month?"

"I received one red gold coin."

The padişah realized that one gold coin per month would not support a family, and so he accepted this low pay as a good enough reason for seeking employment elsewhere. He said, "I shall issue an order that you be paid two pieces of gold a month."

"O my padişah, may your justice and mercy bring you everything you desire."

¹²This gesture appears with some frequency in Turkish tales. It is often interpreted as a means of showing submission to an absolute monarch and acknowledging that one's neck is vulnerable to the executioner's axe.

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The padişah called his chief servant and said to him, “Show this man a couple of rooms and explain to him his duties.”

The chief servant showed the candlestick keeper twelve rooms, each of which had fifty candlesticks. Knowing that all those candles would burn each night, the candlestick keeper realized that he could not possibly tend them properly alone. (Sometimes when a person comes as a stranger to a new location, people there may resent his presence. Malice and abuse may come from such small-minded people. From a large-minded person, one will receive good will, not harm. Allah has placed in the heart of each person an awareness of duties toward others. This ties men together in such a way that the problem of one man becomes also the problem of other men.) In the end the candlestick keeper asked, “Am I the one who is to do all of this work?”

“Yes! Who else?”

The exile thought, “Did we barely save our heads from the axe in Iran only to be executed here?” He therefore returned immediately to the padişah’s presence, where he stood with bowed head and with his hands before him.

“What is it, son?” asked the ruler.

“My padişah, they showed me twelve rooms to attend to, and they showed me fifty candlesticks to be cleaned in each of these rooms. However, these duties which I have been assigned are more than any

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one man can accomplish. If I should attempt to do that much, there may be some shortcoming in my service, and that may cause complaints to come to you about my work. I cannot, therefore, undertake this job, for it is more than I can do.

Realizing the truth of what the candlestick keeper had said, the padişah had the chief servant called into his presence. "How many rooms did you assign to this man?" he asked.

Unable to deny the truth before the padişah, the chief servant replied, "Twelve rooms."

"And how many candles are there in each room?"

"Fifty."

"Can one man do all of that work? Why is it necessary to place a man at such a disadvantage?" Angry at his chief servant, the şah sent him away. Then, turning again to the exile, he asked, "Son, how many rooms can you attend to properly?"

"I can give proper care to only four rooms."

"Then choose four rooms in which to work," said the padişah. "For how many rooms were you responsible in the palace of Emir Gurkan?"

"Only one, my padişah, but there I was also responsible for the care of the çamçırak stones. Night after night I would take those stones from their locked chest and put them in the proper position in the

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Council Room. The glitter from those stones would more than outshine the light given by all fifty of the candles. In fact, they were so bright that they would light up everything for the distance of an hour.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, my padişah.”

The padişah had written down all that the candlestick keeper had told him. After he had sent that servant back to his work, the padişah wrote something else, and that was a letter to Emir Gurkan Şah. In that letter he said, “The candlestick keeper who once worked for you is now working for me. This man has told me that you have two remarkable çamçırak stones. Sell one of those stones to me for whatever price they are worth. If you should say that you are not willing to sell it to me, swords will be unsheathed between us, and I will take the stone from you by force.” This letter was given to a messenger for delivery to the şah. (Back in those days horses, donkeys, and camels were used as means of transportation. May Allah make the people of our country rich and superior. Today we have means of transportation that can bring together two brothers or a son and a father within the short time it takes to smoke a cigarette or to drink a cup of coffee. Such fast transportation is valuable to Turkey, and we should all recognize anything that is beneficial to our country.)

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The messenger carrying the padişah's letter traveled a set distance every day, and in the time predicted he arrived at the palace of Emir Gurkan Şah. There after some polite conversation, he gave the ruler the padişah's message. The şah gave an order to have that message read aloud. This is what the şah and his council heard from the reader: "Sell one of your camçırak stones to me. The candlestick keeper who once worked for you is now working for me. If you refuse to sell me the stone, swords will be unsheathed, and I will take it from you by force."

As Emir Gurkan Şah heard this, he grew angry about this message. "Am I supposed to be frightened by such bitter words?" he asked. Then he said to a scribe, "Write this: 'I am the şah of Iran! I do not have to sell any kind of stone to anyone. If you can draw a sword, then you can use it against Gence, for that city is not hidden in my bosom. If you can take it, you are welcome to it. If blood drips from your sword, do you suppose that it will be only water that drips from ours? Don't deny what you know to be true!'" This letter was written and handed to the same messenger who had borne the padişah's message.

This reply to the padişah was written and placed in the hands of the padişah's own messenger to be taken back with him to Istanbul.

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Traveling his prescribed distance every day, the messenger reached Istanbul close to the time he was expected.

So Emir Gurkan Şah was not afraid that the powerful Turkish army would attack him? When the padışah read the şah's note, he too grew enraged. "Aha, O şah of Iran, have you really no fear of the sword?" he said. He immediately called a meeting of his council to discuss this matter. Let us leave them in their discussion and return to the ruler Emir Gurkan Şah.

Emir Gurkan had only one daughter in this world, a girl named Mahbub, but she was a most unusual person. Her prowess was known far and wide, for she wielded the power of Kubilay.¹³ This girl did not take orders from her father or from anyone else. Allah had given her great strength. She said, "If I did not take a stand against it, there might come a time when my father might give me in marriage to the son of a coward. Such a person would not appreciate me. I shall therefore seek for a husband myself." Having said this, she traveled through Iran in search of a suitable husband. "I shall marry no man, whether poor or rich, who cannot defeat me in combat. I shall never lie beneath a man I have already defeated."

¹³This is the Turkish spelling of Kublai Khan, who founded the greatest Mongol dynasty, which from the late 13th century through the 15th century controlled or influenced much of the territory between the China Sea and the Danube River.

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At that time there was no man in all Iran who could defeat Emir Gurkan's daughter. She had overcome all of the strong men who had been her contenders. Her reputation for strength was so great that her name was sometimes used to frighten little children. If a child cried for too long a time, its mother or father would say, "Stop crying or Mahbub, Emir Gurkan's daughter, will come and get you!" Hearing this, the child would become silent at once. Well, let us leave for now this girl of great strength and return to Istanbul.

In that city there lived a man named Hacı İbrahim Bezirgan.¹⁴ During his stay in this world, this man had a wife and two sons. The older son was named Ahmet, and the younger, Mahmud. Unfortunately, Ahmet, despite the good family from which he came, chose a bad course for his life. With no consideration for the reputation of his family, he associated with thieves and other evil men. Never fully reunited with his family, Ahmet spent his days and nights drinking rakı¹⁵ and wine. People called him Disgraced Ahmet. İbrahim

¹⁴The man's name is simply İbrahim. Hacı is an honorific bestowed upon one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. A bezirgan is a traveling salesman or an itinerant peddler, or a merchant whose business is done by caravan.

¹⁵Really devout Muslims abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages. Rakı is the favorite distilled liquor in Turkey. This anise-flavored liquor is clear until water is added to it. Then it becomes white and is often referred to as "lion's milk."

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finally closed his eyes in death, disappointed that all of his good advice to his son Ahmet had been ignored.

İbrahim had earlier been disappointed by another person whom he had tried to help. That person was named Hacı Murtat. After İbrahim and Murtat had become acquainted, they made the pilgrimage to Mecca¹⁶ together. Following their return from the pilgrimage, İbrahim had accepted Murtat as a business partner, and as a result, Murtat became quite wealthy. But soon İbrahim discovered that his partner was a very careless and wasteful sort of man who would eventually destroy their business. İbrahim therefore decided to end their business relationship. Hacı Murtat was so offended by this that he said to his wife, “Woman, further friendship with the family of Hacı İbrahim is forbidden.” They avoided İbrahim and his family so completely that they did not even know of İbrahim’s sickness and death, though İbrahim’s widow often wondered why they had not come to mourn with her at the death of her husband.

Like Murtat and his family, İbrahim’s older son, Ahmet, was also so estranged from his father that he too was unaware of Hacı İbrahim’s death until some time after that bezirgan’s funeral. When

¹⁶The narrator does not here actually use the word Mecca. By means of synecdoche he lets a very important building (the Kaaba) in Mecca stand for the whole city.

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that tormenting son finally heard that news, he immediately returned home and demanded his share of Hacı İbrahim's estate. The neighbors were well aware of Ahmet's nature and of his unwillingness to take good advice. The friends and neighbors of Hacı İbrahim Bezirgan therefore gathered to make sure that the estate was fairly apportioned to his heirs. They divided it into three equal parts and gave one part to his widow, one part to his older son, and one part to his younger son.

Having taken all of his inheritance in gold, Ahmet took that money at once to a tavern. There he said to the tavern owner, "I entrust all this gold to you. Do not ever again charge me for anything."

Thinking that his patron star must at that moment be directly overhead, the owner of the tavern quickly said, "Very well!"

As sage poets have observed,

The man who has felt no poverty

Cannot appreciate his wealth.

The man who thinks but of himself

Can never know the joys of love.

The one unpierced by sting of bees

Savors but half of honey's taste.

There are many young men who live upon their fathers earnings. Once the money has been spent, can you find another father upon whom to depend? It is more admirable to spend only the money

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that you yourself have earned. With this thought in mind, several neighbors counseled Mahmud, saying, “Don’t be like your brother. No one has a good opinion of him.”

Mahmud arose every morning and went to school. He would go home for lunch and then return to school to attend the afternoon classes. At the end of each schoolday he would go to visit his father’s grave, where he would recite the Yasin prayer.¹⁷ Then he would return to his home for the night. But this wise and mature young man was being observed by some destructive men.¹⁸

These destroyers would rob and plunder any defenseless persons they could find. There were twelve members of the destructive group I am referring to here. One day they gathered to talk with each other about their problems. Such men as they are very likely to be hungry. First of all, they seldom have any money, and, secondly, they are not readily helped by ordinary citizens. No one wishes to support a thief, for it is a complete waste of money to do so. No one wants to see honest men starve, but there is little sympathy for whatever hunger thieves may feel. Therefore the twelve destroyers gathered to discuss

¹⁷The 36th chapter of the Koran, usually recited either when someone is on the brink of death or after someone has died.

¹⁸The term used here by the narrator is karlangoç, a dialectal form of kırlağaç. Kırlağan means a troop of evil men.

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their situation. "For weeks we have had little food in our stomachs or money in our pockets," they agreed.

One of the members of this group was a bald man in disguise. The man who wears a wig or some other headpiece to cover his lack of hair is said to have covered baldness. Such a covered baldy¹⁹ is thought to be both crafty and cruel. There are several types of bald men, and some of them are not at all harmful. But the covered baldy is so notoriously dangerous that even the devil fears him. This covered baldy spoke to the other eleven destructive men: "I have found a goose that we can pluck."²⁰ This covered baldy had been following Mahmud about and observing his activities closely. "I have found a goose with short feathers, just the length that will be easy to pluck. But to bring you much greater money from this goose, I need sixty liras with which to buy some supplies. Can we collect that much money among ourselves?" They all reached into their pockets, withdrawing whatever small amount of money they had. One gave five liras; another gave ten. In the end their contributions added up to sixty liras.

¹⁹The word baldy may seem to be a term too modern and slangy for use here. Some such noun is needed here, however, to bridge a minor structural difference between Turkish and English. Many Turkish adjectives may be used as nouns: a blind man is called a blind; a bald man is called a bald. Because we cannot say a bald, we have substituted a baldy.

²⁰To pluck a goose is an idiomatic expression meaning to exploit a gullible or dull-witted person.

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The covered baldy went straight to a tavern, where he paid forty liras for a bottle of rakı. He then went to a grocery store and spent ten liras on food and another ten on onions. Then, taking his eleven companions to the cemetery, he said, “I want you to surround the grave of Hacı İbrahim Bezirgan, sitting cross-legged, the way do. Each of you take a piece of onion and grind it up between two stones. Then imitate everything that I do. When I put some onion on my eyes to make my tears flow, you put some on your own eyes. Whenever I cry, you cry just the way do.”

By now it was late afternoon and close to the time Mahmud came to visit his father’s grave. Soon Mahmud, who was about eighteen years old, came along with his schoolbooks under his arm to visit his father’s grave. As Mahmud approached the grave, the covered baldy put some onion on his eyes and began at once to cry. His followers also applied onions to their eyes and began at once to weep. When Mahmud observed these men sitting around his father’s grave, he thought, “They must be mistaken. They are crying for their father at the wrong grave.” Going to them, he said, “O young men, you are crying at the wrong grave. This is my father’s grave. Go and find your father’s grave and mourn there.”

At first none of the seated men moved or spoke. Then the covered baldy arose and said, “Oh, little gentleman, we know that this

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is your father's grave. However, the man who was your father was also the father of orphans. Ever since his death, our stomachs have gone without bread, and our backs have been shirtless. From week to week your father used to bring us food and clothing, and when he did so, he always gave us some money to spend. Despite our poverty, he had respect for us. Oh, why did a great man like your father have to die instead of us? Yes, we too know that this is your father's grave, but it is also the grave of the father of orphans. Only we can know the suffering we have gone through since his death. There is no longer bread to nourish us, and there is no longer clothing to replace the ragged garments. There is never in our pockets money to spend." The covered baldy explained all of this very gently to Mahmud.

Listening to this lament, Mahmud thought, "I am the son of a pilgrim. My father once loved, fed, and clothed these men. How can I be the son of such a father and not help any poor people? Will not the shares of these men be held against me when some tomorrow becomes Judgment Day? The rich man will be asked to account for what had become of the poor man's share. Whenever necessary, the wealthy man should assist good and honest people. A merciless man is also an unjust man."

Therefore Mahmud turned to these men and said, "O friends, do not cry! My father is dead, but his wealth is alive. His money still

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exists. Come follow me, and I shall provide you with food.” Gathering the twelve plunderers around him, he took them to his home.

Mahmud’s mother used to gaze out the window every afternoon as she awaited the return of her son. When she looked out on this particular day, she saw the approaching Mahmud followed by the twelve plunderers. The woman immediately recognized those destructive men. She opened the door to her son, but the twelve plunderers remained outside. She asked, “Son, do you know who those men are?”

“Oh, Mother, these were my father’s orphans. My father used to love these men, feeding them and clothing them regularly.”

Upon hearing this, the woman said, “No, no, Son! These men are not poor. They are plunderers. They are burglars and vandals. It was not a good thing to bring them here.”

“Oh, no, Mother! If you had seen how they cried, your lungs would have ached. I shall not allow them to leave today until I have fed them.”

The woman distrusted the plunderers, but having been the wife of a merchant and a benevolent man, she too felt that it would not be honorable to turn away anyone who had come to their door for help. She therefore said, “Very well, Son. Feed those men tonight, but do

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not bring them here again. If you do, they will surely do us serious harm.”

Mahmud invited the plunderers into the house and had them seated in a large room. There he provided them with a large feast and satisfied their hunger. He then went to his mother and said, “Mother, it was my father’s custom to give money to these men. Let us do the same.” No matter how strongly his mother advised against doing this, they ended up giving each man enough money to provide for his needs for two days.

The covered baldy then said, “O little son, you have made us very happy. You have shown today that you are really your father’s son.”

As Mahmud was seeing these men off, he decided, out of courtesy, to walk a short distance with them. (Gentlemen, even if there were no devil, man himself would serve as one! Such a human devil can convert even a sober man into a drunkard!) As they walked along, the covered baldy sighed and looked up. “Keloğlan,²¹ why did you sigh?” asked Mahmud.

²¹This is the first time that the narrator refers to this man as a keloğlan. The keloğlan is a bald boy who is often shrewd—even wily—and he does sometimes cover his head to hide that baldness. The keloğlan, however, is a sympathetic character, partly because of his youth, partly out of pity for his unfortunate physical condition.

The word keloğlan means bald boy. The loss of hair referred to comes not from aging but from ringworm infestation of the scalp.

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"O little son, I see ahead a place that sells Grief-Curing Water. Today when we renewed our grief for the loss of your father, we had no money to buy any of this cure for grief. As a result we cried at great length, and our eyes are still wet. If only we could have bought a bottle of that special water!"

Mahmud had never heard of Grief-Curing Water, though he himself had been in grief since his father's death. "Keloğlan, is there really such a thing as Grief-Curing Water?" he asked.

"Yes, there is."

"Here is some money with which to buy some," said Mahmud.

Keloğlan already had the bottle of rakı in the folds of his coat. He therefore entered the tavern, quickly returned, and withdrew that bottle from his coat. The twelve plunderers then led Mahmud to a deserted part of Istanbul. (May Allah never let anyone else fall into such a trap.)

Ringworm is encouraged by uncleanliness, and it is more common in remote rural areas where bathing facilities are minimal. In a large family the younger children, often unattended, are prey to this disease. In folktales the keloğlan is a sympathetic figure: intelligent, courageous, and often lucky; thus despite his handicap, he is usually successful. By selective extension, the word often has an altered connotation. Keloğlan may simply refer to the youngest child in the family, all the way from the royal household down to that of the most lowly peasant. As such, he retains all the qualities of the bald boy except his baldness. Like everyone else, the keloğlan must have a name, but we almost never learn what it is. The word keloğlan is simply capitalized and serves as his name: Keloğlan.

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As Mahmud drank the Grief-Curing Water, he did indeed seem to become happier. “Fill the glass again, Keloğlan!” he said.

By midnight the plunderers had taken all of the gold from Mahmud’s pockets. They took him to all of the nightclubs in Istanbul. When he saw the entertainment at these places, Mahmud—young and inexperienced—forgot all about his home and his mother.

That mother cried all night and worried about her son. When he finally arrived home the following morning, he looked even worse than Ahmet had looked earlier. When he tried to walk, he took two steps forward and then one step backwards, often falling to the ground. When the woman saw her son in this condition, she knew at once that this could be blamed on the twelve plunderers. (As an old proverb says, “He who sits with filth will himself become filthy.” But all drinkers do not become drunkards. There are sensible men who drink without harming either themselves or anyone else. Drunkards drink until they lose their senses. Pity such a man as that.)

When Mahmud entered his home, his mother asked him, “Son, where were you last night?”

“Mother, do not ask me.”

“Son, it is time to go to school.”

“What school? It is enough that I studied formerly. What good comes from so much studying? Some entertainment is also necessary.”

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Paying no attention to his mother's advice, Mahmud bent down and took from the family treasury enough gold to fill his pockets. Then he left again to rejoin the keloğlan and his eleven companions. This kind of behavior continued for six months, and by the end of that time Mahmud had spent all of Hacı İbrahim's wealth on evil people. In order to get more money to spend, Mahmud began selling the furniture in the family mansion. A good-for-nothing son will make his mother, his father, and his friends weep. Mahmud behaved so badly that he made his brother, Ahmet, look like an angel beside him. At the end of a year Mahmud had sold even the villas which he had inherited from his father. When the plunderers realized that Mahmud and his mother were now poor, having nothing left, they deserted Mahmud.

See here! People should learn from old tales like this one. Where can one find a second father to accumulate enough wealth to support one in comfort? Mahmud had caused not only himself but also his mother to suffer poverty. This young man wandered about destitute, with no shirt on his back and no shoes on his feet. His mother, too, went without proper clothing. They ate only when the neighbors were kind enough to send them some bread and soup. Otherwise, they would go to sleep hungry. When Mahmud wandered about the marketplace and saw well-dressed young men in the streets and fresh loaves on the bakers' shelves, he would break down and

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weep. His good fortune had ended. “Hey, plunderers, why did you turn me into such a person?” he would cry out, but to no avail. Good men will help you to construct a building, but evil men may make you sell or demolish that building. Let us now leave Mahmud in all his difficulties and return to the palace of the padişah.

The padişah’s council continued to meet and to discuss what should be done about the reply of the şah at Gence. Everything can advance by means of discussion, whether there is just one problem to be solved or a thousand. That was why Allah’s lion, the Blessed Ali,²² said, “I would be willing to be the slave of any man who can teach me something that I do not know.” What a meaningful saying! Isn’t that so? Maybe someone else in a group will know something that I don’t, and his knowledge will at that point advance the discussion.

Some of the wise men in the padişah’s council said, “Efendi,²³ there are many solutions to this question, one of which would have to be a secret solution.”

“What is it?”

²²The cousin and son-in-law of Mohammed, Ali eventually became the fourth caliph.

²³In earlier times the word efendi was a term of respect used in speaking to distinguished men. By the mid-20th century, however, its prestige had so eroded that it was used only while speaking to children and servants.

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“Prepare your army quietly. Then lead them to the land of Iran by traveling only at night so that we shall not be observed. Each day the army should hide in a wooded area. We can surround Gence while Emir Gurkan Şah is sleeping. Then in the morning we shall see what good his sword will be to him.” (It is because of situations like this that our ancestors said, “Stay alert, and don’t fall asleep! Your friends may sleep, but your enemies will not! Enemies will observe your sleeping. Therefore, take precautions!”)

Having reached agreement after this consultation, the council ordered town criers to make this announcement: “Whoever is capable of leading the Turkish army by night and concealing them by day should appear at once before the padişah.” Many men and groups of men had wandered undetected in strange lands, but the task now was not to hide 1,000 or even as many as 10,000 men. The task now was to hide during daylight the entire Turkish army! (In those times town criers were used to relay news and to make public announcements. It is no longer like that today. Now it takes only the pressing of a button to tell the whole nation any piece of information.) The criers called their message for three days, but no one volunteered for the duty.

Just before noon of the fourth day Mahmud found himself especially hungry. Neither he nor his mother had eaten anything the night before. Mahmud thought, “O Fate, you hold up a mirror that

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reflects nothing. What has it ever revealed to me? Will there ever come a day when I shall again see my mother dressed in the kind of clothing my father left her? If only my and my mother's hunger could be again satisfied, I should not care if I had but one more day to live after that." Mahmud wept as these thoughts went through his mind. Then he heard the town criers making their announcement. Thinking about their message, Mahmud thought, "After what I have gone through, the only suitable conclusion is death. Rather than continue in hunger, rather than see my mother eventually die of it, it would be better to tell a lie for some quick wealth, even if I were eventually to be executed for it." Walking up to the nearest crier, Mahmud said, "There is no one except me who can lead the Turkish army by night and hide it during the day." That crier took that young man straight to the presence of the padişah.

No matter how poor a man may be, if he has learned courtesy from his family, that trait will remain with him. Mahmud stood respectfully before the ruler. Both the padişah and his council recognized that however poor he might be at that moment, he had been well reared. Mahmud had also learned much during his seven years of schooling. (A mother and a father place a child in school, where he soon becomes much more aware of his surroundings. The education given to a child by his teacher will provide him with a shield against

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the difficulties of this world. A man without education is regarded as inexperienced even if he is eighty years old.)

The padişah asked the crier, “Did this young man come forward and volunteer?”

“Yes.”

Then turning to Mahmud, the ruler said, “Step over here, son.”

Mahmud advanced and then stopped three steps away from the padişah. Claspings hands in front of him, he stood silent in respect.

“What is your name, son?” asked the ruler.

“Good health to Your Majesty. They call me Mahmud.”

“Fine! Your name is as attractive as you are.” (Those who are honest are attractive within. The beauty of the face is of no significance unless there is moral beauty behind it.) “Son, can you lead the Turkish army by night and hide it by day?”

“Yes, I can do that. If I could not, I should not have dared to come before you.” (It was hunger that led Mahmud to tell such a lie. There is a famous saying which claims, “A hungry dog can demolish a bakery.” Mahmud’s only desire was to satisfy his and his mother’s hunger. Beyond that he considered little else. He had never gone anywhere outside of Istanbul, and thus he had never seen a foreign land. He did not even know which direction to travel to reach Iran. Hunger alone had made him speak in the way he did.)

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“Very well, young man. Whose son are you?” asked the padişah.

Before this shabby young man gave the name of his wealthy father, he felt that he should make some explanation of his condition. “O padişah father, it is Allah Who makes decisions. Sometimes He gives people problems, and sometimes He gives them remedies for those problems. Sometimes He makes one rich and sometimes He makes one poor. Sometimes He makes one cry and sometimes He makes one laugh. I am Hacı İbrahim Bezirgan’s son. My father died a loyal and wealthy subject of your rule. But I, thinking my inheritance from him could never be exhausted, spent all of his wealth on entertainment. That is why I am in my present condition.” He had begun weeping before completing this explanation.

“Do not cry, son,” said the padişah. “It is indeed Allah Who makes the major decisions. He makes some poor and others rich, but He also leaves some decisions to be made by each man.”

(The padişah’s words were true, and here I add my own words to his.

Be not deceived by earthly ways!
This world can trick poor mortal man
By means of things he had not known,
With daily suffering for one

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But daily ease for someone else.

It seems to aid one to success

But failure bring to someone else.

You may retire in great wealth

But wake in poverty at dawn.)

Everything that Mahmud said was written down by a scribe, for he was speaking among men in official positions. He was speaking before the padişah and his council, not before a group of shepherds. Statements that are recorded in such circumstances are often tested. Are they accurate or are they false? Mahmud's statements were investigated. "Bring his birth certificate! Verify what he has said about his past! Is his account true or untrue?" Mahmud's birth date, place of birth, and parentage were questioned. It makes little difference what parentage you may claim if it is not confirmed by the registry of your birth. It soon became evident that all of Mahmud's statements had been correct.

When this examination was completed, the padişah said, "Good, son! If you had misrepresented yourself, you would have been punished, but all of your statements were accurate." But to himself Sultan Murat thought, "This boy is very young to undertake the job for which he has volunteered. Can he possibly succeed in that job? Probably his father took him along on some of his business trips to

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Iran, and if that is so, then he may well know the route to that land. Almost every skill can be acquired from experience.” Poets have said, “A fox who wanders will know more than a lion who never left home.” The sleeping lion at home learns nothing, while the traveling fox learns the ways of the world. To Mahmud the sultan said, “Very well, son. It has been proven that you were indeed the son of a great merchant, but what do you wish from me?”

At that moment Mahmud’s only desires were to be able to clothe his mother and himself properly and to have adequate food for both of them. He therefore answered, “O padişah, I am asking for gold in the amount of my own weight, but I shall take only half that money now and the other half after I have completed my duty. This is the first of two requests. The second is that the expedition be delayed for forty days—time enough for both of us to get prepared for the trip. On the forty-first day I shall be at your command.”

“Well spoken!” said the padişah. Why did he say that? Because if Mahmud had asked for only a five-day delay or a ten-day delay, that would not have provided adequate time to prepare a whole army to move. It would have been ill-advised to rush the preparations of so many men.

Accordingly, the padişah gave orders that both of Mahmud’s requests be granted. After all, there was no place to which this young

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man could escape. They gave Mahmud at once half his weight in gold. Mahmud hired a porter to carry that gold and then went at once to the marketplace. Entering the finest clothing store there, he bought the finest garments for his mother and for himself. Then he bought a quantity of kebab from a restaurant and a tray of fruit from a greengrocer. He then started back to his small home with all of these goods. It was close to noon by then, and Mahmud's mother kept glancing out the door in hope that one of their neighbors would bring them some soup. Mahmud had brought into the house all of the goods he had bought, and he had these placed before his mother. He then gave the porter money and sent him away. "Oh, Mother, before we satisfy our hunger, I want you to know that all of the money in the world did not disappear when I wasted my father's wealth."

Crying and pulling her hair, the woman asked, "Where did you get all of this?"

"Mother, you just wear these clothes, and I shall tell you."

"Son, these are not things one can obtain with the wages of a laborer. Clothes should be worn to give good use. They should not be worn to produce tears."

These words brought Mahmud to his senses. "Oh, Mother, it is difficult for me to admit that I got all of this by deceiving the padişah. The son of a bezirgan, I wanted to fly with my father's wings. I

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promised to take the entire Turkish army to another land, leading them in their travels by night and hiding them completely during daylight hours. But I have been given preparatory time of forty days, and I have been paid much gold in advance of my work.”

“You are going to direct the travel of an army? But have you ever been outside of Istanbul?”

“No, and I know very well what I have agreed to accomplish is impossible. This will lead to my certain death. But a short sultanate of just forty days is far better than a long life of poverty.”

Forgetting her hunger, the woman cried out, “Son, why did you do such a bad thing? You spent your father’s fortune with bad companions, doing bad things, but that was your money then, not the money of the padişah or anyone else. You placed me in this small house and left me in poverty, but seeing you healthy from day to day was for me a good substitute for wealth. What can I say to the ruler if he gives an order to have you torn to pieces? You have not considered this matter well. What will you say to the padişah at the end of forty days?” The woman began to pull her hair and beat her knees.²⁴ “Under these conditions, is it possible for me to wear these fine clothes and to eat this food?”

²⁴When people in grief are seated, they sometimes let their hands fall repeatedly to their knees. As their anguish increases, they may strike their knees more forcefully.

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The son and mother grieved together. Only Allah could hear their cries. No one else knew anything about this whole matter. The woman thought, "Only Hacı Murtat can save my son from the hands of the padişah." However, this woman had not gone to the home of Hacı Murtat for several years, for she remembered with bitterness how Hacı Murtat and his family had ignored her at the time of her husband's death. She knew that by going to the door of Hacı Murtat, she might become rich again, but a heart that is offended is not like anything else. "Oh, Hacı Murtat, do you think I would again knock on your door, even if it were the door to heaven? My husband has long lain beneath the ground without your ever having inquired about my welfare. Even if I knew that I was about to die of starvation, your door would be forbidden to me." With all of this resentment, the widow of the bezirgan had closed her mind to any approach to Hacı Murtat and his family.

Let us turn now to Hacı Murtat, who for some time had been lying in his bed ill and suffering great pain. Both Hacı Murtat and his wife had often thought, "Oh, Hacı İbrahim Bezirgan and Hacı İbrahim's wife, I would not even look at your door, even if it were the door to heaven. We have long experienced great suffering and neglect. Would one treat friends this way? Never once have you come to visit us."

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These two families seemed to have forgotten each other's doors because of injured feelings. But had they really forgotten? The truth is that sometimes people become offended by those whom they love. You might not mind so much something said by a person you don't like. The two doors were closed between people who had once been closer to each other. The owner of the one had died, and the owner of the other was lying very ill in his bed. Mahmud did not know Hacı Murtat.

As the woman cried, she thought, "No one besides Allah and Hacı Murtat can save my son." She understood that crying and pulling her hair would achieve nothing. "Oh, Hacı Murtat, I would not normally knock on your door, even if it were the door to heaven, but now the neck of my eighteen-year-old son lies beneath a suspended sword. If he dies, I shall die of the pain I shall suffer. My only means of escaping these circumstances is to oblige myself to you."

As the two were crying, the mother said to her son, "Mahmud, cease your crying. I know of someone who can save you from death. Although I had intended not to speak to that man again, the time has come when I must change my mind. What else could I do? It is more sensible to go to him now than to cry for you after you are dead and beneath the ground. I would not go to him for bread, but this is a matter of life and death." Holding her son by one hand and locking the house door with the other, she set forth for Hacı Murtat's

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neighborhood. Although she knew that their clothes looked shabby, the woman did not hesitate to knock on Hacı Murtat's door. "Stand back!" she said to her son.

When servants came to the door, they did not recognize the two people who stood outside. Mahmud's mother asked, "Is Hacı Murtat inside?"

"Yes, he is here lying in his bed."

"Tell his wife that I have come to visit if she is willing to see us."

The servant went inside to where Hacı Murtat's wife was sitting by her husband's bed. (They were wealthy, but what good is a gold basin when in your pain you can vomit into it only blood?) That servant said, "A young man and an old woman wish to visit Hacı Murtat. What am I to tell them?"

A sick person often looks out a window to see if anyone might be coming to visit him, coming to ask him about his condition. When he heard that two people were waiting to see him, Hacı Murtat said at once to his wife, "Bring them in quickly, woman! Bring them in! I have been waiting a long time to see visitors. Let us see who they are, for they are probably people who care about me." The wife signaled to the maid to bring the guests inside.

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When the two guests entered the house, they could not help observing the contrast between their own shabby clothes and the fine clothes of Hacı Murtat's wife. Mahmud's mother took off her head scarf, threw it on the floor before the sick man's bed, and knelt upon it. Hacı Murtat tried to rise from bed to greet her but was unable to do so. In tears Mahmud's mother asked Hacı Murtat, "Do you recognize me as the wife of a man you once knew well?"

Hacı Murtat answered, "Sister, lying in this bed for so long has made my memory fade. You look familiar to me, but I am not sure who you are. It seems as if you must once have been close to us." Then he said to his wife, "You look at this woman too!" But apparently the wife's memory had also failed, for she could not identify her female guest.

Then Mahmud's mother exclaimed, "Hey, look at me more closely! Am I not the wife of Hacı İbrahim Bezirgan? I thought that I would never come to your home again, even if it were heaven." Talking and crying at the same time, she explained her dilemma to Hacı Murtat and his wife. She told them how she had become poor, how they had long been hungry, and how her son had acquired gold from the padişah. "I had not intended to knock on your door, but when my son's life was endangered, I changed my mind about that. Otherwise I would never have come here, for although my husband has

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been dead for several years, you have never come to my home to comfort me.”

When she said this, Hacı Murtat and his wife became aware for the first time of the death of Hacı İbrahim Bezirgan. Crying, they explained their own difficulties. “Oh, Mohammed!” said Hacı Murtat’s wife. “We were offended by you and your husband. My own husband has been ill for years, but you have never inquired about his health.” After talking for awhile longer each side understood why the other side was offended, and each side regretted its past behavior.

Hacı Murtat understood the problem of Mahmud’s mother. He said to her, “Sister, your husband and I were once like brothers. I have waited for years for him to come and see me, but during all that while he was looking at me from the other world.” Then he turned to his wife and said, “Oh, woman, I used to be very poor. Her husband made me his partner, and in doing so, he made me rich. Although I am ill, we live in wealth. If we were not rich, you would not be able to care for me so well. What justice is there in this world? To think that the wife of such a successful bezirgan should lose her wealth and finally come here, throwing her tattered head scarf at my feet!” After saying this, he cried aloud and beat his knees. Mahmud’s mother then explained how her son had deceived the padişah in order to acquire

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gold. While all of this was going on, Mahmud sat silently in a corner with his neck bent to one side.

The hosts took the bezirgan's wife and son to another room, where they dressed them in expensive new clothes. Hacı Murtat said to them, "May my eyes never again see you in such poor clothing!" Then, turning to his wife, he said, "Wife, this woman has worked hard and swept the dust of both her husband's and my feet. Many times have I eaten the food that she has cooked. For long we did not talk with each other, but that was a mistake." Turning next to Mahmud, he asked, "Oh, Mahmud, son, why didn't you come to me and explain your difficulty?"

"Uncle, I did not know you, and my mother had not told me about you. If I had known you, I would not have suffered this way. I would have disregarded my mother's resentment and come to you."

"Son, for fifteen years I traveled with your father to Gence in the land of Iran. We traveled to and from that place during both summer and winter. I know well every mountain and every river along that route. To lead an army along that route by night and hide it by day would have been a job suitable for your father and me to undertake. Your father is now in the ground, but I, though ill, have retained my mental stability. Son, a piece of ripe fruit cannot be compared with a piece that is still green, nor can an old man be compared with a young

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Easily crushed, the ripe fruit then rots and disappears. Because the unripe fruit is hard and cannot easily be damaged, it can develop. Like the ripe fruit, I am old and do not know how much time I have left ahead of me. But then, neither do you know how much time you have left, even though you are very young. Go to the padişah and ask him to reduce the preparatory time from forty days to twenty days. He will ask you why you have made such a request. You should then make this reply: ‘O my padişah father, I am a young man of only eighteen years, but the time Allah has allotted to me on this earth may be shorter than we might suppose. Wishing to be certain that I can fulfill my promise to you, I do not want to delay too long the time when I shall commence my work.’ Give this answer, son, and both the padişah and his council will appreciate it.”

Mahmud agreed to do this, and he happily set forth at once for the padişah’s palace. When he arrived there, servants asked the padişah if the young man should be admitted into his presence. The ruler agreed to this. Mahmud entered the throne room and stood in silent respect before the padişah. “What is it, son?” the padişah asked.

“Efendi, I asked for a delay of forty days before I began leading the army to Gence. Although I am young, neither I nor anyone else knows how long Allah will make his stay in this world. Wishing to

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be sure that I can fulfill my duty to you, I am requesting that the preparatory time be reduced to twenty days.”

Turning to his council, the padişah said, “Have you ever before heard such wise words from so young a man? Is it not true that death can carry off the young as well as the old?” Turning then to Mahmud, he said, “Very well, son. Your words are correct. When a person takes on a responsibility, he must fulfill it. Whatever your job may be, it is better to accomplish it first, and then, if there is time left, to rest afterwards. But one’s attention should first be devoted to one’s duty.” Thus it was that the waiting period was reduced from forty to twenty days.

Leaving the palace, Mahmud returned to the home of Hacı Murtat. There that old man asked him, “What happened, son?”

“Twenty days were cut from the preparatory time.”

“Yes, those people at the palace can judge such matters well. But there is another matter which I want you to attend to. Take this money and use it to have made a very large and comfortable chair, like a throne. Have it very heavily padded with soft cotton. There is little flesh left on my bones, son, but if preparations are arranged properly, I may live long enough to guide you to Gence. Have this special chair made in such a way that it can be strapped to a horse’s back.”

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Mahmud could now bid poverty to go blind. He still had the gold gained from the padişah, and he also had the money given to him by Hacı Murtat. When all hope is lost, Allah may still help those whom He favors. This help may come directly from Allah, or it may come by way of one of His creatures. He has ordered the rich to look after the poor and the poor to work for the rich.

Saved from death, Mahmud was at last happy again. During the next twenty days, the army made preparations to move while Mahmud and Hacı Murtat made preparations to lead it. The army awaited Mahmud's order to march, and on the twenty-first day that order was given.

How did the Turkish army travel by night but remain hidden during the daylight hours? They traveled by night through desolate places and across mountains rather than take easier and more open routes. Despite the difficult paths they took, the Turkish army marched at double speed, covering more than twice the distance an army usually covers in a day. When dawn approached, they stopped well away from any settlements and with their spades dug deep trenches in which to sleep until darkness again arrived. No one except the birds flying overhead ever saw that army. They wore camouflaged clothes and they ate all of their food while they were in hiding during the day. All along the way Hacı Murtat would give directions to Mahmud, and then

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Mahmud would pass along those directions to the commanders of the army units. One day while they were in their trenches awaiting darkness, Mahmud went to Hacı Murtat and said, "Uncle, we have been marching for the past thirty-eight nights. How much farther is it to Gence in the land of Iran? had supposed it was closer."

"Son, you are right in asking the distance from someone who has traveled in strange lands. You yourself have gone only from home to school and then back from school to home. You have no way of knowing what it is like to cross strange territory. Now take me by the arm and help me to rise from my resting place." When Mahmud had done as he had been directed, the old man stood up and looked around. They were in a deep valley between two mountains. Hacı Murtat said, "Son, being very old, I cannot tell exactly where we are at this moment. But ahead of us, either an hour's distance farther up this valley or in the next valley there is a set of sign stones. If you can locate those sign stones, return to me at once and I shall tell you how much farther you will have to go to reach Gence."

Mahmud walked up the valley an hour's distance, and there he found sign stones both on the left and on the right. As soon as he saw those stones, he turned around and ran back to Hacı Murtat. "Yes, uncle," he said, "I saw two large sign stones, handmade, on both sides of the valley."

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"Son, those are the stones I had in mind. Now I can tell you that there is only a distance of six hours left between this point and Gence. Go and give this good news to the commanders."

The commanders were sitting, talking among themselves about what they would do when they reached Gence. They had been given these orders: "If the Iranian şah gives you one of the camçırak stones, do not draw your swords from their sheaths but come away without having shed any blood. If he does not give you that stone willingly, do not return without having taken it from him." The commanders were making their plans to comply with these orders. As they were talking, Mahmud entered their skin-covered trench and kissed the hands of the pashas. These pashas all liked Mahmud. "Yes, son, what do you wish to say?" they inquired.

"Efendis, there is only a distance of six hours left before we shall arrive at Gence. This is the news that I have come to give you."

"That means that we are almost at the gates of Gence!" said the pashas with pleasure. It was still not quite time for the army to start marching again, but upon hearing Mahmud's news, the commanders decided to surround Gence at midnight. The army marched straight ahead and completely surrounded Gence in the darkness.

The ruler of that city was unaware that this was happening, for he had had no reports of the approach of the Turkish army. (As we

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said earlier, friends sleep, but enemies stay awake. It is better to advance upon the enemy before the enemy can attack you.) On this occasion not only the people of Gence wept but so too did the şah of Gence. (There were no guns at that time, and armies fought with swords.) As soon as he had discovered what had happened, Emir Gurkan Şah gathered his council for consultation. He announced to his advisors, “Osman’s country²⁵ surrounded us while we slept.” Then he asked, “What can we do?”

Let us leave them there discussing their problem and go now to Emir Gurkan’s daughter, Mahbub. When she heard Gence crying, she leaped from her bed and said to a servant, “Go to where my father and his council are meeting and find out what they are planning to do. Then bring that information back to me.”

The girl’s servant secretly listened to the discussion at the palace. One of the şah’s advisors said, “It would be best to keep the damage from going any farther. It would not be wise to allow the danger to become any greater. The enemy has troops on all four sides of Gence, but their swords are still in their sheaths. If we were to confront them, Gence would be destroyed, blood would flow in the

²⁵Osman was the founder of the Ottoman Empire. The adjectival form of the word is Osmanlı in Turkish, Ottoman in English.

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streams instead of water, and our wealth would be plucked from our hands.”

His council gave this decision to Emir Gurkan: “There is no solution to this difficulty but to give the enemy one of the çamçırak stones. If we don’t do this, we shall lose both of our stones, and Gence will be destroyed. It would be better to keep one stone, preserve Gence, and prevent the shedding of blood.”

After the şah had accepted the council’s decision, Mahbub’s servant ran back to her and reported this to her. He said, “O Mahbub Hanım,²⁶ your father and his council have reached a decision.”

“What is it?” the girl asked.

“They are going to give one of the çamçırak stones to the Ottomans to prevent the use of swords so that blood will not be lost.”

As soon as Mahbub learned of that decision, she dressed in the clothing of an Arab warrior and went directly to her father’s council room. Her sword was swinging at her waist, and her shield was strapped upon her shoulder. She said, “O şah father, how quickly you were frightened by the enemy. Remember that you have a daughter named Mahbub who would die before permitting the enemy to enter Gence! Watch me tomorrow morning and see how I will use my sword

²⁶Hanım is a term of respect equivalent to the English word lady. Both the Turkish female honorific Hanım and the male honorific Bey follow the given name of the person referred to.

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against the enemy!” Refusing to obey her father’s orders, the girl placed one of the çamçırak stones in her bosom, and said, “Send me instead of a stone!” Some daughters will not listen to the directions of their fathers.

When the night had passed and dawn was at hand, the girl mounted her horse and rode out through the gates of Gence. The Turkish commanders observed that Gence sent forth only one soldier, but they had no way of knowing whether that lone figure was a man or a woman, for all they could see was its Arabian uniform. They supposed it must be a man, but, as we know, it was Emir Gurkan’s daughter. When a Turkish soldier advanced toward her, she attacked him fiercely and killed him within five minutes. Between dawn and sunset she killed thirty-five Turkish contenders before riding back through the gates of Gence.

All by herself Mahbub fought for eight days and killed 300 Turkish soldiers. Mahmud watched these single combats day after day. During those eight days he sensed more and more a deep love for his country and its people, and his thoughts of the Turkish losses so far filled his nights with pain. “Oh, Arab, may your arms and legs break!” he exclaimed. “You have made martyrs of 300 of my friends!” Then he thought, “If only Allah would give me the strength to face that Arab tomorrow!” Filled with such thoughts, he fell asleep. He had not been

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sleeping very long when he had a dream. A white-bearded old man appeared before him and said, "Why are you sleeping, son? Get up and take your ritual ablutions in the nearby stream. Then pray to Allah, and He will give you what you want."

Mahmud awoke and went happily to the stream near his encampment. After taking ablutions, he prayed: "O Allah, give me strength, for strength and endurance are Yours to give. Give me the strength to face that Arab warrior tomorrow."

"What is your difficulty?" asked a voice nearby.

Turning his head in the direction of the voice, Mahmud saw an aged saint standing near him. He supposed that the man had come to help him in his distress, but he said, "I seek a remedy for my problems from Allah. I seek strength to face the Arab warrior tomorrow."

"Arise, son, for Allah has already given you what you seek," said the aged saint, who was the Blessed Hızır.²⁷ He rubbed Mahmud's arm three times with his right hand and then had Mahmud drink from a

²⁷Once a water deity and fertility god—and still both those figures to most farmers in southern Turkey—Hızır is more widely known now as a granter of wishes, a last-minute rescuer from disaster, and a special messenger and agent of God. In these latter three functions he appears fairly frequently in Turkish folktales. Not mentioned by name in the Koran, a chapter of that work was later named after him. He is assumed to be the person instructing Moses in Chapter XVIII of the Koran, where he is referred to by God simply as "our servant."

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goblet that he handed the young man. He then recited a prayer and blew it²⁸ toward Mahmud, saying, "Know, my son, that if ,000 Arab warriors should appear on the battlefield tomorrow, they could not make a successful stand against you. The strength of two horses has been given to you. [Tape 10] Know, however, son, that the person with whom you will fight tomorrow is not an Arab, nor is that person, as you suppose, a man. She is your destined love, son. It has been written²⁹ that the two of you will grow old upon the same pillow. Do not kill her, for she will be your wife. She does not know this yet, but she has long sought a strong husband. She has declared, 'I shall marry only the man who can defeat me in battle.' Therefore you should defeat her, but overcome her gently, for she is to be your wife. She is not an Arab." Having said that, Hızır vanished.

Mahmud was almost overcome with joy. Grasping a tree, he pulled its roots out of the ground. He knew then that he really had the

²⁸The power of breath has many implications in Turkish folklore all the way from trickery through magic to religion. Self-styled healers often breathed supposed cures upon the sick—for a good fee! Charlatans pretended to perform near-miracles with their breath. The practice of "blowing" became so exploitive that "blowers" were outlawed by one of the Kemalist reforms of the 1920s and 1930s.

²⁹Turkish folk narrators often consider Fate and the Will of Allah (sometimes used synonymously) as having been articulated in divine documents. Instead of asking, "What has been predestined for me?" a person might ask, "What has been written for me?"

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strength of which Hızır had spoken. Putting the tree on his shoulder, he went to the tent of Hacı Murtat. When the old man saw him with the tree on his shoulder, he began to cry. "Uncle, why are you crying?" asked Mahmud.

"Son, you frightened me. There are times when people who think a great deal go mad."

"Fear not, uncle. I am not mad, but I have been given great strength, and tomorrow I shall face the Arab warrior." Then, with the tree still on his shoulder, Mahmud went to the tent of the pashas.

Now that the pashas had discovered how powerful the Arab warrior was, they were in consultation to determine ways of defeating that singular enemy who had killed 300 of their men. As they were talking, Mahmud entered the tent and stood there with his hands clasped before him. The pashas asked, "What is it, son?"

With a gentle voice Mahmud said, "I came to get special permission from you."

"May it be for some good purpose," they responded.

"Tomorrow I should like to ride forth and face the Arab warrior."

The pashas looked at each other. They admired Mahmud's words, but they were concerned about his welfare. One of them said, "Son, you have already completed your duty in this campaign. We

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know that you too were Turkish-born, but you are still too young to be a soldier. It would be a sin for us to assign you to such combat."

Upon hearing that, Mahmud kissed his hands and said, "O pasha, strength does not come from age alone. I have been watching the Arab warrior for a week, and I am convinced that he will be able to kill many more Turkish soldiers. There is no one but me capable of defeating him. All that I want is your permission to encounter him. But with or without your permission, I shall battle him tomorrow."

The pashas looked at Mahmud begging for permission and then they looked at each other. They all thought, "There may be more to this than we know."

"Very well, son, but may no harm come to you. You are still only a young branch."

"Even if I do suffer harm, my parents reared me to be a sacrifice for my country if necessary." Despite their fears for his safety, the pashas heaped praise upon him.

Maḥmud then waited anxiously for dawn to arrive. He thought about the words of the aged saint [Hızır] who had arranged for his receiving special strength from Allah. The old man had said, "Son, that Arab warrior is not a man but a woman. She is the loved one who is your destiny. Do not, therefore, kill her. Throw her to the ground and simply hold her there."

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So Mahmud knew that the warrior was neither an Arab nor a man, but he did not reveal that information to anyone else. He waited eagerly and happily all night long. (May many good mornings arrive for Muslims!) They chose a strong horse for Mahmud and gave him an excellent sword. (That was the weapon of that time.) After buckling the sword on his belt, the pashas both prayed for him and praised him.

As soon as the sun rose, the gates of Gence swung open, and the daughter of Emir Gurkan rode forth wearing Arab clothing and mounted on an Arabian horse. The gates closed behind her, for Gence was surrounded by Turkish troops. This girl in her Arab outfit rode forth and shouted, "Is there anyone among you invaders who is my equal? Have your mothers given birth to such a man?"

On the other side Mahmud, trembling like a leaf with excitement, whipped his horse forward. A moment later he came before the girl and shouted, "Oh, Arab, a single horse cannot travel any great distance. Lift your head and look at me!"

The girl looked up and saw a young man sitting upon a horse, a rider stiff as a stick. She laughed loudly and looked at the army spread out before her. "Have you sent this child before me because there are no Ottoman soldiers left?"

Mahmud replied, "Arab, it is not proper to boast in the battlefield. The results will be clear enough only after the fight has

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begun. Do you not approve of my presence or even take me seriously? But there is no need for many words. This is the time, and this is the place.”

Upon hearing these remarks, the girl asked, “What is your name?”

“Do not ask my name. Instead, come and fight!”

“Oh, Turk, you are too young for such conflict. I am reluctant to harm such a young man.”

“I do not hear any of your words,” said Mahmud. “My eyes do not really see you. I am dreaming of fighting with a strumpet. Lift your arm and draw your sword!”

The girl was surprised by some of his words. She thought, “I thought that only I, my Creator, my parents, and the people of Gence knew that I was a girl. How, then, could he call me a strumpet?”

“Don’t remain there in thought! Start fighting!” shouted Mahmud.

In fury the girl drew her sword and threw herself against Mahmud. A cloud of dust was thrown up by her horse’s hoofs. Using the strength that the aged saint had secured for him, Mahmud grabbed the girl’s wrist and squeezed it so hard that her fingers opened and her sword fell to the ground. “Get down from your horse and recover your sword,” called Mahmud.

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On the one side Emir Gurkan and the people of Gence were observing all of this. On the other side the Turkish army was also watching. They all saw how Mahmud had caused the girl to drop her sword on her first charge. She then attacked Mahmud a second and a third time, but none of her advances disturbed the boy. He said, "Oh, Arab, you were puffing yourself up like a coarse woman, but on the field of combat the victor becomes apparent. I had thought of striking you with my sword, but I have now changed my mind." Grabbing the reins of her horse, he pulled her out of her saddle. Then jumping from his own horse, he held her by the waist. He turned her first toward Gence, showing her face to Emir Gurkan like a mirror; he then turned her in the opposite direction to show her to the pashas. To observe the two on the battlefield, you might think that a falcon was holding a sparrow. Actually, the Arab did not have even the strength of a sparrow in Mahmud's grip. Allah had given Mahmud so much strength that if he had cast her to the ground, her flesh might have parted from her bones. Remembering the instructions of the aged saint, Mahmud very slowly brought the girl's back down against the ground and sat upon her. Drawing out his knife, he said, "Oh, Arab, say your last prayer. Do not die in disbelief." But Mahmud was only trying to frighten the girl.

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Opening her eyes, the girl looked at the young man. She said, "I became a fighter without my father's consent. Some time ago I declared that I would never marry any man who could not defeat me in battle. But what a black day Fate has shown to me!" Crying by then, she asked, "What is your name?"

"When you asked me that before, I did not answer, but now shall do so. My mother and father called me Mahmud, and that is the name I have kept."

"Ah, young man with the beautiful name and beautiful eyebrows, I am not an Arab soldier. Unlace my heavy outer garments and see who I really am."

When Mahmud cut the laces with his knife, he saw the girl's slender neck and the top of her beautiful bosom, and he felt a strong sensation flow through his body. When the girl lifted her mask, Mahmud gave a deep sigh and fell in love with her. Fate had written that they would come together.

Neither you nor I brought this about;

Allah alone caused this to be.

His was the hand that wrote our Fate;

His was the pen which shaped the words.

(The truth is that when such divine writing binds together a man and a woman, there is no way in which they can be kept apart.) Mahbub also

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fell in love with Mahmud, admiring both his strength and his handsome features. Weak with love, Mahmud had fallen to the ground and lay there. The girl then exchanged places with him and sat upon his chest. She then said, "Young man, what are your thoughts? Open your eyes and see the condition to which this world has brought us. Before you were sitting on me, but now it has brought me to the top."

Mahmud opened his eyes and saw sitting on his chest someone who looked like an angel. "What is your name, O Beauty?" he asked. The girl spoke gently, saying, "They call me Mahbub, and I am the daughter of Emir Gurkan. In my search for a husband, I did not until today find the suitable man."

"My state of being from now on depends upon you," responded Mahmud. "I am at your mercy." He gazed at her with mournful eyes.

"My mate, whom I love so deeply, do not sigh and look sad. This turned out to be the day my wish came true. I wanted to grow old on the same pillow with the man who could defeat me. Until now no man ever defeated me. Do not be sad. My life is a sacrifice for you. From now on, let my hair be your broom and my fingers your slaves." She embraced Mahmud, but thinking better of it, she said, quickly, "There are men all around us, and now is not a suitable time to embrace. Tie my arms, and do not tell anyone in your camp that I am

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not an Arab. Only you, I, and Allah, Who watches all, will know that I am a girl

“The çamçırak stones are with me. Let no more blood be shed for them. Did not the Turkish army come here for just one stone? Both stones are with me. If I had not found you, I should have continued to weaken the Turkish army by killing off its soldiers. Of course I took the risk of being killed. But then you brought me to the ground, and I became your slave. Now take me to your pashas. My mother and father are watching, and it is very important that they know I was captured. Without their prayers we could not be happily married. If they should think that I went with you willingly, they would not remember me in their prayers, and they might even curse me. Then you might come to some harm because of me.”

Tying up the arms of the warrior who was thought by most to be an Arab, he lifted this person onto a horse and then led that horse to the tent of the pashas, where he gave a salute. Not only the Turkish army but also all of the people of Gence saw this and so believed that the Arab had been taken prisoner.

Emir Gurkan pounded his knees with his fists. Calling together his viziers, he said, “I wouldn’t surrender one of the çamçırak stones. Then the Ottomans caught me asleep, and as a result I have lost not

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only both stones but my daughter as well.” He wept openly as he said this.

The pashas carried Mahmud about on their shoulders while the supposed Arab remained tied up. “What are you going to do with this Arab?” the pashas asked Mahmud.

“I am not going to kill this person. Instead, I shall make him my lifelong slave, a groom for my horse.”

“Well done, son,” said the pashas. “You have done an excellent job.”

The Turkish army was in high spirits. Mahmud gave the çamçırak stones to the pashas, and they were delighted. The whole force of the expedition to Gence turned around and started home. The army had been told, “If you can acquire one of the stones peacefully, then never draw your swords.” But now the army was returning with both stones. The army had succeeded without engaging in a major battle. At nearly the midpoint in their return trip, the pashas sent a message to precede their own arrival at Istanbul. “O Your Majesty Sultan Murat, may you be in good health! May the victory won for you be beneficial! You issued an order for us to return with one of the çamçırak stones, but we are on our way home with both of them. This victory, however, is less the work of the Turkish army than it is the accomplishment of the eighteen-year-old youth Mahmud, who led the

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army here during the nighttime and concealed it during the daytime.” Also written into the message was an account of how Mahmud had endangered himself by engaging a mighty Arab warrior before the very gates of Gence. They also revealed that the Arab in eight days had killed 300 Turkish troops before Mahmud, with the pashas’ permission, had defeated him on the ninth day. Mentioned also was the fact that Mahmud was bringing the Arab to be his lifelong slave in Istanbul. All of this was written down and placed in the hands of a messenger for delivery in Istanbul. The story has put words upon tongue for many nights of entertainment over the years.

The army continued onward toward Istanbul, covering the same set distance every day and then resting at night. The messenger reached that city well ahead of the army and delivered the good news to Sultan Murat. “Both çamçırak stones have been captured!” he announced. When the padişah read all of the good news in the message, he also discovered that 300 Turkish soldiers had been killed during the expedition.

“I am in most ways very pleased, but 300 of my children were killed. But what can be done about such a thing? Fate was written this way. Regardless of this loss, the victory was ours.”

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The heroism of Mahmud had been described by the pashas. It was not just the padişah who learned this news, but soon it was made known to the people of Istanbul. Everyone was thrilled by it.

The padişah said to the messenger, "Now I want you to return to the army with another message." Sultan Murat wrote two sentences with his own hand: "I want Mahmud and the Arab and the pashas to come to my presence. They must come as soon as they reach Istanbul."

The messenger retraced his path and met the army before it arrived at Istanbul. As the messenger met the troops, he saw Mahmud advancing beneath a red flag, with his Arab slave, tied, riding on a horse behind him. The pashas said, "Mahmud, son, the padişah wishes to see you, along with the Arab whom you have enslaved."

Before the entire military force reached the capital city, the pashas, Mahmud, and the Arab arrived there and prepared to enter the presence of the sultan. They first entered the courtyard of the palace, where a ceremony honoring them was held. They were then led into the throne room, where at first Mahmud stood next to the Arab, whose arms were still tied. Then Mahmud slowly advanced. He kissed the hands of the sultan, after which he bowed in respect to the members of the council. Then he returned to the side of the Arab.

Addressing Mahmud, the padişah said, "Very well done, son. You have gained a great victory, and your name will never be

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forgotten. Thank you very much. I want to ask you, however, about the Arab slave you brought back. Is that Arab standing next to you a man or a woman, Mahmud?"

"O padişah father, the Arab is a man. What would a woman be doing here?"

"Is it a man?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do with that Arab?"

"He has promised to be my groom and slave for the rest of his life," answered Mahmud.

"Very well, son. Now your heroism has become unforgettable." The sultan then paid Mahmud the rest of the gold he had earned, but he added more gold to reward the young man for his exploits. Mahmud went to the ruler's treasury to receive all of this great wealth. At this point Mahmud was both a favorite of the sultan and the object of the army's admiration.

When Mahmud, leading the slave, went to his own home, he found there not only his mother but also his brother Ahmet and a whole crowd of neighbors who, having heard the good news, had come to congratulate the hero. His older brother kissed both Mahmud's eyes³⁰ and said, "Oh, Brother, you have won a great victory! This

³⁰One kisses the hands (and sometimes feet) of an older or more distinguished person as a sign of respect. One kisses the eyes

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celebration is appropriate. I have become a drunkard while you have become a very successful man.”

Mahmud then went to his mother and kissed her hands. She said, “Well done, Son! Well done, Son! Well done, Son. May your victory be auspicious! What are you going to do with the Arab, Son?”

Mahmud gave her the same answer he had given others: “He has promised to be my slave for the rest of his life.” In this way he hid the girl’s identity even from his mother.

During the days that followed, Mahmud and the girl in Arab disguise would sit and talk with men and engage in masculine activities. At night they would enjoy themselves in Mahmud’s room, sleeping side by side. Meanwhile, the padişah, as a favor, had appointed Mahmud’s brother, Ahmet, to the position of chief bekçi³¹ of their district of the city. Mahmud was pleased that his brother had been given that position. Ahmet and his twelve assistants walked the streets of their district at night to protect the residents there.

After some time, Ahmet and his crew one evening passed Mahmud’s house. Mahmud and Mahbub were talking in Mahmud’s

(actually the eyelids) of a younger or less distinguished person as a token of affection or encouragement.

³¹A bekçi is a night watchman in a Turkish city. Bekçis usually patrol the streets in pairs along parallel blocks. Each apprises the other of his own location by blowing a high, shrill whistle every minute or so. This enables them to support each other in case an emergency arises.

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room. (What happens inside your home should be known to no one but you; others should know only what occurs beyond your walls.) Ahmet called to his assistants and said, "My brother's light never went out all last night. I wonder why. If he were married, I would suppose that he was talking to his wife, but he is unmarried. He brought home with him from Gence an Arab whose face one would not want to glance at even once. Bring a ladder so that I can look inside."

From Mahmud's room neither he nor Mahbub could hear a single thing that went on outside. When a long ladder was brought, Ahmet climbed it and peeped cautiously through the window. He saw the beauty of Mahbub Hanım with her hair let down at full length. Was the moon just rising?³² Ahmet saw the Arab slave as a piece of the moon before his brother, Mahmud. "I wonder if my vision is failing?" he wondered. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. After he had repeated this three times, he thought, "If my mother and I were to search for a bride for my brother, we could not find a girl more beautiful anywhere in the world." He then quietly climbed down the ladder.

³²Throughout the Muslim Middle East the moon is greatly admired as a symbol of beauty. Both oral and written literature testify to this. To compare any woman's beauty to that of the moon is to flatter the female. Here the girl is not only being compared with the moon but she is even said to excel the celestial orb in beauty. So great is her beauty that it seems to be saying to the moon, "There is no point in your rising tonight, for I am more worthy of that role."

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In their room Mahmud and Mahbub were completely unaware of anything outside. They were madly in love and much involved with each other. Meanwhile Ahmet asked his assistants, "What kind of person did my brother bring from Gence as his slave?"

"An Arab warrior," they all said.

"Now all of you climb that ladder, one at a time, and see whether what he brought was really an Arab warrior. What I saw was a beautiful girl. Be careful that her beauty does not affect you so much that you fall off the ladder."

One by one, the twelve assistants quietly climbed the ladder and observed the girl. As each descended, he said, "Yes, you are quite right."

Ahmet then said to the other watchmen, "Tomorrow I shall go and report this to the padişah. You are to wait outside the door. The great men inside will ask for witnesses. My word alone will not be sufficient. I shall tell them that all twelve of you also saw the girl, and then you should give this same report to the padişah."

"Yes, Efendi," they answered.

(Yes, people should report what they have actually seen but should not repeat rumors about things which they have not seen. However, Ahmet had not realized the consequences of what he was doing. He had reached a decision without considering either the good

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or bad effects which it might have. Our ancestors said, “Take no action without considering its end.”³³)

Before noon of the following day Ahmet, accompanied by his twelve assistants, arrived at the palace. There Ahmet was permitted to enter the presence of the padişah. “What is it that you want?” asked the ruler.

“May Your Majesty remain in good health. Efendi, did you not question my brother about the Arab he had brought back from Gence?”

“Yes, I did, son.

“May I ask you what answer he gave?”

“I asked Mahmud whether the Arab was a man or a woman, and he told me that the Arab was a man.”

“Then my brother told a lie, my padişah.”

“Why? What about that Arab?” asked the padişah.

“That Arab is such a strikingly beautiful girl that if we searched all Istanbul—in fact, all Turkey—we could not find another half as attractive.”

“How did you discover this?” (The padişah already knew this. Good people keep good things in their hearts; bad people reveal the evil in their hearts.)

³³This piece of advice is sufficiently proverbial to provide the axis on which two ATON tales turn.

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“I climbed a ladder and looked into his room. My twelve assistants, now standing outside, also climbed the ladder and saw the girl.”

The padişah remained silent for several minutes. Then, lifting his head, he gave this order to his guards: “Do not allow this man or his twelve assistants to leave the palace. Go at once and bring Mahmud and the Arab here.”

By the time that the lovers arrived, the padişah’s council had gathered around him, and Ahmet and his twelve men were lined up on the opposite side of the room. Observing the crowd of people there, Mahmud wondered what had happened. He thought, “My brother is a drunkard. Can it be that he committed some crime during his patrol duties last night? Of course, I may well be considered responsible for my brother’s behavior.” He did not consider the possibility that he might be the one at fault. (But this is the way people are. They do not see their own faults but always look first for the faults in others.)

Speaking in a sorrowful voice, the padişah asked Mahmud, “Is the Arab standing beside you a man or a woman?”

Unaware of what had happened, Mahmud made this reply: “Health be unto you, my padişah. This Arab whom you see here is a man. What would a woman be doing here?”

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Upon hearing this response, Sultan Murat grew furious. He called out, "Come forward, Ahmet! What are you going to say to your brother's reply?"

Ahmet went forward and said, "My brother, Mahmud, has told a lie in your presence. The Arab next to him is a woman, not a man. She is such a beauty that her equal could not be found anywhere in all of Turkey.

"Has anyone else observed that the Arab is a woman?"

When Ahmet presented his twelve assistants as witnesses, they all gave the same report. Each said, "Yes, our padişah, we all saw with our own eyes that the Arab Mahmud says is a man is in fact a woman, one whose beauty is unequaled by that of any other woman in this land."

When this testimony was being given, Mahmud's knees began to tremble, and his face became white. Even more angry now, the padişah said to his executioners, "Bind the arms of these two.

The executioners quickly tied the arms of Mahmud and the Arab. Then turning back to the ruler, they said, "Our padişah, a severed head cannot be replaced."

Mahmud then realized that both he and his intended wife were to be beheaded because of the lie that he had told. He said, "Show

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enough mercy to permit me to speak, my padişah. There are three things that I wish to say.”

“What is there that you can say? Are you not ashamed? When have you ever seen an honorable man possess a woman without first having married her? I asked you whether the Arab was a woman or a man. Why did you deny the truth and tell a lie? Were you afraid that someone would take her away from you? What do you have to say?”

In the meantime Ahmet had begun to cry, “Oh, what have I done?” Ahmet now regretted what he had done, and his twelve assistants were also sorry, but of what use were such feelings now? It was now too late to do anything about it.

Mahmud spoke before the sultan, before the council, and before the many other people who had been admitted to this hearing. “I stand before the throne of a polite gentleman. In the eyes of everyone, O padişah, you are the seal of Solomon.³⁴ Do not commit cruelty by killing Mahmud. My brother, Ahmet, is now shedding bloody tears.’

Turning to the right, the padişah saw Ahmet crying in great pain. The combination of Mahmud’s words and Ahmet’s tears caused all those present to shudder in silence. The executioners stood silent,

³⁴Solomon’s power over men, jinns, demons, birds, and several elements of nature resided in the seal given to him by God. This seal was set in a ring, a signet ring. It is sometimes referred to generically for anything or anyone granted divine ability.

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swords in their hands, awaiting their next orders. Pondering deeply upon the decision facing him, Sultan Murat remained silent fully fifteen minutes. With his head bowed and his hand across his face, the sultan reviewed the whole situation. He compared Mahmud's possible sacrifice before the gates of Gence with his fault in Istanbul. In his mind he held these two events in balance and decided that Mahmud's heroism before Gence outweighed his fault at Istanbul. He therefore considered it appropriate for Mahmud to be forgiven. Raising his head, he said to the executioners, "Place your swords back in their sheaths and return to your usual positions."

Then turning to Ahmet, he asked, "Why are you crying?"

"Fate has made this a day of crying for me. Agony over one's brother is like no other pain."

"Don't cry, my son. Mahmud's previous achievement justifies my forgiving his more recent error. He has been pardoned. Untie his arms, Ahmet."

When Mahmud had been released, he went before the sultan and said, "Yes, Efendi?"

"Wipe your eyes, son. Then take your brother and your bride and depart. The feast later and the wedding ceremony beginning today will be given at my expense. What is the name of your bride?"

"It is Mahbub," he answered.

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Ahmet's crying turned to laughter. All sides are shown in the Mirror of Fate.

Brother in distress, don't cry!

The woe of any day will pass.

The One who closes any door

Will open it another day.

If the fifteenth day of any month is dark, its evening hours turn to light. People may lose themselves in despair but then come out into a clearing. Whatever may befall, everyone should try to be content with his destiny.

The weeping eyes became happy eyes. After kissing the padişah's hand, Ahmet took his brother and his brother's bride home. There the bride removed her Arab clothing and dressed in the garments of a woman. Then Ahmet began to make preparations for the wedding. While he is doing this, let us go back to Gence and see what Emir Gurkan is doing.

Emir Gurkan had been waiting for the return of his daughter. He said frequently to those around him, "Because she can break any ropes and twist open any chains with her great strength, nothing will restrain her. She will come back." However, after days and months had passed and the girl had not reappeared, he was forced to conclude that she was unable to escape from the man who had defeated her in battle.

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When has a piece of meat already in a wolf's mouth ever been retrieved? In sorrow the şah consulted his council on this distressing matter.

“Councilmen, find a solution for a problem which I have been unable to solve. The Ottomans caught me asleep and surrounded our city of Gence. There was no real battle, but the Ottomans left with both the valuable çamçırak stones and my daughter. I care little about the stones, but the loss of my daughter, Mahbub, distresses me deeply. It is painful to lose a child. Is there anything that we can possibly do to recover her?”

After the council members had discussed this for awhile, one of them arose and said, “O Şah, what could Gence's army do to a man who was able to defeat Mahbub? We could shed blood trying to recover Mahbub, but there should be some easier way to do that.

“What easier way is there?”

After some further discussion, another councilman arose and said, “Good health to you, O Şah! Let us send a town crier through the streets in search of a man who is a magician. If such a person is found, we can assign him the task of recovering Mahbub. Using the means of magic will make bloodshed unnecessary.”

Emir Gurkan agreed with this suggestion. He ordered several criers to enter marketplaces and walk the streets of Gence announcing

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the need for a magician. They shouted, “Anyone who is a magician is welcome at Emir Gurkan’s palace. The şah wishes to talk with him.”

Everyone in Gence heard the announcement of the criers, but at first no one responded to it. In one of the back streets lived an old woman who rode upon a vase which could carry her anywhere in the world in the time it takes to blink an eye.³⁵ This old infidel was that kind of magician. She was capable of doing many evil things, even of making nations fight with each other. Hearing a nearby crier, she called to him, “Stop your shouting! Who but I could undertake any job for which a magician is needed?”

She went with the crier, and there, after being admitted into the şah’s presence, she asked, “What is the trouble, my ruler? Is it not true that you call upon old women only at times when you need their help?”

“Grandmother, I do indeed need your help. The Ottomans caught me sleeping and took not only my two çamçırak stones but also—worse luck!—my daughter. Is there any way that my daughter can be recovered without the use of swords and the spilling of blood?”

³⁵Her riding upon a vase or jar (küp in Turkish) clearly identifies the woman as a witch. Some Turkish witches have this and other magic skills; some are very strong, capable of lifting huge rocks or dislodging houses from their foundations; some are ghouls who devour newly buried bodies; a few are, like European witches, thought to be in league with the devil; some are simply wily and unscrupulous people willing to engage in any nefarious endeavor for the right price.

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“What will you pay me for doing that?” asked the witch.

“I shall give you whatever you wish

“I want a quantity of gold equal to my own weight. Will you give me that?”

“I shall, grandmother.”

“Count thirty-nine days, and then if your daughter walks through the gates of Gence on the fortieth, I shall have fulfilled my commitment.”

“Go ahead, grandmother, and I promise that I shall give you a sum of gold equal to your weight.”

That wicked witch left the palace and began to make her preparations. She climbed upon her magic vase, ascended into the air, and within one hour and forty-five minutes she flew to Istanbul. There she turned herself into a deer.

At that very time 300 horsemen were accompanying Mahmud in a tour of the city. The deer ran ahead of these 301 riders, and by means of magic she drew Mahmud away from his companions in pursuit of her. Placing an arrow in his bow, he shot at her but missed her. He pursued that deer for three days and three nights, and then it disappeared. Using magic again, she had herself carried swiftly back to Istanbul. There she disguised herself as a pilgrim grandmother³⁶ and

³⁶This is, of course, a reference to the obligatory pilgrimage, made at least once in a Muslim's life, to Mecca.

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went to call upon Mahbub Hanım. The bride was wearing her wedding gown and a red veil. Her hands were dyed with henna,³⁷ and her eyelids had been darkened with kohl. When the witch entered the house where the wedding was to be held, the girls in attendance there respected her white hair and welcomed her. "Oh, girls, oh, my children," she said, "I have come to view the beautiful bride."

When she stood before the bride, Mahbub kissed her hands. The witch then said, "My girl, shall stay for only ten minutes, for I am on my way to Mecca. However, I wanted to see you before I left Istanbul."

"May it be auspicious, pilgrim grandmother."

Deceiving everyone there, the old woman conjured up all of the enchantments that she had learned of to that time and blew them into the face of Mahbub. All 366 of the girl's veins³⁸ were shaken by this magic. "I shall be going now," said the witch woman. "May all

³⁷A reddish-yellow cosmetic dye used by women on ceremonial occasions. It is referred to most frequently in connection with weddings, at which not only the bride but also her attendants may be hennaed.

³⁸Behçet Mahir, narrator of this tale, refers in most of his longer tales to the human being's supposed 366 veins. For him they are the source of a person's vitality. Mahir always stood when he narrated in order (he often explained) to permit his 366 veins to vibrate freely.

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your wedding preparations be propitious.” All those present bade her a safe journey.

As soon as that cruel woman went out the door, all 366 of Mahbub’s veins began to flutter violently under the influence of the enchantment. She tore off her veil and threw it upon the floor, and then she did the same thing to her wedding gown. She knocked down anyone who stood in her way, for it was only Mahmud who could control her. That was how strong the girl was. Putting on her former warrior clothes, she tied on her sword and rushed to the stable to saddle her Arabian horse. Some of the wedding attendants went to Mahmud’s mother and told her about Mahbub’s wild behavior. The woman came and begged Mahbub to remain in Istanbul, but her pleas had no effect. Mahbub rode off in the direction of Gence. To make sure that she continued riding in that direction, the cruel witch flew above her on her magic vase and blew more enchantment upon the girl from time to time. Let us allow her to go her way for now while we observe something else.

News reached the padişah that the bride had gone mad all of a sudden and had ridden away. He was also informed that Mahmud had gone off in pursuit of a deer and had not returned. The padişah sent to Ahmet a message which read, “Why are you sitting unconcerned? The bride in your family has run away. Go and stop her.”

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Taking forty horsemen with him, Ahmet set out in pursuit of the girl. They caught up with her before she had gotten out of Istanbul. "O bride, what has happened? Has your Persian blood begun to boil? Is there anywhere a finer man than my brother? Where are you going? You are Mahmud's beloved."

"Ahmet, take your hands from my horse's reins and do not block my way. If you were not Mahmud's brother, I should kill you.

But Ahmet did not believe the girl's words, and so he continued to hold the reins. Not wanting to kill Ahmet, the girl did not draw her sword. Instead, she punched Ahmet in the face so hard that all of his teeth were knocked out and Ahmet fell to the ground unconscious. As the girl rode off, Ahmet's companions were trying to revive him. When he finally regained consciousness, Ahmet asked his companions, "With what did that girl strike me on the head?"

"With her fist," they said.

"Is that actually what she used? Did you observe that closely?"

"Yes."

"I supposed that an iron ball had struck my head. If this woman can do so much damage with just her fist, what might she do with her sword? She might even kill my brother. We do not need such a bride." Having said that, Ahmet turned his horse around and led his followers back home.

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Everyone was sad that the bride had run away. The wedding feast had been prepared for nothing. When Mahmud returned to Istanbul, he discovered that there was no feast, no wedding ceremony, no bride. He did not yet understand why everyone was mourning. His mother came to him in tears and said, "Where have you been so long, Son? Is this the proper time to go hunting? Your bride has run away."

"Oh, Mother, couldn't you have prevented her departure until I returned?"

His mother continued, "Mahbub mounted her Arabian horse and prepared to leave. I begged her to stop, and I even kissed her feet to persuade her to do so. What kind of religion does she have?"

"Mother, I will either find my love and bring her back or I shall die somewhere between here and Gence searching for her. Forgive all of my mistakes before I depart."

Putting some gold in his saddlebag, Mahmud strapped on his sword and his shield. After saying farewell to his mother and to his brother, Mahmud mounted his horse and set forth on his journey. He rode day and night in an attempt to overtake his love. The girl had crossed the Turkish border and entered Iran, where she soon came to the Karaman Mountains. Among those mountains Mahmud came within sight of the girl, but no matter how much he called to her, she would not turn back. Anxious, Mahmud called out, "O golden thread

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of poetry, can my wishes be achieved by you? I call for her return, but she ignores that call.

She is slender of waist, and she is tall.

Her breasts are round as oranges.

With Gence now within her view,

She leaves her love behind in grief.”

But when the girl heard Mahmud’s verse, she whipped her Arabian horse even harder. Realizing that his poem had not affected her, Mahmud also whipped his own horse harder. After they had passed through two canyons and entered a plain, Mahmud’s horse overtook the Arabian horse. Mahmud said, “O my love, people become alienated, but do they ever become as alienated as this? People may separate, but do they ever separate like this? I have wept from Istanbul to the Karaman Mountains. Even Fate might have felt some mercy for me, but you did not. Come! Let us return,” he said, holding the reins of her horse.

But the girl’s head was filled with enchantment. She said, “Mahmud, release my horse’s reins. You cannot force me to go back. I do not know what has happened to me, but I promise that as soon as my horse’s head enters Gence’s gate, I will turn around and come back.”

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"Do not try to deceive me," said Mahmud. "Anyone who really intended to return would do so now. I will not leave you now." A struggle then began. Drawing her sword from its sheath, the girl struck Mahmud on the head with it. That blade entered his head to the depth of one finger. With blood flowing from his head, Mahmud fell from his horse onto the ground.

As soon as the girl saw blood, the spell which had been placed upon her was broken. Sobbing, she threw herself upon Mahmud. Then taking his head in her lap, she used her sword to cut from her clothing strips of cloth to use as bandages. She wrapped his head with these bandages, and she finally stopped the flow of blood. Mahmud lay in the girl's lap with his eyes closed and his body limp. As the girl looked into his face, all 366 of her veins were filled with sorrow, and she clutched her jasmine-scented hair to her bosom. As night started to fall, she uttered these lines:

In this changing world I knew you not;
I failed to wipe your falling tears.
From early morn to deepening dusk,
From now until my life will end,
I'll speak my endless love for you.

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Having uttered these lines, the girl fell to the ground and began to pull her hair. The night passed that way. When the singing of birds and the swaying of trees in the wind awakened the girl, it was dawn.

Mahbub glanced at Mahmud and saw that he was trembling slightly. She thought, "If he is dying, there is nothing that can be done about it. In that case, what can I do? If I return to the Turkish padişah, he might have me torn to pieces. What can I do when Fate determined these events? I shall continue to cry for my love until I die." She placed Mahmud's saddlebag of gold beneath his head as a pillow and covered him with his cape. She placed his horse beside him, and then, weeping, she mounted her own Arabian horse and rode to Gence.

As the girl came close to Gence, the witch woman sent the good news to Emir Gurkan: "Your daughter is approaching!"

Delighted with this news, Emir Gurkan immediately paid the witch her weight in gold. Then the witch woman was also delighted, and she began to spend some of her money at once.

Emir Gurkan gave orders to his elite guard corps to go and greet his daughter in appropriate fashion for a returning princess. But if one is sad and unwell, does one wish to have such a ceremonial welcome? As the soldiers approached her, Mahbub drew her sword from her sheath and shouted, "I shall cut off the head of anyone who comes any closer to me!" Seeing the drawn sword and hearing these

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words, the elite guard retreated to the city. Finally the girl, crying steadily and overcome with sorrow, tied her horse in the royal stable. Entering the palace, she went to her own room. Locking the door, she sat down, pulling out her hair and pounding her knees. Let us leave her there in this state of grief and return to Mahmud, who was lying by the side of the road.

There were many merchants in Gence, but there was only one who was as wealthy as Emir. He was a just man, and in all of his business concerns he was also a prudent and careful man. He always had ten armed men riding ahead of his caravan and ten following it to prevent bandits from plundering his merchandise. On this particular day, that merchant was passing through the Karaman Mountains on his way back from Turkey. As the advance troops left the mountains and came upon the plain, they saw ahead a horse standing alongside a man who lay on the ground. Drawing their swords, those ten guards looked around to see if there was anyone else nearby. Seeing no one else, these ten guards said among themselves, "He is a lone person, and we are ten. What could he do to harm us? Besides, he may not be an enemy. After all, everyone has a right to travel along this road." They dismounted and walked toward Mahmud. As they got closer, they saw that his clothes were stained with fresh blood. "Someone has seriously wounded this young man," they said. The ten looked at each other, all

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of them wondering whether the horseman on the ground was dead or alive. One of them felt Mahmud's right wrist for a few seconds and then announced to his companions, "He is not dead. There is still life in him." They looked into the saddlebag beneath his head and were surprised to find it filled with gold. Again they looked into each other's faces in wonder. "We have never seen such a strange situation. If he had been struck down by an enemy, his gold would have been taken. But if he was wounded by a friend, why would he be left here in this grave condition?" they said to each other. Talking together for a few minutes, they decided what they should do. "Let us turn back to the merchant for whom we work. He is a just and merciful man. Besides, if we were to take this gold, he might conclude that we had wounded this man."

They rejoined the main section of the caravan which was led by the merchant, seated in a howdah on the back of a camel. There were 2,000 camels in that caravan, and it was so long that one could not see both ends from any one position. When the merchant saw his advance guards returning, he ordered the caravan to halt. When the guards went and stood before him, the merchant asked, "What is the news?"

"Beyond that breach in the mountains ahead there is an open plain. On that plain we came upon a young man covered with blood.

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There is a saddlebag of gold beneath his head, and his horse is standing beside him. He is still alive, but we do not understand what could have happened to him. We therefore returned to give you this information.”

“Start the caravan forward again,” the great merchant ordered. After they had gone through the last pass in the mountains, they moved across the plain to the place where Mahmud lay. The merchant climbed down from the howdah and had the cape removed from Mahmud. Then, after feeling the young man’s right wrist, he concluded that Mahmud was still alive. He had the wounded man placed in his own howdah. He ordered his assistants to take the caravan on into Gence, while he himself took to his own palace the stranger found upon the road.

That great merchant had only one child in this world, a daughter named Telli Gülşah. Telli Gülşah was a friend of Emir Gurkan’s daughter, Mahbub. These two girls had always shared their secrets and their problems with each other. Mahbub had already told Telli Gülşah about her present difficulty. “The solution for my dilemma in life was Mahmud, but in a moment of madness in the Karaman Mountains, I struck him down with my sword.” Both girls were still crying about that misfortune when the great merchant brought into his home the wounded man.

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After Telli Gülşah had greeted the merchant, she asked, “What is this, Father?”

“My girl, I found this man in the mountains. Prepare a bed for him.” A bed with a mattress filled with bird feathers was prepared at once. The merchant then ordered, “Bring all of the doctors in Gence here.”

When the doctors arrived, they said, “Yes, Efendi? What is your wish?”

“Doctors, I found this man in the mountains. His saddlebag of gold was beneath his head as a pillow, and his cape had been thrown over him. My hair grew white as I traveled for many years in strange lands, but I had never before seen such a strange case as this. If a friend struck him . . . Why? If an enemy struck him, why didn’t that enemy take the bag of gold? I am puzzled about this. Cure him so that I may talk to him. If he dies, my curiosity may kill me as well. If you can cure him, I shall give you an amount of gold equivalent to half of what is in his bag. If he dies, you will receive nothing. Those of you willing to attempt this cure should step forward.”

There were a hundred physicians crowded into his palace. Several asked, “Will you not pay us for our work?”

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“Not if he dies. If he lives, you will receive half as much gold as this bag contains.” The merchant spoke in this way in order to make sure the doctors would work with dedication.

The twelve physicians who stepped forward thought, “We shall undertake the work, and if there is a remedy, it will be provided by Allah. It would be a good deed to save such a young man. If he survives, we shall receive the gold, but if he dies, our work will be given without any claim for pay.” To the merchant they said, “We need from you something with which to work.”

“What is it?” he asked.

“Bring us some milk and honey. We shall boil the two together and give him the mixture as his only food. We shall not feed him anything else until he has begun to recover.” The merchant told his daughter to provide the doctors with a bucketful of milk and a bucketful of honey.

After boiling these foods together, the doctors cooled the mixture and began to pour small amounts down Mahmud’s throat. This medicine spread through all 366 of Mahmud’s veins, and as time passed, it began little by little to cure Mahmud. After eighteen days the wound was healed, and the doctors congratulated each other for their success. The merchant inquired of the doctors three times a day how their patient was responding to their medicine. The doctors were

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pleased when they could say to the merchant, “Good news, Efendi! The wound has passed the dangerous stage.”

The merchant was pleased, and he was even more pleased on the fortieth day, when Mahmud was at last able to stand up and walk a few steps around the room. Complying with the doctors’ wishes, the merchant asked his daughter to bring good beef broth. For the next twenty days the doctors fed Mahmud beef broth. As a result, at the end of sixty days Mahmud was as healthy as he was on the day he was born. The doctors reported to the merchant, “Here is your wounded man completely cured. Do you wish anything further from us?”

“No, and may Allah bless you! You have done a good deed by restoring this sick man to health.”

The merchant, accompanied by the doctors, then went to Mahmud. “Selamünaleyküm,” said the merchant.

“Aleykümselam,” responded Mahmud.³⁹

“Son,” said the merchant, “we found you lying with closed eyes and weakened body just this side of the Karaman Mountains. Beneath your head was a saddlebag of gold and beside you stood your horse. You were covered by your cape. Thinking that where there is

³⁹This is a traditional Muslim exchange of greetings, used especially between people not well acquainted with each other. It is a gesture of good will. It means, “Peace be unto you,” and “Peace be unto you too.”

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life, there is hope, I brought you here to be cured by these doctors. This bag of gold is all yours. Not a piece of it is mine. However, you were unconscious, I promised to give these doctors an amount equal to half your gold if they cured you. But now I want to ask whether you are willing to give them that amount of gold. If not, then shall provide half a bag of gold for them. What do you say to this?"

Mahmud kissed the merchant's hands and said, "Uncle, for months I have lived in your house, have eaten here, have drunk here. You have promised these doctors half a bag of gold, but I wish wholeheartedly to give my whole bag of gold to them."

"If you do so, then I shall replace half that amount in your empty bag." And that is what he did. Then to the doctors he said, "Take your load of gold outside and divide it among yourselves." they did by using a cup to dip out equal portions.

The merchant then addressed Mahmud again. "As said, son, I found you near the edge of the mountains, lying in your own blood. If a friend struck you, why did he do it? If an enemy struck you, why did he not take your gold and your horse? I have been curious about this. Tell me now what happened. Tell me now about your difficulty."

Mahmud asked for a saz⁴⁰ with which to help explain his problem. When they brought him a saz, he began singing about his

⁴⁰A three-stringed instrument used by folk poets and minstrels to accompany their verse and sung tales. Today it is Turkey's primary

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misfortune. Telli Gülşah was outside the door while he did this, and she heard all of his words.

Between the noon and early eve
Your eyes, black-lidded, scorched my heart.
Whether by sword or dagger blow,
The one beloved dealt me a wound.

But the merchant did not understand what he had heard, and so Mahmud sang a second verse.

At noon the garden of my love
Put forth a rare and lovely rose;
But near the peaks of Karaman
A thorn thrust forth and wounded me.

This still failed to enlighten the merchant. He said, "But there was no precipice near the place where you lay. From what did you fall?"⁴¹ Mahmud then made a third attempt to explain his tragedy.

One wound the doctors could not cure;
The gash a loved one's hand has made,
A loved one's hand may heal again.
Yet still that wound is gaping wide.

instrument used in folk music, just as the guitar is the primary instrument for that purpose in the United States.

⁴¹The confusion stems from double meanings for the same word. Quite properly Mahmud uses yar to mean love. But the Turkish word yar can also mean precipice.

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The merchant now began to grow angry. He said, "I told him that there was no precipice near the place where he lay in blood, but he continues to say the same thing." Having said this, he walked angrily out the door. Telli Gülşah, who was standing outside that door and had heard everything, tried to calm her father by asking, "What did the young man say?"

"My girl, he keeps telling me that his disaster was near some precipice, but there was no precipice anywhere near the place where we found him."

After her father had gone, Telli Gülşah knocked on the door and entered the room. "Selamünaleyküm," she said.

"Aleykümselam," replied Mahmud.

"Young man, you spoke to my father about your difficulty. Would you be willing to talk about it with me?"

"Your father did not understand anything I said to him. I told him one thing, but he understood something else."

"My father had a fixed idea about the word yar. Because he thought that it referred to a precipice, he became confused."

"Tell me, then, if you understood what I meant."

Telli Gülşah thought quickly. "Mahbub told me that she had struck her beloved after descending the Karaman Mountains and had left him lying in his own blood with his head on his saddlebag of gold,

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his cape over him, and his horse beside him. How can I be sure that this is really the man she wounded?" (If one should suppose that every man one meets is one's father, what would become of one's mother? Because of this, one should strive to understand what may lie behind the words that a person uses.) Then the girl asked, "Are you not Mahbub's lover, Mahmud?"

Hearing Mahbub's name, Mahmud said at once, "Oh, sister, you have understood my situation perfectly. But do not ask me any further questions. Instead, tell me if you have any news from Mahbub."

"Oh, young man, no more than eight of my daily twenty-four hours are spent apart from Mahbub. We are together the other sixteen hours. Since the day that she arrived back in Gence, she speaks of nothing but you. She had put away her red and green clothes, and now, in mourning, she wears only black. I am going now to give her the good news about you. Is there anything I can take to her to prove that you are really alive?"

Mahmud had on a finger of his right hand one of Mahbub's rings, and he now gave this ring to Telli Gülşah as a token of his identity. As Telli Gülşah was leaving, she said to Mahmud, "You should remain here in health and safety. Those who are patient will attain their desires. Those who are impatient may come to harm."

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Meanwhile Emir Gurkan's daughter said to her servants, "It is getting late. Go and see why my friend Telli Gülşah has not arrived here yet."

The servants went to the merchant's home, but Telli Gülşah saw them approaching as she was gazing out her window. When they knocked on the door, Telli Gülşah began acting ill and moaning as she opened the door. "Yes?" she asked the servants. "What is it?"

"Mahbub Hanım is waiting for you."

"Take my greetings to Mahbub, but tell her that I am unable to come to her. I am sick and I do not have strength enough to go to her. I have been resting in bed."

The servants returned and said, "Hanım, Telli Gülşah is lying in her bed, ill."

Mahbub gave an order to four servants. "If she does not have the strength to walk here, then carry her here, along with her bed. She can lie here and even die here, if it should come to that."

When the servants returned to Telli Gülşah, they found the girl moaning and crying, pretending to be ill as she opened the door. They said, "Young woman, if you have no strength to walk, we shall carry both you and your bed. This was Mahbub's order."

"Very well, I shall come."

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Telli Gülşah covered her head and pretended to be moaning with pain as she was being carried to the royal palace. But the servant girls were not deceived. They looked at each other and said, "She is not really ill at all. She is just pretending that she is.

Mahbub greeted Telli Hanım and said, "Cruel girl! You have left me lonely all this sad day. If you are not here, am I supposed to talk to the walls? You are my only intimate friend. Why didn't you come?"

"Mahbub, do not be angry at me. I have been rather weak. However, today at noontime I bought a ring from some peddlers passing by. Perhaps it was their foul breath that affected me, for after they had left, I felt very weak."

"Let me see your ring."

"You will probably take it away from me."

Mahbub laughed despite her pain. "Oh, girl, my heart is ill. What would I do with a ring? You say that you bought it from some peddlers. My jewelry case is full of golden rings, but I do not feel like wearing any of them. You may have them all, but do show me the ring you bought today. I shall not take it away from you."

"Swear that you will not take it away from me." After Mahbub had taken such an oath, the girl stretched out her arm and handed her the ring. When Mahbub saw the ring that she had given to Mahmud,

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she grabbed her friend's wrist and exclaimed, "Oh, Telli, tell me where the owner of this signet ring is right now."

"Mahbub, you want not only the ring but also my hand—indeed my whole arm—as well. You swore that you would not take the ring away from me!"

"My oath concerned the peddler's ring, not this one. I won't take this ring from you, either, but tell me the name of its owner."

Telli Gülşah explained the whole matter to her friend. She then added, "Cruel Mahbub! How could you have struck so fiercely such a fine man?"

"It is you who are the cruel girl," answered Mahbub. "He was in your home for two whole months! Why didn't you tell me that?" She was very happy in one respect, but she was also sad that she hadn't learned of Mahmud's presence earlier.

"You are right, Mahbub. However, I too was unaware of his presence until today when I overheard him talking to my father. That was only two hours ago. I listened, and suddenly I realized that it was he. Then after my father had left, I asked him if he were not Mahmud. Otherwise I was as ignorant of his presence as you were. All I knew was that my father had brought home a wounded young man, but I didn't even know his name."

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You right, too. ai Mahbul bu it th ot ome way
by whi h you can how me my

'Tomorrow jus before noon ou to your pri te arden
shall bring him there where the tw f you talk.

The following day Telli Gülşah took Mahmud to the garden of Mahbub and had him sit beneath a rose tree. "Sit here, young man, and your love will come to you."

Meanwhile Emir Gurkan's daughter put on her best clothing and wore her most precious jewelry. She thought, "I left my love in blood upon the plain. Perhaps if I go to him dressed in this fashion, he will forgive me." In all her fine attire, this beauty looked like the fifteenth day of the moon.

In the meantime Mahmud had leaned back against the rose tree and fallen asleep. When Mahbub arrived in the garden and saw him that way, she wished to rush to him and embrace him, but then she realized that such a sudden awakening might drive him mad. As she stood there before him, Mahmud opened his eyes and saw the likeness of the full moon. A bird has two wings which it opens to embrace its love. The wings of a human being are its arms. Mahbub spread her arms as if to clasp her love to her breast, but Mahmud then revealed his deeply wounded heart. (No doctor in the world can heal such a wound.) "O cruel lover, O shameless lover, O faithless lover, O lover

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lacking in devotion, O lover who struck me with a sword near the Karaman Mountains! Are you now trying to deceive me again with all your finery and jewels? O lover, what did I do to you to deserve such treatment?"

"I knew that you would utter these words, Mahmud, and I know that you have every right to do so. Could I but tell you the truth about this matter, you would understand it, but it will take time to explain it all. I had no control over myself when I struck you. Not knowing myself, I could not very well know you." They talked and talked, and after two hours they understood each other. Then Mahbub gave an account of her present situation. "My love, before you took me to Istanbul, my father had promised me to Black Vizier's⁴² brother, Mujde Khan. Against my will I was engaged. But I had told them that I would find my own love and that I would not marry any man I could defeat in combat. I was going to kill him, but then you came to Gence. I have heard that Black Vizier intends to come and get me for his brother, but I shall not go. Instead, I am going to kill that suitor. My love, don't be offended by the wedding celebration that has already begun, for a separated head and body cannot be rejoined. That is why I must go for now. If you are my love, remain close to me."

⁴²Black Vizier, though unexplained, is apparently just an epithet used for one of the ruler's counselors. There is no indication that he is Negroid.

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“Very well.”

Black Vizier was the husband of Telli Gülşah’s aunt. Knowing this, Mahmud went to Telli Gülşah and asked for her help. In response to this request, the girl wrote this letter to her aunt: “My aunt, please understand that the man following Mahbub from Gence during the wedding celebration is her lover from Istanbul, Mahmud. He was the man who was able to defeat Mahbub and take her to Istanbul. If you become a friend of his, you will remain in good health. If you become his enemy, he may test his sword first upon you. Act accordingly and give what assistance you can to this young man.” Placing this letter in an envelope, she handed it to Mahmud, saying, “Here! Take this and give it to no one but Black Vizier’s wife.” Mahmud took that letter and concealed it carefully in his clothing.

Three or four days later 300 horsemen came to escort the bride first to some special games and then to the bridegroom’s home. Emir Gurkan provided a twenty-four-hour feast for his guests. After that, they took Mahbub away in her veil and wedding dress, but beneath that dress she had strapped to her waist her sword. She was not really a bride but an executioner ready for trouble ahead. At this same time, Mahmud went to the merchant, kissed his hand, and asked for permission to leave the home in which he had been a guest.⁴³ (Those

⁴³The strong sense of hospitality in Turkey places obligations on both hosts and guests. Courtesy requires that a guest not leave his

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who own homes nearby can always return to them, but those who are a great distance from their homes have nowhere to go but to coffeehouses during the day and to inns at night. May Allah not leave anyone without friends in this world. But times have changed, and no longer do brothers have compassion for each other. Fathers sometimes do not have compassion for their sons, and those same sons may not have compassion even for their own fathers.)

Mahmud mounted his horse and followed at some distance the procession accompanied by 300 horsemen. Escorting Mahbub were two women—one on each side of her—who expected to be her future sisters-in-law. After the procession had gone some distance beyond the city limits, the man in charge of the wedding festivities halted the group. He ordered that pilav be cooked and the wedding games be started.

Among the 300 horsemen were twenty-five wrestlers and twenty-five jirit⁴⁴ players who were to provide entertainment for the occasion. The wrestlers now began to grapple with each other, and the jirit players began to throw their javelins. Saying, “I have no quarrel

host’s home without first having secured the host’s permission to do so. Although such permission is usually granted, this exchange between host and guest is an established social ritual.

⁴⁴Jirit (Turkish cirit) is comparable to jousting in medieval Europe. Originally real javelins were hurled by opponents at each other, and so the game could be deadly sport. Nowadays in the few places where jirit is still played, the javelins have blunt wooden tips.

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with any of these jirit players,” Mahmud entered the jirit game. The first javelin that Mahmud threw happened to strike a brother of the bridegroom and knocked that man off his horse. Friends ran to pick him up, but they found him already dead. Could any man stand up against a javelin thrown by Mahmud? His weapon crashed through the rib cage of the victim and penetrated his heart. But it is not unusual to have blood shed on the jousting field.

Another brother of the bridegroom called out to Mahmud, “Hey, rash young Turk, do not leave this jirit field, for I intend to take vengeance for my brother’s death.” When Mahmud hurled a javelin at this second brother, its blade decapitated him. He fell to the ground and lay beside his brother. “What could I do? He challenged me to fight with him,” said Mahmud.

Before the members of the wedding party started home, they sent to Black Vizier a message describing the results of the jirit game. “Both of your brothers who were with us have been killed in a jirit game.”

Black Vizier was not surprised by this bad news. He said, “Such results are not unlikely in dangerous games. Brave men die in the field. Still surviving are two of us brothers of Mujde Khan. Let not the wedding celebration be spoiled by what happened in the games.”

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Everyone who had been invited to the celebration then went to the palace of Black Vizier. But Mahmud, who had not been invited, was left on his own. Along the street through which Mahmud passed were some children at play, among them a keloğlan.⁴⁵ Mahmud called to him, "Keloğlan, do you know where the home of Black Vizier is located?"

"What will you give me if I tell you that?"

"I shall give you this gold coin," answered Mahmud. When the keloğlan saw the gold, he took Mahmud to the door of Black Vizier.

When Mahmud dismounted, servants greeted him and put his horse in the stable. They then announced to the vizier's wife, "A new guest has arrived. He must be the son of a şah or a pasha."

After they had served Mahmud some sherbet, the woman of the house came into the room to which Mahmud had been shown. Taking out the letter from Telli Gülşah, Mahmud handed it to his hostess. After the woman had read that letter, she looked into Mahmud's face and asked, "Are you from Istanbul?"

"Yes."

"Young man, my husband will come any minute now, and then I shall try to explain the situation to him. In the meantime I shall dress you in female clothing so that you will be able to enter the nuptial

⁴⁵See Note 21 above.

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chamber where Mahbub and the bridegroom will be placed tonight
The rest is up to you. I cannot do anything further for you.”

“Sister, you have shown great kindness. Just put me into that
room and leave the rest to me.

That evening before the guests returned, the hostess dressed
Mahmud in the clothes of a woman. Then after all the other guests had
danced, enjoyed themselves, and gone home, two of the bridegrooms
led him to the nuptial chamber. Then the two future sisters-in-law of
the bride brought together her hands with the hands of the bridegroom,
but Mahbub refused to hold hands with him.

Hidden beneath the bed, Mahmud thought, “Mahbub does not
know that I am here. Let me see now whether or not she was telling
me the truth. Is she a friend only with her words but an enemy at
heart?” He watched what took place in the room from his hiding place.

Mahbub did not remove her veil and reveal her face to the
groom, for she had not really come as a bride but as an executioner.
She did not speak to the groom, who sat in a chair watching her. “You
treacherous woman,” he said. “You went away to Istanbul with an
Ottoman, but you ended up with me again. Two of my brothers died
because of you! Fill a goblet with rakı and bring it to me.” Biding her
time, Mahbub poured out a goblet of rakı and took it to the groom.
After drinking the liquor, Mujde Khan tried to throw the goblet into

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the girl's face, but she shielded her face with her arm, and so the goblet struck her elbow. "Was that the way a drink should be served? Fill up another goblet, you daughter of a bitch.⁴⁶ Am I supposed to make you my wife? I shall make you suffer greatly, Mahbub!"

"I am not the daughter of a bitch, but you are certainly the son of a bitch. I did not come here to be your wife but to be your executioner! Open your eyes! My lover from Istanbul stands behind me! Never doubt for a moment that I shall not leave this room without first having cut off your head!" By this time Mahmud had lost all patience. Coming out of hiding, he quickly drew his sword. Before Mujde Khan could even arise from the chair, his head was removed by one stroke of Mahmud's sword.

"Oh, Mahmud, where did you come from?" asked Mahbub.

"Didn't you see where I came from?"

"Who brought you in here?"

"This is not the time to discuss that," answered Mahmud. After sitting down, he said, "Now you are the bride and I am the bridegroom. Fill a goblet for me now."

⁴⁶The groom does not use either of the Turkish expressions for bitch, namely, dişi köpek or kahpe. Instead, he calls Mahbub "child of a dog's woman," and when she returns the compliment, she uses the same idiom.

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Bringing the drink to him, Mahbub said, "Enjoy yourself, my love! Enjoy yourself!"

"I told you not to go near that rude person, but I did not know that he would throw a goblet and hurt your arm." When the goblet hit Mahbub's arm, Mahmud felt as if it had hit his own elbow. People in love do not want to see each other hurt.

The two lovers embraced. Strapping on their swords, they then, hand in hand, left that room. After recovering their horses from the stable, they rode eastward out of the city. People who saw them thought that they were the bride and groom, but before very long the groom was found with his head separated from his body. (It is said that wolves are the most ferocious beasts, but there are some foxes which exceed wolves in ferocity.)

"Oh, Mahbub, you killed your bridegroom," many said. However, the one who had killed Mujde Khan was not Mahbub but Mahmud. Black Vizier ordered everyone, including ordinary citizens of the city, to mount their horses and pursue the two fugitives. Those who had no horses were ordered to join the pursuit on foot.

After riding for some distance, Mahmud and Mahbub came to a spring of fresh water. There they dismounted, watered their horses, and ate some food. Mahmud lay with his head in the lap of Mahbub, who gazed at her lover's face. She knew that Black Vizier and his

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forces would soon pursue them. Looking along the road by which they had traveled, she saw in the distance a great cloud of dust thrown up by the feet of approaching horses and pedestrians. The crowd which followed them was so large that no one could guess how many people and horses it included. The girl thought, "If I were to awaken Mahmud now, he would say, 'Since you are Mahbub, how could anything frighten you enough to wake me up?' But if I let him continue sleeping, then I would have to protect him. It is best that I awaken him." Then she spoke to Mahmud, saying, "My love, why do you sleep at such a time?"

"What is it, girl?"

"Get up and look back along the road by which we came here."

Mahmud arose, looked back down the road, and saw the whole city of Gence approaching. He asked, "Girl, is that why you awakened me?"

"Yes."

"Why? You used to say, 'My sword is my strength. I held at bay those attacking Iran.' You could have scattered those approaching us."

"I knew that you would say this, but you were sleeping. Now watch and observe how I handle this mob. Remain in good health and enjoy yourself."

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“Is it proper for women to engage in battle when there are men available to do that? You attack them from one side, and I shall attack them from the other.”

It was almost as if the two stood against a wild herd of cows. After two hours of battle, one fourth of their pursuers had been killed. Those still alive realized that they too would be killed if the battle continued. They said among themselves, “It is better to walk upon the surface of the earth than to lie beneath it.” With this thought in their minds, they turned around and fled. None of them remained.

The two lovers returned to the spring, where they washed the blood out of their clothes. Then they remounted their horses and rode westward, hoping to circle around Gence and proceed from there to Istanbul. Near noon they came to the plain upon which Gence stood, and they could see the city in the distance. Mahbub sighed and said, “My country, you reared me!” (The truth is that everyone should have love for Allah and love for some country. People who have those two loves can take care of themselves. Those without those two loves cannot appreciate the value of life.) As Mahbub looked at Gence, a yellowish-green smoke had settled around the city. As she gazed at it, Mahbub said, “O my love, Mahmud, I am now separating from my country. This makes me cry. I know that your broken heart has not yet fully healed. This is a crucial moment. Are we going to Istanbul now?”

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“Yes.”

“You are going to be the groom, and I am going to be the bride?”

“Yes.”

“Even if we reach Istanbul, cannot really be the bride, and you cannot really be the groom

“Why?”

“I told you in my garden that there would come a time when I could tell you why I acted the way I did, and that when that time came, you would fully recover. Here is the reason why I lifted my sword against you. My father hired a magician to cut us apart by casting a spell upon me. It was that magician who caused me to run away madly, and if she is still in Gence, she will ride on her magic vase after us and place us under enchantment. It will cause us to fight again, and this time one of us may die before we can place our heads upon the same pillow. This was the reason I did not have control of myself. We cannot expect to remain together unless that witch’s head is cut off. Telli Gülşah knows that witch very well. Give my greetings to that bezirgan’s daughter and tell her not to forget us in her prayers. Tell her that if we remain in good health, we shall meet again. Cut off that witch’s head. Then you can truly become the groom and I can truly become the bride.”

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Upon hearing this, Mahmud felt greatly strengthened. Mahbub's explanation brought about a complete recovery of his wounded heart. He mounted his horse immediately, ready to follow Mahbub's directions.

"Fear nothing," said the girl. "I shall be waiting here for your return."

Mahmud rode through the gates of Gence and went directly to the palace of the wealthy merchant. Telli Gülşah saw him coming from her window. She ran downstairs, opened the door, and said, "Welcome, brother!"

"Sister, this is not the time to come in and sit for long." He then whispered to her an explanation for his coming there. "Mahbub is waiting for me. She told me that you knew where that evil witch lived. Show me her house so that we and all of Gence can be rid of her."

Telli Gülşah immediately put on garments suitable for her to wear outside her home. She then said to Mahmud, "Brother, I shall walk before you. You will follow me at a distance, but pretend that you do not know me. I cannot point at her house with my finger, for if she saw me doing that, you and I would both disappear. When I come abreast of her house, I shall turn slightly toward her door and bend over to straighten my stockings. From that you will understand where the witch's door is located."

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“Very well.”

So Telli Gülşah walked ahead and Mahmud followed. The girl went straight to the district where the witch lived. It was summer, and all the doors were open. Children were playing in the street. The witch's door was half open, and the witch herself was sitting. Telli Gülşah bent down to straighten her stockings. Mahmud followed from a distance and continued walking until he was well past the witch's door. Then he turned around and went back. He asked the children in the street, “Is there any learned old grandmother living in this neighborhood? My head is aching very badly, and I want to have some healing spell put on it.”

The children showed him the witch woman's house. “Here!” they said. “There is a learned grandmother living here.”

The witch woman overheard their words and looked out of her door. Neighbor women looked out of their doors, too. The witch woman asked Mahmud, “Where is your pain?”

“Oh, grandmother, may Allah give you health as a learned person. My head has been aching so badly for three months that I can seldom sleep.”

“Come inside, and we shall see about it.” Mahmud tied his horse and went into her house. “Now sit right in front of me,” she said. He sat down near her. The door was closed as the woman began to

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recite charms and blow them toward the young man. Mahmud grabbed the old woman's throat and squeezed it so hard that the words could not leave her mouth. Her lips could not move, and, falling upon the floor, she died, and her soul went to hell.

"O worthless woman!" said Mahmud. "It is better that an infidel like you be dead! Now no Muslims are endangered by your evil." He quickly left the house, untied his horse, and rode away.

The children and the neighbors thought that he was leaving because the woman had cured his illness. After he had ridden away, the neighbors said, "Let us go and ask grandmother how much that horseman gave her." Opening the door, they found the body of the witch spread out on the floor. "Who do you suppose that horseman was?" they asked each other. But before they could give much thought to that matter, Mahmud had returned to Mahbub.

"What did you do, my love?" asked Mahbub.

"The witch has been killed."

Back in the city of Gence all of the police were searching for the unknown horseman. But Mahmud had departed swiftly, and no one outside the vicinity where the witch had lived had even noticed him.

Mahmud and Mahbub, traveling a set distance every day, passed out of the land of Iran and into that of Turkey. As they passed

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Erzincan and headed toward the Kemah Mountains, Mahbub suddenly reined in her horse and stopped. "Why have you halted, my love?"

"Mahmud, we got rid of the witch woman, and there is nothing to fear about what might come from behind us. But I have been thinking of another problem. Now you will become a bridegroom and I shall become a bride. Isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"Well, people of our class may ask some embarrassing questions about me. When they ask whose daughter I am, what shall I tell them? If I were to tell them that I am the daughter of Emir Gurkan, şah of Iran, would anyone believe me? Won't they say, 'Would the daughter of a şah come emptyhanded?' I do not have even a small bundle under my arm. What do you say? Should we perhaps capture some merchant's caravan? When we arrive in Istanbul, who there will know how we acquired that caravan? When they see all the valuable things we will have captured, will they not then believe that I am the daughter of a şah?"

"Is such a thing possible?" asked Mahmud.

"Who among the caravan would ever know that you are Mahmud and I am Mahbub? Come! Let us go!" she said, and in doing so led Mahmud astray. They became bandits in the Kemah Mountains where they stopped caravans coming from both directions. No

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merchant could stand against them. Human beings are greedy creatures, and after they had started stealing merchandise, they wanted still more. They filled a whole cave with carpets and precious clothing. The two robbed caravans during the day and guarded the cave by night.

When the plundered merchants reached Istanbul, they reported their losses to Sultan Murat. “O padişah,” they said, “know that two powerful bandits have appeared in the Kemah Mountains. It is not known where they came from. But you are a ruler. Either keep these bandits from robbing us or show us a safer route.

Upon receiving this report, Sultan Murat said, “What does this mean? If the wolf and the lamb can survive in this world, how can those two thieves rob the merchants’ caravans of their goods? This is a matter that Mahmud could settle. I should send him to get those two bandits if he were here. He could stop them all by himself.”

One of the sultan’s wise men arose and said, “Your Majesty, if a mosque is destroyed, the mihrab⁴⁷ may remain standing. If Mahmud is not here, there is still his brother, Ahmet. Let us send Ahmet with sufficient troops to capture those bandits.”

“Very well. Call Ahmet,” responded the sultan.

⁴⁷The mihrab is a deeply niched column in a mosque wall. It is meant to indicate the direction of Mecca, toward which Muslims must face when they pray. The column or pier which contains the mihrab does sometimes survive when a mosque is otherwise destroyed by an earthquake or some other disaster.

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When Ahmet was shown into Sultan Murat's presence, that ruler said, "Ahmet!"

"Yes, Your Majesty?"

"According to two petitions given to me, there are two very active bandits in the Kemah Mountains. They are plundering the caravans of merchants. Since you are Mahmud's brother, you may well have some of the same strength that he possesses. Take as many troops as you need and either kill these two bandits or capture them and bring them to me."

Ahmet took 300 soldiers and started for the Kemah Mountains. When they reached the edge of that mountain range, Ahmet sent ahead several scouts to accumulate whatever evidence they might come upon. One of these scouts discovered the cave in which Mahmud and Mahbub were storing their booty, and he returned and reported this discovery to Ahmet. Ahmet and his troops hid themselves during the day. The next night, after Ahmet had drunk some rakı, he ordered his troops to proceed quietly to the cave and surround it. He hoped to be able to trap the bandits in that cave.

That cave was in the face of a cliff, and it was not easily reached. Mahmud and Mahbub had hung a rope ladder from the cave mouth down the cliff. This ladder made it easier for them to climb upward to the cave. On the night when Ahmet and his troops started

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for the cave, the two lovers had forgotten to pull the rope ladder up with them when they retired for the night in the cave. This made it easy for the troops to surround the cave quietly. In those days there were no rifles.⁴⁸ The weapons of the time were swords, bows and arrows, and nets in which to entangle an enemy. At a signal from Ahmet, several soldiers rushed into the cave and threw heavy nets over Mahmud and Mahbub while they were sleeping, and thus captured them without any struggle. The arms of both captives were tightly tied. (If you tie a bird's wings, it is no longer able to fly or take any action. A human being's wings are his arms, and if one's arms are tied, even if he is a powerful man, he is helpless.)

Ahmet did not immediately recognize his captives. He said to the captives, "Get up! Let us see who you are!" When Mahmud was awakened, he tried to spring up but then discovered that he was bound. His bride was shocked to make the same discovery. With his sword in hand, Ahmet shouted at the two captives, "Hey, did you not know that Sultan Murat has a great warrior named Ahmet? Hadn't you heard my name? Who do you think you are that you dare to rob so many caravans? Answer me!"

⁴⁸The narrator does not use the Turkish word for rifle. He uses a figurative expression, "the iron stick with a hole in it," which dates back to early Renaissance times when Turks first saw firearms.

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Mahmud thought, "My brother is under the influence of alcohol again. If I do not answer him, he may use his sword to cut off my head." He therefore said to Ahmet, "Will you give me some quarter?"

"What quarter do you want?"

Mahmud gave this reply to his brother: "You may kill Mahmud, but do not touch the lady with him. If you do harm her, my brother Ahmet will hear of it and shed blood, not tears.

These words shocked Ahmet, who said, "Is your name Mahmud?"

"Yes."

"Is this, then, Mahbub?"

"Yes."

"Whose son are you?" asked Ahmet.

"I am the son of Hacı İbrahim Bezirgan," answered Mahmud.

"Are you my brother Mahmud?"

"Yes."

When Ahmet heard that, the sword fell from his hand. He said, "It is a good thing that you told me that quickly, for I was about to kill my own blood. Alas, Brother, was guilty of squandering my inheritance, but I have never robbed anyone. They called me Drunkard

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Ahmet, but no one could say that I had stolen his money or his precious objects. Your offense has exceeded mine. Why?"

"All I can say is that we made a mistake."

"You have cast yourself into great trouble for nothing.

Petitions have been filed with the padişah against two bandits who turn out to be you and Mahbub. The padişah is furious about this banditry!"

The 300 soldiers accompanying Ahmet loaded on their horses all of the plundered goods in the cave. They sent a message to Sultan Murat informing him that the stolen goods had been recovered. Starting their return march, they proceeded a set distance each day until they reached Istanbul.

Ahmet said, "The padişah is very angry, Brother. I am unable to tell him that the two bandits were my brother and his beloved. You tell him who you are in the same way you told me."

When Mahmud and Mahbub were brought before the ruler, they were still clad in the disguises they had worn as bandits. The arms and legs of both of them were securely tied. The padişah spoke not to them but to Ahmet. "My son Ahmet, did you capture them while they were asleep?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Well done! Did you ask them who they were?"

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Fearing this question, Ahmet gave a deep sigh, and his eyes began to water. "O my padişah, I did ask them that, but it would be better if you also asked them the same question."

"Drunkard, could this be Mahmud? Untie his arms." Then turning to the captive, he asked, "Are you Mahmud?"

"Yes."

"And is that Mahbub?"

"Yes."

"What is this all about, Mahmud?" asked the ruler.

"My padişah, allow me to explain."

After Mahmud had described what had caused him and Mahbub to become bandits, the padişah said, "Son, how could you think that such behavior would be acceptable? How could it be proper? Here are several petitions from merchants for protection against your plundering."

"I cannot deny that all of this has happened, but I hope that you can forgive me."

Sultan Murat answered, "Son, your heroism at Gence compels me to forgive you, but all of this plunder must be returned to its rightful owners. As a bandit, you spent your energy for nothing."

"Your Majesty, my wasted energy does not now matter."

The ruler then turned to Ahmet and said, "Drunkard!"

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“Yes, my padişah?”

“Drunkard Ahmet, start preparations for your brother’s wedding celebration.

That celebration lasted for forty days and forty nights. Drums were beaten throughout that entire time. Great quantities of pilav were cooked and distributed among the poor. Games were played and dances were performed. On the forty-first day the lovers were united, and that is the end of our story.