



A Turkish Judge

Readers Theater Play Script and Performance Notes

AUTHORS: Elaine Lindy & Clarice Cabanlit, COUNTRY: Turkey, GENRE: Legends



CHARACTERS

KING HAROUN

HORSE (no speaking lines)

BEGGAR

NARRATOR

JUDGE

OIL MERCHANT

PORTER

SOLDIER #1 (no speaking lines)

SOLDIER #2 (no speaking lines)

WRITER

TAILOR

If there are performance notes, they can be found on the pages following the script

Scene 1 – Forest

[**Stage Set:** The stage is set with two scenes. The first scene has a forest backdrop and takes up about 2/3rd's of the stage. In the backdrop a path is painted from beginning to end, and at the end of the path is painted the entrance gates to a city. The second scene, taking up about 1/3rd the stage, is a courtroom.]

[The play opens at the end of the forest scene closest to the stage wing. The forest backdrop shows trees, bushes, flowers, a blue sky, fluffy clouds, and a bright sun.]

[NARRATOR enters.]

NARRATOR:

Hello, everyone. Here's a story called "A Turkish Judge" from... what country would you say? (*waits for people in the audience to shout out "Turkey!"*) Yep, that's it, Turkey. The story is brought to you by *Stories to Grow by*.

[NARRATOR steps forward.]

NARRATOR:

Over a thousand years ago, a famous king ruled the land now known as Turkey. Maybe you've never heard of King Haroun al-Raschid (pronounce ha-ROON-ahl-ruh-SHOOD), but he's famous to many people. He was a good and caring king. In fact, sometimes the King left the palace disguised as one of his subjects to see for himself how his people really fared.

[KING HAROUN enters, "riding" a HORSE. To simulate riding a horse, the actor playing HORSE walks on all fours. KING HAROUN walks behind HORSE, with the two of them facing and moving in the same direction.]

[From the opposite site of the stage, BEGGAR enters. He is lame and walks stiffly, or with a cane.]

[NARRATOR exits.]

BEGGAR:

(*waves to King Haroun*) Help! Please won't someone help me?

KING HAROUN: (*looks at the lame beggar*) Here, take a coin. (*gives Beggar a coin*) Buy yourself some shish kabob. (*pauses*) Say, where are you headed, old man?

BEGGAR:

To the city of Basra (pronounce: BAZ-rah).

KING HAROUN:

(to audience) I may as well go to Basra, why not? It's one of my largest cities. *(to Beggar)* How about this? Come ride with me. Someone in your condition shouldn't have to walk.

BEGGAR:

Truly? You are too kind.

[KING HAROUN helps BEGGAR "onto" the HORSE. To simulate this action, KING walks around to the front of HORSE, and walks BEGGAR to behind HORSE. Together, they "ride" HORSE by slowly moving together toward the city gates of Basra.]

Scene 2 – Gates of Basra

[**Stage set:** This scene takes place at the far end of the forest scene described in Scene 1, the area that ends at the city gates of Basra. (See **Performance Notes** for suggestion on creating the city gates.)]

[NARRATOR enters.]

NARRATOR:

You see this? In olden times, cities used to be surrounded by a wall. That was for defense. The walls had a main entrance gate. This (*gestures to the entrance gates to Basra*) was the gate to the City of Basra. Soon the King in disguise and his passenger will be here.

[KING HAROUN, BEGGAR, and HORSE reach the gate of Basra.]

[NARRATOR exits.]

KING HAROUN:

Here we are. I'll help you down now. (*jumps off Horse, or steps around to in front of Horse*) Give me your hand. (*helps Beggar off Horse*) Goodbye, then. Go in peace.

[Both KING and BEGGAR are in front of HORSE.]

BEGGAR:

(*forcefully*) What are you talking about? I am the one who gave YOU a ride. This is MY horse!

KING HAROUN:

What?! How dare you! I gave you a coin. I even gave you a ride to Basra. Now you have the NERVE to claim my horse is YOURS? You could be sent to prison for trying to steal a horse!

BEGGAR:

Don't bet on it! Here in Basra, we are both strangers. It's your word against mine. Who would believe YOU over the word of a poor disabled beggar? (*leans on cane*)

KING HAROUN:

This is outrageous! I could... I could...! (*to audience*) AUGHH! If I lose my temper and get into a fight, he'll cry out. People will rush over and take HIS side. They might even arrest me. Me, the King! I could end up in prison in my own land!

[KING HAROUN holds his chin in his hand in thought for a moment. Then he lifts his right index finger upward in an "aha!" moment.]

KING HAROUN:

I know! (*to Beggar*) We will take the matter to COURT!

BEGGAR:

(sarcastically gives a "tsk, tsk" sound) That would be SUCH a lot of trouble. I have a better idea. Just pay me nice, fat pouch of lira (pronounce: LEE-rah). Keep the lousy horse and be on your way. Or be a fool and take your chances in court. I can be VERY convincing. *(leans on cane)*

KING HAROUN:

(to audience) If I give him a pouch of coins, he'll go away and leave me alone. But that would only encourage him to steal from other people. *(to Beggar)* You know what? I'm taking my chances! We're going to court! *(to audience)* At least I'll get to see how justice REALLY works in Basra.

BEGGAR:

Have it your way. *(snickers)* This will be fun.

[KING HAROUN pulls BEGGAR along with him, and the HORSE. BEGGAR walks with no difficulty.]

KING HAROUN:

(to audience) Everything about him is a sham!

[BEGGAR and KING HAROUN exit.]

Scene 3 – Courtroom

[**Stage Set:** A courtroom scene with a raised table in the middle for JUDGE. JUDGE sits behind the table and faces the audience. Six chairs face the chair. Seated are OIL MERCHANT, PORTER, WRITER and TAILOR. Two seats are empty. On one side is a door that will be a point of entry and exit for the actors. (See **Performance Notes** for suggestions on how to simulate a door.) SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 stand on each side of the door/exit.]

[NARRATOR enters.]

NARRATOR:

(gestures to courtroom scene and people waiting to have their case heard by the judge) You probably guessed. This is the Courthouse in Basra. *(looks offstage)* Ah, look! Here come our hero and his challenger now.

[KING HAROUN and BEGGAR enter. They sit on the two empty chairs.]

NARRATOR:

All right, who's next?

[PORTER and OIL MERCHANT approach JUDGE's table.]

PORTER:

(holds up a gold coin) Your Honor, this gold coin is mine. Yet this man accuses me of stealing it from him!

OIL MERCHANT:

(desperately) It IS mine! I have been carrying this coin with me for many years. I only lost sight of it today... *(glares at Porter)* when this man picked it up. Now he claims it is his!

PORTER:

How DARE you call me a thief!

OIL MERCHANT:

You stole it from ME! That makes YOU the thief!

JUDGE:

(bangs gavel on the table) Enough! No fighting in my courtroom. Now, were there any witnesses?

PORTER:

No, Your Honor.

OIL MERCHANT:

I only wish there were.

JUDGE:

Very well. Leave the coin with me and come back tomorrow. (*calls out to those waiting*) Next?

[OIL MERCHANT and PORTER exit. SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 open the "door."
(See **Performance Notes**) on how SOLDIERS let the two "through" the door if it is not a freestanding prop.. Then SOLDIER shut the "door."]

[WRITER and TAILOR approach JUDGE's table. TAILOR holds a large book.]

JUDGE:

(*to Writer*) What is your occupation?

WRITER:

I am a writer.

JUDGE:

Why are you here?

WRITER:

This morning before I left my house, I put my Book of Learning on the bookshelf. But when I came home, it was gone! Then I saw this tailor outside my house holding my book. (*points accusingly to Tailor*) Yet he says it is his!

TAILOR:

(*hugs the book tightly to his chest*) It IS mine! I've had it for years.

JUDGE:

Are there any witnesses?

TAILOR:

No, Your Honor.

WRITER:

I only wish there were.

JUDGE:

Very well. Leave the book with me and come back tomorrow. (*looks at everyone*) Meeting is adjourned. I will see you all again tomorrow. (*bangs gavel on the table*)

[WRITER and TAILOR exit. SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 open the door to let the two "pass through." Then they "shut" the door again.]

KING HAROUN:

Excuse me, Your Honor!

JUDGE:

Say what? (*looks down, as if examining a docket*) There's not another case on my docket for today.

KING HAROUN:

This incident only just happened, Your Honor. With this... (*gesturing to Beggar, the King does not want to say "gentleman"*) fellow. Will you be so kind to hear our case?

JUDGE:

(*throws up arms*) This always happens! Just as I'm ready to leave. Oh, very well.

[KING HAROUN and BEGGAR approach the JUDGE's table. BEGGAR is limping again, more than ever, and leaning heavily on the cane.]

JUDGE:

(*to King Haroun*) Tell me who you are, and the nature of your trouble.

KING HAROUN:

I'm a traveler from far away. When I was a few miles from your city gates, I came upon this beggar by the side of the road. I gave him a coin, and offered him a ride to this city, too. But when we reached your city of Basra, he claimed MY horse was HIS! After all I did for him, and this is how he repays me?

JUDGE:

(*looks at Beggar*) How do you answer this charge?

BEGGAR:

The horse is mine! I raised him from when he was a colt. I am but a poor lame man who cannot walk a great distance. I depend on my horse. How can I get around now? (*sniffs and pretends to wipe away a tear*)

KING HAROUN:

(*takes a few steps toward the audience, and speaks to the audience*) He's VERY good! If I didn't know better, I would think the horse really WAS his. I hope the judge has more sense than I would have, in this situation!

JUDGE:

Do you have any witnesses?

BEGGAR:

No, Your Honor.

KING HAROUN:

I wish there were.

JUDGE:

Well, then leave the horse with one of my soldiers. Come back to this courtroom tomorrow.

[KING HAROUN hands HORSE to SOLDIER #1.]

[ALL ACTORS exit.]

Scene 4 – Courtroom, the next day

[**Stage Set:** Same as in Scene 3. JUDGE enters first and goes to stand behind his raised table, facing the audience. OIL MERCHANT, PORTER, WRITER, TAILOR, KING HAROUN and BEGGAR enter and find their seats. Each one sits next to the one with whom he is arguing.]

[SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 take their place by the exit and shut the door.]

JUDGE:

Last night, I spent a lot of time thinking. I have come to a decision regarding the cases brought before me yesterday. (*points at Oil Merchant and Porter*) You and you! Come forward.

[OIL MERCHANT and PORTER approach JUDGE.]

JUDGE:

(*to Oil Merchant*) Here is your gold coin. Take it home with you. (*gives Oil Merchant the coin*) You may go now.

OIL MERCHANT:

(*happily*) Thank you, Your Honor. Thank you! (*kisses gold coin and walks toward exit while smiling widely*)

[SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 open the door for OIL MERCHANT to pass through. They leave it open.]

JUDGE:

(*looks sternly at Porter*) As for you, you tried to take something that did not belong to you. For that, you will be given 20 strokes with a rod on the soles of your feet. Soldiers! Take him.

[SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 take PORTER away. PORTER tries to resist but is taken out forcefully. Be gentle! - this is pretend.]

[SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 exit with PORTER, then return to their positions by the exit.]

JUDGE:

You (*points to Tailor*) and you (*points to Writer*) are next.

[TAILOR and WRITER approach the JUDGE.]

JUDGE:

(*holds up book*) This Book of Learning is his (*points book at Writer*). I now return it to him. (*hands book to Writer*) You may go now.

WRITER:

(clasps book to his heart) I am grateful beyond words, Your Honor. This book means more to me than I can say.

[WRITER walks toward SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 while excitedly flipping the pages of the book. He stops between SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 and sighs contentedly. SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 open the door for WRITER to pass through, and leave it open.]

JUDGE:

Soldiers, take this tailor and give him 20 lashes with whips on the palm of his hand. He stole that writer's book, and lied about it to this court.

[SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 take TAILOR away. SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 exit with TAILOR but come back in and return to their position by the door.]

JUDGE:

(looks at King Haroun and Beggar) Now, you two are next. Old Beggar, why did you repay this man's kindness with such ingratitude? Since you are lame, I will not have you beaten. But I will send you to prison. You will stay there until you have repented your evil ways. Now go!

BEGGAR:

(pitifully) But Your Honor... have mercy on me!

JUDGE:

Get him out of here! *(to King Haroun)* Good traveler, the horse is yours. Take it with you and continue on your way. May your kindness be better rewarded in the future.

[SOLDIER #1 and SOLDIER #2 take BEGGAR away. BEGGAR tries to resist. They exit through the door. KING HAROUN steps forward.]

KING HAROUN:

(to audience) How did he do it? He seemed to know exactly how to rule about the gold coin and the book. And he was certainly right about my horse. But how did he figure it all out?

[KING HAROUN approaches JUDGE after all others have left.]

KING HAROUN:

Honored Judge, I am in awe of your wisdom. You must have received divine inspiration! How else could you render such righteous judgments?

JUDGE:

No inspiration at all. The cases were very simple.

KING HAROUN:

How?

JUDGE:

The oil merchant said he always had the gold coin with him. Last night, I placed the coin in a glass of clear water. When I looked at it this morning, I saw the surface of the water covered with tiny drops of oil. I was absolutely sure then that the gold coin belonged to the oil merchant.

KING HAROUN:

Ah, that's clever! What about the case concerning The Book of Learning? How could you know it was the writer who owned it, and not the tailor?

JUDGE:

That was easy, too. When I examined the book, I observed that the pages that were most used were the ones on which the duties of writers and scholars were explained. It was plain to see the book belonged to the writer.

KING HAROUN:

Excellent! that all makes sense. But truly, how could you tell the horse was mine and not the beggar's?

JUDGE:

Yours was an interesting case. You would have to agree that the beggar was very persuasive.

KING HAROUN:

Unfortunately, yes.

JUDGE:

Last night, I instructed my soldiers to put the horse in a stable where you and the beggar would be sure to pass on your way to court. This morning, I waited by the stable. When the beggar passed, the horse did not even look up. But when you passed, the horse stretched out his head towards you. Horses do this only when they see someone they know and love. So I knew that the horse was yours, and the beggar was not telling the truth.

KING HAROUN:

You are truly wise! Honored judge, there is something I must tell you that you don't know. I am not who you think I am. I am... (*dramatically removes his outer clothes to reveal the royal cape underneath*) ...King Haroun al-Raschid!

JUDGE:

Ah, Your Majesty! (*bows low*) What an honor, to meet you in person!

KING HAROUN:

Judge, I need someone like you in my capital city. I am appointing you Judge of the highest court in all the land!

JUDGE:

I am deeply honored, Your Majesty. (*bows again*)

[As NARRATOR speaks the lines below, KING HAROUN shakes JUDGE's hand. They silently pantomime happily talking to each other.]

NARRATOR:

And so the wise judge moved to the capital city, became the Judge of the High Court, and ruled the most important cases in the land.

[KING HAROUN and JUDGE exit.]

[NARRATOR enters.]

NARRATOR:

And this is how the famous King Haroun al-Raschid found out how justice was served in his land, in the city of Basra. And he felt pretty good about it.

[KING HAROUN steps out from the edge of the stage.]

KING HAROUN:

Yeah, I'm feeling pretty good about it.

NARRATOR:

(*light bow to King Haroun*) As well you should, Your Majesty.

[KING HAROUN exits.]

NARRATOR:

And you may be wondering. What of the (*airquotes*) beggar?

[NARRATOR gestures to BEGGAR at the other side of the stage. He is in prison. (See **Performance Notes** on how to convey prison bars.)

BEGGAR:

I would have had a horse of my own if not for that Judge! Drat, drat, and triple-drat!

NARRATOR:

(*to Beggar*) Hush up. You know the old Turkish proverb (pronounce: PRAH-verb), "A liar's candle only lasts till evening."

BEGGAR:

(snappy) Who asked you?

[OIL MERCHANT enters.]

OIL MERCHANT:

Uh, what does that proverb mean again?

NARRATOR:

Since you asked, that a lie works only for a short time. And given that you (*gestures to Oil Merchant*) have your coin back and he (*gestures to Beggar*) is where he is, this story has proven the proverb true. Thanks to the Turkish Judge!

[If you have a curtain, close it now. If you have no curtain, all actors come on stage and bow to the audience.]



Performance Notes for A Turkish Judge

THREE WAYS THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS CAN UTILIZE THIS PLAY

1. Students can read the play aloud while sitting in the classroom. Ask the readers to skip all bracketed stage directions. You may prefer to rotate your actors to give all students a chance to read the speaking parts.
2. Students can perform the play in the classroom. Clear an area that can be used as the stage. Have the audience sit on the floor in front of the stage. Students in the play can make simple costumes and/or sets as described below. When the scene change, the characters "on stage" simply walk to the back of the room where they wait until their next appearance "on stage."
3. Students can perform the play on stage. Refer to the production notes that follow. Ask the actors to enter from the back of the room and move through the audience as they approach the stage.



COSTUMES

- HORSE — Brown clothes, a headband with horse's ears and a tail made of brown yarn.
- KING HAROUN — Light gray shirt, dark gray trousers and black boots. He has a neutral-colored traveler's cape over his clothes. In Scene 3, he dons a red satin or otherwise royal-looking cape underneath the neutral-colored cape. He reveals this at the end of the play to indicate his kingly status.
- BEGGAR — Tattered clothing, neutral in color.



- NARRATOR or NARRATORS — can wear anything. Perhaps nice shirt(s) and slacks and/or a nice skirt(s) and blouse(s), or a nice dress(es).
- JUDGE — Big black robe.
- OIL MERCHANT — Brown robe with a red belt, with a white turban on his head.
- PORTER — Plain light-colored shirt and folded brown or black trousers.
- SOLDIERS — Black short open-fronted jackets with red shirts and red knee-length baggy trousers. They wear a red fez on their head.
- WRITER — Light brown shirt, black baggy pants, black vest, black knee-length socks and black shoes. Optional would be black hat with a feather.
- TAILOR — Plain shirt and trousers.
- WITNESSES — Plain shirts and dull-colored trousers for boys. Light-colored shirts and long flowing skirts for girls.



PROPS

Scene 1

- A silver coin for KING HAROUN to give to BEGGAR.

Scene 2

- A gavel made out of carton or Styrofoam, painted dark brown.
- A real gavel can also be used if available.
- A gold coin for PORTER to hold up.
- A hardbound book that looks old to represent *The Book of Learning*.

Scene 3

- Same as scene 2.



SETS

- **Scene 1** — Paint a backdrop showing a forest scene with trees, flowers and bushes. If you do not have performers who can play as FOREST ANIMALS, animals can just be painted on the backdrop. Another suggestion is to make gray rocks made of cartons and papers to be placed along the painted backdrop.
- **Scene 2** — The courtroom has a raised table for the judge and seats for the witnesses. A wooden teacher's desk that is about 1 ½ meters wide can be used as a judge's table. This can be raised by creating a small platform made of wood. The platform should be big enough to fit the teacher's desk and a chair, and should be the same color as the teacher's desk.

On the left side, arrange 12 chairs in four rows. These are for OIL MERCHANT, PORTER, WRITER, TAILOR and WITNESSES.

If you have the appropriate carpentry support, put up a wooden freestanding double-entry door on the right side which will serve as the entry and exit points for characters. Please ensure that it is firmly secured to the floor to prevent any accident from happening.

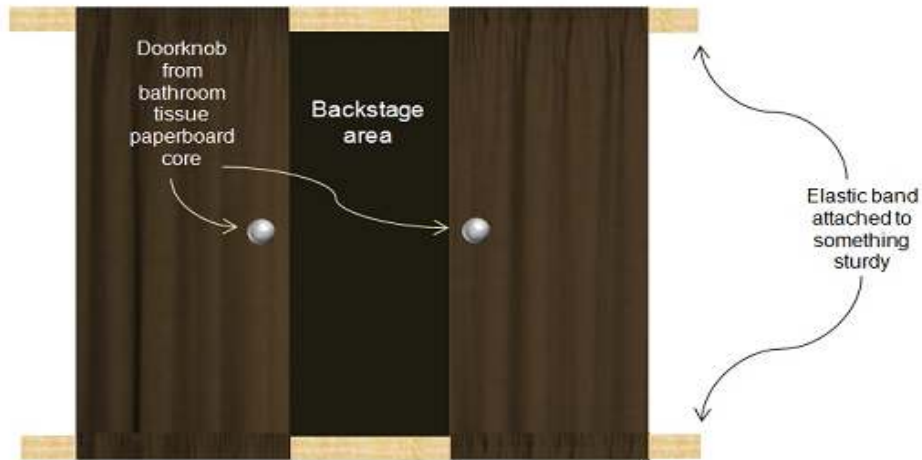
A second option for the doorway is to simulate one by using two pieces of dark fabric. The length and width of the fabric will depend on the size of the doorway that you want to create. Make sure to add an extra 18 inches for hemming. To create this effect:

- 1) At the top and bottom edge of the fabric panels, sew 2-inch hems which should look like curtain rod pockets. No sewing is needed for the finished edges along the sides.
- 2) Slide an elastic band right through the pockets you have sewn on both fabric panels. Do this for both the top and bottom edges. (Note: It will be easier to slide the elastic band through the rod pockets if you tie its end around a screwdriver. The screwdriver will serve as your guide.)
- 3) Stretch the elastic bands and attach their ends on to something sturdy which will serve as the frame for the doors.
- 4) To open the doors, simply slide the fabric panels to the side.

Slide them back to the center to shut the doors. Add a doorknob by



securing bathroom tissue paperboard core on fabric panels with duct tape. You will need two cores covered with silver foil.



Since the doorway will only be used in ACT 2 and ACT 3, make sure that you put this up quickly after the end of ACT 1.

A third option is to have two actors stand facing each other about two feet apart, and raise their hands so that all hands touch. This forms an overhang that can suffice for a door.

