

# TRACE

**Traditional Children's Stories for a Common  
Future**

**How to Teach an Elephant to Speak**



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Many centuries ago, when the Mediterranean was largely ruled by the Great Turk, a vessel headed from Barcelona to Naples happened to be attacked by an Ottoman galley. Although the crew and the passengers of the vessel fought a fierce battle against the assailants, they were outnumbered and defeated. As it turns out, in the vessel there was a servant named Madrigal who was traveling with his lord. The servant was taken prisoner and after a long journey, Madrigal found his bones in the city of Constantinople or Istanbul, as the Turks also called the old Byzantine capital, where he was sold as a slave.

After a long and painful captivity, different adventures related to his longing for escape ended up putting him in a good mess, so Madrigal was brought before a *qāḍī*, that is: before a judge, to be judged at risk of being sentenced to death. As our protagonist feared for his life, to save her he devised a cunning plan.

Once he appeared before the *qāḍī*, Madrigal offered him a prodigy that would allow the *qāḍī* to be very well before the Great Sultan. Madrigal affirmed with great solemnity that he was capable of teaching how to speak to an elephant that belonged to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire within ten years. And that if he did not succeed, he would offer himself to end his own life in the way they thought fit. The *qāḍī*, although he was suspicious of Madrigal's proposal, ended up forgiving his life in exchange for effectively getting the animal to speak.

From that moment Madrigal not only managed to get rid of the prison, but began to enjoy a life given in the *qāḍī*'s mansion. Our protagonist walked through the gardens that surrounded the *qāḍī*'s mansion, enjoyed daily delicious delicacies and listened to recitals of music and poetry. As the days, weeks and months went by and Madrigal hardly spent time with the elephant and was not seen to teach the pachyderm any language lesson, one of his former captivity companions who worked in the judge's house asked him if he did not worried that he could not fulfill the promise he had made to the *qāḍī*, to which Madrigal replied:

“Dear friend, there is nothing to worry about: ten years from now or the elephant is dead, or I have died or the *qāḍī* himself will have already passed away”.