

Mavi Fare, The Mouse In The Mosque

by Stuart Baum

Note for readers: 'Mavi Fare' is pronounced MAH-vee FAR-ee and means, literally, 'blue mouse.' (Thank you to the night watchman at the Sumengen Hotel, Istanbul for the Turkish translation.)

Listen mouse children and you will hear, in his own words, the tale of how Mavi Fare escaped from the Imperial Mosque of Sultan Ahmet I (Sultan Ahmet Camii) of Istanbul, Turkey – known as the Blue Mosque – and from within the figurative jaws of the mosque keepers and the literal jaws of the thousands of cats patrolling outside. Settle down, little mice, and you will hear the tale, which Mavi Fare wove as delicately and intricately as the One Great Man wove his carpets. Are you settled? Are you ready to listen with your big ears wide open? Good, then I shall read from the sacred scrolls, written with Mavi Fare's own paws, the story of his escape from the Blue Mosque, the same mosque that inspired his holy name. I begin...



The Blue Mosque in Istanbul is one of the most well-known and holy houses of worship in the world. It is not really blue. It is white. It looks blue when viewed from across the sea or across the river, which is why it is called the Blue Mosque.

I live in the Blue Mosque. I am a mouse. Like the Blue Mosque, I am really white. Also like the Blue Mosque, I look blue. This is because so many of the stained glass windows and so much of the mosaic in the mosque is blue. The light comes in the blue windows and bounces off the blue walls and makes me, a little white mouse, look blue.

“Eeek!” screams a lady with a shawl covering her head. “The blue mouse! There is that blue mouse again! Someone should kill it!” She doesn’t scream in English. She screams in Turkish. “*Eek! Mavi Fare!*” was what she really screamed. But if I wrote this whole story in Turkish, only a few people would be able to understand.

The men in the mosque understand her Turkish, of course, and they come after me with brooms. I manage to scurry under the door and hide there. The men think I went outside, but I do not dare go outside since Istanbul is full of cats. So many cats! So many hungry cats!

“Mavi Fare!” the cats taunt. “Maaa-veeee Faah-reee! When will you come outside and play with us? We do not want to harm you, only to ask you a few questions.” Their voices are soft and sweet and they purr so invitingly, but I know better than to believe them. They are cats. They do not want to talk to me. They want me to be their meal!

Inside the mosque are women and men who want to swat me with brooms and outside are cats who want to eat me! I am a scared little blue mouse. I want to leave the blue mosque and live somewhere there are no cats who want to eat me and no women in shawls who want their men to kill me.

But how can I get away?

One day I hear three men talking. All three sell carpets for a living. I know, since I can smell the rug wool on them.

“My carpets are the finest in all Istanbul,” says the first man. He is a fat little man.

“My carpets are the finest in all *Turkey*,” boasts the second man. He is less fat, but just as small.

“My carpets are the finest in all *the world*,” declares the third man. This man is tall, thin and greyer-faced than the other two.

The first two men laugh.

“It is true,” says the third, greyer man.

“How can your carpets be the finest in all the world?” asks the first.

“Yes,” asks the second, “What makes your carpets so special?”

The man, the greyer, thinner and taller man, replies, “The wool I use is so fine and so light it can actually float off the ground.” He says this matter-of-factly, but the other two laugh heartily.

“A flying carpet?” scoffs the second one. “This is both ridiculous and impossible.”

The first one adds, in a more serious tone, “It is also an embarrassment to us Turks that you say this.”

The third man, the greyer one, is again straightforward. “But it is true.”

After the first and second men laugh and yell some more, the greyer man offers to bring one of his carpets into the Blue Mosque.

“You cannot bring a carpet into this holy place,” says the second man sternly.

“Then I will bring only a small piece,” the third man declares. “I will bring it tomorrow and you will see.”

The first and second men are laughing as they walk away. They do not believe. But I, Mavi Fare, believe. Or, at least, I really *want* to believe. A flying carpet! Or a piece of a flying carpet. This means he is bringing a *small* flying carpet. Imagine that! A carpet that is too small for a man to use, but just the right size for a mouse. Just the right size for a mouse to use to escape from the women in shawls, the men with brooms, and the cats. Fromm the *many* cats outside who want to eat me.

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The next day, the first and second men are waiting for the third man, the greyer, thinner man, to return with his small flying carpet. I am also waiting. I am hiding alongside the edge of the mosque, half inside a cracked piece of blue and white tile, where I blend in.

I must interrupt the sacred words to explain about these marvelous tiles to those of you who have never and might never see them firsthand in Istanbul. Not solely for the little mouse children, but also for the grown up mice who might be using their big ears to hear this story, for perhaps the hundredth time.

Istanbul is far away and much of it was built many years ago, but the blue Mosque and these very tiles have, like the story you are hearing, well stood the test of time. And they are just as beautiful today as they were when Mavi Fare wrote his story. They are white with lovely and intertwined turquoise tulips. The tulips are surrounded by just as lovely green leaves. The tiles match each other perfectly, with only a small thin white line of mortar showing where the two tiles connect. They are truly magnificent. I have seen them with my own eyes. Now I continue in Mavi Fare's own words...

The women in shawls and the men cannot see me, but the large, striped cat on the windowsill looks down and sees me. Fortunately, he is outside and the window is covered with a wooden shutter with carved openings that are too small for him to get through.

“Mav-eee Far-eee,” he purrs. “Mav-eee Far-eee. Come outside and play with us. We do not want to eat you. The many, many friendly cats only want to talk to you and play with you and then we will let you come back into the mosque to rest. It will be fun.” Not a word of it is true. He wants to eat me.

Suddenly a man turns to the cat and hisses. The cat, startled, more falls than leaps from the windowsill. I hear him land softly on the ground. I can still hear him purring, “Mavi Fare, I am still outside if you want to come out to playyy. *You* can easily get out through the holes in the shutters.” I say nothing back. I know if I let out even the smallest squeak the women in shawls will scream.

Again I interrupt. The ‘shutters’, though Mavi Fare’s own word, does not do these exquisite wooden artifacts justice. I will not take the time to describe them here, but, again, you must see them with your own eyes. Perhaps, if you are a good and lucky little

mouse, then, someday, you will have the chance to travel to Istanbul as I have. I continue...

Soon the third man appears and he is immediately taunted by the second man.

“Did you walk here or fly here? I kept looking up at the sky to watch for your arrival.”

The first man is more serious. “Did you bring this magic, flying carpet?”

The third man nods and pulls out from his loose black shirt a small piece of carpet. It is thin, almost like a tissue. It is the size of a tissue as well. It is very ornate, with dark green and maroon tulips and other flowers woven into it. It is so beautiful it takes your breath away. Even the other two men cannot help but stare.

The greyer man holds the small carpet out from his body and drops it into the air.

The carpet flattens out, like a small sheet of paper, and then falls slowly to the ground. For a moment, a small moment so brief that I almost missed it, the carpet stops falling. Then it continues to fall until, after many seconds it reaches the ground.

The first and the second men are clearly impressed. They did not expect the carpet to be so light or so beautiful.

Just as they reach down to the floor to touch it, a woman in a dark blue shawl screams, “Mavi fare! The blue mouse! *There* is the blue mouse again!”

I realize that I was slowly moving forward as I watched the carpet and I am now far away from the wall and my hiding place.

Many people come rushing towards me. I see two men raising brooms into the air.

The blue-shawled woman continues to yell, “Cannot any of you brave strong men kill one small mouse? Do us women have to do all the work in this city?”

Many people laugh and this only makes the men angrier and more determined to swat me with their brooms. A broom falls right behind me and catches my tail. It does not hurt, but I was just a couple inches from being killed. I fear them more than I fear the cats outside, so I quickly dart underneath the door and I am outside.

In front of me is that big striped cat, his paw raised, ready to strike. If he had struck immediately, he would have gotten me, but he purrs instead, “Mavi Fare. How nice of you to join me. I was just about to have my lunch.” I know what he plans to have for lunch and now I fear him more than the men with brooms, so I scurry back into the mosque.

“The mouse is back! Over there!” It is a woman’s voice, but I do not take to time to look at her. A man swings a broom at me, but hits a woman’s foot.

“Ouch!” she yells. “My foot is not a mouse!” Many people laugh. I am not laughing. I am running for my life.

I see a broom coming towards my head and I quickly dart left. It grazes my whiskers. That was close! I look for a place to hide or a wall, but I am now in the center of the mosque and there are bare feet and socks everywhere. I know not to go under a carpet, since then they will stomp on me, so I run around feet and over feet (“He ran over my foot!” yells one man.) and around socks and over socks. I look up to see who yelled and it is not a man with a broom, so I have a second to look to see how I might escape. In front of me are more people and there are two men with brooms waiting for me to come that way. The wall is behind them, as if they know I will try to reach it. To the right are more men with brooms. To the left are a crowd of people and the greyer man with the flying carpet. I run left. I run directly towards the greyer man, run around his bare feet and jump, as quickly as I can, into his pants cuff. I make myself as thin as I can and remain perfectly still. I can see nothing from inside the cuffs, but I imagine the men with brooms are looking for me and I only hope they do not look here. I also hope the greyer man does not notice the extra weight in his pants cuff. The weight of one small, thin and hungry blue mouse in his cuff. Barely any weight at all! I think light thoughts.

Soon all the yelling and commotion dies down.

“Where did he go?” I hear a man ask.

“He was right here,” says another man.

“He ran over my toes!” screams a woman.

“Everyone quiet down,” says a man. “Shhh.” The room becomes quiet. The man continues, “The blue mouse must be nearby. He did not go past me.” I stay still and, though it is difficult, I hold my breath.

The room remains quiet, but soon people start whispering and then a woman says, “All these large brave men outwitted by one small blue mouse.”

Many people laugh. They start talking again and soon the mosque returns to normal. I stay still. I breathe very slowly and quietly.

Everyone quiets down. I feel the greyer man go down to his knees and I hope I am not crushed, but he is being careful. The chanting starts. It is beautiful and relaxing. Before I fall asleep, I hear (or I think I hear) the greyer man say, “I know you are there, there in my cuff, my little mavi fare.”

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A hand touches me! I am awake and, without looking or even thinking, I dart left right left right and run right some more into a dark place. It is the edge of a pile of carpets, very thin carpets. Nothing is coming towards me.

I look around and see the greyer man smiling at me.

He speaks slowly, calmly. "You are safe here, my little mavi fare. No terrified women. No brooms. No cats. Only my carpets."

I stare at him, wary. The cats say nice things, too, but they want to eat me.

He continues to talk. "You can stay here, my little mavi fare, for as long as you want. I have left out some water and bread for you." He points to a bare place on the wooden floor. I see a tea saucer full of water and a small piece of bread.

"You are hungry, I can see, my little mavi fare. I will leave soon so you can eat." His face gets closer to me, so I back up more tightly against the pile of carpets. His warm smile becomes a slight frown. "But you must promise me one thing, my little mavi fare. You must promise me that you will not nibble on my carpets." He slowly moves his hand towards me. I try to back up further, but I am pressed against the carpets as far as I can go already. His hand stops and he opens it. There is a pile of wool threads in his hand. He turns his hand over and the threads and small wool pieces fall, ever so gently and slowly, like tiny leaves, like tiny feathers, to the ground. "Here is enough to get you started on your nest. I will bring more after your dinner. But you must promise to use only the material I give you." He looks me in the eyes. I nod my head up and down until he smiles. "That is a good little mavi fare," he says. "Now I will leave so you can have your dinner."

The man stands up and leaves the room. I do not move an inch. I hear a door close and still I wait. I wait as long as my hungry stomach will let me and then I slowly, slowly inch towards the water and bread, keeping to the edges of the piles of carpets the entire time.

I fill my belly with bread and water. I eat as much as I can. For the first time in my life, I eat until I can eat no more. Tomorrow, I will eat only as much as I need. I do not want to get fat or the cats and brooms will catch me. But today, today, I eat. Today, today, I am safe and can rest.

Exploring the room, I find a small place where the carpets do not quite touch the wall and decide to make my nest in there. Piece by piece, I bring the threads and small wool pieces to my nest. It is not much, but it is like a palace to me. Just in case, I go back to the bread and nibble off a large piece. I bring that back to my nest.

I curl up in my palace of wool and listen. What I hear is amazing: silence. No people yelling ‘Kill the blue mouse!’ No cats purring ‘Mav-eee far-eee come out and play-ayy.’ None of those sounds. Just silence.

But my reverie is broken by the sound of the door opening. I go still.

The grey man speaks, “I see you have enjoyed your dinner, little mavi fare. I will leave more when I am gone. And I will refill the water. As well, I am leaving another handful of wool for your nest. I will bring more of that as well. Plenty for the largest nest you will ever need to build. And you can live here in peace and luxury for as long as you want. No brooms to crush you. No cats to eat you. *So long as you promise never to gnaw on my carpets.* Not even the smallest, tiniest nibble.”

Though he could not see me, I nod. I understand and very much appreciate his hospitality. Not one nibble. Use only the wool left in a pile by the bread.

Except for the nod, I remain still until I hear the door open and close again and, even then, for a long while afterwards.

I am so happy to escape the Blue Mosque and be free from the brooms and cats. I am also happy to have a full belly and a large, comfortable nest. But I am not fully content. Even making my nest larger would not make me content. I need to find that small carpet. That small flying carpet he showed to the first and second man. I need to stand on it, command it to fly, and leave Istanbul and all of Turkey. To find a place where mice would be free from men and women, brooms and cats. To find a place ruled by mice. If I fly far enough and long enough, I will find that place. If not, I will make that place myself.

Tomorrow, I will find the flying carpet. Tomorrow. But tonight I am tired, warm and fat. Tonight I will sleep peacefully for the first time in my life. Tonight I will rest before my big journey. Because today I have escaped from the Blue Mosque. And tomorrow I will begin the quest for the Great Mouse Place. And I will not stop until I find it. So swears the Blue Mouse of Istanbul. So swears Mavi Fare.

And that, my little mouse children, is the story, in his own paws, of Mavi Fare’s escape from the Blue Mosque of Istanbul. The rest of the sacred histories, as you know, were written by others and detail Mavi Fare’s search for the Great Mouse Place, his adventures on the only true flying carpet in the world, his teachings, and his place in both Mouse and, of lesser importance, human and cat history. But these are stories well known to many of you. If you have not yet heard them, then I shall read them to you, as best I can ... but on another night. For it is late and you need to get your sleep. Your little mouse sleep. Otherwise, you might not have enough energy to avoid the next broom or the next cat that comes your way.

Go to sleep, my little mice. Sleep still, my little mice. Curl up your long tails and fold up your big ears, my little mice. And, like Mavi Fare, dream big dreams...

The End.

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