

The Adventures of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid

V.

Of the Treachery of Hassan the Merchant, in the Matter of Ali Cogia.

Now in those days there dwelt in Bagdad a merchant named Ali Cogia. To this merchant there appeared in a dream, an old man of venerable but severe countenance, who bade him make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Ali Cogia was unwilling to leave his merchandise: he therefore endeavoured to forget the dream, and to make amends for his neglect of the pilgrimage, by giving largely to the poor. Nevertheless, as the neglect of a duty, admitted for such by our consciences, is in no wise to be atoned for by the performance of other duties less inconvenient or disagreeable to us, Ali Cogia found no peace in his mind; he therefore sold off his furniture, disposed of his shop and his merchandise, and let his dwelling-house, after which he prepared to accompany the next caravan to Mecca.

Now he had a thousand pieces or his of gold, over and above the sum he had set aside for his pilgrimage; and not knowing how to secrete them more safely, he put them into a jar, and then filled it up with olives. Having strongly tied down the jar, he took it to a merchant named Hassan, who was his friend.

“Brother,” said he, “thou knowest that I am about to start for Mecca; wherefore, I beg of thee to take charge of this jar of olives, till my return.” Hassan the merchant replied, “Undoubtedly I will. Here is the key of my warehouse; take thy jar thither thy self, and bestow it where thou wilt. As thou dost leave it, so shalt thou find it.”

Thereupon, Ali Cogia deposited his jar on a shelf; and shortly afterwards departed unto Mecca, taking with him the merchandise he had reserved to sell there, when his religious duties should be accomplished.

It befell that he overheard one merchant say to another, after surveying his goods, “This man knows not what he is about, for he would have found a much market at Cairo!” Therefore, as Ali Cogia had a great desire to behold Cairo, he abode not long at Mecca, but packed up his bales, placed them on camels, and joined an Egyptian caravan. When he arrived at Cairo, he disposed of his goods to great advantage, and then took pleasure in seeing the pyramids, and whatsoever was worthy to be seen; after which, instead of returning straight home, he resolved to extend his journeyings unto Damascus.

Having seen Damascus, Ali Cogia proceeded to Aleppo, and there he tarried some time; then, having crossed the Euphrates, he travelled to Moussoul, intending to shorten his journey by going down the Tigris. But he met some merchants at Moussoul, who persuaded him to alter his course, and journey with them to Ispahan and Shiraz. From Shiraz he proceeded to India; and he did not set his face homeward till the end of seven years.

Meanwhile the jar of olives had remained in the charge of the merchant Hassan, who had ceased to think of Ali Cogia, or of his jar. One evening, about the time that Ali Cogia was returning to Bagdad, Hassan was supping with his wife, when it occurred to her to say she was fond of olives, and had not tasted any for a long while.

“O wife!” then said Hassan, “thou remindest me of what I had long ceased to think of, that Ali Cogia, when he went to Mecca, left a jar of olives in my charge. Seven years have now passed; we have seen nothing of him, and though there was indeed a report that he had gone to Egypt, I question not that he is dead. Surely we may eat the olives, if still they are good! Give me a dish and a light, and I will go and fetch some.”

“O Hassan, will this be well done?” said his wife. “A charge is no less to be respected, be it for a short or a long season, be it concerning an important or a trifling matter. How know we that Ali Cogia is not living, and intending to return to Bagdad? Thou wouldst make thy name infamous among men, if he were to come and claim his own of thee, and thou couldest not restore it as it was left. Think no more of the olives, I entreat thee: we have left them alone these seven years, cannot we do without them still? I have a foreboding that if we touch them, Ali Cogia will come back and require them at thy hand. Besides, after so long a time, can they be good? They must be putrid and naught.”

Hassan gave no heed unto the words of his wife, but provided himself with a lamp and a dish. Then said his wife, “Remember, O Hassan, I have no share in what thou art about to do, and do not consent to it, or approve of it.”

Thereupon, Hassan the merchant laughed, and went forth to his warehouse, where he opened the jar, and found that the olives were spoiled. In the hope that some better ones might be found under the rest, he emptied the jar into the dish, and, to his great surprise, saw a heap of gold pieces fall out. As Hassan was of a sordid disposition, he greedily seized on the money, put the olives again in the jar, and, having deposited the treasure in a secret place, he quitted the warehouse.

“O wife,” said he, returning to her, “thou wast in the right. The olives are naught, and I have tied down the jar again, that, should Ali Cogia return, he may not perceive I have opened it.” “Thou haft done prudently,” said his wife, “and it would have been yet better hadst thou abstained from meddling with the jar.”

Hassan lay awake nearly all the night, deviling how to employ the thousand pieces to the best advantage, and how to answer Ali Cogia, should he ever return. The next morning, very early, he went out to buy olives of that year’s growth, as

the jar was nearly empty, now that the gold was withdrawn. He threw away the old olives; then, quite filling the jar with those that were fresh, he tied it down again, and set it in its place.

About a month after this, Ali Cogia returned to Bagdad, and engaged a lodging at a khan, till he could procure himself a house. The next day, he visited Hassan, who appeared rejoiced as well as surprised to see him again. After talking for some time about his travels, Ali Cogia requested of him that he would give him the jar of olives he had left in his charge. "Brother," said Hassan, "I have never thought of it from that day to this. Behold it on the shelf where it was placed by thine own hands. As thou didst leave it, so thou findest it."

Thereupon, Ali Cogia gave him thanks, and took down the jar, and carried it home to his khan. Having shut the door of his lodging, he took a dish, and poured the contents of the jar into it. He found no gold, nor aught besides olives. On this he became stupid with astonishment; and raising his eyes and his hands to heaven, "Is it possible," said he, "that the man I have trusted, can be treacherous and dishonest?"

Then he returned with haste to Hassan and said, "O Hassan, in the jar of olives I gave thee to keep, there were a thousand pieces of gold; and now I have emptied the jar, and behold, they are not there!"

Then said Hassan, "O friend! what know I about any thousand pieces of gold? Didst thou shew them to me? or tell me of them? or did I require the charge of thy jar? Did I not give thee the key of my warehouse, and bid thee set the jar where thou wouldest, and didst thou not this morning find it in the same place, where it had stood in the dust these seven years? Thou saidst it contained olives, and I concluded it contained olives. Any way, as thou didst leave it, so didst thou find it." Then said Ali Cogia, "O Hassan! I have not found it as I left it; and if thou wilt not tell me, between thee and me, what has become of the gold, I shall reluctantly be compelled to have thee examined by a magistrate, for the money is more than I can afford to lose. Confess, then, thou hast it by thee, O my brother."

But Hassan answered and said, "I have it not, and have nothing to confess. What! is a man to leave olives in my charge, and then, at the end of many years, to declare that the jar contained not olives, but money? Away from me, O man! I am surprised thou didst not say there were ten thousand pieces, while thou art about it. Draw not a crowd about my door by thine expostulations."

For it befell that persons passing the house were stopping to learn why wrathful words were passing between the two merchants; and some of the neighbours, being drawn to their doors, came forth, and interfered, and endeavoured to mediate between them. Finding that neither would yield unto the other, they said, "Refer the matter to the *cadi*!" So to the *cadi* they went, accompanied by much people.

Ali Cogia having accused Hassan the merchant of stealing the thousand pieces of gold which were in the jar of olives, the *cadi* asked him whether he had

any witnesses. Thereupon Ali Cogia replied that indeed he had not taken the precaution to have any, because that he had trusted wholly unto the honour of his friend.

Thereupon the cadì desired Hassan to make his defence; and he, having declared that he had neither taken the gold, nor so much as opened the jar, offered to make oath to the same effect. The cadì accepted the oath, and dismissed him as innocent.

Then was Ali Cogia exceedingly indignant at this judgment, and said he would appeal to the caliph; but the cadì heeded not his threat, considering that he had done justice in acquitting a man whose accuser had no witnesses to bring against him. For, is not one man's word as good as another's, till it be proven otherwise? Only their own hearts knew the matter.

Now, while Hassan was glorying in his acquittal, Ali Cogia was drawing up a statement of the case in a petition to the caliph, which he presented to one of his officers when the caliph returned from the mosque. When Haroun Alraschid reached his palace, the officer presented to him the petition, which he read, and deliberated on; after which he commanded that Ali Cogia should appear before him the following morning; and that Hassan should be cited to appear before him at the same time.

On the evening of the same day, the caliph, attended by Gaifar and Mesrour, went in disguise through the city. In passing through a certain by-street, he heard a great clamour of children's voices in a court-yard; and, looking in, perceived a dozen or more boys at play. Then said the caliph to his vizier in a low voice, "Gaifar! thou and I once played together, even as those boys! Let us wait awhile and watch them, for they please me." So they stood in the shadow of the gateway, where was a stone bench, whereon the caliph presently seated himself; and they remained looking at the little boys playing in the moonlight.

One of the children presently said, "Let us play at the cadì! I am the cadì; do you, O playmates, bring before me Ali Cogia, and the merchant who stole his thousand pieces of gold."

Then whispered the caliph to Gaifar, "We shall have some rare sport; I am about to receive a lesson in judgment;" and he stroked his beard, and smiled.

The boy-cadì, having taken his seat with great pomp and gravity, another boy, as his officer, presented two others to him, one of whom he called Ali Cogia, and the other Hassan.

Then the boy-cadì spoke and said, "O Ali Cogia! wherefore comest thou before me, and what is thy complaint?" Then the boy Ali Cogia bent low before the cadì and related his case. After this, the boy-cadì desired the boy Hassan to shew why he had not returned the jar of olives as he found it. Then the boy Hassan averred that he had verily done so; no one had intermeddled with it; as he was ready to make oath.

Thereupon, Haroun the caliph jogged the elbow of Gaifar, to bid him attend to what should follow. "Not so fast, O Hassan," said the boy-cadi. "Before we proceed to swearing, I desire to see and to taste these same olives. O Ali Cogia, hast thou brought the jar with thee?"

Then the boy Ali Cogia replied that he had not; whereon he was desired to fetch it, which he made as though he did, without delay. Not to omit any formality, the boy-cadi then said, "O Hassan, dost thou admit that to be the jar?" "Yes," said Hassan, "I do." "Open it, then," said the boy-cadi to Ali Cogia, who immediately feigned to do so, and to offer it to the cadi. Then said the boy-cadi, feigning to look into the jar, "These " are indeed olives, and the jar is quite full, which appears as though none could have been taken out." Then he made as though he tasted them, and said, "Verily, they are excellent, but somewhat too fresh to have been in this jar seven years. Go, summon some olive merchants; we must have their opinion."

Then two boys came forward, who said they were olive merchants. "Tell me, O olive merchants!" said the boy-cadi, "how long can olives that are preserved in this manner be kept undecayed and fit to eat?"

"O cadi!" said the first merchant, "whatever care may be taken to preserve them, they are naught after the third year: they lose both their flavour and colour, and are fit only to be cast away."

"Taste me these olives," says the boy-cadi; "how long have they been kept?"

"O cadi!" said the olive merchants, after pretending to taste them, "they are fresh, and of the present year."

"Ye are mistaken," said the boy-cadi, "for they have been kept in this jar for seven years." The merchants looked at one another derisively, and said that the thing was impossible, and not to be believed. "Besides," said they, "the olives would have shrunken, whereas this jar is quite full. We can declare to thee, O cadi, that these olives are of this year's growth, and our testimony will be supported by that of every olive merchant in Bagdad."

Then the boy Hassan was about to interrupt the merchants, but the boy-cadi exclaimed, "Silence! there is no appeal from such testimony as this. Hassan, thou art a thief, and shalt be hanged!"

"Good!" then ejaculated the caliph, whose voice was unheard in the acclamations of the boys. "O Gaifar!" said he, rising from his Seat, and quitting the gateway, "What thinkest thou of the judgment of this boy?"

"Verily, I am surprised at his wisdom and acuteness," replied Gaifar; "which exceed what we are accustomed to find at so early an age."

"Note well the house wherein this young boy lives," said the caliph, "and bring him to me to-morrow, that he may judge the cause of the real Ali Cogia. Require the cadi, also, who acquitted Hassan, to be present, that he may learn sagacity from this child, and correct his own deficiencies. Like wise desire Ali

Cogia to bring his jar of olives with him; let Hassan be cited to appear, and let a couple of olive merchants be in attendance."

On the morrow, therefore, Gaifar repaired to the house where the young boy dwelt, and accosted his mother, and said, "How many children hast thou?" She, perceiving him to be a man of consideration, replied reverently, "Thy servant has three." "Go, fetch them hither," says Gaifar. She went, and presently returned with three young boys. Then said Gaifar, "Which of you three lads played the *cadi* last night?" The elder of them, changing colour, stepped forward and said, "It was I." "Come with me, then," said Gaifar, "to the Prince of the Faithful."

Then the mother trembled greatly, and said, "O my lord! has my boy been guilty of any fault, that he is to be taken to the caliph? and will he return to me no more?" "Fear not," said Gaifar, "he shall return to thee in about the space of an hour, and then thou shalt know, with pleasure, on what account he has been sent for." "Suffer me, at least, to warn his face and change his garment, that he may more fitly appear before the caliph," said his mother; to which Gaifar readily consented. Then he conducted the young lad to Haroun Alraschid.

The caliph, seeing the boy tremble a little, said to him kindly, "Fear nothing! Rememberest thou playing the *cadi* overnight? I was by; and saw and heard thee, though thou sawest me not, and I approved thy judgment." Then the boy raised his eyes, and looked earnestly at the caliph, and his fear departed.

Then the parties concerned in the cause were admitted, and each, as his name was named, touched the ground before the throne with his forehead. Then the caliph said unto them, "Let each plead his cause; this child will hear and give judgment; and if it needs amendment, I will supply it." Then Ali Cogia brought forward his accusation, and Hassan answered it; offering, as before, to make oath of his truth and honesty. Hereupon, the young boy interposed, saying it was not yet time, for that the jar of olives must first be examined. Then, to Hassan's surprise and uneasiness, Ali Cogia immediately produced the jar, placed it at the caliph's feet, and uncovered it. The caliph tasted one of the olives, and found it good and fresh. Then some skilful olive merchants were called forward, and desired to examine the olives, and pronounce their opinion of them. The olive merchants, after trying them, pronounced them to be undoubtedly of that tear's growth. The young boy told them that Hassan professed them to be the olives which Ali Cogia had given him in charge seven years before; but they averred it was impossible that the olives could be the same.

Then Hassan the merchant stood pale and trembling before the judgment-seat, without a word to proffer. But the boy, after musing in his mind, looked up into the face of the caliph, and blushed. "O Prince of the Faithful!" said he, "this is no child's game, but a matter of life and death: I gave judgment but in play; thou must give judgment in earnest."

Then the caliph with solemnity pronounced sentence of death on the fraudulent merchant; who, as he was led away to execution, confessed, with great

shame and sorrow, where he had secreted the thousand pieces of gold. Thereupon, they were restored to Ali Cogia; and the caliph embraced the young boy, and sent him home, with an hundred pieces of gold, to his mother.



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