

The Adventures of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid

VIII.

Of the Trick played by the caliph on Abon Hassan. And of the Trick played by Abon Hassan on the caliph.

After these things, Bagdad continued to increase in greatness and glory; and the fame of the caliph drew to it learned and enlightened men from all quarters, all of whom he munificently rewarded. Moreover, he caused some of them to translate the best Latin and Greek authors in Arabic, that their wisdom and eloquence might be dispersed over his whole empire; and also he made the Iliad and Odyssey to be studied by the court poets: but they appreciated them not.

It happened one evening that, Gaifar the Barmecide having been employed by him in some special transactions, the caliph went forth in disguise, attended only by a slave named Musa, to see how it fared with his people. As he was returning across the Bridge of Boats, a man in the prime of life, handsome and well attired, accosted him, and said, "O stranger, hast thou any desire for a supper and night's lodging?" "I am willing to be thy guest," said the caliph. "Follow me, then," said the other, who immediately led the way through several streets till he entered a house which appeared that of a rich merchant. Having passed through the courtyard, and entered a saloon, he placed the caliph on a couch, and sat beside him, and slaves brought them water for their hands, after which a feast was spread, and the host helped his guest to the best morsels. Then said the caliph, "O friend! who art thou? and why am I indebted to thee for this kindness?" "O stranger," replied the other, "I am a merchant, named Abon Hassan, and I have sworn an oath never henceforth to entertain more than one guest at a time, nor to receive him or to speak to him again after having entertained him one night." "Verily," said the caliph, "this is a singular resolution. What has induced thee to adopt it?"

Abon Hassan replied with a sigh, "My father, who was a rich merchant, died and left me heir to all his wealth, which I immediately divided into two equal parts, one of which I set aside, the other I resolved to spend freely. After enjoying myself and entertaining my friends till it was all gone, I repaired to them one after another, and said, 'Behold me now reduced to poverty! Bestow somewhat on me, I pray thee, that shall contribute to my necessities without impoverishing thyself.' But they one and all refused me. Then returned I to my mother, and told her what

had happened. Then replied she, 'O son! thus are the men of this age; as long as thou hast anything, they share it with thee; and when it is gone, they cast thee off.' Then she wept, and I said, 'Cheer up, my mother; Half my fortune is secretly reserved; however, not one of those who helped to devour the first half of it shall taste of this; nor will I ever henceforth entertain more than one guest, nor for longer than a single night.'" Then the caliph laughed and said, "Verily thou hast had cause."

So they feasted and conversed, and made good company for one another, till the caliph at length thought, "I will see now what is in this man's heart." So he said, "Is there any service thou wouldst have performed, or any desire thou wouldst have accomplished?" "Truly," said Abon Hassan, "there is one thing I should be glad to see accomplished; for in this neighbourhood there is a mosque, to which belong an imaum and four sheikhs; and these absurd and disagreeable old men cite me before the cadì and impose fines on me, whenever they hear the least sound of music or cheerfulness within my house. Were they in my power, they should each get a hundred good lashes, and that would be my desire accomplished!"

"May thy wish be gratified!" said the caliph; and at the same moment, unperceived, he put a lozenge containing a strong narcotic into Abon Hassan's cup. Abon Hassan presently drank of the cup, and was almost immediately overcome by profound sleep. Then the caliph, quietly summoning his own slave, bade him procure a mule, and place Abon Hassan upon it, and convey him to the palace.

When they reached the palace, the caliph said unto his attendants, "Behold now this man who lies insensible; place him on the royal couch, and when, in the morning, his drowsiness shall have departed from him, salute him and obey him in all respects as though he were the caliph, and whatsoever he commandeth you, fulfil it." Likewise, so said he to his female slaves; after which, he entered a private alcove, and, having let fall a curtain over the entrance, slept.

Now, the next morning, when Abon Hassan awoke, he found himself upon the royal couch, with the attendants standing around; and a female slave said unto him, "O my lord, it is time for morning prayer." On this he opened his eyes very wide in amazement, and then rubbed them violently, believing himself yet dreaming: then, looking about him, he perceived himself in a pavilion adorned with gold and ultramarine, and festooned with hangings of silk; and rich carpets and vessels of gold and of crystal on every side. Then said he to himself hastily, "Verily I am yet dreaming, or else this is paradise." And he bit his finger, to ascertain whether he were awake, and when he felt the pain, he cried, "Ah!" and made a wry face. Then, accosting the slave who had already spoken to him, he said, "Come hither." She replied, "At thy service, O Prince of the Faithful!" Said he, "What is thy name?" She made answer, "Cluster of Pearls." Then said he, "Knowest thou who I am, and where I am?" She replied, "Undoubtedly, my lord,

thou art Prince of the Faithful, sitting upon thy royal couch, in thy palace." Then rejoined Abon Hassan, "This passes understanding, it seems to me the work of enchantment, and that I am bereft of reason." Then, turning to the other attendants, he cried, "Who am I?" They replied, bowing down to the ground, "The Prince of the Faithful." Then cried he, "You lie, one and all, for I am Abon Hassan, the merchant, and I suspect the guest I entertained overnight hath bewitched me!"

All this while, the caliph was narrowly observing him from his place of concealment, and laughing in his heart. The slaves now brought Abon Hassan a pair of shoes of gold stuff, embroidered with precious stones; which, when he had attentively examined, he put into his sleeve. "O my lord," said one of the slaves, "the shoes are for walking." "I know it," replied he with assumed carelessness, "I only feared they might be soiled." So he withdrew them from his sleeve, and put them on his feet. Then they brought a bairn of gold, and an ewer of silver, and poured water on his hands; after which they spread him a prayer carpet. He said his prayers mechanically, repeating within himself, "All this is the work of enchantment!"

While he was in this state, a Mamlouk addressed him and said, "O Prince of the Faithful! the chamberlain is at the door, requesting permission to enter." "Let him enter, then," said Abon Hassan. The chamberlain, therefore, entered, followed by many officers of the court; all of whom, according to the commands they had received, made their usual obeisances. When the chief judge drew near, Abon Hassan exclaimed, "O judge! I have a word to speak unto thee!" The Judge replied, "At thy service, O Prince of the Faithful!" "Repair immediately," said Abon Hassan, "to such a street, and give a hundred pieces of gold to the mother of Abon Hassan the merchant, with my salutation; then take the imaum and the four sheikhs of the adjoining mosque, and inflict on each of them a hundred lashes; after which, thou shalt parade them through the streets mounted on mules, with their faces to the tails, and proclaim before them, 'This is the recompense of those who annoy their neighbours, and molest them with impertinent investigations.'"

The judge said, "I hear and obey." Then Abon Hassan dismissed all the state officers; and turning to a slave, said, "I am hungry, and desire to eat." Immediately the attendant took him reverently by the hand, and conducted him into another apartment, where a table was spread with rich viands. Ten slave-girls stood behind him to wait; and Abon Hassan while he was eating said unto one of them, "What is thy name?" She replied, "Branch of Willow" "Tell me, Branch of Willow," said he, "who am I?" "The Prince of the Faithful," replied the slave. "What a lie!" muttered he to himself. "These girls are without doubt all laughing at me." Then, musing within his mind, he considered, "There is nothing too wonderful for the unseen powers to effect. Doubtless the person I entertained last night, was no other than King of the Genii; who has taken this method of requiting my kindness unto him. I will enjoy myself while the freak lasts." So he ate and drank, and discoursed gaily with the damsels; one of whom at length, instructed by the

caliph, dropped a narcotic lozenge into his cup; the quick effect of which was, to reduce him to as entire a state of insensibility as that wherein he had been brought into the palace; and while he was still in his torpor, the caliph commanded that he should be carried unto his home, and laid on his own bed.

Now, when Abon Hassan recovered from his insensibility, which was not till towards midnight, he found himself in the dark. He called out, "Cluster of Pearls!" but no one answered him. Then, rousing himself up, he called loudly for Branch of Willow, and all the other damsels whose names had become familiar to him. His mother hearing him thus bawling, arose and went to him, and said, "What aileth thee, O my son?"

To this, he roughly replied, "Who art thou, ill-omened old woman, who thus addressest the Prince of the Faithful? Know thine own place, and keep it!" "My son," then said she, "thou art under the influence of some evil dream. Come, arouse thy self, and thou shalt hear the good news of something that happened to me yesterday in thine absence. What thinkest thou? The caliph sent me a hundred pieces of gold! Moreover, he caused the imaum and the sheikhs whom thou hatest, to be beaten and paraded ridiculously through the city." "O woman!" cried Abon Hassan, "it was I who gave orders for those things to be done, in my capacity of Prince of the Faithful!"

His mother here began to make with laughter; on which he, getting out of bed in a rage, seized an almond-stick and violently struck her. She, shrieking with pain, soon drew the household about her, and they beheld him desist from time to time, crying furiously, "Say now, O woman, am I the caliph, or am I not?" on which he vehemently cried, "Thou art not," and then he fell to beating her again.

His servants, beholding him act thus to their mistress, said, "Verily our master hath become mad." Wherefore they laid hold upon him and bound him with cords. Then they summoned a physician, who directed that Abon Hassan should be carried to a mad-house. Herein he continued ten days, chained to the wall; at the end of which time, his mother came unto him to visit him.

"O my son, how fares it with thee?" saith she, "art thou still Prince of the Faithful?" "How can I be otherwise?" replied he. "How canst thou do otherwise than doubt it," rejoined his mother, "considering thy present predicament? Is it likely thou wouldest be thus in bonds, if thou wert indeed Prince of the Faithful?" "It must have been all a dream then, I suppose," said he reluctantly, "but verily I appeared unto myself to be caliph." "Ah, my son," said she, "the powers of darkness are able to effect even stranger delusions than this. Come home with me now, I pray thee, and behave like a reasonable man." "I will do so," replied he. Whereupon, they released him from his bonds, conducted him to the bath, clothed him, and gave him food.

Having returned home, he led a quiet Life for some time, falling into great fits of silence; but at length he wearied of this, and of the continual attempt to

penetrate mysteries that would not be unravelled; wherefore, to find relief, he returned to his old post on the bridge, to look out for a chance guest.

He had not long waited, when lo! he beheld the caliph himself drawing nigh, in the garb of a merchant. Immediately recognising him for his old guest, he plucked him by the sleeve, and said, "A friendly greeting to thee, O King of the Genii!" "What have I done unto thee?" said the caliph. "What couldst thou do that thou hast not done?" retorted Abon Hassan. "I took thee home and fed thee with my best, and in return for this, thou bewitchedst me, and made me suppose myself what I was not; and causedst that I should be cast into a mad-house, chained to the wall, and beaten with a leathern thong, thou evil one!" The caliph laughed and said, "O my brother! when I left thee that night, I inadvertently left thy door open; and doubtless some evil spirit entered in and effected all this mischief." "Come home with me, then, and sup with me again," said Abon Hassan, "though it is contrary to my rule; but promise me not to leave the door open again." "I promise," said the caliph. Whereon Abon Hassan took him home and feasted him as before, saying, "Certainly I know not why I should make an exception to my rule in thy behalf; but there is something in thy company which delighteth me."

As they sate at meat, Abon Hassan could not refrain from relating with great earnestness and minuteness all that had befallen him; to which the caliph gave ear with lively attention, drawing him on from one thing to another by his questions. In conclusion he said, "O my Brother! think no more about this. It was only the delusion of a dream." And, as he spoke, he dropped a narcotic lozenge into Abon Hassan's cup. "A dream! I can never believe it," said Abon Hassan; and raising his dup as he spoke, he quaffed deeply of its contents, and almost instantly became insensible. The caliph immediately arose, went forth, and summoned his young men, who, at his command, took up Abon Hassan in their arms, conveyed him to the palace, and placed him on the royal couch as before. The caliph then desired a slave-girl to strike a few chords on her Lute, close to the couch, while the other slaves accompanied her on various instruments a little farther off.

Abon Hassan awakened by the sound of lutes, tambourines, and flutes, cried out, "O my mother! what new surprise is this?" The slave-girls said, "What are thy commands, O Prince of the Faithful?" "Wonderful, most wonderful!" exclaimed he, "Am I again dreaming? or have I been dreaming till now? Which is the dream, and which is the truth? Who are these all about me? Unquestionably they must be spirits . . . Come hither, slave! and bite my ear!" A mamlouk approached and bit him pretty hard. "Ha!" cried he, "thou art no spirit! Hold, hold, I say! or thy teeth will meet together!"

Hereupon the caliph, unable to contain himself any longer, issued from his concealment, exclaiming, "O Abon Hassan! thou wilt make me exhaust myself with laughter!" Abon Hassan, recognising his voice and his countenance, and

seeing all the slaves fall back before him, became aware that he beheld the real caliph, who had made merry with him, and, making obeisance before him, kissed the ground and prayed for his long life. Then the caliph spoke pleasantly to him, and gave him a rich dress and a thousand pieces of gold, and said, "What more shall I give unto thee?"

"O caliph," said Abon Hassan, "there is nothing that my soul more covets than to have perpetual access to thy presence, and look upon thy glory." "Be it so, then," said the caliph; and from that time forth Abon Hassan was continually in the palace and in the presence of the caliph and of his wife the Lady Zobeide, the daughter of Kajim. And in course of time, Zobeide said unto the caliph, "It were well that we bestowed one of my handmaidens upon Abon Hassan in marriage." Therefore he was espoused to the favourite slave of Zobeide, named Nouzatoulsuad.

They led a delightful life together, till all their money was expended; and then Abon Hassan said to his wife, "O Nouzatoulsuad! our funds are exhausted and must needs be replenished; how shall we manage?" "I know not," said Nouzatoulsuad. "Listen to me, then," said Abon Hassan, "and for the trick which the caliph played aforetime upon me, I will now play a trick upon him." "How wilt thou proceed?" said Nouzatoulsuad. "In this manner," said Abon Hassan. "We will feign ourselves dead. I will die before thee, and lay myself out: then thou shalt spread over me a Coverlet of Silk, and unfold my turban over me, and tie my toes together, and put upon my stomach a knife and a little salt; and then thou shalt go, loudly wailing, to the Lady Zobeide, and tell her I am dead; whereupon she will give thee a piece of Silk and a hundred pieces of gold for my burial. Then, when thou returnest, thou and I will change places, and thou shalt feign to be dead, and I will go and lament thee in the ears of the caliph, and I likewise shall obtain from him a piece of Silk and a hundred gold pieces." "O my husband!" cried Nouzatoulsuad, laughing, "thy device is excellent; there is no end of thy merry conceits. Lose no time in stretching thyself out, and I will act according to thy instructions."

So, having followed all his directions, she dishevelled her hair, and went, beating her breast and making loud lamentations, to the Lady Zobeide. When Zobeide beheld her in this condition, she said, "What is this state in which I see thee, and what evil hath befallen?" Then said Nouzatoulsuad, "O my mistress! may thy life long exceed in length the life of my unhappy husband, Abon Hassan! How short is all earthly felicity!" and then sobbed and bemoaned herself, to the great trouble of Zobeide and of all her attendants, who cried, "Alas for the poor Abon Hassan!" Then said Zobeide to her treasurer, "Go, give Nouzatoulsuad a piece of silk, and an hundred pieces of gold for the burial. Depart, O Nouzatoulsuad, and let not thy grief be immoderate. Know we not all, that death is the terminator of delights, and separator of companions?" Then Nouzatoulsuad departed, full of secret rejoicing, and she returned to her husband with the gold and the silk, and

cried, "Arise, O my Love! and make merry, for thy stratagem hath succeeded!" So he sprang up, and danced about the room, and sang, and rejoiced; and then he said to his wife, "Now it is thy turn!"

Thereupon he did unto her as she had done unto him; and having left her stretched for dead, he repaired to the caliph, tearing his beard and turban, and smiting himself violently on the breast. Then said the caliph, "What aileth thee, O Abon Hassan? Why is thy face smeared with weeping?" Then said Abon Hassan, "May thy days, O caliph, far exceed the days of Nouzatoulsuad!" and appeared unable to say more, on account of his being choked with grief. Then said the caliph, "Be comforted, O friend! there is one lot appointed for all. I will give thee another wife; and as for her whom thou hast lost, my treasurer shall give thee a piece of silk and a hundred pieces of gold to defray the charges of her burial." Abon Hassan, therefore, with many groans and sighs, received what the treasurer was commanded to give him; and, returning home, began to dance and to sing as before, saying, "O my Life! I have requited the caliph! with his own coin have I repaid him!" Then he jumped up and began to laugh and rejoice, and they conversed together and made merry.

Meanwhile, the caliph repaired to the Lady Zobeide, attended by Mesrour, and, seeing her plunged in thought, he said, "May thy life be extended long beyond the life of thy slave-girl Nouzatoulsuad!" "O my lord!" cried Zobeide, "no harm has befallen my slave; it is her husband, Abon Hassan, who is dead!" "Abon Hassan was with me but this moment," returned the caliph, "making lamentation for his wife; it is she, and not he, who is deceased." "Thou art jesting with me, O my lord," said Zobeide, "unless my slave-girl hath died but quite suddenly. Even in that case, Abon Hassan cannot be alive." "I gave him a hundred pieces of gold, and a piece of silk, for the burial," said the caliph. "I gave her a hundred pieces of gold and a piece of silk for the same purpose," said Zobeide. The caliph then began to laugh, and said, "None is dead but Nouzatoulsuad." Zobeide became angry, and said, "None is dead but Abon Hassan"

At length, the caliph, becoming impatient, said to Mesrour, "Repair immediately to the house of Abon Hassan, and see which of the two is dead." Mesrour said, "I hear and obey." As soon as he had gone forth, the caliph said to Zobeide, "Come, let us lay a wager. I will stake my Garden of Delight against thy Pavilion of Pictures, that Nouzatoulsuad is dead." "I agree to it," said Zobeide; and they sat at opposite ends of the sofa, awaiting Mesrour's return.

Now, when Abon Hassan, who was reclining against a window, saw Mesrour hastily approaching, he cried to Nouzatoulsuad, "O my Love, compose thyself quickly under thy shroud; for here comes a messenger from the caliph, doubtless to ascertain which of us is dead."

Nouzatoulsuad had scarcely laid herself out, when Mesrour entered; and, beholding Abon Hassan bending over her in a posture of grief, he exclaimed, "How speedy is the stroke of fate! Great is thy loss, O Abon Hassan; but deplore not too

bitterly that which is irreversible." Then, returning to the palace, he said to the caliph, "O my lord! Abon Hassan is in excellent health, though plunged in grief, it is Nouzatoulsuad who is dead. I have seen her laid out." "Said I not so, O Zobeide?" said the caliph, "thou hast lost thy pavilion by thy play." Zobeide pouted and replied, "Who would believe the word of a slave?" Then the caliph laughed, and Mesrour was enraged; and said in a low voice, "He spake truth who said that women are deficient in sense and proper confidence."

Then said Zobeide, "I am mocked at by thee and thy slave. I shall send one of my own women, on whom I can depend, to ascertain the truth." "Do so," replied the caliph, still laughing. Then she called an old woman and said, "Repair quickly to the house of Nouzatoulsuad, and see whether she or her husband be dead; and return with speed."

The old woman hastily departed; and Abon Hassan, who was still at his window, cried out, "O my soul! an old woman is running hither, doubtless sent by the Lady Zobeide, wherefore it seemeth that I had better appear to be dead." Then he laid himself along, and his wife covered him up, and began to weep and bewail as the old woman entered. She, beholding her distress, cried, "Alas, my daughter, what sorrow is thine! Verily, life is full of tribulation." "Oh, how good he was!" cries Nouzatoulsuad, tearing her hair. "Doubtless," then said the old woman, "thou hadst become habituated to him, and he had become habituated to thee. Console thyself, however, my daughter; for the same event must happen to us all, soon or late."

Then she drew the cloth down a little from his face, and beheld it swathed and swollen. Hastily covering him up again, she gave a little shudder, and said, "Heaven comfort thee, my daughter!" and returned to the palace, where, with great garrulity, she recounted what she had seen. "Hear her, hear her!" cried Zobeide to the caliph, who knew not what to believe. At length he exclaimed, "There is no resource but in satisfying our own eyes. Let us all four go to the house together." So they set forth on foot, through the garden of the palace, the gate of which was but little removed from the gate of Abon Hassan's house; and Mesrour and the old woman reviled each other all the way.

Abon Hassan, still looking forth, exclaimed, "O my wife! here come the caliph and the Lady Zobeide, and Mesrour and the old woman! We must both of us be dead!" So they stretched themselves out.

When the caliph and Zobeide entered, they were amazed to behold two corpses lying side by side. "Alas," said the caliph, "how melancholy a sight! One has died of grief for the loss of the other." "That may be, O my lord," said Zobeide, sighing deeply, but I am convinced that my slave died last." "Do not disturb me with thine assertions on that matter," said the caliph; "for Abon Hassan came to me immediately after her death; and it appears that her loss was insupportable to him." The Lady Zobeide would not concede this, and she seated herself in a

melancholy posture beside Nouzatoulsuad, while the caliph sate down beside Abon Hassan.

“By the tombs of my ancestors,” at length cried the caliph, “I would give a thousand pieces of gold to be certified which of these two died first!” “Prince of the Faithful,” cried Abon Hassan, starting up, “I died first! Give me the thousand pieces!”

Thereupon the Lady Zobeide gave a shriek of surprise, and the caliph started back. At the same Instant, Nouzatoulsuad arose likewise, and cast herself at the feet of her mistress, who, recovering from her surprise, embraced her with affection, and then chid her for her deception. The caliph likewise chid Abon Hassan, and demanded an explanation.

“O caliph,” said Abon Hassan, “we had spent all our ready money, and I was ashamed to ask thee for more; wherefore I devised this method of obtaining somewhat of thee, till something better should occur. Before thou gavest me a wife, I was not covetous of money, but the expenses of women are endless. Moreover, I owed thee a grudge for having formerly caused me to be cast into the madhouse; but now we are quits, and I pray thee, give me the thousand pieces of gold, for they are fairly mine.” Then the caliph laughed; and said, “I would have given thee enough and to spare, without all this subterfuge. Receive thy thousand pieces, and henceforth look for a regular salary, and live in happiness with thy wife as long as life lasts.”

[Previous](#)



[Home](#)



[Next](#)

Prepared for www.wollamshram.ca/1001/Manning/am_main.htm

© 2011 (110115)