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The Further Adventures of Ali Baba

By ALLAN GOVAN

What happened after the death of the forty thieves is entertainingly told in this story

HAVE you ever felt that some of the stories in *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* leave you wondering? The Arabian story-teller has a habit of stating that his hero and heroine "continued in joy and happiness until they were visited by the Terminator of Delights and the Separator of Companions." Haven't you sometimes been conscious of the tiniest shadow of doubt about the joy and happiness?

For instance, the story of Ali Baba and the forty robbers!

The naïve writer of that story says that Ali married his deceased brother Cassim's widow and promised her that his other wife should not be jealous. One doesn't feel that that promise was worth a great deal. And it didn't seem to occur to Ali that the things in the robbers' cave were stolen property. Did he report the find to the police? He did not. He piously thanked Allah for his good fortune, and proceeded to convert the stolen goods to his own use—a course of action which was sure to lead to trouble sooner or later.

There were forty robbers. Is it reasonable to suppose that the whole forty were bachelors? It isn't. They had wives and families somewhere, who were not going to have boiling oil poured over their husbands and fathers without doing something about it.

Another point: throughout the story Ali Baba isn't particularly bright. It is his slave, Morgiana, who does all the clever things. In fact, the story leaves one with

the impression of a weakish man who would be almost certain to make a mess of things after Morgiana married Ali's son Hasan and was no longer at her father-in-law's elbow to do his thinking for him.

The present writer has consulted various ancient manuscripts preserved in the museums at Baghdad, Cairo and Teheran, and these manuscripts go to show that Ali Baba did *not* live happily ever after.

Ali Baba's first trouble, as could be supposed, resulted from his taking over Cassim's widow.

When Fatimeh, his other wife, heard of the proposal, she told Ali quite plainly: "If you think, Ali Baba, that I'm going to take kindly to sharing this house with Cassim's flat-faced wife and her two imbeciles of sons, then you're up a gum-tree;" and about a month after Ali's second marriage rites had been solemnized Ali's life was such a burden to him that he had begun to think that the Terminator of Delights and the Separator of Companions was taking a deuced long time in coming his way.

THE chief bone of contention between the two wives was as to which of the families should have the secret of the cave (a secret which Ali had had the good sense to keep to himself so far). Life, in those days, was even more precarious than in these; and the wives lived in constant dread that something would happen to Ali before he had passed the secret on.

Khatoon, Ali's new wife, became at



"He demonstrated to tourists how the door opened and closed magically."

last convinced that the chance of Ali imparting the secret to one of her sons was a poor chance, so she decided to resort to strategy. She had heard from Ali how he had been hiding in a tree near the mouth of the robbers' cave when he learned the magic word that caused the door to open and shut.

So, next time Ali went to the cave to replenish the family cupboard, Khatoon followed him at a safe distance, waited until he had entered the cave, then climbed the tree.

Presently Ali appeared with several pouches stuffed full of pearls and rubies and other odds and ends. He had already opened his mouth to say "Shut, Sesame!" when there was a slight noise behind him. Ali swung round . . . and his eyes lighted on a woman's red leather slipper lying at the foot of the tree!

Three wild springs and a downward swoop, and he had the slipper in his hand. One glance at it told him all he needed to know.

"So ho, serpent!" he yelled. "So this is

how you repay me for marrying you and making my life one great longing for the comparative quiet of Paradise! Come down, scorpion, or by the beard of Suleyman the son of Daood (on both of whom be peace!) I'll——"

Khatoon came down—and the branch of the tree as well, right on Ali's head.

Ali was the first to recover. Tearing off his own slipper, which had a thicker sole than Khatoon's, he administered such chastisement as made Khatoon yowl for mercy.

"If you ever follow me again, she-adder," roared Ali, "I'll——" and the flourish of his slipper was more effective than words.

Having done what he considered to be his duty by his erring wife, Ali took his ax and cut down the tree so that nobody else should try the same trick on him. Then, sending Khatoon to a safe distance, he said: "Shut, Sesame!" after which he drove Khatoon home in front of him afoot while he himself bestrode his ass.

AFTER her adventure Khatoon was able to console herself with the thought that she had at least discovered where the cave was. Unfortunately there wasn't another scrap of cover where she could hide and hear the magic word. Yet Khatoon felt that there must be some way of learning the secret. She cogitated long and earnestly.

The result of Khatoon's cogitations was that she appeared one day before the cave of a local magician.

"Can you transform people into animals and things and then back again to their original shape?" Khatoon asked him.

The magician stroked his long white beard. "Provided it is made worth my while I——"

"What would your terms be for trans-

forming me into a raven, then back again to myself?" Khatoon inquired.

"Oh, I could do you a raven for—shall we say?—a hundred pieces of gold. . . . How would that suit you?"

"Inclusive terms, for both ways?" Khatoon asked.

"Prepaid," said the magician.

"Right-ho! I'll be along one day soon." Khatoon made for the door.

"My consulting-hours are the whole twenty-four," said the magician, and bowed her out.

Three days later Khatoon appeared again at the magician's cave, breathless with her haste.

"Quick," she said, "here are the hundred pieces of gold."

"If I remember rightly it was a raven that was called for——?"

"Yes, quick," said Khatoon. "No; wait a minute!" She held up her hand to stop him. "You're sure I'll be able to understand everything after I'm a raven?"

"It is only in the outward appearance that there is a change," the magician assured her; "you will still be your own charming self——"

"Good!" said Khatoon; "get busy and do your stuff."

The magician threw some powder into the brazier that stood in the middle of the cave. When the powder flared up he said certain magic words and waved his wand. . . .

A raven flew out through the door and made straight for the robbers' cave. . . .

WHEN Ali Baba arrived at the cave he looked about him cautiously. Within a hundred yards there wasn't as much cover as would have hidden a lizard. The only thing in sight was a raven, which stood with its head held to one side.

Ali Baba slid off his ass's back. "Open, Sesame!" he said, and strolled nonchalantly into the cave.

The raven gave one delighted croak, then made a bee-line for the abode of the magician.

Arrived at the magician's door, the raven walked smartly in . . . and gave one hoarse cry of dismay. For, lying stretched out on his bed was the magician . . . with his throat cut from ear to ear!

A glance round the cave made everything plain. While the magician was having his afternoon siesta some enterprising neighbor had crept in and slit the wonder-worker's throat before he got a chance to say any magic spells. That done, he had ransacked the place and carried off everything of intrinsic value.

Presently a certain raven had gone stark staring mad. In the hope of waking the magician it pecked at him furiously. But the magician had said his last spell, and was by now chucking the hours of Paradise under the chin.

"Oh, what shall I do, what *shall* I do?" wailed Khatoon, in a series of throaty croaks. "How can I ever explain to anybody that I'm not really a raven at all? If I had only had the sense to stipulate that I was automatically to return to my own form at sunset! What shall I do—oh, what *shall* I do?"

FOR three days the house of Ali Baba was bothered by a raven that would persist in coming inside.

"There's that durned raven again," cried Ali in exasperation on the third morning. "Have you forgotten how to throw stones?" he asked his youngest boy contemptuously. And almost in the same breath he said to Fatimeh, "Where *can* Khatoon have got to?"

"If you mention Khatoon to me again," said Fatimeh, "I'll yell. . . . Go and console yourself with one of your dancing-girls—you've got plenty of them in all conscience;" and Fatimeh stumped indignantly out of the harem.

It must reluctantly be confessed that Ali Baba *had* spent quite a bit on dancing-girls—but if a man has had a sudden accession of wealth he's got to spend it on something. Ali's name had, in fact, become so well known as a buyer that every morning there was a queue of slave-dealers lined up at his door wanting to show him some very special lines they had in stock.

Also—and it is with regret that this is confessed—contrary to the wise rules laid down by the Prophet, Ali had allowed himself to acquire a taste for the more expensive products of the grape industry. Fatimeh told him repeatedly: "A man with a brain like yours should stick to sharbet: one of these days when you're squiffed you'll give the whole show away and then the lot of us will be up before the Kadec."

But when Fatimeh spoke like that Ali merely smiled superiorly, clapped his hands, and told his slave to bring him "The same again!"

It was when Ahmad Kamakim, a wealthy merchant, called for supper that Fatimeh got really scared.

Ahmad was enjoying the supper, and was in the act of complimenting Ali, for the third time, on his taste in dancing-girls . . . when suddenly his words froze on his lips. His trembling forefinger stabbed the air in the direction of a golden bowl laden with fruit which a slave had just brought in.

"My bowl!" he shrieked wildly, and for a moment could make no other sound.

"Your what?" asked Ali peevishly.

"O Allah—my golden bowl!" Ahmad had struggled to his feet. He seized the bowl from the hands of the slave, tipped the fruit on to the floor, and began to turn the vessel over and over, handling it lovingly.

"Here! steady with those bananas and pomegranates!" Ali protested.

But Ahmad's bushy black brows had now come together threateningly. His red-dyed beard was bristling. "Where did you get this bowl?" he demanded sternly.

"Where did I——"

"——get this bowl?"

Ali knew perfectly well where he had got it—from the cave, like the other stuff. But he could hardly explain that to a comparative stranger.

"I bought it from a Jew," he lied.

"Where did the Jew get it?"

Ali raised protesting hands to high heaven. "Allah (whose name be exalted!) alone knows where Jews get things."

"Would it surprize you to learn"—said Ahmad accusingly—"that this bowl was stolen from me some years ago by a band of robbers that attacked my caravan?"

Ali shook his head. "After some of the things that have happened to myself, nothing would surprize me."

Ahmad looked round the apartment—a man can't quite suddenly become wealthy without exciting suspicion. "It would be interesting to know where quite a lot of the things in this house came from originally," he said.

"Very interesting," Ali agreed—he had often wondered about some of the things himself.

"Where is this Jew's shop?" asked Ahmad.

"Where is——" That was a poser. Suddenly Ali felt himself beginning to get all hot and uncomfortable inside. "He's—ah—he's gone away."

"Where to?"

"Eh—er—to Cairo." Ali realized that the sweat was now trickling down his nose.

"Funny thing!" said Ahmad.

"Very," Ali concurred, and bent his head while his slave Abdallah whispered

something in his ear. The something was an instruction from Fatimeh, who had been listening from behind the harem curtains, that if Ali wasn't an out-and-out jackass he would give Ahmad the bowl and so help to silence his wagging tongue.

Ali took the hint. He pulled himself together, and snorted indignantly. "May Et Taghoot get all robbers in the end and roast them for ever in Jahennem," he said piously. "Both them and all who traffic with them," he added just to make doubly sure. "Take the bowl, my friend, as a gift from me—there are plenty more where it—ahem!" said Ali when a loud warning sneeze came from behind the curtains.

"IT JUST so happened"—said Fatimeh on the following day when the whole position was being discussed at a family conference—"it just so happened that Ahmad Kamakim was murdered on his way home; so he will not be able to lay a complaint before the chief Kadee. But it was a near thing."

"My advice," said Morgiana, "is that we all clear off to Samarkand or somewhere with as much of the loot as we can conveniently take with us. We can arrive there as a rich Persian family and nobody will question us or recognize any of the stuff."

"Oh, shucks!" was Ali's only comment on that.

"I'm going to Samarkand, whether you all come or not," said Hasan—"I got a scheme for making money honestly."

"Huh! money-lending!" snorted Ali contemptuously.

"Better than money-lending. I got a scheme that——"

Fatimeh interrupted to ask Ali point-blank: "Are you or are you not going

with Hasan and Morgiana to Samarkand?"

"I'm not," said Ali, so definitely that that finished the discussion.

The upshot of the family council was that Ali woke up one morning, out of what he felt sure had been a drugged sleep, to find that Hasan and Morgiana and their family were gone, also Fatimeh and his own family, with the exception of Khatoon's boys—and every bit of gold plate and every jewel and all the money in the house had gone too, and were evidently by now on their way to Samarkand to form the capital for that honest scheme which Hasan had in mind.

"There is no strength nor power but in Allah!" wailed Ali, and he threw dust on his head and rent his robes—and cursed Morgiana, Hasan, Fatimeh and the rest of the family, jointly and severally.

WITH Morgiana and Hasan and Fatimeh and the rest of Ali Baba's family this account has nothing more to do, except to record that they founded the Samarkand branch of the Baba family. Hasan successfully carried out his intention. He originated and developed a lucrative trade in imitation Persian rugs, a trade in which his descendants are profitably engaged to this very day.

As for Ali Baba, he decided that he would start life all over again. What Hasan and the rest of them had taken from the house was a mere flea-bite compared to the wealth still lying at his disposal in the robbers' cave—enough to purchase all the wives and dancing-girls that the heart of man could desire. He took three asses and set off for the cave that very day.

After that very unfortunate experience with Khatoon, Ali had made a habit of reconnoitering carefully before crossing the open ground between the forest and

the cave. So, as usual, he left his asses well hidden and crept forward to the edge of the forest.

And the sight that met his eyes drew from Ali Baba a great groan of anguish; for there, right in front of the cave, were a score or more horsemen!

Even from that distance Ali could see that the horsemen were all mere youths. He understood. They were the sons of the forty robbers! Some old dotard had been able to give them a clue that had at last enabled them to find the cave!

The door of the cave was fast shut, but one of the horsemen was standing in front of it, bawling at the pitch of his voice.

Presently he stopped, and said something to another of the horsemen. What he said, Ali was too far away to hear, but it was, "Here, Mesood, you have a go at it—I'm hoarse. I've yelled at that blighted door every word, secular, sacred, and profane, that I can think of, and the dratted thing hasn't budged an inch."

Thereafter, for several hours, while his heart fluttered dizzily, Ali Baba lay and watched one youthful robber after another take his stand in front of the door and shout and roar at it until he was purple in the face. A score of times Ali could have sworn that he saw the door beginning to open, and a score of times the sweat oozed out of every pore of his body.

Toward midday the youthful robbers desisted, and Ali groaned afresh when he saw that the young man in command was giving orders to the others to prepare a camp. They weren't going to be easily discouraged!

Ali crawled back to his asses, mounted one, and wended his way homeward, unable to get his mind off those young men trying every word in their vocabularies. If one of them should hit on the right word! . . . The thought was very painful; Ali groaned once more.

He passed a wretched night, and when he got back to the edge of the forest again, the robbers were still there.

SOME days, some weeks, and some months went by, and the robbers had by now made a more or less permanent camp at the cave. In the meantime Ali had been very reluctantly compelled to turn some of his dancing-girls into ready cash—they realized a mere fraction of the figures he had paid the slave-dealers for them. But those that were left simply ate their heads off; so at last they all had to go.

It was when Ali Baba had reached this pitiable plight that the youthful leader of the robbers ran him to earth. The young man was introduced by Abdallah.

"My name is Selem," he said. "I am the son of Cogia Houssain the captain of the robbers—the man whom your slave Morgiana stabbed. . . ."

"O Suleyman! O Daood! O day of misery!" moaned Ali. "Here, Abdallah, don't go away."

"I'll give you a share," Selem promised. "If you come with me and open the door of the cave I'll give you a tenth share."

"You'd cut my throat after I had opened the door for you," said Ali, doing his best to keep his lip from quivering.

"I'll give you a quarter share."

"No."

"A half share. . . ."

"I've only got one throat," moaned Ali—"are you certain, Abdallah, that you bolted the door after you let this man in?"

Selem talked long and as convincingly as he could, but Ali Baba had no illusions at all about robbers.

"Very well!" said Selem at last; "some of our gang will keep an eye on this place, and if you stir outside, they'll nobble you;

and when they bring you to me, I'll grill you over a slow fire until you tell me the magic word." Selem got smartly to his feet. "The peace of Allah be upon this house!" he said, and was gone.

So the position became an *impasse*. Ali knew that he daren't complain to the Sultan, for the Sultan would simply drive off the robbers and collar the loot for himself, probably throwing the complainer into jail for keeping the secret so long. All he could do was to hold on, and hope that the robbers would get tired of waiting before he himself was reduced to absolute starvation.

So he sent Abdallah out daily to pawn the remaining household effects and spare apparel. He would have instructed Abdallah to sell himself, but there would have been nobody to bring back the money. So he had to abandon that idea, although he was left with two mouths to feed.

ALI and Abdallah had begun to show signs of lack of proper nourishment when, without warning, a miracle happened.

"Here's somebody who asked to have a word with you," said Abdallah one day, ushering a young woman into the presence.

Ali Baba cast one approving glance at the young woman, and said: "Leave us, Abdallah! . . . Well, my dear?" he inquired, when they were alone.

"You don't seem to remember me," said the girl.

"Just for the moment I'm afraid I—"

"I'm Yasemeen. I was one of your dancing-girls. . . ."

"I had so many really charming girls that I can't quite call you to mind, but I'll take your word for—"

"You were very good to me."

"Was I really?"

"Yes. One night when you were—when you were particularly merry you gave me my freedom and a large emerald."

"That *was* nice of me."

"I'm still free, and I've still got the emerald." From the folds of her robe Yasmeen produced the stone and held it out in her rosy palm.

Ali's brows assumed an interrogatory pucker.

"I heard that you had struck a bad patch," Yasmeen explained; "and you had been such a darling old thing to me that I felt I ought to stand by you." Yasmeen paused. "And people are not always down in their luck, you know." Evidently she was trusting that her unselfish act would not go wholly unrewarded.

"But, my dear," said Ali, "just at the moment there isn't enough food in the house to provide one square meal."

Yasmeen clapped her hands and Abdallah appeared.

"Take this emerald to the Jews and get as much as you can for it, and when you've done that——" and Yasmeen told Abdallah what to bring home with him for supper.

"But my darling child——" Ali Baba began.

Yasmeen sank down on the cushions beside him, laid her soft cheek against his beard . . . and what Ali had intended to say further, remained for ever unsaid. . . .

Under the influence of the first square meal that he had had for some time, and the first decent wine he had tasted for days, Ali Baba allowed himself to relax; and before very long Yasmeen had his whole history from him, right up to the present date—with the exception of the magic word itself; Ali didn't let his gratitude run away with him altogether.

When she had it all at her fingers' ends Yasmeen said, "Let me think!"

She thought, and when she had done it for a while she proclaimed suddenly: "It's easy! . . . Listen to this, Ali.

"Send Abdallah for the captain of the robbers. When young Seleem comes, tell him that Allah has put it into your heart that you did wrong to take things from the cave. Your conscience is troubling you, and you want to make amends. Say you'll open the door in Seleem's presence, and will leave it to his generosity to provide for your declining years."

Ali sniffed. "To me, that seems a silly sort of——"

"Wait!" said Yasmeen. "He will agree at once, for he will tell himself that, after you have opened the door for him and he has got out the loot, he can cut your throat at his leisure."

"And that's just exactly what he will——"

"No he won't. When you open the door the robbers will be so eager to see what is in the cave, and so greedy to get their fingers on it, that they will all rush pell-mell inside. You will simply say the magic word that closes the door . . . and go peacefully home and remain there until the robbers have starved to death."

"Excellent!" cried Ali. "Excellent! Now why didn't I think of a simple scheme like that before. . . . Here, Abdallah!" and Ali clapped his hands for his slave. . . .

When it had all been arranged between Ali and Seleem, Yasmeen insisted upon going with Ali to the cave. Ali was inclined to demur.

"I know what you're thinking," Yasmeen told him. "You're thinking that if I go with you I will hear you saying the magic word. But you're such a simple old dear that you would be sure to make a mess of things if I wasn't there to give you a hint when required. Besides, if you're going to marry me, as you say you

are——" and she smiled on Ali in a way that put an end to the argument.

"All right, you can come," Ali agreed, and felt that life wasn't such a bad thing after all.

IN DUB course Ali and Yasmeen and the robbers foregathered in front of the cave.

Ali was about to pronounce the magic word when he paused for a moment. He addressed himself to Seleem.

"You swear by the beard of Suleyman (on whom be peace!) that you will provide for my declining years?"—Ali liked his joke.

"I swear it," said Seleem solemnly.

"Get on with the business," Yasmeen urged.

"All ready?" Ali asked Seleem.

"All ready," said Seleem, and the robbers held their breaths.

"Then . . . Open, Sesame!" said Ali Baba in a commanding voice, and at once the door of the cave swung open.

For a moment the robbers stood staring, hardly able to believe that the thing they had so long desired had happened at last. Then, helter-skelter, tumbling over one another in their haste, they rushed through the door, Seleem himself bringing up the rear.

"Now!" screamed Yasmeen, "shut it. Quick—quick!"

"Shut, Sesame!" yelled Ali Baba . . . and the last thing he remembered for a while was the sight of the door closing smartly; for something hard and heavy crashed down on his turbaned head and he floated away into the land of sweet oblivion.

WHEN Ali Baba came to himself he was lying, loosely pinioned, just outside the cave, the door of which was open. He heard a voice shouting, "Have you got everything?" and another voice

answering, "We've cleaned the place right out."

Ali twisted himself round as far as his bonds would permit, and saw a long string of heavily laden camels marching away, with the youthful robbers riding alongside.

Somebody gave him a kick to intimate that he was about to be addressed. It was Seleem.

"We've got to be moving now, Yasmeen and I," he said, and he smiled sweetly on the young woman, who smiled back at him the very same smile that she had lately smiled on Ali.

"I think you have already met my wife!" and Seleem waved his hand in the direction of Yasmeen. Then he laughed a loud, nasty laugh. "Let's get!" he said.

Ali Baba had again changed his opinion about life. Life seemed to Ali a poor, poor thing.

Then he recalled how, just before Yasmeen swiped him over the head, he had reminded Seleem about his promise. He wondered if Seleem had any softness at all in his heart. . . .

"You swore by the beard of Suleyman that you would provide for my declining years——"

"Your declining years are provided for," answered Seleem, and he explained how.

Then he and Yasmeen mounted the same horse, and Yasmeen kissed her hand to Ali as the horse galloped away after the rest of the caravan.

So during his declining years Ali Baba sat at the entrance to the robbers' cave and, at half a dirhem a time, demonstrated to tourists how the door opened and closed magically.

And he shared his crusts with a certain rather teary-eyed raven which refused to be driven away.

— In our next issue Mr. Govan will relate "What Happened to Aladdin's Lamp."