# The History of Caliph Stork

Once upon a time, on a fine afternoon, the Caliph Chasid was seated on his sofa in Bagdad: he had slept a little, (for it was a hot day,) and now, after his nap, looked quite happy. He smoked a long pipe of rosewood, sipped, now and then, a little coffee which a slave poured out for him, and stroked his beard, well-satisfied, for the flavor pleased him. In a word, it was evident that the Caliph was in a good humor. At this season one could easily speak with him, for he was always very mild and affable; on which account did his Grand-Vizier, Mansor, seek him at this hour, every day.On the afternoon in question he also came, but looked very serious, quite contrary to his usual custom. The Caliph removed the pipe, a moment, from his mouth, and said, “Wherefore, Grand-Vizier, wearest thou so thoughtful a visage?”The Grand-Vizier folded his arms crosswise over his breast, made reverence to his lord, and answered: “Sir, whether I wear a thoughtful look, I know not, but there, below the palace, stands a trader who has such fine goods, that it vexes me not to have abundant money.”The Caliph, who had often before this gladly indulged his Vizier, sent down his black slave to bring up the merchant, and in a moment they entered together. He was a short, fat man, of swarthy countenance and tattered dress. He carried a chest in which were all kinds of wares—pearls and rings, richly-wrought pistols, goblets, and combs. The Caliph and his Vizier examined them all, and the former at length purchased fine pistols for himself and Mansor, and a comb for the Vizier’s wife. When the pedler was about to close his chest, the Caliph espied a little drawer, and inquired whether there were wares in that also. The trader drew forth the drawer, and pointed out therein a box of black powder, and a paper with strange characters, which neither the Caliph nor Mansor could read.“I obtained these two articles, some time ago, from a merchant, who found them in the street at Mecca,” said the trader. “I know not what they contain. They are at your service for a moderate price; I can do nothing with them.” The Caliph, who gladly kept old manuscripts in his library, though he could not read them, purchased writing and box, and discharged the merchant. The Caliph, however, thought he would like to know what the writing contained, and asked the Vizier if he knew any one who could decipher it.“Most worthy lord and master,” answered he, “near the great Mosque lives a man called ‘Selim the Learned,’ who understands all languages: let him come, perhaps he is acquainted with these mysterious characters.”The learned Selim was soon brought in. “Selim,” said the Caliph to him, “Selim, they say thou art very wise; look a moment at this manuscript, and see if thou canst read it. If thou canst, thou shalt receive from me a new festival-garment; if not, thou shalt have twelve blows on the cheek, and five and twenty on the soles of the feet, since, in that case, thou art unjustly called Selim the Learned.”Selim bowed himself and said, “Sire, thy will be done!” For a long time he pored over the manuscript, but suddenly exclaimed, “This is Latin, sire, or I will suffer myself to be hung.”“If it is Latin, tell us what is therein,” commanded the Caliph. Selim began to translate:—“Man, whosoever thou mayest be that findest this, praise Allah for his goodness! Whoever snuffs of the dust of this powder, and at the same time says, Mutabor, can change himself into any animal, and shall also understand its language. If he wishes to return to the form of a man, then let him bow three times to the East, and repeat the same word. But take thou care, if thou be transformed, that thou laugh not; otherwise shall the magic word fade altogether from thy remembrance, and thou shalt remain a beast!”When Selim the Learned had thus read, the Caliph was overjoyed. He made the translator swear to tell no one of their secret, presented him a beautiful garment, and discharged him. To his Grand-Vizier, however, he said: “That I call a good purchase, Mansor! How can I contain myself until I become an animal! Early in the morning, do thou come to me. Then will we go together into the country, take a little snuff out of my box, and hear what is said in the air and in the water, in the forest and in the field.” Chapter II.CARCELY, on the next morning, had the Caliph Chasid breakfasted and dressed himself, when the Grand-Vizier appeared, to accompany him, as he had commanded, on his walk. The Caliph placed the box with the magic powder in his girdle, and having commanded his train to remain behind, set out, all alone with Mansor, upon their expedition. They went at first through the extensive gardens of the Caliph, but looked around in vain for some living thing, in order to make their strange experiment. The Vizier finally proposed to go farther on, to a pond, where he had often before seen many storks, which, by their grave behavior and clattering, had always excited his attention. The Caliph approved of the proposition of his Vizier, and went with him to the pond. When they reached it they saw a stork walking gravely to and fro, seeking for frogs, and now and then clattering at something before her. Presently they saw, too, another stork hovering far up in the air.“I will wager my beard, most worthy sire,” exclaimed the Grand-Vizier, “that these two long-feet are even now carrying on a fine conversation with one another. How would it be, if we should become storks?”“Well spoken!” answered the Caliph. “But first, we will consider how we may become men again.—Right! Three times bow to the East, and exclaim ‘Mutabor!’ then will I be Caliph once more, and thou Vizier. Only, for the sake of Heaven, laugh not, or we are lost!”While the Caliph was thus speaking, he saw the other stork hovering over their heads, and sinking slowly to the ground. He drew the box quickly out of his girdle, and took a good pinch; then he presented it to the Grand-Vizier, who also snuffed some of the powder, and both exclaimed “Mutabor!” Immediately their legs shrivelled away and became slender and red; the handsome yellow slippers of the Caliph and his companion became misshapen stork’s feet; their arms turned to wings; the neck extended up from the shoulders, and was an ell long; their beards had vanished, and their whole bodies were covered with soft feathers.“You have a beautiful beak, my lord Grand-Vizier,” exclaimed the Caliph after long astonishment. “By the beard of the Prophet, in my whole life I have not seen any thing like it!”“Most humble thanks!” responded the Vizier, as he bowed. “But if I dared venture it, I might assert that your Highness looks almost as handsome when a stork, as when a Caliph. But suppose, if it be pleasing to you, that we observe and listen to our comrades, to see, if we actually understand Storkish.”Meanwhile the other stork reached the earth. He cleaned his feet with his bill, smoothed his feathers, and moved towards the first. Both the new birds, thereupon, made haste to draw near, and to their astonishment, heard the following conversation.“Good-morning, Madam Long-legs; already, so early, upon the pond?”“Fine thanks, beloved Clatter-beak. I have brought me a little breakfast. Would you like, perhaps, the quarter of an eider-duck, or a little frog’s thigh?”“My best thanks, but this morning I have little appetite. I come to the pond for a very different reason. I have to dance to-day before the guests of my father, and I wish to practise a little in private.”Immediately, thereupon, the young lady-stork stepped, in great excitement, over the plain. The Caliph and Mansor looked on her in amazement. When, however, she stood in a picturesque attitude upon one foot, and, at the same time, gracefully moved her wings like a fan, the two could contain themselves no longer; a loud laugh broke forth from their bills. The Caliph was the first to recover himself. “That were once a joke,” said he, “which gold could not have purchased. Pity! that the stupid birds should have been driven away by our laughter; otherwise they would certainly even yet have been singing.”But already it occurred to the Grand-Vizier that, during their metamorphosis, laughter was prohibited; he shared his anxiety on this head with the Caliph. “By Mecca and Medina! that were a sorry jest, if I am to remain a stork. Bethink thyself, then, of the foolish word, for I can recall it not.”“Three times must we bow ourselves to the East, and at the same time say, Mu—mu—mu—”They turned to the East, and bowed so low that their beaks almost touched the earth. But, O misery! that magic word had escaped them; and though the Caliph prostrated himself again and again, though at the same time the Vizier earnestly cried “Mu—mu—,” all recollection thereof had vanished, and poor Chasid and his Vizier were to remain storks. Chapter III.The enchanted ones wandered sorrowfully through the fields, not knowing, in their calamity, what they should first set about. To the city they could not return, for the purpose of discovering themselves, for who would have believed a stork that he was the Caliph? or, if he should find credit, would the inhabitants of Bagdad have been willing to have such a bird for their master? Thus, for several days, did they wander around, supporting themselves on the produce of the fields, which, however, on account of their long bills, they could not readily pick up. For eider-ducks and frogs they had no appetite, for they feared with such dainty morsels to ruin their stomachs. In this pitiable situation their only consolation was that they could fly, and accordingly they often winged their way to the roofs of Bagdad, to see what was going on therein.On the first day they observed great commotion and mourning in the streets; but on the fourth after their transformation, they lighted by chance upon the royal palace, from which they saw, in the street beneath, a splendid procession. Drums and fifes sounded; on a richly-caparisoned steed was seated a man, in a scarlet mantle embroidered with gold, surrounded by gorgeously-attired attendants. Half Bagdad was running after him, crying, “Hail, Mizra! Lord of Bagdad!” All this the two storks beheld from the roof of the palace, and the Caliph Chasid exclaimed,—“Perceivest thou now why I am enchanted, Grand-Vizier? This Mizra is the son of my deadly enemy, the mighty sorcerer Kaschnur, who, in an evil hour, vowed revenge against me. Still I do not abandon all hope. Come with me, thou faithful companion of my misery; we will go to the grave of the Prophet; perhaps in that holy spot the charm may be dissolved.” They raised themselves from the roof of the palace, and flew in the direction of Medina.In the use of their wings, however, they experienced some difficulty, for the two storks had, as yet, but little practice. “O Sire!” groaned out the Vizier, after a couple of hours; “with your permission, I can hold out no longer; you fly so rapidly! Besides, it is already evening, and we would do well to seek a shelter for the night.”Chasid gave ear to the request of his attendant, and thereupon saw, in the vale beneath, a ruin which appeared to promise safe lodgings; and thither, accordingly, they flew. The place where they had alighted for the night, seemed formerly to have been a castle. Gorgeous columns projected from under the rubbish, and several chambers, which were still in a state of tolerable preservation, testified to the former magnificence of the mansion. Chasid and his companion went around through the corridor, to seek for themselves a dry resting-place; suddenly the stork Mansor paused. “Lord and master,” he whispered softly, “were it not foolish for a Grand-Vizier, still more for a stork, to be alarmed at spectres, my mind is very uncomfortable; for here, close at hand, sighs and groans are very plainly perceptible.” The Caliph now in turn stood still, and quite distinctly heard a low moaning, which seemed to belong rather to a human being than a beast. Full of expectation, he essayed to proceed to the place whence the plaintive sounds issued: but the Vizier, seizing him by the wing with his beak, entreated him fervently not to plunge them in new and unknown dangers. In vain! the Caliph, to whom a valiant heart beat beneath his stork-wing, burst away with the loss of a feather, and hastened into a gloomy gallery. In a moment he reached a door, which seemed only on the latch, and out of which he heard distinct sighs, accompanied by a low moaning. He pushed the door open with his bill, but stood, chained by amazement, upon the threshold. In the ruinous apartment, which was now but dimly lighted through a grated window, he saw a huge screech-owl sitting on the floor. Big tears rolled down from her large round eyes, and with ardent voice she sent her cries forth from her crooked bill. As soon, however, as she espied the Caliph and his Vizier, who meanwhile had crept softly up behind, she raised a loud cry of joy. She neatly wiped away the tears with her brown-striped wing, and to the great astonishment of both, exclaimed, in good human Arabic,—“Welcome to you, storks! you are to me a good omen of deliverance, for it was once prophesied to me that, through storks, a great piece of good fortune is to fall to my lot.”When the Caliph recovered from his amazement, he bowed his long neck, brought his slender feet into an elegant position, and said: “Screech-owl, after your words, I venture to believe that I see in you a companion in misfortune. But, alas! this hope that through us thy deliverance will take place, is groundless. Thou wilt, thyself, realize our helplessness, when thou hearest our history.”The Screech-owl entreated him to impart it to her, and the Caliph, raising himself up, related what we already know.Chapter IVWhen the Caliph had told his history to the owl, she thanked him, and said: “Listen to my story, also, and hear how I am no less unfortunate than thyself. My father is the king of India; I, his only, unfortunate daughter, am called Lusa. That same sorcerer Kaschnur, who transformed you, has plunged me also in this affliction. He came, one day, to my father, and asked me in marriage for his son Mizra. My father, however, who is a passionate man, cast him down the steps. The wretch managed to creep up to me again under another form, and as I was on one occasion taking the fresh air in my garden, clad as a slave, he presented me a potion which changed me into this detestable figure. He brought me hither, swooning through fear, and exclaimed in my ear with awful voice, ‘There shalt thou remain, frightful one, despised even by beasts, until thy death, or till one, of his own free will, even under this execrable form, take thee to wife. Thus revenge I myself upon thee, and thy haughty father!’“Since then, many months have elapsed; alone and mournfully I live, like a hermit, in these walls, abhorred by the world, an abomination even to brutes. Beautiful nature is shut out from me; for I am blind by day, and only when the moon sheds her wan light upon this ruin, falls the shrouding veil from mine eye.”The owl ended, and again wiped her eyes with her wing, for the narration of her wo had called forth tears. The Caliph was plunged in deep meditation by the story of the Princess. “If I am not altogether deceived,” said he, “you will find that between our misfortunes a secret connection exists; but where can I find the key to this enigma?”The owl answered him, “My lord! this also is plain to me; for once, in early youth, it was foretold to me by a wise woman, that a stork would bring me great happiness, and perhaps I might know how we may save ourselves.”The Caliph was much astonished, and inquired in what way she meant.“The enchanter who has made us both miserable,” said she, “comes once every month to these ruins. Not far from this chamber is a hall; there, with many confederates, he is wont to banquet. Already I have often watched them: they relate to one another their shameful deeds—perhaps he might then mention the magic word which you have forgotten.”“Oh, dearest Princess!” exclaimed the Caliph: “tell us—when will he come, and where is the hall?”The owl was silent a moment, and then said: “Take it not unkindly, but only on one condition can I grant your wish.”“Speak out! speak out!” cried Chasid. “Command; whatever it may be, I am ready to obey.”“It is this: I would fain at the same time be free; this, however, can only take place, if one of you offer me his hand.” At this proposition the storks seemed somewhat surprised, and the Caliph beckoned to his attendant to step aside with him a moment. “Grand-Vizier,” said the Caliph before the door, “this is a stupid affair, but you can set it all right.”“Thus?” rejoined he; “that my wife, when I go home, may scratch my eyes out? Besides, I am an old man, while you are still young and unmarried, and can better give your hand to a young and beautiful princess.”“Ah! that is the point,” sighed the Caliph, as he mournfully drooped his wings: “who told you she is young and fair? That is equivalent to buying a cat in a sack!” They continued to converse together for a long time, but finally, when the Caliph saw that Mansor would rather remain a stork than marry the owl, he determined sooner, himself, to accept the condition. The owl was overjoyed; she avowed to them that they could have come at no better time, since, probably, that very night, the sorcerers would assemble together.She left the apartment with the storks, in order to lead them to the saloon; they went a long way through a gloomy passage, until at last a very bright light streamed upon them through a half-decayed wall. When they reached this place, the owl advised them to halt very quietly. From the breach, near which they were standing, they could look down upon a large saloon, adorned all around with pillars, and splendidly decorated, in which many colored lamps restored the light of day. In the midst of the saloon stood a round table, laden with various choice meats. Around the table extended a sofa, on which eight men were seated. In one of these men the storks recognised the very merchant, who had sold them the magic powder. His neighbor desired him to tell them his latest exploits; whereupon he related, among others, the story of the Caliph and his Vizier.“What did you give them for a word?” inquired of him one of the other magicians.“A right ponderous Latin one—Mutabor.” Chapter VWhen the storks heard this through their chasm in the wall, they became almost beside themselves with joy. They ran so quickly with their long feet to the door of the ruin, that the owl could scarcely keep up with them. Thereupon spoke the Caliph to her: “Preserver of my life and that of my friend, in token of our eternal thanks for what thou hast done for us, take me as thy husband.” Then he turned to the East: three times they bowed their long necks towards the sun, which was even now rising above the mountains, and at the same moment exclaimed “Mutabor!” In a twinkling they were restored, and in the excessive joy of their newly-bestowed life, alternately laughing and weeping, were folded in each other’s arms. But who can describe their astonishment when they looked around? A beautiful woman, attired as a queen, stood before them. Smiling, she gave the Caliph her hand, and said, “Know you your screech-owl no longer?” It was she; the Caliph was in such transports at her beauty and pleasantness, as to cry out, that it was the most fortunate moment in his life, when he became a stork.The three now proceeded together to Bagdad. The Caliph found in his dress, not only the box of magic powder, but also his money-bag. By means thereof, he purchased at the nearest village what was necessary for their journey, and accordingly they soon appeared before the gates of the city. Here, however, the arrival of the Caliph excited great astonishment. They had given out that he was dead, and the people were therefore highly rejoiced to have again their beloved lord.So much the more, however, burned their hatred against the impostor Mizra. They proceeded to the palace, and caught the old magician and his son. The old man the Caliph sent to the same chamber in the ruin, which the princess, as a screech-owl, had inhabited, and there had him hung; unto the son, however, who understood nothing of his father’s arts, he gave his choice,—to die, or snuff some of the powder. Having chosen the latter, the Grand-Vizier presented him the box. A hearty pinch, and the magic word of the Caliph converted him into a stork. Chasid had him locked up in an iron cage, and hung in his garden.Long and happily lived Caliph Chasid with his spouse, the Princess; his pleasantest hours were always those, when in the afternoon the Vizier sought him; and whenever the Caliph was in a very good humor, he would let himself down so far, as to show Mansor how he looked, when a stork. He would gravely march along, with rigid feet, up and down the chamber, make a clattering noise, wave his arms like wings, and show how, in vain, he had prostrated himself to the East, and cried out, Mu—mu. To the Princess and her children, this imitation always afforded great amusement: when, however, the Caliph clattered, and bowed, and cried out, too long, then the Vizier would threaten him that he would disclose to his spouse what had been proposed outside the door of the Princess Screech-owl!When Selim Baruch had finished his story, the merchants declared themselves delighted therewith. “Verily, the afternoon has passed away from us without our having observed it!” exclaimed one of them, throwing back the covering of the tent: “the evening wind blows cool, we can still make a good distance on our journey.” To this his companions agreed; the tents were struck, and the Caravan proceeded on its way in the same order in which it had come up.They rode almost all the night long, for it was refreshing and starry, whereas the day was sultry. At last they arrived at a convenient stopping-place; here they pitched their tents, and composed themselves to rest. To the stranger the merchants attended, as a most valued guest. One gave him cushions, a second covering, a third slaves; in a word, he was as well provided for as if he had been at home. The hottest hours of the day had already arrived, when they awoke again, and they unanimously determined to wait for evening in this place. After they had eaten together, they moved more closely to each other, and the young merchant, turning to the oldest, addressed him: “Selim Baruch yesterday made a pleasant afternoon for us; suppose Achmet, that you also tell us something, be it either from your long life, which has known so many adventures, or even a pretty Märchen.”Upon these words Achmet was silent some time, as if he were in doubt whether to tell this or that; at last he began to speak: “Dear friends, on this our journey you have proved yourselves faithful companions, and Selim also deserves my confidence; I will therefore impart to you something of my life, of which, under other circumstances, I would speak reluctantly, and, indeed, not to any one: The History of the Spectre Ship.”

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