

## THE STORY OF ALI COGIA

From the book "Children's Classics in Dramatic Form" by Augusta Stevenson  
Adapted from The Story of Ali Cogia from The Arabian Nights

### CHARACTERS:

*The Merchant*

*The Merchant's Wife*

*The Caliph*

*The Grand Vizier*

*First Child (who plays the Cauzee, a Mohammedan judge)*

*Second Child (who plays the Officer)*

*Third Child (who plays Ali Cogia)*

*Zeyn (who plays the Merchant)*

*Two boys (who play Olive Merchants)*

*Many other children (who act as onlookers at their imaginary court trial)*

### SCENE I

*TIME: One evening*

*PLACE: The house of a merchant in Bagdad*

*(The Merchant and his Wife are at supper.)*

WIFE: Our neighbors bought some fine olives today. It has been a long time since we have had olives. I am quite hungry for them.

MERCHANT: Now you speak of olives, you put me in mind of the jar which Ali Cogia left with me.

WIFE: *(Pointing to a jar in another part of the room.)* There is the very jar waiting for him against his return.

MERCHANT: Certainly he must be dead, since he has not returned in all this time. Give me a plate; I will open the jar, and if the olives be good, we will eat them.

WIFE: Pray, Husband, do not commit so base an action. You know nothing is more sacred than what is left to one's care and trust.

MERCHANT: But I am certain Ali Cogia will never return.

WIFE: And I have a strong feeling that he will. What will he think of your honor if he finds the jar has been opened?

MERCHANT: Surely a jar of olives is not to be guarded so carefully, year after year.

WIFE: That is Ali Cogia's affair, not ours. Besides, the olives can't be good after all this time.

MERCHANT: *(Taking a plate.)* I mean to have a taste of them, at least.

WIFE: *(Indignantly.)* You are betraying the trust your friend placed in you! I will not remain to witness it. *(She leaves the room. The Merchant crosses and takes cover from jar.)*

MERCHANT: *(Looking in jar.)* My wife was right—the olives are covered with mold, but those at the bottom may still be good. *(He turns the jar up and shakes out the olives. Several gold pieces fall out.)* What is this? Gold pieces! As I live! Gold! Gold! *(He shakes the jar again; a shower of gold pieces fall. The Merchant drops the jar in astonishment.)* A thousand pieces at least! The top of the jar only was laid with olives! *(He puts the gold into his pockets.)* Tonight, when my wife is asleep, I will fill the jar entirely with fresh olives, for these show they have been disturbed. And I will make up the jar so that no one, except Ali Cogia himself, will know they have been touched.

## SCENE II

*TIME: One month later; a moonlight night*

*PLACE: A small court opening upon a narrow street of Bagdad.*

*(The Caliph, accompanied by his Grand Vizier, enters the narrow street upon which the court opens. They are in disguise, appearing as merchants.)*

CALIPH: Perhaps we may hear some talk of this affair of Ali Cogia and the merchant, as we go through the city tonight.

VIZIER: It is possible, O Commander of the true Believers! The affair has made a great noise in Bagdad.

CALIPH: Ali Cogia carried the merchant before the Cauzee, I believe.

VIZIER: Yes; he claimed that the merchant had taken from him one thousand pieces of gold.

CALIPH: Proceed; I would know all.

VIZIER: Ali Cogia left with this merchant, so he says, a jar in which he had placed this money. Upon his return, which was but yesterday, he went to the merchant, and, having received the jar, opened it. To his surprise he found that the gold, which he had hidden below a layer of olives, was no longer there.

CALIPH: Ah, that is what Ali Cogia says. What says the merchant?

VIZIER: The merchant made oath before the Cauzee that he did not know there was money in the jar, and so of course could not have taken it.

CALIPH: And the Cauzee dismissed the merchant, I believe.

VIZIER: Yes, Commander of the Faithful, the merchant was acquitted.

CALIPH: This Ali Cogia presented a petition to me today, and I promised to hear him tomorrow. Would that I could know the truth of the matter that I may give a just sentence!

*(They arrive at the court where several children are playing in the moonlight. The Caliph stops to watch them.)*

FIRST CHILD: Let us play that the Cauzee is trying the Merchant.

SECOND CHILD: *(Joyfully.)* Yes, yes!

THIRD CHILD: *(Joyfully.)* Yes, yes!

ALL CHILDREN: *(Clapping their hands.)* Yes, yes!

CALIPH: *(Softly to Vizier.)* Let us sit on this bench. I would know what these children are playing.

*(They sit, but are not seen by children.)*

FIRST CHILD: *(Taking his seat with great dignity.)* I choose to be the Cauzee!

SECOND CHILD: *(Taking his place behind the Cauzee.)* I choose to be the Officer!

THIRD CHILD: I choose to be Ali Cogia!

CAUZEE: Who chooses to be the Merchant?

*(Long pause; all the children hang back.)*

CAUZEE: Come, Zeyn, you be the Merchant.

ZEYN: Not !! The part does not please me.

OFFICER: Would you spoil everything, Zeyn?

ZEYN: Oh, well, then, I'll be the Merchant this time.

CAUZEE: Officer, bring in the accused and his accuser.

*(The Officer presents the Merchant and Ali Cogia before the Cauzee.)*

CAUZEE: Ali Cogia, what charge have you to make against this Merchant?

ALI COGIA: *(Bowing.)* Sir, when I journeyed from Bagdad seven years ago, I left with this Merchant a jar. Now, into this jar I had put, with some olives, a thousand pieces of gold. When I opened the jar, I found that it had been entirely filled with olives; the gold had disappeared. I beseech your honor that I may not lose so great a sum of money!

CAUZEE: Merchant, what have you to say to this charge?

MERCHANT: I confess that I had the jar in my house, but Ali Cogia found it exactly as he had left it. Did he ever tell me there was gold in the jar? No. He now demands that I pay him one thousand pieces of gold. I wonder that he does not ask me for diamonds and pearls instead of gold. I will take my oath that what I say is the truth.

CAUZEE: Not so fast! Before you come to your oath, I should be glad to see the jar of olives.  
*(Turning to Ali Cogia.)* Ali Cogia, have you brought the jar?

ALI COGIA: No; I did not think of that.

CAUZEE: Then go and fetch it.

*(Ali Cogia goes.)*

CAUZEE: *(To Merchant.)* You thought the jar contained olives all this time?

MERCHANT: Ali Cogia told me it contained olives at the first. I will take oath that what I say is the truth.

CAUZEE: We are not yet ready for your oath.

*(Ali Cogia enters. He pretends to set a jar before the Cauzee.)*

CAUZEE: Ali Cogia, is this jar the same you left with the Merchant?

ALI COGIA: Sir, it is the same.

CAUZEE: Merchant, do you confess this jar to be the same?

MERCHANT: Sir, it is the same.

CAUZEE: Officer, remove the cover.

*(The Officer pretends to remove the cover.)*

CAUZEE: These are fine olives! Let me taste them. *(Pretending to eat an olive.)* They are excellent! But I cannot think that olives will keep seven years and be so good. Therefore, Officer, bring in Olive Merchants, and let me hear what is their opinion.

OFFICER: *(Announcing.)* Forward, two Olive Merchants!

*(Two boys present themselves.)*

CAUZEE: Are you Olive Merchants?

BOYS: *(Bowing.)* Sir, we are.

CAUZEE: Tell me how long olives will keep.

FIRST OLIVE MERCHANT: Let us take what care we can, they will hardly be worth anything the third year.

SECOND OLIVE MERCHANT: It is true, for then they will have neither taste nor color.

CAUZEE: If it be so, look into that jar and tell me how long it is since those olives were put into it.

*(Both Merchants pretend to examine and taste the olives.)*

FIRST OLIVE MERCHANT: These olives are new and good.

CAUZEE: You are mistaken. Ali Cogia says he put them into the jar seven years ago.

SECOND OLIVE MERCHANT: Sir, they are of this year's growth. There is not a merchant in Bagdad that will not say the same.

CAUZEE: Merchant, you stand accused. You must return the thousand pieces of gold to Ali Cogia.

MERCHANT: Sir, I protest—

CAUZEE: *(Interrupting.)* Be silent! You are a rogue. Take him to prison, Officer.

*(All the children seize the Merchant and run from the court, laughing and shouting.)*

CALIPH: *(Rising.)* I know now what will be a just trial. I have learned it from the child Cauzee. Do you think I could give a better sentence?

VIZIER: I think not, if the case be as these children played it.

CALIPH: Take care to bid Ali Cogia bring his jar of olives tomorrow. And let two olive merchants attend.

VIZIER: It shall be done, O Commander of true Believers!

CALIPH: If the olives be indeed fresh, then the merchant will receive his punishment and Ali Cogia his thousand pieces of gold. *(Starting off; stopping.)* Take notice of this street, and tomorrow present the boy Cauzee with a purse of gold. Tell him it is a token of my admiration of his wisdom and justice.

THE END