

“Three Quarrelsome Brothers”

BY ANONYMOUS DESERT SHEPHERDS IN ARABIA

Adapted for students by Jennifer Turay



Vocabulary

Find the definition of each vocabulary word below. Have the definitions handy as you read “Three Quarrelsome Brothers.” While reading, you may need to change your definitions to fit the meaning of the words as used in the story. • **sultan** • **ailments** • **wares** • **decree** • **hoisted** • **rogues** • **grimace** • **alcoves** • **befallen**

Long ago, there was a **sultan**¹ who had three sons, Ahmad, Ali, and Rashaad. Ahmad was a champion with the bow and arrow, Ali had such powerful strength in his hands that he was an outstanding boxer, and Rashaad was second to none with the sword. The three boys were close in age, and as children, they enjoyed each other's company. Together they played games, built sandcastles, rode their camels, trapped sand lizards, studied chemistry, explored the constellations, solved math problems, and told stories to each other. They also shared their secrets, goals, and dreams.

 **Quick Check**

True/False – Ali was a champion with a bow and arrow.

Their father, Sultan Bishad, and their mother, Sultana Ilyana, were so pleased with the way the sons got along that they envisioned them ruling their kingdom together upon the sultan's death. Unfortunately, when the boys reached their early teen years, their relationship changed. Instead of enjoying each other, they did nothing but quarrel and fight among themselves. They argued and fought over everything: who was the tallest, who was the fastest, who was the strongest, who was the best looking, who could smell baking bread and roasting hens from the farthest distance, and even whose goat was the healthiest.

They were so touchy and testy with each other that the least little thing led to a fight. If one brother looked at

¹ Ruler of a Moslem country in the Middle East

another brother, "Stop looking at me!" was the cry that was heard. If one brother accidentally bumped into another brother, "He hit me!" was the scream that went forth. They refused to share, they refused to cooperate, and they refused to get along under any circumstances. They fought so much that they destroyed gardens, trees, and furniture. Often after their fights, the entire palace was in shambles.

 **Quick Check**

What problem did the three brothers have once they became teenagers?

Sultana Ilyana kept saying the sons would grow out of this stage, but each year, they got worse. Only now they argued over girls and power: who was liked by the most beautiful girl in the kingdom, which one was the smartest, and which one should rule the entire kingdom when their father died. Not only were the sultan and his wife grieved over the intense friction among their sons, but they were also embarrassed. More than once, police officials had brought them home in handcuffs. They were charged with fighting in public places and with destroying several thousand dollars worth of public property during their fight.

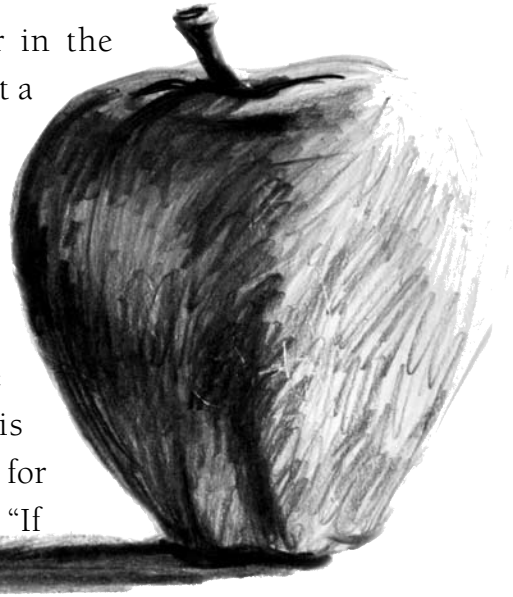
Although each one of the three brothers dearly loved his parents and disliked seeing them in such sorrow over their actions, they seemed unable to live harmoniously with each other. One day, the sultan called them to his chamber and uttered these words. "I am sick and tired of seeing

my only sons fight among themselves. My hopes of your ruling this great kingdom together will never be realized unless something happens that makes you see that you are stronger when you are united than you are when you are divided. Therefore, I issue this **decree** for all to hear. 'My sons are to leave this city, go in separate directions, and travel throughout the land in search of the greatest wonder in the world. In one year, they are to return together, with each of them bringing back the wonder he has found.' May you have good fortune on your journeys, and may you come back with hearts that have been changed."

And so the three sons rode out together on their camels. They stopped at an inn and agreed to meet there again in exactly one year. When Ahmad said, "May the best man win," Rashaad smiled. Assuming this smile meant Rashaad thought he was the best man, Ali and Ahmad wrestled him to the ground and beat him up. True to character, the three brothers straggled off in separate directions after a bloody fight among themselves.

The eldest brother, Ahmad, paid a boatman to ferry him across the water so that he could search the African kingdom of Ethiopia for the greatest wonder in the world. When he reached the African coast, he rode his camel to Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa. In this city, Ahmad rented an apartment, and he began life as an ordinary citizen of that nation. He fit right into the community, and the people appreciated him for his honesty and his respect for human life. With his ears and eyes ever open in his quest

for the greatest wonder in the world, Ahmad heard about a green apple that cures all **ailments**. Having been told that a very religious, holy man had this apple in his possession, Ahmad went to the man's house and offered to buy this wonder. "The apple is not for sale," said the holy man. "If you want it, you must earn it."



"What can I do to earn it?" asked Ahmad.

"Well," the holy man replied, "you have great skill with a bow and arrow. Show me how great a man you really are and the apple is yours."

Ahmad **hoisted** his bow and immediately shot five arrows into the bull's eye of a target that had been erected for him. Then as men threw biscuits into the air, he shot his arrows into the biscuits and split each one into two parts before it floated toward the ground. Next, a candle was put on a table some fifteen yards away from Ahmad. With his bow, the archer shot an arrow between the candle and the base of the flame, thus extinguishing the flame. One challenge after the other was presented to Ahmad, and each time, his expert marksmanship made the test look easy.

Finally, a young boy was brought into the room, and an apple was placed on his head. Ahmad looked at the holy man to see if he was serious. A blindfold was placed over his eyes, and the sultan's eldest son was instructed to shoot the apple from the child's head. The prince hoisted his bow and arrow and paused. Then, with a **grimace** on his face, he dropped his arms from their shooting position.

Ahmad tore the blindfold from his eyes and said, "This is too risky. If I shoot, I could miss the target and kill the boy."

"How badly do you want the apple?" the holy man asked. "Which means more to you, the boy or the apple?"

Glancing from the boy to the green apple that cures all ailments, Ahmad was blindfolded again, and he lifted his bow and arrow a second time. Once more he hesitated. A look of extreme pain came over his face. Time stood still as everyone in the room waited breathlessly to see what the prince would do. Suddenly, he snatched the blindfold from his face saying, "I lose. I will not risk killing the boy."

"No," the holy man said, "you win."

"How can I win," replied Ahmad, "when I take myself out of the contest?"

"You win by losing," answered the holy man. "You refused to win at any cost. The price of an object is not measured in money alone. It is also measured by what you must give up in order to get it. You were not willing to give up your respect for human life, you were not willing to give up your moral values, and you were not willing to give up

your decency in order to acquire the apple. So by losing, you win. The apple of life is yours. Take it, and may you use it as an instrument of healing for many people."

 **Quick Check**

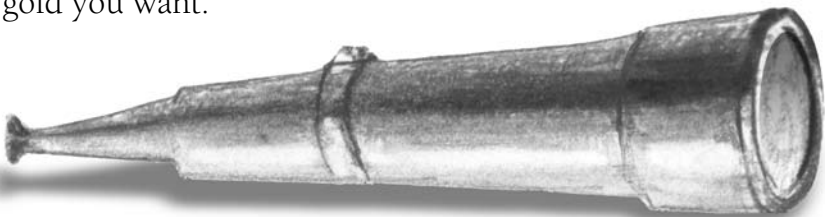
Why wouldn't Ahmad try to shoot the apple that was on the boy's head?

Ahmad took the apple, rode off from Addis Ababa, crossed the Red Sea, and waited at the inn for his brothers so they could return to their parents, together.

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Before the brothers left the inn to search for the greatest wonder in the world, Ali had decided to travel eastward to the Arabian city of Riyadh. One day while walking through the marketplace, the prince struck up a conversation with a craftsman. This craftsman said he had created a tube through which one could see anything one wanted to see. "Let me hold this tube," was Ali's request. He put it to his eye, said he wanted to see his mother tending her prized plants in the palace garden, and looked through the optical lens of the instrument. Surely enough, there was Sultana Ilyana, walking through the garden as she watered her plants.

"How many pieces of gold must I give you for this?" asked Ali. "I am a prince, and I can give you any amount of gold you want."



“It is not mine,” replied the craftsman. “I made it for someone else. I am going now to the owner. Come with me, and ask him what he will take in exchange for it.”

The owner of the tube said he had no intention of selling it. “I have all the wealth I need, but I do enjoy good sporting events. I hear there is much strength in your hands. If you are able to defeat my boxers, then the tube is yours.”

Prince Ali stepped into the boxing ring in the man's backyard, and four boxers appeared. The prince defeated each one soundly. Then four more appeared, and four more, and they continued coming in an endless stream. In fact, so many men stepped into the ring against him that Ali lost count. Even so, he was victorious over each one of them. At last, every young man in the city had fought against the prince, and all of them had gone down in pitiful defeat. Ali was not even tired. When there was no one left to fight him, Ali picked up the tube and went back to the inn where he was to meet his brothers.

 **Quick Check**

What item did Ali find as the greatest wonder of the world and what could he do with this item?

In what Arabian city did he find it?

Now Rashaad was the brother who traveled the farthest to find the greatest wonder in the world. He went to the ancient kingdom of Persia with the goal of walking through every market, in every city in that kingdom, until he found his prize. One day, while looking over the **wares** at a market

in the Persian province of Fars, Rashaad noticed a man selling an old, worn piece of carpet.

"Only fifty pieces of gold," said the vendor.

"You must be out of your head," replied Rashaad. "Nobody in his right mind would pay fifty pieces of gold for that old carpet."

"Do you have fifty gold pieces?" asked the vendor.

"I most certainly do," answered Rashaad. "I am a prince. My bags are filled with gold."

"Then you must know," said the vendor, "that this is no ordinary carpet. It is a flying carpet. Come into the back room if you want to learn more."

In the back room, the vendor spread the carpet on the ground and commanded it to rise. At his words, the carpet lifted itself from the floor and began to move around in the air. Then he gave it a command to be at rest, and the carpet returned to the floor just as surely as it had risen.

Rashaad stood in awe and amazement. "Fifty pieces of gold is not enough for this carpet," said the prince. "Please let me pay you one hundred fifty pieces of gold." He put that amount into the vendor's hand and picked up the carpet. Rashaad did not know he was in the midst of a murderous trap. Before he could leave the room, three thievish-looking **rogues** entered from the side **alcoves** and surrounded him.

"Drop the carpet on the floor," said one of the murderous thieves, intending to use it for their next victim. "Now, we will take all your gold, and then kill you."

Instead of dropping the carpet, Rashaad bolted through the door with the rug over his shoulder and the thieves rushing after him. They screamed, "Thief! Thief!" People in the marketplace, thinking Rashaad was a thief, began to chase him. At last, someone put out his foot and tripped the prince. When Rashaad fell to the ground, the carpet rolled out before him. Fortunately, he had the presence of mind to say, "Rise carpet, rise."

The carpet began to rise, and Rashaad, crawling onto it, rose with it. One of the thieves jumped onto the carpet and unsheathed his sword. Taking out his own sword in self-defense, Rashaad and the thief began to fence with each other. The thief was no match for the brilliant fencing tactics of Rashaad, and eventually he fell off the carpet. The prince flew the carpet to the inn where he and his brothers had agreed to meet. Ahmad and Ali greeted him politely, anxious to see his outstanding wonder.

Later, as Ahmad was examining the tube Ali had brought, he asked, "May I test this tube?"

"Of course," answered Ali. "Just tell the tube what you want to see."

"I want to see our father," said Ahmad, and immediately the father's image appeared in the tube. But it was a distressing picture for Ahmad. The father was in bed with a very serious illness. His wife was wiping his feverish brow, and the doctor was saying the sultan would be dead before the sun set.

"What can we do?" cried Ahmad. "Our father is dying, and we must get to him."



“That is impossible,” said Ali. “By camel, it is a five-day journey to our palace. We will never reach him in time.”

“Don’t be discouraged,” spoke Rashaad. “What do you think this magic carpet is for? We can all sit on it and be transported to our father in one hour.”

So the three brothers sat on the magic carpet, commanded it to rise, and directed it to the sultan’s palace. Within one hour, Rashaad, Ali, and Ahmad were at their father’s bedside. Ahmad put the apple that cures all **ailments** under the sultan’s nose, and immediately the father got out of bed. He moved around as though no illness had ever **befallen** him. The doctor was astonished, and he went back to his office completely puzzled.

The brothers spent the rest of the day talking about how their cooperation with each other had led to their father's recovery. With each one using the wonder he had discovered, the brothers realized that men united are more effective than men divided. Never again did they argue and fight. Instead, when their father stepped down from the throne, they ruled his kingdom together in perfect peace and harmony.



 **Discuss It**

1. “The Three Quarrelsome Brothers” is a story about cooperation. What does cooperation mean to you? Talk about times when you have been cooperative with the goals of your school and your community. Has there ever been a time when you were not cooperative with school and community goals? What happened in that situation?

 **Recall It**

- 2.** What talent did each of the three brothers have?
- 3.** At what age did the brothers' relationship become quarrelsome?
- 4.** What item did each brother select as the greatest wonder of the world?
- 5.** What did each brother do to acquire his item?
- 6.** How did Ahmad, Ali, and Rashaad finally show cooperation and teamwork?

 **Think It**

- 7.** Do you think the sultan knew his sons would learn to cooperate after fulfilling his decree? Why or why not?
- 8.** Ahmad had the opportunity to acquire his wonder by shooting an apple from a boy's head. He would not do this, yet he still earned the apple. The holy man who owned the object said these words:
- "The price of an object is not measured in money alone. It is also measured by what you must give up in order to get it."* (page 84)
- In your own words, explain what this statement means to you. Do you think the price of an object is measured by what you have to give up? Explain your reasoning.
- 9.** When Ali found his item, he was required to fight every young man in the city in order to get the item. During these fights, Ali could have been hurt or even killed. Do you think anything is worth possible harm or death to get? What is worth that much? Explain your answer.

 **Write It**

- 10.** Pretend you are a friend to Ahmad, Ali, and Rashaad. Write a letter to the three of them giving advice about their relationship before the father's decree.

 **Research It**

- 11.** The three brothers in the story traveled to real-life destinations. Ali went to Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), Ahmad went to Ethiopia, and Rashaad went to Persia. Using the Internet, find ten facts on each of these places. Write a one-page report on each destination.

 **Use It**

12. Complete the crossword puzzle using the definition of the vocabulary words from the story for clues.

Word List: sultan, ailments, wares, decree, hoisted, rogues, grimace, alcoves, befallen

Across

2 Secluded structures or areas in a garden

5 A contorted facial expression indicating disapproval or pain

6 Articles of merchandise or goods

8 Unprincipled people; scoundrels

9 Ruler of a Moslem country

Down

1 To happen or occur

3 Physical or mental disorders

4 A formal order

7 Raised or hauled up

