

Abducted in Yemen

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Recap:

Avraham Sharabi settles in the Jewish community in Turkey, with his two children, Yonasan and Mazal. Yonasan learns Torah with remarkable diligence and is known as a budding talmid chocham. Avraham sends a letter to the Mori in Sana'a, inquiring about his son Yosef, but no one knows where Yosef disappeared to. The Mori reassures Avraham that Yosef will come home. He will not be lost forever. Meanwhile, in Sana'a, Yosef is appointed as a judge, although he is a mere eighteen years old.

"Mah as-salama*," Abdul called out to his uncle, the revered sheikh. "I'm leaving now. I'm headed to the courthouse!"

The sheikh was immensely proud at the sight of his adopted son Abdul dressed in the severe judicial robes worn in the Yemenite court system.

"I hope that your day will proceed smoothly and successfully," he said. "Show the world that Abdul, son of Sheikh Abdullah, is a force to be reckoned with! You can do it, son!"

"I won't disappoint you, Uncle," Abdul promised.

He quickly turned on his heel and headed out into the great big world. His heart was beating so quickly that he feared he would have to chase it down the street, before the astonished gazes of his Yemenite friends.

Stop fantasizing, he berated himself. These childish thoughts are completely unsuited for my new position!

He pictured himself sitting on the podium, banging his gavel on

the polished wooden desk. He would decide the fate of hundreds of people! Lowly criminals would beg for mercy; for a second chance. Dejected paupers would pour out their hearts to him. Rich merchants would haggle over exorbitant taxes.

And he, Abdul, would decide their futures! He would cast people into the depths of despair or raise them to the heights of joy.

When he finally found himself in his imposing yet surprisingly comfortable chair, Abdul felt himself at the pinnacle of success. He looked down at the long line of people waiting impatiently for their chance to be heard. They were all waiting for him, Judge Abdul!

"Case #137," Abdul intoned.

Two people approached his desk.

"Ahlan-va-sahlan*! Greetings!" Abdul greeted them warmly.

His secretary, Mohammed, leaned over and whispered into his ear, "Sir, that is utterly inappropriate."

Abdul was caught by surprise. How had he slipped up during his very first minute on the job?!

"What's inappropriate?" he asked in confusion. "All I did was greet these two gentlemen. I haven't even said anything yet!"

"Your Honor!" Mohammed said. "You should not be greeting anyone, understand? In this courthouse, others may greet you. But that's where it starts and ends!"

Abdul smiled, slightly thrown off by this unexpected criticism. "I see that I have much to learn," he

whispered to the loyal secretary. "Stay near me and make sure I don't make any mistakes."

"Ma ismak*?" Abdul asked the rich man who was standing before him with a straight back and a confident gaze. "Who are you?"

"My name is Bin-Ganima," the rich Arab replied. "I am a wine merchant here in Sana'a. You know as well as I do that the best grapes are grown right here, in Sana'a!"

"That is of no interest to you," Mohammed muttered. "Warn him to stick to the facts."

"I don't mind his chatter," Abdul argued. "Let the man talk."

"I said this is of no interest to you," came the furious reply. "Tell him to get to the point. Otherwise, you'll have to dismiss his case!"

Abdul sighed. With his refined, sensitive personality, he found it very difficult to criticize or shame others...but Mohammed was the expert on everything judicial. If he said that this man had to be stopped, so be it.

"Get to the point," he told the wine merchant. "We don't have time for poetical speeches about Sana'a and grapes and whatnot!"

Mohammed smiled with satisfaction, while the wine merchant bit his lips in obvious discomfort.

"I'll do as you say," the merchant said, somewhat more hesitant than before. "We have a problem. I ordered a large quantity of grapes from this farmer, Al-Nahir."

The merchant pointed to his companion, a simple farmer who looked decidedly out of place in the courtroom.

"And?" Abdul prompted him.

"I promised one of my customers that I would have a barrel of freshly pressed wine for him today, but the farmer didn't provide the promised amount! He tricked me! And his trickery cost me this large order. My customer retracted his order and went directly to one of my competitors!"

"Is that true?" Abdul asked the farmer.

The farmer looked down at the floor and nodded.

"Yes," he mumbled. "But it's not my fault. Thieves infiltrated my vineyards last week and they stripped the branches bare! I have barely any grapes left!"

"But he must reimburse me for my loss," the merchant demanded. "I lost out on a big order because of him!"

"I haven't even one extra rial*," the farmer exclaimed. "I cannot even afford a loaf of bread for

my starving children!"

Mohammed winked at Abdul.

"What do you want now?!" Abdul asked impatiently. "I have a great plan to help both of them — the angry merchant and the helpless farmer."

Mohammed forcefully shook his head. "You don't have to help anyone, Your Honor! Leave the good deeds for some do-gooder who has nothing better to do with his time. You have to tell the farmer to pay the entire price of the canceled order."

Abdul was shocked and horrified, but Mohammed wasn't done.

"Half of that sum will be given to the merchant, and the other half will go directly into the government's coffers."

"What are you talking about?!" Abdul hissed in anger. "That's unfair and dishonest!"

Mohammed laughed. "You just don't get it, do you? In the Sana'a courthouse, no one cares about right and wrong. It doesn't matter if the farmer is right and it doesn't matter if the merchant's claims are correct. The only thing that concerns us is the wealth and power of the Yemenite government. Understand?"

Abdul didn't respond. He merely turned to the farmer and said, "I sympathize with your pain, Al-Nahir, but there's nothing much I can do. You have to pay the full price of the canceled order, which will be divided between the merchant, Bin-Ganima, and the government."

The farmer looked down at the ground. He appeared broken and helpless, while the merchant grinned and slipped a little envelope onto Abdul's table.

"What— What is this?!" Abdul asked.

Mohammed clapped a hand on his shoulder and squeezed tightly. "Shh... Not so loud, Your Honor! You'll open the envelope later, when you don't have an audience."

Abdul looked at the little envelope and couldn't fathom what it contained.

"You never told me that this is the protocol," he said. "Does this need to be filed in the court archives?"

Mohammed allowed himself a condescending smile. "Oh, Abdul! You are so naïve. Your Honor, when you know to choose the proper verdict, there is money to be made. Secretly, of course!"

To be continued...