

Translated by: Mariam Al-Bakry

Juha's Tales

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With a Preface by:

Abanoub Wagdy

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PREFACE

In the tapestry of world folklore, there are threads that span cultures and epochs, weaving together the timeless wisdom and humor of humanity. Among these threads, the tales of Juha stand out as vibrant, showing expressions of wit, folly, and the complexities of the human condition.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this collection of Juha's tales, expertly translated into English by Egyptian engineer-turned-translator Mariam Al Bakry. Through her skillful interpretation, these tales, which have echoed through generations in the Arabic-speaking world, now find new life and resonance for readers around the globe.

Westerners are used to hearing about adventurous heroes like Sinbad and Ali Baba from Arabic folklore. But in the Middle East, many folks actually prefer Juha, the clever old fool, and his donkey. Juha may not be a sword-wielding warrior, but he has been a beloved character in local stories for generations, bringing laughter to audiences through jokes and satire. Juha, often depicted as a wise fool, a trickster figure, or simply a lovable eccentric, serves as a conduit for profound insights delivered with a wink and a smile. His adventures offer not

only entertainment but also profound lessons on morality, ethics, and the foibles of human nature.

It can be added that Juha possesses a remarkable wit, which becomes evident from his ability to make humorous remarks even in the most solemn circumstances. Furthermore, an intriguing facet of his personality is his aversion to rules. He harbors a dislike for regulations and although he may adhere to them in certain narratives, he never fails to express his disdain towards them. He boldly vocalizes his opinions, ensuring that his sentiments are heard by all. By now, you must be sensing the distinctive aura he exudes.

Mariam Al Bakry's translation is a collection of tales created by Arabs, revolving around Juha and his famous donkey that accompanies him everywhere. Undoubtedly, these stories highlight his clever and amusing moments. He has earned the title of the Wise Fool for a reason. Despite his tendency to go against the rules, he still manages to follow through. Moreover, he resolves problems in a hilarious manner. His character is quite peculiar and odd, as he falls somewhere in between being good and bad.

This book captures the essence of Juha's tales, preserving their cultural richness while rendering them accessible to English-speaking audiences. Al-Bakry's understanding of both languages ensures that the humor, wisdom, and subtle nuances of the original stories will remain intact, inviting readers into Juha's world with warmth.

As you journey through these pages, may you find delight in Juha's words, laughter in his jests, and wisdom in his folly. May his timeless tales continue to inspire us and transcend borders and languages to remind us of the universal truths that unite us all.

Abanoub Wagdy

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1. Juha's Garment

In the middle of the road, Juha stood proudly, dressed in his luxury garment (thawb) watching passers-by. When people saw him, they gathered round him to look at his new garment closely. “Where did you buy this beautiful piece of cloth, Juha?” Some of them asked.

And so, a group of them were asking Juha for the address of the tailor, while others asking about the cost of one meter of the cloth and that of sewing.

Juha felt very annoyed and bored with people's too many questions, and as the crowd was growing there, he was unable to

answer everyone. Thus, he fled back to his home where he told his wife, “Go tell people that Juha fell sick, come see what’s wrong with him.”

People crowded in front of Juha's house to check on him. And, lo and behold, Juha appeared and shouted from his rooftop, “Well, folks, I’m fine, I just had to get away from you because the large crowd and your many questions disturbed me. Now let everyone know that I bought such-and-such meters of the cloth from So-and-so, and the tailor, so-and-so, sewed this garment for me. Now would you get off my back and get lost?!”

2. Juha's Trick

Once upon a time, three friends went to Juha's orchard to eat some fruits. These friends were a master, a sheikh, and an ordinary man. Juha entered his orchard to find the three men eating from the fruits of his orchard trees. He wanted to come to blows with them, but he realized that he would be crushed if he got into such a fight. While he was thinking of what to do, an idea crossed his mind.

Juha turned to the ordinary man and snapped, "You intruding dummy, this's a master who owns a fifth of our wealth, he's

eating from his grandfather's share. And this venerable sheikh may also eat because he's eligible to receive zakat , besides he's an Imam . So, both are considered rightful owners of this orchard. As for you, what does give you the right to intrude upon my orchard and eat from my fruits unjustly?!" Then he started beating the man.

When the other two men had realized that Juha did not take offense at their intrusion, they agreed with him. "Juha is right, how could you devour people's wealth without their permission?" They addressed the ordinary man.

Juha stopped beating the ordinary man, tied him up, and turned to the sheikh,

saying, “Mr. Sheikh, you are surely knowledgeable enough and know without a shadow of a doubt that a fifth of our wealth should belong to masters, so if this master ate a fifth of my orchard’s fruits, then he would have every right. But you haven’t yet reached the level of knowledge that makes you eligible to an imam’s share. Moreover, I have paid the duty of zakat from my own money. So now what does give you the right to devour people’s wealth without their consent?”

When the master saw that he was immune to Juha's anger, he helped him tie up the sheikh. Juha beat the sheikh, too, and had a short break before he turned to the master

and snapped, “Fie upon you and upon your grandfather! No master should have a fifth of this orchard, and even if necessary, how did you know that this orchard’s owner didn’t pay that damn fifth? Did your grandfather teach you to devour people’s wealth just for nothing?!”

Then the master was given his beating by Juha who tied him up and flung him to the ground next to the sheikh and the ordinary man. Thus, thanks to this clever trick, Juha was able to defeat the three men all at once.

3. Juha's Donkey & the Chili Pepper

Juha's donkey used to be too lazy and annoy Juha who always tried to figure out a trick so as to make the donkey go faster. One day, it happened that Juha was passing by a chilies' seller when an idea suddenly popped into his mind.

Juha headed immediately for the seller and bought a chili, then he put it beneath his donkey's tail. The heat of the chili soon really bothered the donkey, so it started running as fast as a hare. Juha found that he would not be able to catch up with his donkey with such speed; in consequence, he

had to return to the chili's seller.

“Didn't the chili you bought work?” the seller asked Juha.

Juha replied, “It did. I put it beneath the donkey's tail to make it go faster, but now it runs so fast that I can't catch up with it, no matter how fast I run. So, I had to return to buy another chili, but this time it would be for me so that I wouldn't get behind my donkey.”

4. Juha, the Music Expert

One day, Juha was playing a string instrument. He was pressing down on a single fret, fixing it with his finger, then plucking the strings with a quill without releasing that fret, producing a sharp high-pitched sound.

Some people gathered round and asked him, “what’s this playing style, Juha? Why don’t you move your fingers between the different frets to produce a sweet melody?”

Juha replied, “You’re not an expert in this art. Those who move their fingers between the frets are still looking for the major scale across the fretboard. For me, as a music

expert, I know where exactly the major scale is, and I place my finger right on it.”

5. Juha & the Burglar

One day, a burglar broke into Juha's house and started collecting his home's furniture and equipment. Juha woke up from the noise but he did nothing. He waited for a while until the burglar packed the items which he collected and was about to leave the house. As the burglar was leaving, Juha moved quickly and collected the remaining items, packed them in a bundle, and left the house after the burglar.

After they crossed a few alleys and streets, and as they were drawing near the town square, the burglar could hear a sound of footsteps behind him. He turned; and lo, found himself in front of Juha. He was

extremely surprised and worried that Juha would cause him troubles.

“So, where are you going?” The burglar asked Juha.

Joha replied, “I just saw you moving the furniture and wanted to help.”

The burglar, who knew Juha well, was about to die of embarrassment, threw Juha's furniture and items on the ground and ran away.

6. Juha's Clever Trick

One day, Juha's wife asked his permission to visit her sister, who lived in a nearby village. Juha's wife kept pestering him to let her spend that night at her sister's place, promising that she would return home early the next morning. At her insistence, Juha had to let her. The wife packed a bag with some clothes and hit the road.

At that night, Juha got bored to death. He had no one to talk to or nothing to do. So, he finally decided to go to sleep, though too early. He turned out all the lights in the house and went to bed.

At the same time, a burglar was planning

to break into Juha's house. When he approached it, he saw that all the lights were completely off. Being too early to go to bed, he thought that the household was out, almost sure about that as he remembered seeing Juha's wife heading towards the train station in the morning.

The burglar soon broke into Juha's place. Juha, still awake, sensed the burglar's presence as soon as he set foot in the house, so he immediately rushed to a box in his room, wedged his small body into it, hiding himself completely, and stayed there.

The burglar started hunting Juha's house for something to steal, but he was surprised that the house had nothing of value.

The burglar did not give up hope. He kept searching the house for hours but couldn't find anything either. As he was persistently searching, he spotted a small box at the corner of the room. The burglar brightened up and thought to himself, "This box must be filled with jewelry." He immediately headed for the box. Once he opened it, he got surprised by Juha who leapt out of the box.

The burglar was quite surprised, but he did not run away. "What are you doing here, Juha?!" He asked in astonishment.

Juha replied in a simple, laugh-inviting way, "Actually sir, I knew that you're coming to rob my abode and I was deeply

ashamed of you because I do know that I have nothing of value you can steal. So, I decided to hide myself away from you in this box.” The burglar couldn’t help himself—he cracked up and walked away bewailing his bad luck.

7. Juha & The Ten Donkeys

One morning, Juha headed for the market in order to buy a drove of donkeys so that they help him do all his works quickly and effectively, instead of his only one donkey that could hardly help him.

At the market, Juha asked the donkey trader, “How many donkeys do you have today?”

“I have ten donkeys,” answered the trader.

“Are they perfectly healthy? Can they carry heavy loads?”

“Yes. They’re clever donkeys that can work all day tirelessly,” the trader replied.

Thus, Juha decided to buy the ten donkeys. He paid the money to the trader, took his donkeys, and went off, happy and content.

On his way home, he kept telling himself, “I’m going to make money ten times more than I used to. I’ll make each donkey do a specific job.”

Juha was on one of the donkeys and leading the others in front of him when it occurred to him to count his donkeys. When Juha counted the donkeys, he found only nine! Juha was about to lose his mind. He angrily started counting them again one

by one, but they were still nine.

He immediately dismounted the donkey and counted them for the third time, but, this time, he found ten donkeys. Juha was quite astonished. He mounted the donkey again and counted the donkeys for the fourth time. To his surprise, he found that they were nine again. So, he dismounted the donkey again, counted them one more time and found that they were ten.

Juha pondered over the matter and said to himself, "It's necessary to go home on foot, without riding a donkey, so that none of my donkeys would be missed.

8. Juha & His Sheep

A long time ago, Juha had a lovely sheep that he loved a lot. Every morning, Juha would bring him food and water. He also used to clean his barn and wash his body regularly to keep him look his best. Juha's friends were astonished for he would take such great care of a mere animal. They wanted to get rid of that sheep. So, they agreed that they would tell Juha a lie to trick him into slaughtering his sheep.

They also involved Juha's neighbors in their trick so that when Juha asked them, they would confirm their lie.

Juha's friends visited him the next day and told him, "Hey Juha, didn't you know that

the Doomsday will be tomorrow?!” Juha was shocked at these words. He did not believe his friends and ousted them from his abode.

However, Juha went and asked his neighbors if the news was true and the Doomsday would be the next day. “That's true, Juha.” Juha's neighbors confirmed, “You'd better get rid of your sheep. Slaughter it instead of letting it die from the terrors of the Doomsday, and then you won't be able to benefit from it or its meat.”

Juha felt deeply sorry for ousting his friends. He apologized and told them, “I'm going to invite you over for my sheep.” Juha's friends were highly delighted at his

invitation and forgave him immediately.

Juha headed for his sheep's barn, he reluctantly slaughtered him and began roasting its meat with great sadness.

When Juha's friends smelled the roasting meat, they hurried to Juha's place so that they do not miss the fancy meal. Juha welcomed his friends who took off their shoes and decided to have a short nap until Juha finished preparing the food.

Juha took all of his friends' shoes and threw them onto the fire so that he could finish roasting the sheep's meat quicker.

When they woke up, they asked Juha, "Where're our shoes, Juha?"

"I burned them so that I can roast the

sheep.” Juha answered.

“Why the hell would you do that?!” Juha's friends yelled.

Juha replied, “Didn't you say that the Doomsday will be tomorrow? What good are your shoes when the world is ending?!”

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Born in October 1993, Maryam Al-Bakri Tawfiq graduated from the Faculty of Engineering - Architectural Engineering, Mansoura University. She worked in engineering after graduation, but the idea of translation had been nagging at her since the time she was studying, so she started shifting to it at the beginning of 2021, and has been employed job at a certified office in June of the same year.

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