



## **The Fair Merchants**

by

**Ali Michael Taciroglu Sr.**

In the year 1750, when the world still whispered secrets to those who listened, Mehmet and his 12-year-old son, Ali, roamed the vast landscapes as nomad merchants. Their caravan, laden with vibrant carpets, exotic spices, and carefully cured meat products, wove through deserts, crossed mountain ranges, and followed the winding trails of forgotten civilizations.

One fateful morning, as the sun stretched its golden fingers across the horizon, a weary traveler approached their camp. His face was etched with lines of hardship, and his eyes held stories untold. He spoke of a treacherous journey ahead—a path that led through shadowed valleys and ancient forests, where danger lurked in every whisper of the wind.

"I seek sustenance," the traveler said, his voice a mere echo of hope. "Food that will withstand time and trials."

Mehmet exchanged glances with Ali. The traveler's request was not uncommon; nomads understood the value of provisions that defied decay. But their coffers were thin, and coins scarce. The traveler, sensing their hesitation, proposed a barter: a massive barrel of lamp oil in exchange for their dried meat products.

Ali's eyes widened. The barrel stood taller than him, its wooden staves bound by iron rings. "Father," he whispered, "this is madness. How will we carry such weight across the shifting sands?"

Mehmet, however, saw beyond the practicalities. His heart beat to a different rhythm—one that resonated with compassion. "Not every decision," he said, "revolves around profit, my son. Sometimes, it dances to the tune of humanity."

And so, they loaded the barrel onto their creaking carriage, its weight sinking into the very bones of their old mare. The traveler's gratitude was a silent flame that warmed their souls as they set off toward the next city.

As twilight draped the land, they arrived at the city's edge. But something was amiss. The streets lay shrouded in darkness, devoid of the usual flicker of gas lamps. Mehmet and Ali exchanged puzzled glances. Had they stumbled upon a ghost town?

At the guesthouse, they learned the truth. The city's lamp oil storage had recently burned down, leaving its inhabitants groping in the blackness. The nomad merchant's journey now seemed more perilous than ever.

Morning dawned, and the market square buzzed with activity. Merchants hawked their wares—spices, silks, and precious gems—but it was the lamp oil that drew the desperate gazes. A few cunning souls had seized the opportunity, selling tiny vials at exorbitant prices. Darkness, it seemed, was a lucrative business.

Ali tugged at Mehmet's sleeve. "Father," he whispered, "we could be rich! Imagine the coins we'd earn from that barrel."

Mehmet's gaze swept over the crowd—the weary mothers clutching their children, the old men squinting into the void. "Riches," he said, "are not always measured in gold."

And so, they set up their humble stall. The barrel stood like a sentinel, its alabaster sides gleaming in the morning sun. Mehmet poured the oil into small clay lamps, each wick a promise of light. The price? No more than a handful of coins—the same as before the shortage.

Ali scowled. "Father, we're fools! We could have—"

"—profited," Mehmet finished. "But what good is profit if it leaves hearts colder than the darkest night?"

Word spread like wildfire. Soon, the city gathered around their stall—the blind beggar, the orphaned girl, the weary traveler.

Mehmet and Ali stood in the heart of the market square, their stall surrounded by curious faces. The barrel, now half-empty, still exuded its alabaster radiance. Customers approached—one by one, their eyes filled with gratitude. Mehmet, with his salt-and-pepper beard, greeted each with a nod, while Ali, his youthful spirit aflame, counted coins and handed out measured portions of lamp oil.

"Only one flask per family," Ali announced, his voice carrying over the crowd. "Let us share the light."

And share they did. The baker's wife, her apron dusted with flour, clutched her lamp as if it were a newborn. "For my children," she whispered, tears glistening in her eyes.

The blacksmith, his hands calloused from hammering iron, grinned. "A fair trade, indeed. May your path be ever bright."

By the end of the day, the barrel stood empty, and the last customer departed with a smile. The sun dipped low, casting long shadows across the cobblestones. Mehmet wiped his brow, and Ali stretched his tired limbs. Their coin pouch bulged—enough to mend the frayed edges of their caravan and buy fresh spices for the journey ahead.

As the last lamp found its oil, the elder of the city approached. His eyes held a secret—a truth that transcended time and trade. "You've given us more than light," he said. "You've kindled hope."

And so, the lamp of alabaster burned, not just to banish darkness, but to warm souls and illuminate paths unknown. Mehmet and Ali, guided by

principles older than the stars, knew they had traded more than lamp oil that day—they had bartered kindness, and in doing so, lit a beacon that would guide them through all their nomadic days.

And so, beneath the vast expanse of a star-studded sky, they slept—their hearts alight, their dreams woven with threads of compassion.

Mehmet whispered: "For sometimes, the greatest treasures are not found in barrels of gold, but in the glow of a single lamp".

The city, once shrouded in darkness, now glowed like a constellation of earthly stars. Every home, from the humblest hovel to the grandest mansion, harbored the warm embrace of light. The lamp oil had become more than a commodity; it was a beacon of hope, a testament to the power of fair dealings.

That night, as stars winked through the city's narrow alleys, Mehmet and Ali sat by their campfire. The flames danced, casting shadows on the canvas walls of their tent. Ali, his eyes wide with wonder, broke the silence.

"Father," he said, "why didn't we charge more? We could have filled our coffers."

Mehmet leaned back, his gaze tracing the constellations. "Profit, my son, is like a river. It flows, but it can also flood. We could have drowned in wealth, but what good would it do? Our duty as merchants extends beyond coins and barrels. It reaches into the hearts of those we serve."

Ali frowned. "But others profited from the shortage. Why not us?"

"Because," Mehmet said, "our wealth lies in trust. When the city needed light, we didn't hoard—it was a gift freely given. And now, look around." He gestured toward the distant rooftops, where lamplights flickered like fireflies. "Every glow is a testament to our fair dealings."

The following morning, as they hitched their mare to the freshly repaired carriage, the city bid them farewell. Grateful residents lined the streets, their hands laden with gifts—a woven rug, a jar of honey, a carved wooden flute. Ali marveled at the abundance.

Mehmet patted his son's shoulder. "Remember this, Ali. Being a merchant isn't just about profit. It's about weaving threads of kindness into the fabric of our lives. Our caravan may carry spices and silks, but our true cargo is goodwill."

As they reached the city's border, the sun peeked over the horizon. Their carriage groaned under the weight of gratitude—a sack of fragrant tea leaves, a handwoven scarf, a pouch of rare saffron. And at the very bottom, nestled among the treasures, lay the filled coin bag—a tangible reminder that integrity was its own reward.

Mehmet smiled. "Our lamp of alabaster burns brighter than any flame," he said. "And Ali, my son, that light will guide us through every trade, every desert, and every star-studded night."

And so, with hearts full and lanterns aglow, they set forth—a nomad caravan, bound not only by the winding trails of forgotten civilizations but by the luminous legacy of fair dealings.

For in the dance of lamp oil and stars, Mehmet and Ali had found riches beyond measure.

