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The Small Lie

Kafoor was a black slave. He worked for a rich merchant. The master was a man of principle. Following his master's footsteps, Kafoor also followed a principle in his own life. It was to tell a small lie once in six months and to tell a big lie once in every twelve months.

Kafoor was sold to another master who was also a man of principle. He bought Kafoor as his slave. The new master said that he himself lied so many times.

Kafoor, a hard-working man, worked honestly, sincerely and faithfully for his master and his wife. They were very impressed by Kafoor and his work. Soon, they began to trust him so much so that he became their personal slave.

One day, the merchant threw a party in honour of his guests at the Rang Mahal, a beautiful structure in the outskirts of the city. While the party was in full swing, the merchant realized that he had forgotten the gold phial of perfume. At once, he ordered Kafoor to go home, and tell the mistress to give him the golden phial of perfume and come back soon.

Obeying his master's order, Kafoor left for the house. He had completed six months as the merchant's slave. He then

remembered that, as per his principle, it was time for him to tell a small lie. Thus, he made up a story to tell a small lie.

On his way to the house, Kafoor rolled himself in the dust and the mud on the road. His hair also became completely dishevelled. As soon as he reached his master's house, he began to wail loudly.

The merchant's wife heard the wailing of Kafoor and came out of the house. She was shocked to see him and hear his words. Kafoor started wailing even louder and said, "O mistress, a misfortune has befallen us. My master was enjoying the party in the Rang Mahal, when all at once, the wall behind him collapsed! My master and the guests were buried alive under the debris of the wall."



Unable to bear her grief at the tragic news, she started beating her chest and crying loudly. In grief she pulled her hair and tore her own clothes. Soon her two daughters and all the neighbours gathered there to mourn the death of the merchant.

The merchant's wife could not control herself. She commanded Kafoor to raze their house to the ground. She said that she needed now no wealth nor grandeur.

Obedying his mistress, Kafoor took a big hammer and destroyed everything in the house. The whole house was ruined.

Meanwhile, the merchant's wife, his two daughters and all the neighbours left for the Rang Mahal.

Rushing back to the Rang Mahal Kafoor arrived earlier. He began to beat his chest and wailed. The master asked him why he was crying. Kafoor said in a broken voice, "O master! An unexpected accident occurred at the house. The mistress, your two daughters and your son were buried alive when, all of a sudden, the wall behind them collapsed. O master! What a tragedy!"

Shocked and in deep grief, the merchant went mad, and started breaking everything around him. Then everybody left for the merchant's house.

As they were heading towards the house, they saw the merchant's wife and the other people coming towards them. When the two crowds stood before each other, the merchant saw his wife and his wife, too, saw him.

“Oh, no. This is my wife’s ghost!” cried the merchant.

“Oh, no. This is my husband’s ghost!” cried the merchant’s wife.

Both of them fainted. After regaining consciousness, the merchant and his wife exchanged the news given to them by their personal slave, Kafoor. They also told each other about the damages and destruction caused by his words.

The merchant called Kafoor to him and said, “You devil! Why did you play such tricks?” Kafoor replied that he had followed his principle to tell a small lie once every six months. Since he had completed six months in the master’s service that day he told the lie. He said he had also to obey his mistress.

The merchant was furious. “You fool! Don’t you realise that I will have to bear very heavy costs of these damages?” he asked angrily.

Undisturbed, Kafoor said, “Master, your principle is to enslave a human being. Accordingly you have the right to buy or sell an innocent, harmless and faithful man! You also have the right to beat and even kill him if you wish. A man is destroyed in slavery and bondage. Compared to such damage and destruction, a small lie of mine has not caused so much of harm, has it?”

The merchant told Kafoor that he would no longer keep him as his slave. But, Kafoor said that the stipulated period of twelve months as per the contract had not yet been completed.

After a heated argument between the two of them, the matter was taken to the court of the Sultan. The Sultan carefully heard both the parties. Impressed with the arguments of Kafoor, the Sultan freed him from slavery.

- *A story from the Arabian Nights retold*

GLOSSARY

outskirts	:	border, periphery
phial	:	a small bottle
dishevelled	:	to become disordered or ruffled
debris	:	a mass of broken fragments
raze	:	to destroy completely

COMPREHENSION

I. Answer the following questions:

1. Who was Kafoor?
2. What was Kafoor's principle?
3. What happened at the Rang Mahal?
4. What did the merchant forget?
5. What did Kafoor say to the merchant's wife?
6. How was the house ruined?
7. Why did the merchant and his wife faint?
8. Whose principle was it to enslave a human being?
9. What were the terms of the contract?
10. What did the Sultan do?