

THE CLEVER SMUGGLER

A Sufi tale

Adapted by Carole L. Cooney

Setting: The Border Inspection Post

Characters:

Narrator

Mahir, the *expert* inspector

Kushal, the *clever* smuggler

(The italicized words give the meaning of the Sufi names.)

Narrator: It was the custom in India, that merchants, traveling from one land to another, were to stop midway at a border inspection post and have their merchandise inspected for smuggled goods. Mahir, was an *expert* inspector who caught many crooks as they tried to enter a land with stolen goods. His searches were so thorough that many avoided going to his border inspection post.

Kushal: This heat is blazing! Ahh... little donkey, we have only a few more miles to go before we enter a land filled with shady trees and cool water wells. Soon we can unload our cart of straw and...Oh, no! It is Mahir. Why couldn't *able* Kalpa or *fearless* Abhi be at the post today? They are my friends and I know how to pass quickly.

Mahir: Ahh... so it is you, *clever* Kushal. What are you carrying across today?

Kushal: The same as yesterday and the day before that. Just a load of straw. Come, Mahir, take a look.

Mahir: You know, Kushal, that you must pay *ME* a border fee if you have hidden a valuable treasure to sell at the market.

Kushal: Of course, Mahir. Please search to your heart's content. If you find some smuggled item, I will most gladly pay you the penalty.

Mahir: I know you are a clever smuggler and today I shall find out what it is that you are smuggling. I am an expert, as you know. *I – will - find – it!*

Narrator: And so, Mahir quickly pulled the piles of straw apart. Straw flew into the air, and onto the ground so that straw was everywhere.

Mahir: Yes, Kushal, you are a clever one. Today I did not find the goods you've hidden, but I guarantee I will at your next post check. Go!

Narrator: As Kushal guided his donkey safely through the check point, a faint smile crossed his lips. The next day Kushal returned with his donkey and cartload of straw and again Mahir found no hidden goods. This went on for ten years.

Mahir: I am tired of this job. I've searched and searched and always found hidden goods in every cart except the straw cart of Kushal. I shall spend my time thinking of what he was doing.

Narrator: As so Mahir retired. One day he was walking through the marketplace, still thinking about Kushal and muttering to himself.

Mahir: I know Kushal was smuggling *something*. There was nothing in the piles of straw. What else could there be? There was only the cart, the straw and the donkey. **THE DONKEY!** Ahh... I should have looked for golden teeth in the donkey's mouth. Or maybe there were silver threads hidden between the hairs of the donkey's tail.

Kushal: (calling) Mahir, Mahir! You should be home relaxing. Why do you have that frown upon your face?

Mahir: I've been trying to figure out what you've been smuggling across the border these past ten years. I've been trying to solve this mystery every day and I have no luck. Tell me. Were you were smuggling something across the border?

Kushal: Indeed, I was!

Mahir: You must tell me so that I can stop this thinking and go to sleep at night. What was it?

Kushal: Donkeys.