

# Hammy and his Father's Head



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AUTHOR'S NOTE: I've tacked this story and four others onto the end of a novella called *The Cognitive Dissidents*. The stories are the source material for some one-act plays described in the book.

"Do not touch that, Muhammad."

Hammy had just walked in the front door, and he'd nearly tripped over a bowling bag on the floor. He looked up from the bag and saw his father in his bathrobe. He was drying his hair and beard with a towel.

"Hello, Father."

"Use the Prophet's tongue in my house."

"Yes, Father," Hammy said, switching from English to Arabic. He noticed some blood on his father's towel, and he thought of his youngest sister, Dalal. At the beginning of the school year he'd come home to find his parents and Uncle Nazim performing a circumcision on Amani, so maybe now it was Dalal's turn.

"Excuse me, Father, but may I ask if you performed khafd on Dalal?"

"Khafd?" Hammy gestured to the towel. His father looked at it and said, "Ah, the blood. No, that is from something else."

Hammy set his backpack next to the bowling bag and wondered why his father would have such a thing. When he turned to his father to ask, he saw that he'd gone to the living room and was lowering himself into his favorite chair. Hammy entered the room and stood a respectful distance away from the chair.

"Excuse me again, Father, but I am curious about the bag at the door. Have you taken up bowling?"

"Of course not. Bowling is a ridiculous western game. The bag contains a head."

"A head?"

"Yes. The head of an infidel. May Allah forgive me for desecrating the house with it, but I did not want to leave it in the car."

"Where did you find it?"

"I did not find it, I *took* it. With my scimitar."

Hammy watched as his father finished drying his hair and laid the towel over the arm of his chair. He ran a smoothing hand down his beard and looked up at the picture of the mosque in Al Madinah. Several framed photographs of mosques adorned the walls of the room.

Hammy went to his customary chair and sat facing his father.

"May I ask why you took the head, Father?"

"Because the man it belonged to committed an unpardonable sin. He insulted the Prophet."

"How did he do that?"

"He posted a blasphemy on the internet. He wrote, 'If I convert, can I keep the tattoo of Muhammad on my ass?' Or so it was reported to me. Such disrespect cannot be tolerated. So I went to his home, and when he answered the door, I struck. Qur'an 8:12. Recite it to me."

Hammy was caught off-guard and struggled to retrieve the passage from his memory. He couldn't.

His father snorted again. "Pathetic." He closed his eyes and recited. "I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve..." He opened his eyes and looked at Hammy. "Finish it."

Fortunately Hammy remembered the rest.

“Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them.”

His father considered, then sighed. “Perhaps I am wrong to send you to public school. I was told that the schools in America are advanced, but how can they not teach Qur’an 8:12? I wonder if your mother and I should educate you at home, as we do your sisters.”

Hammy had heard this kind of talk before and it made him nervous. He was always careful not to tell his father too much about what went on at school, and he was glad that his parents never attended school functions. His father disapproved of the female teachers because they didn’t wear burkas. He’d told Hammy that he only enrolled him in the school so he could learn the ways of the enemy, but Hammy didn’t think of them as enemies. Not anymore.

There was so much his father didn’t know about Hammy’s school life. He didn’t know about his nickname and would never understand why his classmates gave it to him. They saw that referring to him as Muhammad sometimes brought hostile looks from adults, so they began calling him Hammy. But his father wouldn’t believe the renaming was an act of kindness. If he heard somebody call him Hammy he would merely think of pigs and ham and fly into a rage.

“You should study religion more, Muhammad.”

“Yes, Father.”

“An extra quarter hour after you have finished your homework each evening.”

“An extra *half* hour, if you will permit me, Father.”

His father smiled and stroked his beard.

“You please me, Muhammad. Yes, you have my permission.”

Hammy was glad that the issue of school had been addressed, and in such a way that would allow him to learn more about Islam. Lately he’d felt a burning need for answers. Like on the subject of punishments. He glanced at the bowling bag by the door.

“With your indulgence, Father, may I ask why you brought it home?”

“Brought what home?”

“The head in the bag.”

“Oh.” It seemed to Hammy that a look of concern crossed his father’s face. “I must take it to Mullah Aswad. There is a matter for him to pass judgement on.”

“What matter, Father?”

“Well, you are too young to fully understand, but I will try to explain. My problem is thus: after I parted the infidel’s head from his body, I remembered the tattoo on his ass. And I could not stand the thought of anyone seeing so great a blasphemy after I left, so I decided to remove the offending thing, to skin it off. I lowered the man’s trousers accordingly, but there was no tattoo.”

“Then you . . . you killed an innocent man?”

“Hardly innocent. He had no tattoo insulting the Prophet, but merely *claiming* he did was reason enough for him to die. But you distract me from my story. As I said, I lowered his trousers, and there was no tattoo, but . . . and this is why I say you are too young to fully understand what happened . . . when I lowered his trousers I was struck by the beauty of his ass. Say what you will of the Americans and their heathenish ways, but their Stairmaster does wonders for the ass. And this man’s was so beautiful that I was overcome by a sexual emergency.”

“A sexual emergency, Father?”

“Yes. Suddenly I felt distressed in my mind. I was filled with lust, and I visited that lust upon the man I had just slain.”

“You mean you . . . sodomized him?”

His father hesitated, then nodded.

“But he was a man, Father. Isn’t homosexuality a sin?”

“Of course it is, and punishable by death. Sharia law is clear on that. One adult man may not have sex with another adult man. But I sodomized a *beardless* man. That is permitted.”

“So the infidel you killed was a child?”

“Not a child, but young. A youth, I would say. Without a beard, but . . .” Hammy saw the look of concern again when his father glanced at the bowling bag. He was definitely worried about something. “Yes,” he

said, stroking his beard, "he was a youth. There is no doubt about it. But some might disagree, so I must consult Mullah Aswad before word of the deed spreads. I shall ask him to rule the infidel a youth, to prevent a mistaken punishment from being visited upon me."

"How old is the . . . was the infidel, Father?"

"I could not say. I did not look at any sort of identification, so who knows? But he was still youthful in appearance, therefore my behavior was lawful."

"But there's a chance that Mullah Aswad will rule him an adult?"

"A chance. But in that case I will go to my, what do Americans call it, my backup plan." Hammy noticed how his father's eyes took on a shrewd look. "I merely had sex with his dead body, so technically I did not have sex with *him*."

"Is sex with the dead permitted?"

"Yes. The Prophet himself had sex with the dead. There is a hadith which describes it."

His father picked up one of the books from the table beside his chair. He opened it and flipped through the pages. "Here it is." He pinned a page with a fingertip and looked at Hammy. "Muhammad laid with a dead woman in her grave. The hadith reads . . ." He squinted at the book. "'The gravediggers proceeded to hurl dirt atop the corpse and the prophet, exclaiming, 'O Prophet, we see you doing a thing you never did with anyone else,' to which Muhammad responded: 'I have dressed her in my shirt so that she may be dressed in heavenly robes, and I have laid with her in her grave so that the pressures of the grave may be alleviated from her.''" Hammy's father looked up from the book and smiled proudly.

"Who could dare fault me for emulating the Prophet?"

"I've never heard that story before, Father."

"That is why it will be good for you to study religion an extra half hour each night. We shall go over this hadith later, so that you may understand the perfection of the Prophet's behavior."

"Thank you, Father. You are most kind."

"Yes, well . . ." His father set the book aside and

stroked his beard. "There is much you must learn about Islam. And I suppose you are old enough now for us to discuss the practices of sex. Did you know, for instance, that you may have sex with animals? Or, some say you may, though others would call this a . . . I believe Americans call it a 'gray area.' But some mullahs permit sex with animals, if no women or beardless men are available. But you may not eat the meat of the animal you sodomized afterwards. You may sell the beast to someone from another village, but you may not consume the flesh yourself."

"Is that what Mullah Aswad believes?"

"Yes. He is quite enlightened on the subject. He was known at home for selling many goats to neighboring villages."

"So, men may have sex with women, with animals, the dead, and with beardless men?"

"That is correct. But not with adult men. That is too vile even to contemplate."

"But I'm a beardless man. What if a man sodomized me? Wouldn't you be angry?"

"Of *course* I would. For a man to have sex with you would be an outrage, unless he asked my permission first. Your welfare is always utmost in my mind, Muhammad."

Hammy's father smiled at him, but then his eyes drifted to the bowling bag. His smile faded.

"What's wrong, Father?"

"It just occurred to me that hair continues to grow after death. Or so I have heard." He got up from his chair and went to the bag. He unzipped it and reached inside. Hammy could hear a raspy sound as his father moved his hand back and forth. "Yes, I am sure now that I heard about hair continuing to grow after death. This stubble was not here earlier." He zipped up the bag and returned to his chair. "There *was* some rather coarse hair on his ass, but hair on the ass comes before hair on the face, does it not?" He looked at Hammy. "I shall need to see your ass later. But whatever the case, it was not the hair which aroused me, it was the shape of the buttocks. They were like two perfect melons, so

ripe and firm and . . .” His voice trailed away and he smiled, staring off into space.

They sat in silence for several seconds, then Hammy’s father returned to the moment. He cleared his throat and stroked his beard.

“I must remind Aswad of the hair growth when I show him the head. I mean, it is common knowledge that hair continues to grow after death. And my legal defenses . . .” He touched the book of hadiths by his chair. “My defenses are sound, but perhaps I should tell Aswad that I castrated the body before I sodomized it. That way, I could claim it was not the body of a male. Not technically. Therefore I . . . No, the condition of the body will be known. I left the testicles in place and there is no way to change that now.” He stroked his beard and thought. “What if . . . Yes. If Aswad criticizes me for failing to castrate, I will say that I momentarily lost control of my senses. That would allow me to use what the Americans call an insanity defense. I could say I neglected to castrate the decapitated body before I sodomized it because my mind was clouded and . . . No.” He shook his head and sighed. “Clearly I did nothing that could be considered insane.”

He got up from his chair, went to the bag and unzipped it. He reached in and felt the head again.

“In any event, I must remove all doubt on the matter of the beard.” He picked up the bag and called out. “Wife! Bring me a razor! And be quick or you will feel the sting of my cane!”