

Calamity Ahmad and Habzalam Bazazah

From the Arabic

CALIPH HARUN AL RASCHID went in to Kut al Kulub, who rose to him on sighting him and kissed the ground between his hands; when he said to her, "Hath Ala al-Din visited thee?" and she answered, "No, O Commander of the Faithful, I sent to bid him come, but he would not." So the Caliph bade carry her back to the Harim and saying to Ala al-Din, "Do not absent thyself from us," returned to his palace. Accordingly, next morning Ala al-Din mounted and rode to the Divan, where he took his seat as Chief of the Sixty.

Presently the Caliph ordered his treasurer to give the Wazir Ja'afar ten thousand dinars and said, when his order was obeyed, "I charge thee to go down to the bazaar where handmaidens are sold and buy Ala al-Din a slave girl with this sum." Accordingly in obedience to the King, Ja'afar took Ala al-Din and went down with him to the bazaar.

Now as chance would have it that very day, the Emir Khalid, whom the Caliph had made Governor of Baghdad, went down to the market to buy a slave girl for his son, and the cause of his going was that his wife, Khátun by name, had borne him a son called Habzalam Bazazah, and the same was foul of favor and had reached the age of twenty without learning to mount horse; albeit his father was brave and bold, a doughty rider ready to plunge into the Sea of Darkness.¹ And it happened that on a certain night his mother said to his father, "I want to find him a wife." Quoth Khalid, "The fellow is so foul of favor and withal so sordid and beastly that no woman would take him at a gift." And she answered, "We will buy him a slave girl."

So it befell, for the accomplishing of what Allah Al-

¹Or night. A metaphor for rushing into peril.

mighty had decreed, that on the same day Ja'afar and Ala al-Din, the Governor Khalid and his son went down to the market, and behold, they saw in the hands of a broker a beautiful girl, lovely faced and of perfect shape, and the Wazir said to him, "O broker, ask her owner if he will take a thousand dinars for her." And as the broker passed by the Governor with the slave, Habzalam Bazazah cast at her one glance of the eyes which entailed for himself one thousand sighs; and he fell in love with her and passion got hold of him and he said, "O my father, buy me yonder slave girl."

So the Emir called the broker, who brought the girl to him and asked her her name. She replied, "My name is Jessamine"; and he said to Habzalam Bazazah, "O my son, an she please thee, do thou bid higher for her." Then he asked the broker, "What hath been bidden for her?" and he replied, "A thousand dinars." Said the Governor's son, "She is mine for a thousand pieces of gold and one more," and the broker passed on to Ala al-Din who bid two thousand dinars for her; and as often as the Emir's son bid another dinar, Ala al-Din bid a thousand.

The ugly youth was vexed at this and said, "O broker! who is it that outbiddeth me for the slave girl?" Answered the broker, "It is the Wazir Ja'afar who is minded to buy her for Ala al-din Abu al-Shamat." And Ala al-Din continued till he brought her price up to ten thousand dinars, and her owner was satisfied to sell her for that sum.

Then he took the girl and said to her, "I give thee thy freedom for the love of Almighty Allah"; and forthwith wrote his contract of marriage with her and carried her to his house.

Now when the broker returned, after having received his brokerage, the Emir's son summoned him and said to him, "Where is the girl?" Quoth he, "She was bought for ten thousand dinars by Ala al-Din, who hath set her free and married her." At this the young man was greatly vexed and cast down and, sighing many a sigh, returned home, sick for love of the damsel; and he threw himself

on his bed and refused food, for love and longing were sore upon him.

Now when his mother saw him in this plight, she said to him, "Heaven assain thee, O my son! What aileth thee?" And he answered, "Buy me Jessamine, O my mother!" Quoth she, "When the flower seller passeth I will buy thee a basketful of jessamine." Quoth he, "It is not the jessamine one smells, but a slave girl named Jessamine, whom my father would not buy for me." So she said to her husband, "Why and wherefore didst thou not buy him the girl?" and he replied, "What is fit for the lord is not fit for the liege and I have no power to take her: no less a man bought her than Ala al-Din, Chief of the Sixty."

Then the youth's weakness redoubled upon him, till he gave up sleeping and eating, and his mother bound her head with the fillets of mourning. And while in her sadness she sat at home, lamenting over her son, behold came in to her an old woman, known as the mother of Ahmad Kamakim, the arch thief, a knave who would bore through a middle wall and scale the tallest of the tall and steal the very kohl off the eyeball. From his earliest years he had been given to these malpractices, till they made him Captain of the Watch, when he stole a sum of money; and the Chief of Police, coming upon him in the act, carried him to the Caliph, who bade put him to death on the common execution ground. But he implored protection of the Wazir whose intercession the Caliph never rejected; so he pleaded for him with the Commander of the Faithful who said, "How canst thou intercede for this pest of the human race?" Ja'afar answered, "O Commander of the Faithful, do thou imprison him; whoso built the first jail was a sage, seeing that a jail is the grave of the living and a joy for the foe." So the Caliph bade lay him in bilboes and write thereon, "Appointed to remain here until death, and not to be loosed but on the corpse-washer's bench"; and they cast him fettered into limbo.

Now his mother was a frequent visitor to the house of

the Emir Khalid, who was Governor and Chief of Police; and she used to go in to her son in jail and say to him, "Did I not warn thee to turn from thy wicked ways?" And he would always answer her, "Allah decreed this to me; but, O my mother, when thou visitest the Emir's wife, make her intercede for me with her husband." So when the old woman came into the Lady Khatun, she found her bound with the fillets of mourning, and said to her, "Wherefore dost thou mourn?" She replied, "For my son Habzalam Bazazah"; and the old woman exclaimed, "Heaven assain thy son! what hath befallen him?" So the mother told her the whole story, and she said, "What wouldst thou say of him who should achieve such a feat as would save thy son?" Asked the lady, "And what feat wilt thou do?" Quoth the old woman, "I have a son called Ahmad Kamakim, the arch thief, who lieth chained in jail and on his bilboes is written: Appointed to remain till death; so do thou don thy richest clothes and trick thee out with thy finest jewels and present thyself to thy husband with an open face and smiling mien; and say: By Allah, 'tis a strange thing! When a man desireth aught of his wife he dunneth her till she doeth it; but if a wife desire aught of her husband, he will not grant it to her. Then he will say: What dost thou want? and do thou answer: First swear to grant my request. If he swear to thee by his head or by Allah, say to him: Swear to me the oath of divorce and do not yield to him except he do this. And when he hath sworn to thee the oath of divorce, say to him: Thou keepest in prison a man called Ahmad Kamakim, and he hath a poor old mother who hath set upon me and who urgeth me in the matter and who saith, 'Let thy husband intercede for him with the Caliph, that my son may repent and thou gain heavenly guerdon.'" And the Lady Khatun replied, "I hear and obey."

So when her husband came in to his wife, she spoke to him as she had been taught and made him swear the divorce oath and yield to her wishes. When morning dawned, after he had made the Ghushl-ablution and prayed the dawn

prayer, he repaired to the prison and said, "O Ahmad Kamakim, O thou arch thief, dost thou repent of thy works?" whereto he replied, "I do indeed repent and turn to Allah and say with heart and tongue: I ask pardon of Allah." So the Governor took him out of jail and carried him to the Court (he being still in bilboes), and approaching the Caliph kissed ground before him.

Quoth the King, "O Emir Khalid, what seekest thou?" whereupon he brought forward Ahmad Kamakim, shuffling and tripping in his fetters, and the Caliph said to him, "What! art thou yet alive, O Kamakim?" He replied, "O Commander of the Faithful, the miserable are long-lived." Quoth the Caliph to the Emir, "Why hast thou brought him hither?" and quoth he, "O Commander of the Faithful, he hath a poor old mother cut off from the world who hath none but this son and she hath had recourse to thy slave, imploring him to intercede with thee to strike off his chains, for he repenteth of his evil courses; and to make him Captain of the Watch as before."

The Caliph asked Ahmad Kamakim, "Dost thou repent of thy sins?" "I do indeed repent me to Allah, O Commander of the Faithful," answered he; whereupon the Caliph called for the blacksmith and made him strike off his irons on the corpse-washer's bench. Moreover, he restored him to his former office and charged him to walk in the ways of godliness and righteousness. So he kissed the Caliph's hands, and, being invested with the uniform of Captain of the Watch, he went forth, whilst they made proclamation of his appointment.

Now for a long time he abode in the exercise of his office, till one day his mother went in to the Governor's wife, who said to her, "Praised be Allah who hath delivered thy son from prison and restored him to health and safety! But why dost thou not bid him contrive some trick to get the girl Jessamine for my son Habzalam Bazazah?" "That will I," answered she and, going out from her, repaired to her son. She found him drunk with wine and said to him, "O my son, no one caused thy release from

jail but the wife of the Governor, and she would have thee find some means to slay Ala al-Din Abu al-Shamat and get his slave girl Jessamine for her son Habzalam Bazazah." He answered, "That will be the easiest of things; and I must needs set about it this very night."

Now this was the first night of the new month, and it was the custom of the Caliph to spend that night with the Lady Zubaydah, for the setting free of a slave girl, or a Mameluke, or something of the sort. Moreover, on such occasions he used to doff his royal habit, together with his rosary and dagger-sword and royal signet, and set them all upon a chair in the sitting saloon: and he had also a gold lantern, adorned with three jewels strung on a wire of gold, by which he set great store; and he would commit all these things to the charge of the eunuchs, whilst he went into the Lady Zubaydah's apartment.

So the arch thief Ahmad Kamakim waited till midnight, when Canopus shone bright, and all creatures to sleep were dight, whilst the Creator veiled them with the veil of night. Then he took his drawn sword in his right hand and his grappling hook in his left and, repairing to the Caliph's sitting saloon, planted his scaling ladder and cast his grapnel on to the side of the terrace roof; then, raising the trapdoor, let himself down into the saloon, where he found the eunuchs asleep.

He drugged them with hemp fumes; and, taking the Caliph's dress, dagger, rosary, kerchief, signet ring, and the lantern whereupon were the pearls, returned whence he came and betook himself to the house of Ala al-Din, who had that night celebrated his wedding festivities with Jessamine. So arch thief Ahmad Kamakim climbed over into his saloon and, raising one of the marble slabs from the sunken part of the floor, dug a hole under it and laid the stolen things therein, all save the lantern, which he kept for himself. Then he plastered down the marble slab as it was before, and returning whence he came, went back to his own house, saying, "I will now tackle my drink and set this lantern before me and quaff the cup to its light."

Now as soon as it was dawn of day, the Caliph went out into the sitting chamber; and, seeing the eunuchs drugged with hemp, aroused them. Then he put his hand to the chair and found neither dress nor signet nor rosary nor dagger-sword nor kerchief nor lantern; whereat he was exceeding wroth and, donning the dress of anger, which was a scarlet suit,¹ sat down in the Divan.

So the Wazir Ja'afar came forward and kissing the ground before him, said, "Allah avert all evil from the Commander of the Faithful!" Answered the Caliph, "O Wazir, the evil is passing great!" Ja'afar asked, "What has happened?" So he told him what had occurred; and behold, the Chief of Police appeared with Ahmad Kamakim the robber at his stirrup, when he found the Commander of the Faithful sore enraged.

As soon as the Caliph saw him he said to him, "O Emir Khalid, how goes Baghdad?" And he answered, "Safe and secure." Cried he, "Thou liest!" "How so, O Prince of True Believers?" asked the Emir. So he told him the case and added, "I charge thee to bring me back all the stolen things." Replied the Emir, "O Commander of the Faithful, the vinegar worm is of and in the vinegar, and no stranger can get at this place."²

But the Caliph said, "Except thou bring me these things, I will put thee to death." Quoth he, "Ere thou slay me, slay Ahmad Kamakim, for none should know the robber and the traitor but the Captain of the Watch."

Then came forward Ahmad Kamakim and said to the Caliph, "Accept my intercession for the Chief of Police, and I will be responsible to thee for the thief and will track his trail till I find him; but give me two Kazis and two

¹ This till very late years was the custom in Persia, and Fath Ali Shah never appeared in scarlet without ordering some horrible cruelties. In Dar-For wearing a red cashmere turban was a sign of wrath, and sending a blood-red dress to a subject meant that he would be slain.

² That is, this robbery was committed in the palace by some one belonging to it.

Assessors, for he who did this thing feareth thee not, nor doth he fear the Governor nor any other." Answered the Caliph, "Thou shalt have what thou wantest; but let search be made first in my palace and then in those of the Wazir and the Chief of the Sixty." Rejoined Ahmad Kamakim, "Thou sayest well, O Commander of the Faithful; belike the man that did this ill deed be one who hath been reared in the King's household or in that of one of his officers." Cried the Caliph, "As my head liveth, whosoever shall have done the deed I will assuredly put him to death, be it mine own son!"

Then Ahmad Kamakim received a written warrant to enter and perforce search the houses; so he went forth, taking in his hand a rod made of bronze and copper, iron and steel, of each three equal parts. He first searched the palace of the Caliph, then that of the Wazir Ja'afar; after which he went the round of the houses of the Chamberlains and the Viceroys till he came to that of Ala al-Din.

Now when the Chief of the Sixty heard the clamor before his house, he left his wife Jessamine and went down and, opening the door, found the Master of Police without in the midst of a tumultuous crowd. So he said, "What is the matter, O Emir Khalid?" Thereupon the Chief told him the case and Ala al-Din said, "Enter my house and search it." The Governor replied, "Pardon, O my lord; thou art a man in whom trust is reposed and Allah forbend that the trusty turn traitor!" Quoth Ala al-Din, "There is no help for it but that my house be searched."

So the Chief of Police entered, attended by the Kazi and his Assessors; whereupon Ahmad Kamakin went straight to the depressed floor of the saloon and came to the slab under which he had buried the stolen goods, and let the rod fall upon it with such violence that the marble broke in sunder, and behold something glittered underneath.

Then said he, "Bismillah; in the name of Allah! Ma-shallah; whatso Allah willeth! By the blessing of our coming a hoard hath been hit upon; wait while we go down into this hiding place and see what is therein." So the

Kazi and Assessors looked into the hole and finding there the stolen goods, drew up a statement of how they had discovered them in Ala al-Din's house, to which they set their seals. Then they bade seize upon Ala al-Din and took his turban from his head, and officially registered all his moneys and effects which were in the mansion.

Meanwhile, arch thief Ahmad Kamakim laid hands on Jessamine, and committed her to his mother, saying, "Deliver her to Khatun, the Governor's lady." So the old woman took her and carried her to the wife of the Master of Police.

Now as soon as Habzalam Bazazah saw her, health and heart returned to him, and he arose without stay or delay and joyed with exceeding joy and would have drawn near her; but she plucked a dagger from her girdle and said, "Keep off from me, or I will kill thee and kill myself after."

With this the ugly youth's love-longing redoubled and he sickened for yearning and unfulfilled desire; and refusing food returned to his pillow.

Then said his mother to her, "O wretch, how canst thou make me thus to sorrow for my son? Needs must I punish thee with torture; and as for Ala al-Din, he will assuredly be hanged." "And I will die for love of him," answered Jessamine. Then the Governor's wife arose and stripped her of her jewels and silken raiment and, clothing her in sackcloth, sent her down into the kitchen and made her a scullery wench, saying, "The reward for thy constancy shall be to break up firewood and peel onions and set fire under the cooking pots." Quoth she, "I am willing to suffer all manner of hardships and servitude, but I will not suffer the sight of thy son." However, Allah inclined the hearts of the slave girls to her and they used to do her service in the kitchen.

Such was the case with Jessamine; but as regards Ala al-Din, they carried him, together with the stolen goods, to the Divan where the Caliph still sat upon his throne. And behold, the King looked upon his effects and said,

"Where did ye find them?" They replied, "In the very middle of the house belonging to Ala al-Din Abu al-Shamat," whereat the Caliph was filled with wrath and took the things, but found not the lantern among them and said, "O Ala al-Din, where is the lantern?" He answered, "I stole it not; I know naught of it; I never saw it; I can give no information about it!" Said the Caliph, "O traitor, how cometh it that I brought thee near unto me and thou hast cast me out afar, and I trusted in thee and thou betrayest me?" And he commanded to hang him.

So the Chief of Police took him and went down with him into the city, whilst the crier preceded them proclaiming aloud and saying, "This is the reward and the least of the reward he shall receive who doth treason against the Caliphs of True Belief!" And the folk flocked to the place where the gallows stood.

Thus far concerning him; but as regards Ahmad al-Danaf, Ala al-Din's adopted father, he was sitting making merry with his followers in a garden, and carousing and pleasuring when lo! in came one of the water carriers of the Divan and, kissing the hand of Ahmad al-Danaf, said to him, "O Captain Ahmad, O Danaf! thou sittest at thine ease with water flowing at thy feet, and thou knowest not what hath happened." Asked Ahmad, "What is it?" and the other answered, "They have gone down to the gallows with thy son Ala al-Din, adopted by a covenant before Allah!" Quoth Ahmad, "What is the remedy here, O Hasan Shuuman, and what sayest thou of this?"

He replied, "Assuredly Ala al-Din is innocent and this blame hath come to him from some one enemy." Quoth Ahmad, "What counselest thou?" and Hasan said, "We must rescue him, Inshallah!"

Then he went to the jail and said to the jailer, "Give us some one who deserveth death." So he gave him one that was likest of men to Ala al-Din Abu al-Shamat; and they covered his head and carried him to the place of ex-