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THE CALIPH'S ADVENTURE.

The Caliph Almanoum came out of his harem one day in a very great passion. Now, as this caliph was at that time the greatest monarch in the world, it is worth while to inquire the cause of his wrath for the edification of all great monarchs to come hereafter.

Almanoum was the great grandson of Mahadi, who was the son of Almanzor, who succeeded the dynasty of Omar, who was the conqueror of Persia; and traces his descent to the holy prophet, and through him up to the patriarch Nod, who, as every good Musliman knows, was an illegitimate child of Adam. Hence it will be seen that Almanoum's genealogical tree was somewhat remarkable for its altitude, and he, being the very topmost twig, was not a little proud of his elevated situation. Indeed, the vanity of birth was the Caliph's only foible, if we except some slight weaknesses common to all despots—such as cruelty, perfidiousness, and the like. He firmly believed that no man could be worth a coz who did not know his ancestors for at least twenty generations back. On this principle he selected his ministers and his wives, and was not a little surprised when a vizier and ten courtiers, all directly descended from men who lived a thousand years before them, formed a conspiracy to dethrone their lord and master, for which they were all bowstringed; and still greater was his consternation when his last and youngest caliphine, whose seventeenth grandfather was a near relation of Ishmael, had the presumption to dispute with the lord of the universe and even to laugh at his beard. Whereupon the Caliph left the zenana in a pet.

"I will see," said he, as he strode irefully up and down the apartment like a tiger in his cage, "I will see if the master of the world, the one hundred and fiftieth grandson of Adam, is to be contradicted and mocked to the face by chits whose families have just sprung from their hangbills—mere mushrooms of five centuries! I swear, by the great toe of the great Abu Beer, I will seek out a fourth spouse, who shall possess every virtue under the sun—particularly a proper and discreet humility. By the beard of the prophet, she shall be a paragon! and her family shall be three thousand years old. Wallah! Billah! Mashallah! So be it! And then we will see who shall laugh." And the Caliph stamped about the room, and curled his whiskers, and put himself into a very great passion as aforesaid.

The feelings of a despot are quickly reflected in the actions of his subjects. No sooner was it known that the sun of the royal countenance was under a cloud, than the vizier also began to suffer an eclipse, and he berated the treasurer; and the treasurer fell into a rage with the master of ceremonies; the master of ceremonies lectured the chief eunuch, who threatened the chibouque bearers, who hastened the messengers, who kicked and pummelled the stable boys till they were out of breath. This was the first consequence of the Caliph's anger.

Almanoum then entered the hall of Audience. Here he rejected three hundred and seventy-six petitions, ordered the decapitation of sixty criminals, and dispatched an army to lay waste, with fire and sword, a province which the devastations of the locusts had prevented from paying its accustomed tribute. This was the second consequence of the Caliph's anger.

By this time the vizier, observing that his master's wrath was somewhat appeased, ventured to approach him, and inquire whence had originated the stain that sullied the breast of the royal complacency. "Ibn Hassan," replied the monarch, "I want a wife who shall have a genealogy reaching to Noah; and moreover, she shall be perfect in every thing." This was the third consequence of the Caliph's passion, and the most absurd of all.

The vizier bowed himself to the earth, and answered—"I know of but one, O sire, who claims such a descent; and report speaks her worthy of the imperial hand. She is Ilaa,

the daughter of the Prince of Faristan, and is even now in the city."

"Humph!" said the Caliph, "I have heard of her; but it is dangerous to trust to hear-say;" and here he cast a significant glance towards the door of the harem, as if to intimate wherein he had already been deceived. "Could not I manage to obtain a sight of her, unknown—eh?"

The vizier bowed to the dust. "Nothing human," he replied, "is impossible to the lord of the world; yet he will consider that it will be deemed unworthy of a monarch to violate the established decorum of his people. But perhaps the eyes of the most magnificent may be satisfied with a portrait taken by the cunning infidel artist (may his soul be burnt!) who came in the train of the Frank ambassador;" and Ibn Hassan, with another prostration, presented to the Caliph a miniature studded with brilliants, which he had at the time by good fortune in his bosom.

"Wallah! Barikillah!" ejaculated the Caliph in admiration, "but these Franks are a wonderful people! And the face is very well. But don't you think, Ibn Hassan, that the nose is a little too slim? A sharp nose, you know, is the sign of a long tongue."

"Perhaps, most exalted, the painter may not have been able to depict a proper nose; the lady Ilaa is said to be very beautiful."

"Humph," said the Caliph, "you may go;" and Ibn Hassan retired.

Now Almanoum knew very well that his vizier had received large bribes from the Khan of Faristan to recommend his daughter to the royal notice. He therefore very sensibly determined to trust to nothing but his own eyes. When evening approached, he ordered his favourite slave, Lalouk, to be summoned to his presence. "Lalouk," said the monarch, "does the dwelling of Kazim, Prince of Faristan, come within the sphere of your knowledge?"

"Every chamber, ma'ann, * and roof," replied the privileged slave; "it was there I spent the early days of my servitude, when it was in the possession of the traitor Ben Omri, (may he burn for ever!) Shall I tell your highness some remarkable stories?"

"Another time—another time, my good Lalouk," interrupted the Caliph; "we cannot listen to your narratives now. You are to prepare our merchant dresses without delay; we make an expedition to-night. Be wary of your tongue thereupon; and the slave withdrew.

In about two hours the Caliph and Lalouk, in the disguise of Cairo traders, left the palace by a secret passage, and pursued their way toward a huge conglomeration of low, irregular buildings, which formed the mansion of the Khan. The slave's knowledge of the localities enabled him to guide his master to a place where he judged he would be most likely to attain his object. This was a balcony extending half round a small wing which projected from the main building, seemingly for the purpose of catching the cool breeze from the river, which flowed not far from its base. By the light which streamed through the half-curtained casements, it was apparent that the apartment must be occupied. With great caution the Caliph and his companion ascended the balcony, which had probably never before been profaned by the tread of a male, with the exception of the lord of the palace, and some hideous harem-warder; and by raising themselves on some stools which had been left there evidently for the convenience of the tenants of the apartment when they chose to watch the stars of a clear evening, they managed to obtain a distinct view, through a division in the curtain, of the interior.

The room was fitted up in a style of gorgeous splendour. The floor was covered with one of those costly carpets of Shiraz on which none but princes might dare to tread. The walls, which were of cedar frame-work, in order to allow free passage to the air, were hung with curtains of Damascus cloth, looped up by

curts of silk and gold. A magnificent ottoman extended along one side of the apartment, and from the centre of the painted ceiling descended, by a chain of twisted gold, a small chandelier, in which the rays of three lamps were caught and reflected by a sparkling globe of the most brilliant stones. Around the room, as if thrown off hastily by one eager to escape from the sultriness of the inner harem, were scattered many articles of female attire too magnificent to permit any doubt of their wear.

The figures which occupied the apartment were but two. Extended on the sofa, in a costly though negligent undress, one hand hanging listlessly over the side of the couch and playing with the tassels which adorned it, lay one whom the Caliph immediately recognized as the original of the portrait. There was, on her really fine features, an expression of ill-humour, which seemed to be directed toward a young Georgian attendant, who, dressed in the close-fitting embroidered vest and white trowsers of her country, was kneeling on a cushion near her mistress, and holding in her hand a lute, by which she was evidently endeavouring to beguile the ennui of the princess.

"Barikillah,—may I drop from Al Sirat! but she is beautiful!—lovelier than the waning cypress, brighter than morning," whispered the enraptured Caliph.

"Fairer than the full moon," chimed in the favourite; "and what splendid pearls on her zone!"

"Pshaw!" returned the monarch, "I was not thinking of her. She is well enough, indeed, except that her nose is too sharp. But only look at the slave! What a form! what eyes! Wallah! She would do honour to a heron-tuft."

"Very true, my lord," replied the complaining Lalouk; "she is more lovely than the rose of Shiraz; and what a beautiful bracelet!"

"Pish!" ejaculated the Caliph; "let us listen to their words;" and they were silent.

"Do you mean really to say," exclaimed the Princess to the kneeling Georgian, "that you can sing no other verses but those doleful ones about loss of country and home, that you have been dining into my ears all the evening? Truly you would make a fine chanter at funerals. Sing me a lively air,—something about love—for you must know some such."

"Lady," replied the damsel, "I do indeed know a few tunes of a merrier cast than the one I have just sung. But it is natural that the thoughts of a captive and a slave should dwell upon her own sad fortunes."

"Thoughts, indeed!" returned her mistress, peevishly, "I did not know that you had anything to do with thinking, except as I command you."

The beautiful slave answered not; but as she bent over her lute to touch the preluding note, the Caliph thought he perceived a tear fall on the instrument.

"Wallah! billah!" he muttered, glancing a look of any thing but admiration at the unconscious princess,—"but her nose is excessively sharp!"

Thus sang the lovely musician:—

"THE GEORGIAN'S TWILIGHT SONG."

"It is the holy hush of eve, the sun's last ray is gone,
And softly over hill and plain the shades of night come on;
And as the weary moments glide, the shadows deeper fall,
The dew is heavy on the flower, and damp upon the wall;
The nightingale has hushed her song within the cypress tree,—
But yet, alas! he cometh not, he cometh not to me.

The breeze is flowing from the south, with all its fragrant load,
The gift of every lovely flower it met along its road;
It sighs above the dusky lake, and through the tree tops dim,

And kisses now the cheek I kept so holy pure for him;
The silent stars look pitying down my weary watch to see,
But ah! alas! he cometh not, he cometh not to me.
"I hear a tread! 'Tis but a lone gazelle that wanders by—
Is that its voice! Ah no! it his the jackall's human cry!

Cease! cease! my restless heart! Keep down the throbbings of thy fear!
Woe's me! the twilight hour is past, and I alone am here,
Alas! for every happy hope! that I should live to see
The hour in which he cometh not, he cometh not to me!"

"Pish!" exclaimed the Khanine, "do you call that a lively air? Why it is a tune to which a troop of ghosts might dance all night! But you selected it on purpose to provoke me.—I understand it very well! But beware of the slipper, girl."

"Well, did I ever!" murmured the Caliph, "By the black mule of our father Ishmael, she is a downright vixen! and her nose is as sharp as the edge of my sabre." So saying, in the excess of his indignation he made some movement which overthrew the stool on which he was standing; as he fell, he involuntarily caught hold of Lalouk, and both the eaves-droppers were precipitated through the slight frame-work of the windows into the apartment. The occupants, as may be supposed, shrieked aloud; and a crowd of domestics, chiefly eunuchs, immediately surrounded the disguised wanderers, with uplifted scimitars, ready for the words of fate from their mistress.

"Stop!" shouted Lalouk, who did not relish this turn of affairs,— "would you slay the —?"

"Silence!" whispered the Caliph, "leave it to me. Most noble princess," he continued, "be assured that our sudden and violent intrusion was wholly unintentional. We are harmless merchants of Cairo, who were quietly returning to our inn this evening, when we observed that we were followed by some suspicious-looking individuals; to avoid them, we hastily took refuge in your highness's balcony, and were unfortunate enough to stumble against the casement, causing a most involuntary entrance into your sublime presence. We would hope, most surpassing lady, that our unwilling offence is not a mortal one."

"A pretty story, truly," returned the princess, who was not in a forgiving mood,— "a very pretty trap to catch flies in; and think you that a vulgar trader can gaze upon the Khanine of Faristan, when prices have longed in vain to see, and live? Yet, as ye would have some grace, we allow you till dawn to prepare for death. Hence with the dogs!"

"Wallah!" exclaimed the Caliph, when he had somewhat recovered from the effect of the rudeness with which they had been thrust into a cold and dark apartment, which was to be their prison till morning,— "By the seven troubles of Ahn Nast, we are in a pretty pickle, and her tongue is as sharp as her nose."

"And does your majesty really intend to let her throat be fulfilled?" inquired the favorite, with a ludicrous whine of supplication and anxiety.

The monarch laughed. "My good Lalouk," said he, "set your mind at ease with regard to the safety of that fearful head of yours. We shall have nothing worse than a rather uncomfortable night's lodging in this wretched hole of a prison. And who knows what a few hours may bring forth? I would willingly escape, if possible, without making ourselves known; however, that shall be as it pleases Allah and our gentle hostess."

So saying, the Caliph stretched himself on the floor of the room, and endeavoured to sleep; but his uneasy posture, and the thousand varied thoughts and recollections which thronged upon his mind forbade the approach of slumber. About midnight, a slight noise excited his attention; he started up, and aroused the slave, who was rousing at ease in

* Court of square.

* The badge of royalty.