

AZREEL AND THE THREE BROTHERS.

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To be completed in four numbers.

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"At the gates of Paradise," said I, more boldly.

"Indeed, you are not far from the truth," said she, trembling, "My father is Daniel Ben Eli, treasurer, and favourite of the Caliph, and if he finds you here, you will perish."

"Better that than leave you," said I.

"Unhappy youth, what must I do?" exclaimed she.

"Love me," I cried passionately: "hear me and you will." I then told her my story, but with such episodes as love suggests. When I finished, I was sitting at her feet, clasping her hand in mine.

"Oh, rare and wonderful youth," she said: "on the day you name, I completed my sixteenth year. I fell asleep in this summer house, and dreamed that by this fountain slept a youth your image and counterpart. In my dream, I sang this favourite song, which some mysterious agency wafted to you. One year to-day has elapsed since then. I yield to the Fates, which overrule the destinies of men, and to love, which overrules the Fates. I was to have been the bride of the Caliph, but to thee I pledge my faith."

As I clasped her in my arms a lofty and stern form appeared before me. It was Daniel Ben Eli, in a saffron robe, his head bound with cabalistic characters. "Miserable fools!" cried he, "could I have averted this hour, you, my daughter, would have been the bride of the Caliph; and you, young man, equally unfortunate, would have met his favour, and become his Grand Vizier. I blame you not that other influences have prevailed, but, to save you from death, you must accept the alternative I bestow upon you." He touched with his wand, first myself, and then his daughter. "She is thy wife," said he, and left us. I passed seven days in the greatest happiness. On the eighth morning Daniel appeared before me, and with a cheerful countenance told me that it would be necessary for me to spend one day in the city. "Seek there a jewel merchant named Othman, and buy from him a string of pearls for thy wife. This key will re-admit you if you desire to return. If not, go thy way in peace; but you must return before midnight, or be forever excluded."

Without more ado, I made haste to enter the city and transact my business, that I might speedily return. After some search I found Othman, the Jeweller, and was bargaining for a string of pearls with him, when something in his face struck me as familiar. As we conversed, I recalled his features, and recognized in him an intimate friend of my father's that I had left in Bagdad. I did not, however, reveal myself to him, but, having finished my purchase, which was of value, accepted his invitation to refresh myself with sherbet. After receiving and returning compliments on the beauty of my purchase, I asked him if he was a native of Granada. He replied he was of Bagdad, but had lived six years in Granada. This struck me with amazement, for I had left him a year before at Bagdad, and I had always esteemed him a truthful man. I continued, "My father had a friend there, one Hussein, a great merchant." "Say you so," said he briskly; "whoever is the friend of Hussein is the friend of Othman," and he warmly grasped my hand, and proffered me all manner of good offices. I wondered that he did not know me, but supposed that my beard, which I had not formerly worn, made a difference in my appearance. "Lives the good merchant?" asked I. "Yes, he lives, but somewhat saddened in life," said Othman. "Seven years ago his only son was lost near this very city, and has never been heard from since." "Surely you are mistaken," I urged; "his son left him only a year since." "I see, sir, you are not so familiar with Hussein as you would appear. In all his letters to his friends, he begs them to omit no inquiry about his son, whom he bewails as one dead. It is seven years since he parted

from companions near this city; and, now that I remember it, to-day is the anniversary of that event, for it was the poor boy's birthday."

At this I kept silence, for I was impressed by the firm belief of Othman. Could he be mad, or was I, or was this all enchantment? At length I arose, and, thanking my host, said, "I am glad that I can in some sort return your hospitality, worthy merchant. I have lately been with Selim, the son of Hussein, and he bade me to ask you to write to his father that he was alive and in health, comfort, and happiness." Before Othman could recover from his astonishment, I was gone. The sun was declining when I reached the gate in the high wall, through which I had come forth in the morning. I fitted my key to the lock, and speedily entered. I was affectionately received by Hannah, and her father invited me to sup with him. I passed several hours with him at table, and, though his conversation was very wonderful, and he seemed by a word to be able to open to my understanding the secrets of the universe and to fix them there as the characters of a seal are impressed on wax, yet I longed to be with Hannah, for whose prattle I gladly quitted his learned society. Seven more days of happiness passed, when Daniel again came to me, and said, "My son, it is necessary for you again to visit Othman, and purchase from him a string of pearls. Return before midnight, I implore you, lest you be shut out forever; and do not reveal your secret to Othman, lest he detain you by force."

This I readily promised, and soon found my way to the shop of the Jeweller. Having bought the finest string of pearls he had, I could not resist the temptation to inquire after my father, and so, accepting his invitation to coffee, I conversed with him. After I had chatted awhile as a stranger might, I again asked the question, "Know you one Hussein of Bagdad?" At once Othman rose to his feet, and exclaimed with flashing eyes, "Yea! I know him and thee also. Thou art the stranger who, seven years ago, told me thou hadst been with Selim the son of Hussein, since which time land and sea have been searched for him in vain. Seven years have gone by since then, and thou comest now, doubtless, with the same lie on thy lips."

I bade him be calm, and quietly said, "It is no lie, honorable stranger! For I have indeed lately been with Selim, and he sends thee the same message as before."

"Then thou knowest where he is! and wilt tell me," answered Othman.

"In truth, I do know," I replied, "But I cannot tell thee, because he has promised to keep his place of residence a secret."

"Hell-born and accursed!" cried Othman, throwing himself upon me, and almost strangling me, with his powerful clutch on my throat, "Release Selim from thy wicked enchantments, or I will throttle thee."

For a moment my head reeled, but remembering my promise to Daniel, and gathering my strength, with one tremendous effort I flung him off, and, springing from his shop, fled rapidly down the street. As soon as Othman recovered himself, he pursued me with loud cries, gathering a crowd who knew him. By a desperate flight, I evaded the pursuit of the mob, which would quickly have ended my life, had it overtaken me. At last, breathless and exhausted, I rested in a quarter unknown to me. Not knowing in which direction to go, I asked a countryman passing by, if he knew where Daniel Ben Eli, the king's treasurer, lived.

The fellow, who was one of the baser sort, wagged his head at me, and leering, asked me "How old I was, and if my venerable father knew I was absent from home."

I gravely replied that he did, that my age was of no consequence, but that I was a stranger in the city, and that Daniel, being my debtor, I wished to find him.

"Then you are in like case with the Caliph," replied he, "for he, too, would like to see him and receive acquaintance of some old debts between them. But seeing you are a stranger and are serious, know that Daniel disappeared fourteen years ago, and by powerful enchantments conveyed away his daughter, who was promised

in marriage to the Caliph; and for the matter of that, like a thrifty old tortoise as he was, he took off his house on his back, and his gardens and treasures also. On yonder distant hill, that bleak, deserted spot, is where his gardens stood, but is a bad place to go to. Luck does not follow it." With this he walked off. I remained for some time thinking over all that had occurred, and now plainly saw that I was the victim of sorcery, and that the fourteen days I had spent with Hannah, were really fourteen years. I hesitated long whether I should return, considering whether I should consume my life in a dream or give up Hannah. The sun went down, the moon rose, and still I lingered, until suddenly the words of Daniel flashed before me that I must reach home before midnight or be forever banished. I turned my footsteps in that direction, and slowly wended my way towards it. I had walked a long time, when the call of the muezzin from the minaret of a mosque, inviting the faithful to prayer, roused me from my reverie.

It lacked but a few minutes of midnight, but the gate of the garden was in sight. I flew on the wings of love, and had just time to enter and close the gate after me, when the midnight call was given. Hannah sunk at my feet in tears, and Daniel stood regarding me with looks of mingled dismay and anger. Retiring to his tower with Daniel, I told him truly all I had learned, and how my love of Hannah had triumphed over my temporal prospects. "Now, indeed, I see that thou canst be trusted," said Daniel. "But it is meet that thou, who inheritest my power, shouldst wield it with knowledge. One fourth of each day must thou give to acquire the learning of the ancients. It will but add a zest to the society of thy wife."

To this I readily agreed, and by this arrangement, during the next seven days, I had mastered all the science of the sages, and under the instruction of Daniel, readily compounded the Potent Elixirs which protract human life, and give command over the precious metals. The songs of Hannah filled every crevice of my heart with gushing melody, and on the fifth day, she presented me with a beautiful daughter. This completed our joy. With a command over the principle of life and the origin of gold, what did it matter that years seemed as days. Nevertheless, on the seventh day, Daniel reminded me that an inevitable necessity compelled me to present myself to Othman, and make the purchase of pearls from him, warning me of the danger of delay in returning, and promising to render me all the aid he could, should I be prevented. With fear in my heart, I took my way to Othman's. Having made my purchase of pearls, I entered into conversation with him. Looking keenly at me he said, "Heard you the news? One Hussein of Bagdad has arrived with letters from the great Haroun Al Raschid, Caliph of Bagdad, to the Caliph here at Granada."

My heart bounded with the hope of seeing my father, but I quietly asked, "Are these letters to the Caliph of great import?"

"Hussein is much esteemed by the Caliph Haroun, and comes with high commendation from him. It seems that twenty-one years ago he lost his son, on his twenty-first birth day, near this city. On each seventh anniversary of that day, a foul magician who keeps him in bonds appears in this city, and after purchasing pearls from me, escapes. To-day he is again expected, and Hussein waits in the audience chamber of the Caliph for news of him."

"I would be glad to see this Hussein, if my business permitted," said I.

"I will lead you to him," answered Othman.

"Worthy merchant!" said I, considering the danger of forcible detention in my own mind, "I cannot go to Hussein, but I would gladly ease his heart's pain. His son is well."

Before I could utter another word, Othman clasped his hands, and four powerful slaves seized and bound me. Othman then had me conveyed to the audience chamber of the Caliph of Granada, where my father sat on the Caliph's right hand. "Father of the faithful," cried he, "I have at last entrapped and seized this wicked sorcerer, as I hoped, and bring him before thee for judgment." He then told his story.