

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

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“The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad”

Once upon a time there was a porter in Baghdad who was a bachelor and who would remain unmarried. It came to pass on a certain day, as he stood about the street leaning idly upon his crate, behold, there stood before him an honorable woman in a mantilla of Mosul silk brodered with gold and bordered with brocade. Her walking shoes were also purred with gold, and her hair floated in long plaits. She raised her face veil and, showing two black eyes fringed with jetty lashes, whose glances were soft and languishing and whose perfect beauty was ever blandishing, she accosted the porter and said in the suavest tones and choicest language, “Take up thy crate and follow me.” The porter was so dazzled he could hardly believe that he heard her aright, but he shouldered his basket in hot haste, saying in himself, “O day of good luck! O day of the Lord’s grace!” and walked after her till she stopped at the door of a house. There she rapped, and presently came out to her an old man, a Christian, to whom she gave a gold piece, receiving from him in return what she required of strained wine clear as olive oil, and she set it safely in the hamper, saying, “Lift and follow.” Quoth the porter, “This, by the Lord, is indeed an auspicious day, a day propitious for the granting of all a man wisheth.” He again hoisted up

the crate and followed her till she stopped at a fruiterer's shop and bought from him Shami apples and Osmani quinces and Omani peaches, and cucumbers of Nile growth, and Egyptian limes and Sultani oranges and citrons, besides Aleppine jasmine, scented myrtle berries, Damascene nenuphars, flower of privet and camomile, blood-red anemones, violets, and pomegranate bloom, eglantine, and narcissus, and set the whole in the porter's crate, saying, "Up with it." So he lifted and followed her till she stopped at a butcher's booth and said, "Cut me off ten pounds of mutton." She paid him his price and he wrapped it in a banana leaf, whereupon she laid it in the crate and said, "Hoist, O Porter." He hoisted accordingly, and followed her as she walked on till she stopped at a grocer's, where she bought dry fruits and pistachio kernels, Tihamah raisins, shelled almonds, and all wanted for dessert, and said to the porter, "Lift and follow me." So he up with his hamper and after her till she stayed at the confectioner's, and she bought an earthen platter, and piled it with all kinds of sweetmeats in his shop, open-worked tarts and fritters scented with musk, and "soap cakes," and lemon loaves, and melon preserves, and "Zaynab's combs," and "ladies' fingers," and "Kazi's titbits," and goodies of every description, and placed the platter in the porter's crate. Thereupon quoth he (being a merry man), "Thou shouldest have told me, and I would have brought with me a pony or a she-camel to carry all this market stuff." She smiled and gave him a little cuff on the nape, saying, "Step out and exceed not in words, for (the Lord willing!) thy wage will not be wanting." Then she stopped at a perfumer's and took from him ten sorts of waters, rose scented with musk, orange-flower, water-lily, willow-flower, violet and five others. And she also bought two loaves of sugar, a bottle for perfume-spraying, a lump of male incense, aloe wood, ambergris, and musk, with candles of Alexandria wax, and she put the whole into the basket, saying, "Up with thy

crate and after me." He did so and followed until she stood before the greengrocer's, of whom she bought pickled shallots and olives, in brine and in oil, with tarragon and cream cheese and hard Syrian cheese, and she stowed them away in the crate, saying to the porter, "Take up thy basket and follow me." He did so and went after her till she came to a fair mansion fronted by a spacious court, a tall, fine place to which columns gave strength and grace. And the gate thereof had two leaves of ebony inlaid with plates of red gold. The lady stopped at the door and, turning her face veil sideways, knocked softly with her knuckles whilst the porter stood behind her, thinking of naught save her beauty and loveliness. Presently the door swung back and both leaves were opened, whereupon he looked to see who had opened it, and behold, it was a lady of tall figure, some five feet high, a model of beauty and loveliness, brilliance and symmetry and perfect grace. Her forehead was flower-white, her cheeks like the anemone ruddy-bright. Her eyes were those of the wild heifer or the gazelle, with eyebrows like the crescent moon which ends Sha'aban and begins Ramazan. Her mouth was the ring of Solomon, her lips coral-red, and her teeth like a line of strung pearls or of camomile petals. Her throat recalled the antelope's, and her breasts, like two pomegranates of even size, stood at bay as it were. Her body rose and fell in waves below her dress like the rolls of a piece of brocade, and her navel would hold an ounce of benzoin ointment. In fine, she was like her of whom the poet said: On Sun and Moon of palace cast thy sight, Enjoy her flowerlike face, her fragrant light. Thine eyes shall never see in hair so black Beauty encase a brow so purely white. The ruddy rosy cheek proclaims her claim, Though fail her name whose beauties we indite. As sways her gait, I smile at hips so big And weep to see the waist they bear so slight. When the porter looked upon her, his wits were waylaid and his senses were stormed so that his crate went nigh to fall from his head, and he said to

himself, "Never have I in my life seen a day more blessed than this day!" Then quoth the lady portress to the lady cateress, "Come in from the gate and relieve this poor man of his load." So the provisioner went in, followed by the portress and the porter, and went on till they reached a spacious ground-floor hall, built with admirable skill and beautified with all manner colors and carvings, with upper balconies and groined arches and galleries and cupboards and recesses whose curtains hung before them. In the midst stood a great basin full of water surrounding a fine fountain, and at the upper end on the raised dais was a couch of juniper wood set with gems and pearls, with a canopy like mosquito curtains of red satin-silk looped up with pearls as big as filberts and bigger. Thereupon sat a lady bright of blee, with brow beaming brilliancy, the dream of philosophy, whose eyes were fraught with Babel's gramarye and her eyebrows were arched as for archery. Her breath breathed ambergris and perfumery and her lips were sugar to taste and carnelian to see. Her stature was straight as the letter l and her face shamed the noon sun's radiancy; and she was even as a galaxy, or a dome with golden marquetry, or a bride displayed in choicest finery, or a noble maid of Araby. The third lady, rising from the couch, stepped forward with graceful swaying gait till she reached the middle of the saloon, when she said to her sisters: "Why stand ye here? Take it down from this poor man's head!" Then the cateress went and stood before him and the portress behind him while the third helped them, and they lifted the load from the porter's head, and, emptying it of all that was therein, set everything in its place. Lastly they gave him two gold pieces, saying, "Wend thy ways, O Porter." But he went not, for he stood looking at the ladies and admiring what uncommon beauty was theirs, and their pleasant manners and kindly dispositions (never had he seen goodlier). And he gazed wistfully at that good store of wines and sweet-scented flowers and fruits

and other matters. Also he marveled with exceeding marvel, especially to see no man in the place, and delayed his going, whereupon quoth the eldest lady: "What aileth thee that goest not? Haply thy wage be too little?" And, turning to her sister, the cateress, she said, "Give him another dinar!" But the porter answered: "By the Lord, my lady, it is not for the wage, my hire is never more than two dirhams, but in very sooth my heart and my soul are taken up with you and your condition. I wonder to see you single with ne'er a man about you and not a soul to bear you company. And well you wot that the minaret toppleth o'er unless it stand upon four, and you want this same fourth, and women's pleasure without man is short of measure, even as the poet said:"Seest not we want for joy four things all told— The harp and lute, the flute and flageolet— And be they companied with scents fourfold, Rose, myrtle, anemone, and violet. Nor please all eight an four thou wouldst withhold— Good wine and youth and gold and pretty pet. "You be three and want a fourth who shall be a person of good sense and prudence, smart-witted, and one apt to keep careful counsel." His words pleased and amused them much, and they laughed at him and said: "And who is to assure us of that? We are maidens, and we fear to entrust our secret where it may not be kept, for we have read in a certain chronicle the lines of one Ibn al-Sumam:"Hold fast thy secret and to none unfold, Lost is a secret when that secret's told. An fail thy breast thy secret to conceal, How canst thou hope another's breast shall hold?" When the porter heard their words, he rejoined: "By your lives! I am a man of sense and a discreet, who hath read books and perused chronicles. I reveal the fair and conceal the foul and I act as the poet adviseth:"None but the good a secret keep, And good men keep it unrevealed. It is to me a well-shut house With keyless locks and door ensealed." When the maidens heard his verse and its poetical application addressed to them, they said: "Thou

knowest that we have laid out all our moneys on this place. Now say, hast thou aught to offer us in return for entertainment? For surely we will not suffer thee to sit in our company and be our cup companion, and gaze upon our faces so fair and so rare, without paying a round sum. Wettest thou not the saying: "Sans hope of gain Love's not worth a grain"? Whereto the lady portress added, "If thou bring anything, thou art a something; if no thing, be off with thee, thou art a nothing." But the procuratrix interposed, saying: "Nay, O my sisters, leave teasing him, for by the Lord he hath not failed us this day, and had he been other he never had kept patience with me, so whatever be his shot and scot I will take it upon myself." The porter, overjoyed, kissed the ground before her and thanked her, saying, "By the Lord, these moneys are the first fruits this day hath given me." Hearing this, they said, "Sit thee down and welcome to thee," and the eldest lady added: "By the Lord, we may not suffer thee to join us save on one condition, and this it is, that no questions be asked as to what concerneth thee not, and frowardness shall be soundly flogged." Answered the porter: "I agree to this, O my lady. On my head and my eyes be it! Look ye, I am dumb, I have no tongue." Then arose the provisioneress and, tightening her girdle, set the table by the fountain and put the flowers and sweet herbs in their jars, and strained the wine and ranged the flasks in rows and made ready every requisite. Then sat she down, she and her sisters, placing amidst them the porter, who kept deeming himself in a dream. And she took up the wine flagon and poured out the first cup and drank it off, and likewise a second and a third. After this she filled a fourth cup, which she handed to one of her sisters, and lastly, she crowned a goblet and passed it to the porter, saying: "Drink the dear draught, drink free and fain What healeth every grief and pain." He took the cup in his hand and, Touting low, returned his best thanks and improvised: "Drain not the bowl save with a

trusty friend, A man of worth whose good old blood all know. For wine, like wind, sucks sweetness from the sweet And stinks when over stench it haply blow." Adding: "Drain not the bowl, save from dear hand like thine, The cup recalls thy gifts, thou, gifts of wine." After repeating this couplet he kissed their hands and drank and was drunk and sat swaying from side to side and pursued: "All drinks wherein is blood the Law unclean Doth hold save one, the bloodshed of the vine. Fill! Fill! Take all my wealth bequeathed or won, Thou fawn! a willing ransome for those eyne." Then the cateress crowned a cup and gave it to the portress, who took it from her hand and thanked her and drank. Thereupon she poured again and passed to the eldest lady, who sat on the couch, and filled yet another and handed it to the porter. He kissed the ground before them, and after drinking and thanking them, he again began to recite: "Here! Here! By the Lord, here! Cups of the sweet, the dear! Fill me a brimming bowl, The Fount o' Life I speer." Then the porter stood up before the mistress of the house and said, "O lady, I am thy slave, thy Mameluke, thy white thrall, thy very bondsman," and he began reciting: "A slave of slaves there standeth at thy door, Lauding thy generous boons and gifts galore. Beauty! May he come in awhile to 'joy Thy charms? For Love and I part nevermore!" Then the lady took the cup and drank it off to her sisters' health, and they ceased not drinking (the porter being in the midst of them) and dancing and laughing and reciting verses and singing ballads and ritornellos. All this time the porter was carrying on with them, kissing, toying, biting, handling, groping, fingering whilst one thrust a dainty morsel in his mouth and another slapped him, and this cuffed his cheeks, and that threw sweet flowers at him. And he was in the very paradise of pleasure, as though he were sitting in the seventh sphere among the houris of Heaven. And they ceased not to be after this fashion till night began to fall. Thereupon said

they to the porter, "Bismillah, O our master, up and on with those sorry old shoes of thine and turn thy face and show us the breadth of thy shoulders!" Said he: "By the Lord, to part with my soul would be easier for me than departing from you. Come, let us join night to day, and tomorrow morning we will each wend our own way." "My life on you," said the procuratrix, "suffer him to tarry with us, that we may laugh at him. We may live out our lives and never meet with his like, for surely he is a right merry rogue and a witty." So they said: "Thou must not remain with us this night save on condition that thou submit to our commands, and that whatso thou seest, thou ask no questions thereanent, nor inquire of its cause." "All right," rejoined he, and they said, "Go read the writing over the door." So he rose and went to the entrance and there found written in letters of gold wash: WHOSO SPEAKETH OF WHAT CONCERNETH HIM NOT SHALL HEAR WHAT PLEASETH HIM NOT! The porter said, "Be ye witnesses against me that I will not speak on whatso concerneth me not." Then the cateress arose and set food before them and they ate. After which they changed their drinking place for another, and she lighted the lamps and candles and burned ambergris and aloe wood, and set on fresh fruit and the wine service, when they fell to carousing and talking of their lovers. And they ceased not to eat and drink and chat, nibbling dry fruits and laughing and playing tricks for the space of a full hour, when lo! a knock was heard at the gate. The knocking in no wise disturbed the seance, but one of them rose and went to see what it was and presently returned, saying, "Truly our pleasure for this night is to be perfect." "How is that?" asked they, and she answered: "At the gate be three Persian Kalandars with their beards and heads and eyebrows shaven, and all three blind of the left eye— which is surely a strange chance. They are foreigners from Roumland with the mark of travel plain upon them. They have just entered Baghdad, this being their first visit

to our city, and the cause of their knocking at our door is simply because they cannot find a lodging. Indeed one of them said to me: 'Haply the owner of this mansion will let us have the key of his stable or some old outhouse wherein we may pass this night.' For evening had surprised them and, being strangers in the land, they knew none who would give them shelter. And, O my sisters, each of them is a figure o' fun after his own fashion, and if we let them in we shall have matter to make sport of." She gave not over persuading them till they said to her: "Let them in, and make thou the usual condition with them that they speak not of what concerneth them not, lest they hear what pleased them not." So she rejoiced and, going to the door, presently returned with the three monoculars whose beards and mustachios were clean-shaven. They salaamed and stood afar off by way of respect, but the three ladies rose up to them and welcomed them and wished them joy of their safe arrival and made them sit down. The Kalandars looked at the room and saw that it was a pleasant place, clean-swept and garnished with flowers, and the lamps were burning and the smoke of perfumes was spiring in air, and beside the dessert and fruits and wine, there were three fair girls who might be maidens. So they exclaimed with one voice, "By the Lord, 'tis good!" Then they turned to the porter and saw that he was a merry-faced wight, albeit he was by no means sober and was sore after his slappings. So they thought that he was one of themselves and said, "A mendicant like us, whether Arab or foreigner!" But when the porter heard these words, he rose up and, fixing his eyes fiercely upon them, said: "Sit ye here without exceeding in talk! Have you not read what is writ over the door? Surely it befitteth not fellows who come to us like paupers to wag your tongues at us." "We crave thy pardon, O Fakir," rejoined they, "and our heads are between thy hands." The ladies laughed consumedly at the squabble and, making peace between the Kalandars

and the porter, seated the new guests before meat, and they ate. Then they sat together, and the portress served them with drink, and as the cup went round merrily, quoth the porter to the askers, "And you, O brothers mine, have ye no story or rare adventure to amuse us withal?" Now the warmth of wine having mounted to their heads, they called for musical instruments, and the portress brought them a tambourine of Mosul, and a lute of Irak, and a Persian harp. And each mendicant took one and tuned it, this the tambourine and those the lute and the harp, and struck up a merry tune while the ladies sang so lustily that there was a great noise. And whilst they were carrying on, behold, someone knocked at the gate, and the portress went to see what was the matter there. Now the cause of that knocking, O King (quoth Scheherazade) was this, the King Harun al-Rashid had gone forth from the palace, as was his wont now and then, to solace himself in the city that night, and to see and hear what new thing was stirring. He was in merchant's gear, and he was attended by Ja'afar, his Vizier, and by Masrur, his Swarder of Vengeance. As they walked about the city, their way led them toward the house of the three ladies, where they heard the loud noise of musical instruments and singing and merriment. So quoth the King to Ja'afar, "I long to enter this house and hear those songs and see who sing them." Quoth Ja'afar, "O Prince of the Faithful, these folk are surely drunken with wine, and I fear some mischief betide us if we get amongst them." "There is no help but that I go in there," replied the King, "and I desire thee to contrive some pretext for our appearing among them." Ja'afar replied, "I hear and I obey," and knocked at the door, whereupon the portress came out and opened. Then Ja'afar came forward and, kissing the ground before her, said, "O my lady, we be merchants from Tiberias town. We arrived at Baghdad ten days ago and, alighting at the merchants' caravanserai, we sold all our merchandise. Now a certain trader invited us to an

entertainment this night, so we went to his house and he set food before us and we ate. Then we sat at wine and wassail with him for an hour or so when he gave us leave to depart. And we went out from him in the shadow of the night and, being strangers, we could not find our way back to our khan. So haply of your kindness and courtesy you will suffer us to tarry with you this night, and Heaven will reward you!" The portress looked upon them and, seeing them dressed like merchants and men of gave looks and solid, she returned to her sisters and repeated to them Ja'afar's story, and they took compassion upon the strangers and said to her, "Let them enter." She opened the door to them, when said they to her, "Have we thy leave to come in?" "Come in," quoth she, and the King entered, followed by Ja'afar and Masrur. And when the girls saw them they stood up to them in respect and made them sit down and looked to their wants, saying, "Welcome, and well come and good cheer to the guests, but with one condition!" "What is that?" asked they, and one of the ladies answered, "Speak not of what concerneth you not, lest ye hear what pleaseth you not." "Even so," said they, and sat down to their wine and drank deep. Presently the King looked on the three Kalandars and, seeing them, each and every blind of the left eye, wondered at the sight. Then he gazed upon the girls, and he was startled and he marveled with exceeding marvel at their beauty and loveliness. They continued to carouse and to converse, and said to the King, "Drink!" But he replied, "I am vowed to pilgrimage," and drew back from the wine. Thereupon the portress rose and, spreading before him a tablecloth worked with gold, set thereon a porcelain bowl into which she poured willow-flower water with a lump of snow and a spoonful of sugar candy. The King thanked her and said in himself, "By the Lord, I will recompense her tomorrow for the kind deed she hath done." The others again addressed themselves to conversing and carousing, and when the

wine gat the better of them, the eldest lady, who ruled the house, rose and, making obeisance to them, took the cateress by the hand and said, "Rise, O my sister, and let us do what is our devoir." Both answered "Even so!" Then the portress stood up and proceeded to remove the table service and the remnants of the banquet, and renewed the pastilies and cleared the middle of the saloon. Then she made the Kalandars sit upon a sofa at the side of the estrade, and seated the King and Ja'afar and Masrur on the other side of the saloon, after which she called the porter, and said: "How scant is thy courtesy! Now thou art no stranger— nay, thou art one of the household." So he stood up and, tightening his waistcloth, asked, "What would ye I do?" And she answered, "Stand in thy place." Then the procuratrix rose and set in the midst of the saloon a low chair and, opening a closet, cried to the porter, "Come help me." So he went to help her and saw two black bitches with chains round their necks, and she said to him, "Take hold of them," and he took them and led them into the middle of the saloon. Then the lady of the house arose and tucked up her sleeves above her wrists and, seizing a scourge, said to the porter, "Bring forward one of the bitches." He brought her forward, dragging her by the chain, while the bitch wept and shook her head at the lady, who, however, came down upon her with blows on the sconce. And the bitch howled and the lady ceased not beating her till her forearm failed her. Then, casting the scourge from her hand, she pressed the bitch to her bosom and, wiping away her tears with her hands, kissed her head. Then said she to the porter, "Take her away and bring the second." And when he brought her, she did with her as she had done with the first. Now the heart of the King was touched at these cruel doings. His chest straitened and he lost all patience in his desire to know why the two bitches were so beaten. He threw a wink at Ja'afar, wishing him to ask, but the Minister, turning toward him, said by signs, "Be silent!"

Then quoth the portress to the mistress of the house, "O my lady, arise and go to thy place, that I in turn may do my devoir." She answered, "Even so," and, taking her seat upon the couch of juniper wood, pargetted with gold and silver, said to the portress and cateress, "Now do ye what ye have to do." Thereupon the portress sat upon a low seat by the couch side, but the procuratrix, entering a closet, brought out of it a bag of satin with green fringes and two tassels of gold. She stood up before the lady of the house and, shaking the bag, drew out from it a lute which she tuned by tightening its pegs; and when it was in perfect order, she began to sing these quatrains: "Ye are the wish, the aim of me, And when, O love, thy sight I see, The heavenly mansion openeth, But Hell I see when lost thy sight. From thee comes madness, nor the less Comes highest joy, comes ecstasy. Nor in my love for thee I fear Or shame and blame, or hate and spite. When Love was throned within my heart I rent the veil of modesty, And stints not Love to rend that veil, Garring disgrace on grace to alight. The robe of sickness then I donned, But rent to rags was secrecy. Wherefore my love and longing heart Proclaim your high supremest might. The teardrop railing adown my cheek Telleth my tale of ignomy. And all the hid was seen by all And all my riddle ree'd aright. Heal then my malady, for thou Art malady and remedy! But she whose cure is in thy hand Shall ne'er be free of bane and blight. Burn me those eyne that radiance rain, Slay me the swords of phantasy. How many hath the sword of Love Laid low, their high degree despite? Yet will I never cease to pine, Nor to oblivion will I flee. Love is my health, my faith, my joy, Public and private, wrong or right. O happy eyes that sight thy charms, That gaze upon thee at their gree! Yea, of my purest wish and will The slave of Love I'll aye be called." When the damsel heard this elegy in quatrains, she cried out "Alas! Alas!" and rent her raiment, and fell to the ground fainting. And the King saw scars of the palm rod on

her back and welts of the whip, and marveled with exceeding wonder. Then the portress arose and sprinkled water on her and brought her a fresh and very fine dress and put it on her. But when the company beheld these doings, their minds were troubled, for they had no inkling of the case nor knew the story thereof. So the King said to Ja'afar: "Didst thou not see the scars upon the damsel's body? I cannot keep silence or be at rest till I learn the truth of her condition and the story of this other maiden and the secret of the two black bitches." But Ja'afar answered: "O our lord, they made it a condition with us that we speak not of what concerneth us not, lest we come to hear what pleaseth us not." Then said the portress, "By the Lord, O my sister, come to me and complete this service for me." Replied the procuratrix, "With joy and goodly gree." So she took the lute and leaned it against her breasts and swept the strings with her finger tips, and began singing: "Give back mine eyes their sleep long ravished, And say me whither be my reason fled. I learnt that lending to thy love a place, Sleep to mine eyelids mortal foe was made. They said, 'We held thee righteous. Who waylaid Thy soul?' 'Go ask his glorious eyes,' I said. I pardon all my blood he pleased to shed. Owing his troubles drove him blood to shed. On my mind's mirror sunlike sheen he cast, Whose keen reflection fire in vitals bred. Waters of Life let the Lord waste at will, Suffice my wage those lips of dewy red. And thou address my love thou'lt find a cause For plaint and tears or ruth or lustilied. In water pure his form shall greet your eyne, When fails the bowl nor need ye drink of wine." Then she quoted from the same ode: "I drank, but the draught of his glance, not wine, And his swaying gait swayed to sleep these eyne. 'Twas not grape juice gript me but grasp of Past, 'Twas not bowl o'erbowled me but gifts divine. His coiling curlets my soul ennetted And his cruel will all my wits outwitted." After a pause she resumed: "If we 'plain of absence, what shall we

say? Or if pain afflict us, where wend our way? An I hire a truchman to tell my tale, The lovers' plaint is not told for pay. If I put on patience, a lover's life After loss of love will not last a day. Naught is left me now but regret, repine, And tears flooding cheeks forever and aye. O thou who the babes of these eyes hast fled, Thou art homed in heart that shall never stray. Would Heaven I wot hast thou kept our pact Long as stream shall flow, to have firmest fay? Or hast forgotten the weeping slave, Whom groans afflict and whom griefs waylay? Ah, when severance ends and we side by side Couch, I'll blame thy rigors and chide thy pride!"

Now when the portress heard her second ode, she shrieked aloud and said: "By the Lord! 'Tis right good!" and, laying hands on her garments, tore them as she did the first time, and fell to the ground fainting. Thereupon the procuratrix rose and brought her a second change of clothes after she had sprinkled water on her. She recovered and sat upright and said to her sister the cateress, "Onward, and help me in my duty, for there remains but this one song." So the provisioneress again brought out the lute and began to sing these verses: "How long shall last, how long this rigor rife of woe May not suffice thee all these tears thou seest flow? Our parting thus with purpose fell thou dost prolong Is't not enough to glad the heart of envious foe? Were but this lying world once true to lover heart, He had not watched the weary night in tears of woe. Oh, pity me whom overwhelmed thy cruel will, My lord, my king, 'tis time some ruth to me thou show. To whom reveal my wrongs, O thou who murdered me? Sad, who of broken troth the pangs must undergo! Increase wild love for thee and frenzy hour by hour, And days of exile minute by so long, so slow. O Muslims, claim vendetta for this slave of Love, Whose sleep Love ever wastes, whose patience Love lays low. Doth law of Love allow thee, O my wish! to lie Lapt in another's arms and unto me cry 'Go!?' Yet in thy presence, say, what joys shall I enjoy When he I love but works my love to

overthrow?" When the portress heard the third song, she cried aloud and, laying hands on her garments, rent them down to the very skirt and fell to the ground fainting a third time, again showing the scars of the scourge. Then said the three Kalandars, "Would Heaven we had never entered this house, but had rather nighted on the mounds and heaps outside the city! For verily our visit hath been troubled by sights which cut to the heart." The King turned to them and asked, "Why so?" and they made answer, "Our minds are sore troubled by this matter." Quoth the King, "Are ye not of the household?" and quoth they, "No, nor indeed did we ever set eyes on the place till within this hour." Hereat the King marveled and rejoined, "This man who sitteth by you, would he not know the secret of the matter?" And so saying he winked and made signs at the porter. So they questioned the man, but he replied: "By the All-might of the Lord, in love all are alike! I am the growth of Baghdad, yet never in my born days did I darken these doors till today, and my companying with them was a curious matter." "By the Lord," they rejoined, "we took thee for one of them and now we see thou art one like ourselves." Then said the King: "We be seven men, and they only three women without even a fourth to help them, so let us question them of their case. And if they answer us not, fain we will be answered by force." All of them agreed to this except Ja'afar, who said, "This is not my recking. Let them be, for we are their guests and, as ye know, they made a compact and condition with us which we accepted and promised to keep. Wherefore it is better that we be silent concerning this matter, and as but little of the night remaineth, let each and every of us gang his own gait." Then he winked at the King and whispered to him, "There is but one hour of darkness left and I can bring them before thee tomorrow, when thou canst freely question them all concerning their story." But the King raised his head haughtily and cried out at him in wrath, saying: "I have no patience left for my

longing to hear of them. Let the Kalandars question them forthright." Quoth Ja'afar, "This is not my rede." Then words ran high and talk answered talk, and they disputed as to who should first put the question, but at last all fixed upon the porter. And as the jangle increased the house mistress could not but notice it and asked them, "O ye folk! On what matter are ye talking so loudly?" Then the porter stood up respectfully before her and said: "O my lady, this company earnestly desire that thou acquaint them with story of the two bitches and what maketh thee punish them so cruelly, and then thou fallest to weeping over them and kissing them. And lastly, they want to hear the tale of thy sister and why she hath been bastinadoed with palm sticks like a man. These are the questions they charge me to put, and peace be with thee." Thereupon quoth she who was the lady of the house to the guests, "Is this true that he saith on your part?" and all replied, "Yes!" save Ja'afar, who kept silence. When she heard these words she cried: "By the Lord, ye have wronged us, O our guests, with grievous wronging, for when you came before us we made compact and condition with you that whoso should speak of what concerneth him not should hear what pleaseth him not. Sufficeth ye not that we took you into our house and fed you with our best food? But the fault is not so much yours as hers who let you in." Then she tucked up her sleeves from her wrists and struck the floor thrice with her hand, crying, "Come ye quickly!" And lo! a closet door opened and out of it came seven Black African slaves with drawn swords in hand, to whom she said, "Pinion me those praters' elbows and bind them each to each." They did her bidding and asked her: "O veiled and virtuous! Is it thy high command that we strike off their heads?" But she answered, "Leave them awhile that I question them of their condition before their necks feel the sword." "By the Lord, O my lady!" cried the porter, "slay me not for other's sin. All these men offended and deserve the penalty of crime

save myself. Now, by the Lord, our night had been charming had we escaped the mortification of those monocular Kalandars whose entrance into a populous city would convert it into a howling wilderness." Then he repeated these verses: "How fair is ruth the strong man deigns not smother! And fairest fair when shown to weakest brother. By Love's own holy tie between us twain, Let one not suffer for the sin of other." When the porter ended his verse, the lady laughed despite her wrath, and came up to the party and spake thus: "Tell me who ye be, for ye have but an hour of life. And were ye not men of rank and perhaps notables of your tribes, you had not been so froward and I had hastened your doom." Then said the King: "Woe to thee, O Ja'afar, tell her who we are lest we be slain by mistake, and speak her fair before some horror befall us." "'Tis part of thy deserts," replied he, whereupon the King cried out at him, saying, "There is a time for witty words and there is a time for serious work." Then the lady accosted the three Kalandars and asked them, "Are ye brothers?" when they answered, "No, by the Lord, we be naught but fakirs and foreigners." Then quoth she to one among them, "Wast thus born blind of one eye?" and quoth he, "No, by the Lord, 'twas a marvelous matter and a wondrous mischance which caused my eye to be torn out, and mine is a tale which, if it were written upon the eye corners with needle gravers, were a warner to whoso would be warned." She questioned the second and third Kalandar, but all replied like the first, "By the Lord, O our mistress, each one of us cometh from a different country, and we are all three the sons of kings, sovereign princes ruling over suzerains and capital cities." Thereupon she turned toward them and said: "Let each and every of you tell me his tale in due order and explain the cause of his coming to our place, and if his story please us, let him stroke his head and wend his way." The first to come forward was the hammal, the porter, who said: "O my lady, I am a man and a porter. This

dame, the cateress, hired me to carry a load and took me first to the shop of a vintner, then to the booth of a butcher, thence to the stall of a fruiterer, thence to a grocer who also sold dry fruits, thence to a confectioner and a perfumer-cum-druggist, and from him to this place, where there happened to me with you what happened. Such is my story, and peace be on us all!" At this the lady laughed and said, "Rub thy head and wend thy ways!" But he cried, "By the Lord, I will not stump it till I hear the stories of my companions!" Then came forward one of the monoculars and began to tell her

