

CHU CHIN CHOW

NOVELIZED BY

WILLIAM A. PAGE

FROM THE OPERA LIBRETTO BY

OSCAR ASCHE

1917

Edited by David Trutt

CHU CHIN CHOW
A MUSICAL TALE OF THE EAST

TOLD BY
OSCAR ASCHE

SET TO MUSIC BY
FREDERIC NORTON

First produced at His Majesty's Theatre, London
August 31st, 1916

PRESENTED HEREIN IS THE NOVELIZED VERSION BY
WILLIAM A. PAGE

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Chu Chin Chow is a musical comedy written, produced and directed by Oscar Asche, with music by Frederic Norton, based, with embellishments, on the story of *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves*. The piece premiered at His Majesty's Theatre in London on August 31, 1916 and ran for five years and a total of 2,238 performances (more than twice as many as any previous musical), a record that stood for nearly forty years.

As the piece became more popular, a souvenir booklet was prepared, which included a novelized version by William A. Page. He included background explanations with which the audience would have become familiar through the scenery and physical attributes of the characters. Page had the characters in his 'novel' use the dialogue from the play when appropriate.

In order to preserve the mysteries of the East, Oscar Asche had used olde English language and grammar, a practice somewhat followed by Page. This editor was drawn between producing a 'reading copy' and an historical record. The decision was to produce a reasonable compromise. Olde English language such as *thee*, *thou*, *hath* has been judged inappropriate to an Eastern milieu, and has been updated or reserved for those instances where it emphasizes the importance of the interchange. Asche's (and by derivation, Page's) odd grammatical sentence structure is used in many places to represent how foreign languages may be transliterated into English, and has been retained. It is noted that while Asche had used British spelling (such as *honour*), Page used American spelling (such as *honor*).

DRAMATIS PERSONAE (in order of appearance or mention in the story)

KASIM BABA	Wealthy merchant wishing to do business with Chu Chin Chow.
CHU CHIN CHOW	Purported wealthy Chinese merchant en route to Bagdad.
ABDULLAH	Kasim Baba's steward.
ALCOLOM	Kasim Baba's chief wife, youngish and shapely.
ZAHRAT-AL-KULUB	Beautiful slave girl, is Abu Hasan's spy in Kasim Baba's house.
MARJANAH	Young slave girl of Kasim Baba, in love with Nur-al-Huda.
ALI BABA	Kasim Baba's poor brother, in love with Alcolom.
NUR-AL-HUDA	Ali Baba's son, in love with Marjanah.
MABUBAH	Ali Baba's wife, now older and unattractive.
ABU HASAN	The Sheik of the Robbers, posing as merchant Chu Chin Chow.
KHUZAYMAH	Member of Abu Hasan's band.
MUSAB	Member of Abu Hasan's band.
AL MALIK AL-NASIR	Slave dealer of El Kabar (not included in the play).
MUKBILL	A slave auctioneer.
LADY BUYER	A slave dealer (named in the play as Zanim).
BOSTAN	She is Mabubah's servant.
MUSTAFA	A cobbler.
STALL-KEEPER	Seller of expensive silks (named in the play as Otbah).

Robbers, Dancers, Servants, Slaves.

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The Palace of Kasim Baba

In the Palace of Kasim Baba, all was merriment and mirth. The richest and most despised merchant of ancient Bagdad had planned an entertainment on a lavish scale and at great sacrifice of much good Persian gold, because of the coming visit of the famous Chinese Mandarin the great Chu Chin Chow, of China. News had been brought by special courier to Bagdad that a rich caravan was en route through the desert escorting the great potentate of the Far East.

Kasim Baba, ever eager to turn an honest or a dishonest dinar, had planned the feast in honor of the Oriental stranger, hoping that perchance much trade and many silks and satins might become his, if he could only fill the Chinese throat with sufficient liquor.

Abdullah, the chief steward of the household, had been told to spare no expense in preparing for the feast. Dozens of Nubian slaves ran back and forth arranging the divans and the settees for the distinguished guest and his escort. In the kitchens rare fowls were being trussed and roasted, strange dishes were being concocted by the resourceful Abdullah, and the keeper of the wine cellar dusted off some of his oldest and most precious wines to quench the Chinese thirst that was so rapidly approaching across the desert sands toward the great and powerful city of Bagdad, the jewel of Persia, and the center of the universe.

In the Palace itself, Kasim Baba, the elderly and miserly scarecrow who had accumulated a hoard of gold by denying himself the simplest of luxuries except when he thought the expenditure would bring in much more gold than he had to pay out, surveyed himself with proud satisfaction. Only Alcolom, his head wife, the official mistress of his harem, sighed behind his back as she saw him in these rich garments, for Alcolom was as fair and fat by contrast as Kasim Baba was lean and ugly. And Alcolom deigned not to disguise her scorn and hate for her worthy master.

In the gorgeous hall of state of the Palace, Abdullah, the steward, gave the final directions for the feast and the entertainment in honor of the visit of the Chinese merchant, Chu Chin Chow.

As the Nubian slaves completed their task of arranging the great dishes of gold and silver, laden with rare fruits, Abdullah turned and faced a beautiful young woman— young, yet with much of the wisdom of the world in her eyes—as she strolled down the great staircase of the palace. It was Zahrat-al-Kulub, dark of face and eyes, her hair close-cropped so that it fell just to her shoulders. She surveyed half-sadly the preparations for the feast.

“How now, Abdullah, what guest are you preparing for to-night?” she asked, with a somewhat bored air, reclining upon a divan in front of a great antique throne chair, evidently placed for the coming guest of honor.

Abdullah bowed low before the beautiful Zahrat-al-Kulub, the fairest slave in the harem of Kasim Baba. "Don't you know, Oh Zahrat-al-Kulub," he replied respectfully, "that our master this night will entertain Chu Chin Chow, a rich merchant from China?"

The slave laughed harshly. "Whereby the rich merchant will wax richer and our master Kasim, the poorer, eh?" she cried, scornfully.

Abdullah surveyed her in blissful astonishment and ignorance. "What do you mean, oh serious and mysterious one?" he asked.

The girl rose her feet lazily, and came toward the steward. "After every such feast of honour to these traveling strangers from afar," she said, meaningly, "bad fortune has knocked at the door of Kasim Baba."

"In sooth you are right," agreed the servant.

"Was there not Sharrkan, the Wizar of Sharazynar, who came to us not long since?"

"Aye, whose bilious skin Kasim sought to render even more bilious with a feast of fat rich food which I had to prepare," added the chief steward, sadly.

"And before the next new moon, one of Kasim's vessels, laden with perfumes and spices from the Indies, was sunk at sea by pirates. And then there was the wealthy Yacoub, of Damascus. You remember him well, for you cooked strange dishes for him. And then there was the royal Grecian prince, Constantine."

"Yeh," Abdullah nodded, reminiscently, "with whom our master joined in a three days' orgy of rare Egyptian wines and strong waters from the west."

"And before his head had cooled, news came of a rich caravan sacked in the Bagdad pass," added the slave girl.

"Yeh, you speak the truth, Zahrat-al-Kulub. Allah has indeed exacted heavy payment from Kasim Baba for each and every straying from his wonted path of meanness." [Straying from his usual path of a mean between two extremes.]

"For which Allah ever be praised," murmured Zahrat, reverently, yet there was a subtle meaning in her voice as she asked the punishment of Allah upon her hated master that did not escape the attention of the chief steward. He too hated Kasim Baba.

"Amen," he murmured, bowing low as he crossed his arms, mockingly. "It matters not to us, this feast, for it is seldom good wines and rich food find their way through the portals of Kasim's palace."

"Wherefore it matters little to us, his slaves, whether he be rich or poor," added the girl, bitterly. "Would to Allah he lost everything, the shriveled son of a dog."

Once more Abdullah crossed his arms. "Amen! Allah hear thy prayer," he whispered.

"Hush," interrupted the slave girl. "Go and bring in the wines, for Alcolom, the proud and haughty wife of Kasim's harem, may hear your evil wishes. She is here."

Alcolom, the fair, fat and fatuous lady of uncertain age, who rejoiced in the position of chief wife of the hated Kasim, giggled and gargled as she literally fell upon a great mass of cushions on one of the divans. She gasped for breath, for Alcolom's girth was ample and the slightest exercise interfered with her normal functions. She fanned herself coquettishly, and beckoned to a slender young girl of perhaps eighteen years, with long dark tresses and the grace that comes only with great beauty. The young girl was Marjanah, the fairest of the youthful slaves in the harem of Kasim Baba, and the particular pet of Alcolom, for whom she acted as hand-maiden.

"Oh, if Ali Baba were but here for the feast," murmured Alcolom.

Marjanah clapped her hands with delight at the suggestion.

"Ah, if Ali Baba were but master here," she sighed, "then should we have such a feast after every sunset prayer."

Zahrat-al-Kulub drew nearer. She smiled, and shook her head. "And you, Marjanah, would attain your heart's desire, and become the wife of his son, Nur-al-Huda, the slave of love."

Marjanah faced her proudly and defiantly. "Yeh," she cried, in the rough hard dialect of the people of Bagdad, "His head and only wife, for does he not love me even as I love him, with the love of first sight and hearing?"

"But Kasim will never part with you," insisted Zahrat, insinuatingly, "oh daughter of longing desire."

The young girl crossed her arms and bowed. "Therefore, I pray to Allah that Kasim may lose every dinar of his hoarded ill-gotten gains," she said simply. "But I shall love only Nur-al-Huda, and I shall never be happy until I am his head and only wife."

The Desert Woman

A gong sounded in the distance. Outside the Palace there was the great noise of a vast caravan, and the murmur of many voices. Zahrat-al-Kulub hastily drew Alcolom and the young slave girl, Marjanah, into an alcove beneath the great Palace staircase down which in a few moments the mighty Chu Chin Chow would descend as the guest of honor at the feast. "List," she cried. "There are some I know who pray to Allah at every rising and setting of the sun that Kasim may lose not only wealth but life itself."

"Allah hear their prayer," murmured Alcolom, fervidly.

"I know of one, his wife, Alcolom, the ravisher of hearts, who would not mourn his absence," added Marjanah, meaningly.

"Yeh," agreed Zahrat, "And his brother Ali for another."

Marjanah mockingly bowed low before her plump mistress. "Aye," she assented. "For Alcolom, the plump turtle dove of turtle doves, has cast longing eyes upon her husband's brother, and would be cooing in a new harem. Is it not so, my mistress?"

Alcolom tapped her reprovingly with her fan, yet smiled. "Oh, impudent and all-knowing one," she simpered.

"And Ali Baba's palate is tickling for a taste of such a luscious sugar melon after so many years dieting on a withered date," mocked Zahrat.

But Alcolom interrupted her with a laugh. "Nay, you flatter Ali's wife, the ancient Mahbubah, in likening her to a withered date," she cried, "she is but the sun-dried stone of a withered date."

"Yeh," added Marjanah, with a deep bow, "She who starves poor Ali with crackling nagging words."

"Whereas Alcolom would feed him with ever ripening kisses," mocked Zahrat.

Alcolom, who had taken the jest in good spirit so far, became angry at the teasing. "Nay, not alone my kisses," she said, fiercely, "but all the wealth and power of Kasim Baba would be his, would Allah but grant my prayer."

Zahrat, who had spoken at first in jest, realized now that Alcolom was in earnest, and that she really loved the poor brother of the rich Kasim Baba. Taking her by the arm, she whispered: "List—there is one coming to the feast to-night, who has power to grant your prayer. One mighty, even as Allah."

Alcolom blinked without understanding. With a laugh, she queried: "So? Comes then Satan to the feast?"

"Not Satan, but the very son of Satan comes himself," cried Zahrat, bitterly, clenching her hands together in hate at the thought of the man about to visit the house of Kasim Baba. "I mean the great Chu Chin Chow of China."

Marjanah gazed at her in amazement, and Alcolom looked at her blankly.

"Will you both give the bond of Allah never to unfold that which I about to tell?"

The two women nodded, crossed their arms and bowed. "We swear by the Koran," they added together, raising both hands toward the sky.

"Know then that I am above all the very slave of this Chu Chin Chow," cried Zahrat, tensely. "Even as I was the slave of the Wazir of Sharazynar, of the Hebrew from Damascus, and of the Royal Grecian Prince. For all four are but one and the same."

"Are you then the slave of some evil spirit?" asked Alcolom, trembling.

"Yeh, of the spirit of all evil, of the ifrit [*demon*] of ifrits," cried Zahrat, fiercely. "I am the slave of Abu Hasan of Khorasan," she added, hysterically.

The two women gazed upon her in awe. "The robber chief?" cried Marjanah

"Yeh, of him whom all men fear, the robber of mankind."

"You, his slave?" stuttered Alcolom.

Zahrat-al-Kulub bowed her head submissively as she told her story. "Five years since he raided the desert of Almarah, and dragged me from my desert home and my desert lover," she said mournfully. "Then tiring of me, he sold me by subtle means and cunning, as a slave to Kasim Baba. I am his spy. In every household of the rich, he keeps a slave to spy for him on pain of torture."

Alcolom, much agitated, interrupted her. "And you send him word and warning when there is aught to rob?" she inquired.

"Even so. Then he comes in some strange disguise to gather up by wit and guile what threads be lacking."

"And what threads does he come to gather up to-night?" asked the head wife of Kasim Baba.

Your lord sends forth tomorrow some score or so of precious slaves for sale," explained Zahrat. "They are the pickings and the barterings of many climes and moons. You, Marjanah, and I among the rest."

"Awah, awah [*Alas, alas*]," sighed Marjanah, mournfully. "I will never see my lover Nur-al-Huda again."

"Only the wealthiest are bidden to this sale," continued Zahrat. "The time and place of selling unknown to common ears. Abu Hasan at the feast tonight, disguised as the rich Chinese merchant, Chu Chin Chow, will learn the time and place and gain a bidding to the sale."

"But how can he help us to our desires?" queried Alcolom.

"Yeh, that I will explain," said Zahrat. "Let Marjanah here before the feast gain speech with him, and pretend to pierce through his disguise."

Marjanah clapped her hands together joyfully. "I will say you have unwrapped his secret, and will threaten to expose him."

But the desert girl wailed sadly. "Awah," she cried. "That would mean death to him I love and worse than death to me. He holds my desert lover a prisoner in his cave, as hostage for my faithfulness, and should he prove me false, my lover dies."

"Then how?" inquired Marjanah.

"Upon his thumb he ever wears a ring," explained Zahrat. "An emerald carved like an eagle's claw. Let your wits, Marjanah, devise the rest. Yet must he not suspect that you know he is Abu Hasan, for that would mean death to all of us."

"But what will you do, Zahrat-al-Kulub?" asked Alcolom.

"I do but wait until Allah shall unfold to me the path to freedom and revenge," cried the girl from the desert, clenching her knife and half drawing it from her girdle. "My time will come. 'Tis written in the sands, my fate and his."

The Merchant from Shanghai

The hour for the great dinner in honor of Chun Chin Chow of China, had arrived. From the courtyard, where he had left his rickshaw, with half a dozen Chinese coolies in care, the Chinese merchant entered the Palace of Kasim Baba. The figure of Chu himself was large and dominant, and seemed to tower above his escort. Chu seemed a giant in form, as, clad in Oriental robes and garments of richest silk, and waving a beautiful fan of peacock feathers, he strolled majestically into the great banquet hall of the palace where Kasim Baba's retinue of servants were waiting to salaam before him.

"Thou art the great Chu Chin Chow of China," cried Abdullah, as he and the Nubian servants kneeled abjectly before the potentate of the Orient, who took his place in the chair of honor. "Your servants salute you. My master bids me welcome to his humble palace the great prince of the Eastern Empire. The banquet has been spread in honor of my lord, and soon a feast and entertainment will make you forget your journey."

The great Chinese merchant smiled indulgently. "I am Chu Chin Chow of China," he proclaimed, in a sonorous voice. "No blood finer as mine in China. I am a Merchant Mandarin, I have a purple palanquin [*enclosed litter to carry him*], and a record that is strangely clean, in Shanghai, China."

Abdullah again prostrated himself. "We are the dust beneath your feet, oh Chu Chin Chow. I will acquaint my lord of your arrival."

The steward backed off from the banquet hall, followed by the Nubian servants. The rich Chinese merchant, left alone with his own escort, suddenly changed his manner. Instead of the dignified and sonorous Chinese prince he now became the laughing, sneering and treacherous personification of wickedness.

"Ha, what a fool my old friend Kasim Baba has become," he cried, laughingly, whereat the escort of Chinese soldiers nudged each other and gazed at him in admiration. "He has prepared another sumptuous feast in my honor, in honor of the notorious robber chieftain Abu Hasan of Khorasan, or rather in honor of Chu Chin Chow of China. Even as he prepared a feast for the Wazir of Sharazynar, and for the Hebrew from Damascus, and for the royal Grecian Prince. May Allah bless this feast as he blessed the others, that I may worm out of Kasim Baba the secret of the slave selling that we may plunder this miser yet once again."

The pseudo Chinese raised their hands, palms outward, and gazed toward the sky. "Glory be to Allah, may it be so," they murmured as with one voice.

A sudden cough apprised Chu Chin Chow of an interruption. Marjanah, the young slave timidly approached.

“Are you our master’s honored guest, the great Chu Chin Chow of China?” she asked, fearfully. Chu lazily fanned himself, and replied, “Yeh, thou daughter of inquisitive questioning.” Chu held out his hand for the slave girl to kiss. She kneeled before him. Suddenly she started back. Upon the thumb of the right hand was a great emerald ring, cut like an eagle’s claw.

“Nay, you may deceive others, but never Marjanah, oh Chu Chin Chow,” she cried, rising quickly.

The robber chieftain fanned himself lazily, though the members of his band instinctively placed their hands upon their knives. “What do you mean, oh daughter of ignorance?” asked the Chinese merchant.

“That ring,” cried Marjanah. “This is the fourth time you have honored Kasim Baba’s palace and ever in different garb, but ever wearing that same ring upon your thumb.”

The members of the robber band quickly closed about the slave girl, but Chu lifted his hand as a warning signal. “Nay, fear not that I will betray you,” added Marjanah, nervously. “If I swear to keep your secret, oh Chu Chin Chow, will you swear to aid me?”

There was honey in the smile of the notorious brigand as he leaned toward the young girl and softly said, “I swear it, by the Koran. What is it that you ask, little jasmine bud?”

Marjanah came swiftly to his side. “Will you this night bargain for me with Kasim Baba, and having bought me, give me my freedom that I may enter the harem of my soul’s delight?”

“I swear it, by the Koran,” said Abu Hasan of Khorasan, whose word was never worth even the fraction of a dinar and who held his honor lightly.

“And yet one more boon,” added Marjanah, as an after thought. “My mistress Alcolom, hates and is hated by her lord Kasim, yet Allah will not hearken to her prayers. Can you not aid her to her desires, oh Chu Chin Chow?”

“By the removing of her lord to Paradise?” asked Chu, significantly, pointing upward.

“Nay, to your father’s kingdom,” responded Marjanah, pointing downward [*to Hades*].

The robber chieftain smiled sardonically. The joke was on him. “Whence this knowledge of my pedigree, Marjanah? And do you think I will crush the bee that makes me honey? Yet if your mistress will but aid me to rob the comb, she shall remain queen bee,” he added.

Marjanah looked at him inquisitively. “How, oh son of Satan?”

“That she shall know hereafter,” commanded Chu, imperiously. “Now go, for the feast is about to begin.”

Marjanah ran lightly up the staircase, turned and cast a mocking kiss to him. “May Allah send you days of light and delight, oh lord of the rising sun,” she cried, laughingly, and disappeared.

Chu rapped angrily upon the arm of the chair. “I am betrayed!” he cried.

Master and Slave

As the members of the band of Abu Hasan gathered around him in dismay, now that the identity of their chieftain was known to the slave girl Marjanah, the keen sharp eyes of the pseudo Chinese merchant caught a glimpse of a familiar figure lurking behind one of the columns of the staircase.

“Zahrat-al-Kulub,” he cried. “Nay, hide not, thou bashful flower,” he added, insinuatingly. “Draw near, thou bloom of the desert. Do you hear me?”

Slowly the slave from the desert came down the great staircase, and slowly she made obeisance before the false merchant from China. “My lord and master,” she murmured, bowing low. Abu Hasan smiled wickedly. “Why do you lurk in the shadows, Zahrat-al-Kulub?” he asked.

The slave girl inclined her head slightly. “Awaiting opportunity of speech with you, alone and unobserved,” she said simply.

The keen, sparkling eyes of the robber chieftain flashed malevolently. “And your news then is true oh faithful flower?”

“Yeh, oh master.”

“These slaves of Kasim’s, so highly prized, and to be sold so secretly, set forth at sunrise tomorrow?”

“Yeh, in charge of Abdullah and a guard of scimitars.”

“Whither?” asked Chu.

“That is for you to learn, oh master.”

“And you have ever served me faithfully, oh Zahrat-al-Kulub?”

“Has not my master proof of my devotion?”

Abu Hasan leaned toward the desert woman and scanned her face carefully. “And you bear no malice for the years now past, no desire for vengeance?”

The slave girl prostrated herself before him, and bowed her head. “How could so poor a creature as I have vengeance upon the all-powerful Abu Hasan of Khorasan?”

“Yet thy fellow-slave Marjanah does suspect me,” declared Chu. “She has named her price of silence. “Why does she suspect?”

Zahrat smiled. “Marjanah’s eyes are ever keen,” she said, rising to her feet again.

“Your mistress, Alcolom, has likewise named her price. The death of her lord Kasim.”

Zahrat clenched her fists in anger. “A jackal by whose death the world would gain,” she said, bitterly.

Abu Hasan observed her carefully for a full half minute in silence. “Yet why should Marjanah suspect? Your tongue has never loosely wagged?” he queried.

“Never, oh master.”

“And your reward, oh Zahrat? What do you desire?”

Zahrat unfolded her thoughts. “Oh, master, I likewise go for sale. Buy me at the auction market, set me and my lover free and let us return to our former home in the desert of Almarah. Do this, oh Abu Hasan, and you will ever have the blessings of Zahrat-al-Kulub.”

“And you have no desire for riches?” The robber chief’s voice spoke in a bantering tone.

“None, oh master.” The girl’s voice was simple and sincere.

“Yet for your services here in the home of Kasim Baba, I shall reward you as befits you,” spoke Abu Hasan, meaningly. “Until your end of life, which Allah grant be not for many years, I swear by the Koran you and your lover shall live midst wealth uncountable.”

The girl clasped his hand convulsively. “You swear?” she demanded.

“By the Koran,” replied Abu Hasan, and smiled as he spoke.

“Amen,” cried Zahrat, with a sigh of joy.

“Amen,” cried the Chinese members of the band of Abu Hasan, and kneeled with uplifted palms.

The robber chief took a small vial of liquid from his robe. “Take this drug,” he commanded, “and drop it in your master’s cup at the feast tonight, so that he may be absent from the sale tomorrow. Bid your mistress Alcolom take his place. Go!”

Zahrat-al-Kulub took the vial of liquid, and salaamed. “Hearing is obeying,” she murmured, as she retired.

Alone with his band, Abu Hasan laughed long and loudly. The false Chinese merchant and his retinue chuckled and grinned at the grim joke just perpetrated upon the girl who had betrayed them, and upon whom they proposed to be revenged.

“By wealth uncountable until they die,” repeated Abu Hasan of Khorasan, with a mocking laugh. “Be that not just, oh men?”

And the members of the robber band chuckled, and cried “Amen.”

But Abu Hasan did not tell Zahrat-al-Kulub that she and her lover, to be surrounded by wealth uncountable until they died, must remain prisoners chained to the rocky walls of the cavern near Bagdad where he hoarded the vast sums of gold and great stores of precious jewels gathered as a result of his crimes.

The Poor Brother of Kasim

The feast of Kasim Baba was the culmination of a thousand and one efforts on the part of his vast army of slaves to please their illustrious and hated master. Dances by Japanese girls, weird music played by Nubians upon strange instruments, and the intoxicating perfumes wafted in a hundred directions by enormous fans of ostrich feathers, served to soothe the senses. The soft siren tones of the dancing girls as they sang in time with the undulating movements of their bodies, seemed like an Oriental fantasy. The deference with which Chu was treated by all, from Kasim Baba himself down to the humblest slave, pleased the robber baron.

When the slaves poured wine from rare old jars, it was Zahrat-al-Kulub who insisted upon serving Kasim Baba. "Nay, I must serve my master with the first cup," she declared, and Chu's eyes twinkled as he beheld the slave girl deftly pour a few drops from the vial into the wine.

In the midst of the merriment, as the servants placed oysters stewed in honey before the Chinese merchant, there was the sound of singing and carousing from without. Then down the great staircase, half reeling, half dancing, came a strange and attractive figure of a man—one whose attire showed that he and gold had been strangers for a long time, yet one whose genial personality won every heart. It was Ali Baba, the younger and poorer brother of the miserly merchant, Kasim Baba. Close behind Ali came yet another figure, Mabubah, Ali's wife, who had been his constant companion for many years.

The poor brother, breaking thus upon the feast, took heed of none save Alcolom, the stout and plump wife of his brother, she who sat by the right hand of the great Chu.

"Alcolom, oh Alcolom, you ravisher of hearts," cried Ali, speaking lovingly because of too much wine. "You are sweet basil, you are white jasmine."

Alcolom blushed. Chu Chin Chow seemed amused and surveyed the new comer kindly. "Who is this father of mirth and girth, oh host of hosts?" he asked.

Kasim bowed low in apology. "A poor half-witted brother of mine, the babbler of Bagdad, oh guest of guests," he replied.

Ali Baba turned from the ravishing Alcolom to survey the haughty Chu Chin Chow. Carefully he inspected the eastern potentate, and then turned to his brother. "And who is this father of air and hair, oh brother of brothers?" mocked Ali.

"The rich merchant, the great Chu-ch—" stammered Kasim Baba, unable to remember the name.

"I am Chu Chin Chow of China," interposed the pseudo mandarin, with dignity.

Ali Baba laughed uproariously. "Yeh," he cried, merrily, "And you have journeyed all those many miles from China to walk at last into the web of the ancient spider Kasim. He will suck you dry even as I suck this blood orange of the Khulanjan."

Kasim Baba started up with rage, but Chu Chin Chow calmly fanned himself. A sudden interruption saved more words and ill feeling. The worthy Abdullah, who had prepared a special entertainment for the diners, announced that Marjanah, the singing slave girl, and the dancers from the Nile, would next entertain the guests.

As Marjanah, the beautiful young slave girl, sang her lyric of the sorceress of the Nile, who betrayed so many legions of admirers and sent them to death, a young man, a recent comer to the feast, gazed toward her eagerly. It was Nur-al-Huda, the young son of the tipsy Ali Baba, and because of his love for Marjanah whom he hoped some day to make his wife, he was present at the feast.

Other eyes than those of the love-sick young man had found the fair Marjanah an attractive magnet. The Chinese merchant gazed at her in admiration. "By Buddha's tomb," he cried, when the song was over, "this slave of yours delights my celestial eye. What sum, oh Kasim, will tempt you to part with such a gem?"

Nur-al-Huda sprang forward and faced the Chinese prince. "She is not for sale, oh stranger from Shanghai," he cried. "She is my beloved. Is it not so, oh love of loves?"

Marjanah turned and spoke tenderly to the faithful Nur-al-Huda. "You are the heart of my life, O Nur-al-Huda, yet am I but a chattel of my lord Kasim," she sighed.

Kasim, the miserly host, glared at the scapegrace and disowned nephew. "By Allah, who are you to bandy words?" he demanded.

"Your brother's son," replied Nur-al-Huda, proudly. "My father and I have come hither to bargain with you for her freedom."

"Yeh," added the hilarious Ali Baba, lurching forward. "What is the price you ask, oh my brother?" Mabubah, the shrewish wife, plucked him by the arm and would have drawn him back from the feasting table. "What do you talk of price, you drunken fool?" she cried. "You do not own even the price of a pair of worn out slippers."

The deep sonorous voice of Chu made all pause. "Are you willing to change your master, oh daughter of song?" he demanded. "Speak—"

"As Allah wills—" responded Marjanah, solemnly, raising both hand with the palms outward in token of submission.

But Nur-al-Huda cried sadly, "Nay, Marjanah, never to him."

The young girl turned to him with tears in her eyes, for she feared to cause him pain, yet could not explain that the proposed sale was but part of the plan whereby the generous Chu Chin Chow would later re-unite her with her beloved. "Allah's ways are strange," she murmured, softly.

The keen sharp eyes of the miser Kasim, in fancy, was already counting the gold of the rich merchant. "What do you offer, oh noble one," he cried, greedily.

"A thousand pieces of Chinese gold," said Chu, carelessly. Ali Baba, breaking loose from the shrewish Mabubah, and clutching his son's arm, cried out, "And I offer two thousand pieces."

"Pieces," demanded Kasim, angry at the interruption, for he would fain sell the girl and get the gold. "What pieces, fool?"

"Pieces of Persian firewood," interrupted Mabubah, fiercely. "That is all he can offer. Ali Baba cannot bid against this stranger for the girl."

Ali climbed upon the low table in his exaltation, sipping a cup of wine to give him further courage. "Now by Allah," he cried, "you do not know all the secrets of my unknown wealth, you crinkled crow Mabubah. Nor you too, my brother, you shrunken spider. Whatever Chu Chin Chow offers, I will double."

The guests at the feast stared in amazement, for was not Ali Baba known throughout Bagdad for his poverty and his beggar's clothes? Yet he dared dispute in terms of gold with the rich Chinese merchant.

"I offer twenty thousand pieces of Chinese gold," thundered Chu Chin Chow.

"And I," responded Ali Baba, "I offer forty thousand golden pieces of Turkey, Persia, Egypt, Greece, or any land that pleases you."

"Offer?" shrieked Kasim, shrilly. "When will you pay?"

Ali gulped down another drink. Chu smiled. There was a moment's silence.

"According to our Persian law," said Ali, slowly, "I claim a full day's time in which to pay."

"Then if you fail to pay your forty thousand pieces of gold before the next midnight, then will I take your offer, most noble one," cried Kasim, eagerly.

But Chu Chin Chow calmly waved his peacock fan. Hasan. "Nay, I'll bid again, perchance," he added."

Ali Baba placed his arm affectionately on his son's shoulder, as Marjanah fell into her lover's arms. "The slave is yours, oh son of my heart," he said, gently.

And the clutching claw of the miserly Kasim Baba reached out viciously and separated the two young people. "Nay, when you have paid the price of forty thousand pieces of gold, then may the slave girl be your son's beloved," he cried angrily. "And see that you pay the debt before tomorrow midnight."

"Tomorrow midnight?" blinked Ali, filling his goblet again with wine, "Yeh, you shall be paid, oh brother of brothers—you shall be paid, somehow."

In the Cactus Grove

Near the ancient turquoise god in the cactus grove just outside the farthest gate of the city of Bagdad, Nur-al-Huda walked with his beloved, the slave girl, Marjanah, the day after the feast.

“Oh, Nur-al-Huda, light of my soul,” said Marjanah, sadly, “Your father has brought dire calamity upon us by his meddling. I had made bargain with that stranger from Shanghai that he should buy me from Kasim Baba and give me my freedom, that I might become your wife. And now, owing to your father’s drunken boasting, am I still in bondage.”

“But did not the stranger say he would bid for you again?” asked Nur-al-Huda, hopefully.

“Awah,” wailed Marjanah, “he has departed from Bagdad, having concluded his business with my master, and we are never likely to set eyes on him again.” Nur-al-Huda took his beloved in his arms and sought to comfort her.

Through the cactus grove came the sound of a merry, maudlin song. It was the voice of Ali Baba, easily recognized, for in all Bagdad none could sing with greater zest than he when in his cups. Soon he came within sight of the lovers, a jug of wine beneath his arm, and at every dozen steps or so, he stopped to drink. Dropping beneath a great graven image, he gazed up at the two young people.

“Drinking yet again, oh my father,” remonstrated Nur-al-Huda.

“Again?” protested Ali. “It’s the first I’ve had this day.”

“Yeh, my father. But yesternight at Kasim’s feast, did you not drink sufficient to last you even for a journey to Mesopotamia?”

Ali blinked and waved him away. “Is it not written that the past is past? I remember naught but the present,” he said, singing.

“But do you not remember your bid of forty thousand pieces at the feast?”

“No, I remember nothing.”

“And how you did swear by Allah to pay these forty thousand pieces of gold for the freedom of my beloved Marjanah?”

“No.”

“And here you are drunk in the forest, after your wife had turned you out to look for firewood. Had you not meddled and muddled at Kasim’s feast, Marjanah would even now be mine.”

Ali took another drink from the jug, carefully placed it on the ground, and looked up at his son seriously. “There are many women in the world, oh my son,” he said simply.

“But none like Marjanah,” protested Nur-al-Huda, drawing her closer to him, whereat she smiled. “Her figure is like a willow branch, and my soul almost quits me at the sight of her movements.”

Ali Baba caressed the wine jug, and shook his head doubtfully. "Only two kinds of women, my son, even as the cattle in Pharaoh's dream, fat and lean," he declared. "Consider your poor father's lot. When I married Mabubah, she was as beautiful as a wild gazelle, even as Marjanah here. Consider her now. Oh, my son! How the passing years have leaned and angled her. When I embrace her, I embrace a thistle. If only Alcolom were in her place—a soft pillow to rest on after the day's work is done. Choose a fat wife, oh my son, not such a one as Marjanah here, so slender and so thin."

Ali rose with difficulty, and wobbled on his feet, the jug beneath his arm. "Look at what Alcolom slipped under my robe last night—this jug of Grecian wine, and this plump basted pullet, stuffed with cloves and almond patties. Plump and juicy, even as Alcolom herself, the ravisher of hearts. Fare thee well, my turtle doves, but talk not to Ali of a wife unless she be like Alcolom."

Staggering, halting, half singing in a maudlin way the father of Nur-al-Huda left the young lovers together in the cactus grove by the blue turquoise god.

The Cave of the Robbers

Nur-al-Huda and Marjanah seated themselves on a small rock in a slight recess not easily viewed from the path through the grove. Around them, at intervals, were many large rocks, and a particularly large flat rock lay a score of paces from them.

"Oh, my sweet myrtle bud," sighed Nur-al-Huda, taking his beloved in his arms tenderly. "We must hasten away from Bagdad ere your master, Kasim Baba, can suspect your absence."

"Nay," responded the young girl, "Kasim Baba sleeps soundly this day, for has not Zahrat-al-Kulub given him the drug with which to soothe his senses and keep him from the slave market to please Abu Hasan?"

"I had forgot," cried Nur-al-Huda. "Our time then approaches when we can away."

In the distance the voice of the muezzin summoning all within the city to the mosque for noonday worship, and for prayer to Allah, could be heard. The lovers dropped upon their knees, and in silence uttered a prayer to Allah that they might escape from the hated Kasim and the evil Chu Chin Chow.

Suddenly from the bowels of the earth, it seemed a great voice rang out.

"Open, oh Sesame," cried the voice. As they gazed in wonder, the great flat rock not a stone's throw from them slowly rose upon its side, and from an opening beneath the rock can forth a strange procession of men, garbed in rich and fantastic clothes, and each armed with the deadly curved scimitar. To a soft and stealthy chant, they came forward, one by one. Then as easily as though he had climbed the staircase of Kasim Baba's palace, came the rich Chinese merchant, Chu Chin Chow, still in Oriental garb, and attended by half a dozen Chinese servants as the night before.

Chu Chin Chow raised his hand for silence. The members of his robber band listened respectfully. "Now we must to the slave market El Kabar, where the most beautiful slaves of Kasim Baba will be sold to the highest bidder," commanded Chu. "Do thou, Khuzaymah, and thou, oh Musab, collect all our band and gather outside the market gates to await my signal when the rich buyers have displayed all of their gold. Thus we may yet plunder Kasim Baba once again."

Turning toward the rock, Chu Chin Chow, still waving in stately fashion the great fan he always carried, command in a loud voice, "Shut, oh Sesame." Slowly the great slab of rock, as though influenced by some unseen force set into action by the magic words, sank into place. With the strange chant of the robbers, and at a signal from Chu, the entire band disappeared into the cactus grove on the path leading toward the city.

Marjanah and Nur-al-Huda, almost stricken dumb with astonishment, gazed blankly at each other as the band of robbers disappeared. "By Allah," cried Nur-al-Huda, rising to his feet and aiding Marjanah, as the two ran down to the mysterious rock which they had seen move. "What wonder of wonders is this? It is the Chinese merchant, Chu Chin Chow—"

"You mean It is Abu Hasan of Khorasan," replied Marjanah. "Did I not tell you it was he in disguise at the feast?"

"Yeh, the robber sheik."

"Yeh," continued Marjanah, in great excitement, "Gold and jewels and silks, stolen by his band, must all be hidden in this cavern grim and cold."

"What were the words they spoke to close the rock?" asked Nur-al-Huda.

"Yeh, and the words to open it," puzzled Marjanah. "Let me think—"

"I have it—it was—" cried Nur-al-Huda.

In the distance, singing his maudlin song, was heard the voice of Ali Baba. He came to the young people sadly, his jug upside down, his face dejected.

"Oh father of fathers—" began Nur-al-Huda.

"We have seen strange sights," cried Marjanah. But Ali waved both away.

"Yeh, even as I see a strange sight now," muttered Ali. "You my son, loitering away your hours with this chattering magpie, while your poor hard working father toils and broils in the noon-day heat, with never a drop of water or of wine to cool him."

"Nay, listen, father of cryings and lyings" commanded the son. "Even as Marjanah and I were prostrating ourselves to Allah at the call of the noonday prayer, the earth opened before us."

"And a troupe of strange men came out of the bowels of the earth, singing as they went," added Marjanah.

“Oh, my son,” murmured Ali, “you have been drinking from my bottle of wine.”

“Nay, you did drink it all yourself,” replied Nur-al-Huda.

“Then where, oh son of mine, have you two procured the inspiration for your dreams?”

“Nay, ’tis true, oh father of misbelieving,” insisted Marjanah. “Here knelt we, here by the rock, when we heard a strange singing beneath our feet.”

“A singing of strange voices,” added Nur-al-Huda.

Ali Baba shook his head sadly. “Have you left any wine for your father, oh my son?” he inquired, blandly.

“Then certain words were spoken, and this rock raised up its head, and a band of robbers poured out,” explained the slave girl.

“Ah, poured out?” murmured Ali, with great satisfaction. “Where’s the wine, my son? Poured out, eh? Pour some more.”

“And then they spoke the words again, and the rock closed down, and they trooped off through the trees.”

Ali blinked from one to the other. “That rock rose on its head and then shut down, and then they all trooped off singing?” he repeated, blankly.

“And all at their spoken word,” insisted the girl.

“And do you think we speak not the truth when we tell you we heard them singing?”

Ali laughed and patted his son on the shoulder. Marjanah almost frantic, sought to convince him: “But we heard the voice cry out and the rock opened. Wait—I remember the very words the robber sheik spoke to open and close the rock. He cried in a loud voice, like this, ‘Open, oh Sesame’.”

Ali Baba stood facing the rock as the girl spoke. Slowly the rock rose in the air, and before them yawned the opening of the cavern. Ali Baba dropped upon his knees, while the two young people gazed in astonishment. The robbers cave lay open before them.

Midst Wealth Uncountable

“Oh, Allah, what has befallen us?” moaned Ali Baba, alternately prostrating himself and raising his hands in despair.

“It is the cave of Abu Hasan,” cried Marjanah. “We have discovered the secret word that opens and closes the storehouse of his hidden wealth.”

Ali stumbled to his feet and backed away from the cave. “Let’s all go home to bed, oh son of sons,” he muttered, fearfully.

“Nay, we will all go down there into the cave,” insisted Nur-al-Huda, bravely.

“By Allah, I’ll go home,” insisted Ali.

“But gold and precious stones must be in the cavern,” interrupted Marjanah, “And silks and satin and rich brocades.”

“Stones and gold?” murmured Ali. “I’m going home.”

“Nay, you shall not,” declared Nur-al-Huda. “Here in the bowels of the earth, you may find the golden pieces which will buy the freedom of my beloved and bring her to the harem of my heart’s delight. Come, oh father of fathers, into the cave of Abu Hasan.”

“Down there?” blinked Ali, dismally, pointing down into the depths where a flight of stone steps led to the chamber beneath.

“Yeh, down there,” insisted Nur-al-Huda, taking Ali by one hand, and Marjanah by the other, and leading them downward into the cavern. A flight of rough hewn steps in the solid rock led them downward until only a few stray rays of light from the opening above them illumined their path. But from below came a dull glowing light from many lamps in the cave, and as this grew lighter when they approached, Marjanah thoughtfully stopped the party to give the command to close the rock.

“Shut, oh Sesame,” she commanded, and the disappearing light from above told them that the magic rock had obeyed the voice of the slave girl. “Oh, let us away before the robbers return,” moaned Ali, fearfully.

“Nay, they are on their way to the slave market of El Kabar to plunder your brother, Kasim Baba,” said Nur-al-Huda.

In a moment more they were in the cave itself, a great bare cavern, illumined with dozens of burning oil lamps, while rich hangings of silks covered many spaces of the bare rock. Almost at their feet were giant cedar chests, and these Nur-al-Huda eagerly opened. He emptied their contents upon the ground.

Great masses of golden coins rolled out before their astonished eyes, brilliant jewels sparkled in the reflected light from the lamps, and the ransom of a hundred kings lay at their feet. Ali eagerly grasped many coins which fell from his nerveless clutch, tinkling upon the other coins as they fell, with a weird metallic ring. “Forty thousand pieces ringing on the ground,” he cried, joyously.

“Glory be to Allah,” said Marjanah. “What wealth is this? Behold, admire and wonder. Confess your eyes have never beheld jewels so rich and beautiful before. Rubies and diamonds, emeralds and pearls, sapphires and amethysts, and silks of every hue and weaving.”

Ali left the golden coins alone to explore the other hidden treasures, and gave a cry of exultation as he beheld many casks of rare wines. “And wines of Egypt, Greece and Turkey,” he added. “Sweet scented syrups from Syracuse and Smyrna; strong waters, burning juices and essences from the eastern Indies. Oh, Allah bless me with a thirst.”

“And piles and sacks of gold and silver,” cried Nur-al-Huda, in excitement. “There, oh my delight, is Allah’s blessing on us. Here is the price of your freedom.”

“And the price of my bondage to thee, oh Lover of my life, my soul’s desire,” added Marjanah, as Nur-al-Huda took her in his arms.

“My beloved,” sighed Nur-al-Huda. Then turning quickly to Ali Baba, he commanded him to “Go at once and bring the donkey you intended to load with firewood, to the mouth of the cavern. Then we will load it with many bags of gold and jewels, and disappear before the robbers can discover their cave has been plundered. Quickly— Marjanah will open the rock for you, and then must we hasten with our riches which Allah has bestowed upon us, oh light of my soul, my heart of hearts.”

The Slave Market of El Kabar

In the walled enclosure used by the slave dealer, Al Malik al-Nasir for the disposal of his human wares, were many beautiful slaves penned in the different stalls and guarded by their keepers. They were the choicest and most favored from the harem of Kasim Baba, and since early morn they had been in the slave pens, idle except for the care and attention that had been bestowed upon them to make them look even more beautiful than usual. Javanese girls, Chinese girls, beautiful Arabians, dark skinned girls from the Indies, and fair Albinos, all were bunched together waiting to go upon the auction block.

In a separate slave pen were a dozen young girls from the desert, wild and untamed, dancers who whirled like dervishes in a desert storm, so uncouth and so rough in their play that the slave dealer thought best to keep them separate from the more quiet and well behaved slave girls. Among the desert women was Zahrat-al-Kulub, she who was to be sold with the rest that very day.

Slave boys sprinkled water upon the dry sand to settle the dust. Others brought elaborate mats to spread upon the ground. The sound of a tom-tom droned lazily through the air. Then a gong sounded, and Mukbill, auctioneer, attended by two keepers dressed in white and carrying long bamboo poles, entered the slave ring.

Mounting a raised dais at the center of the enclosure, he unrolled a parchment and read: “Be it known that unto you, oh Mukbill, public auctioneer of slaves, that I, Al Malik al-Nasir, slave dealer, have granted unto Kasim Baba the use this mid-afternoon of my private slave market for the selling of his slaves. And you, oh Mukbill, shall have the selling of the slaves and the rendering of the accounts to me. Allah’s blessings on you and on the selling.” He rolled up the parchment and put it to one side. “Where be Kasim Baba’s steward, Abdullah?” he asked.

“Here, oh Mukbill,” replied Abdullah, coming forward.

“Are your master’s slaves ready for the ring?”

“Yeh. They be all be-decked and be-jewelled and be-wrayed in their finest, even as they shall walk for sale.”

“Then we have but await the coming of the master Kasim for the opening of the market.”

“Yeh. None shall enter to the selling save at his bidding.”

A gong sounded outside the gates. The voice of Alcolom was heard demanding admittance. The gate keepers threw open the gates, and Alcolom, reclining upon a gorgeous litter, was brought in by bearers, attended by a guard of scimitars. She directed that her palanquin be set down opposite the gates of the slave market.

Abdullah prostrated himself before her. “Rise, oh Abdullah,” she commanded. “Your master is grievous sick, inflicted with pains internal and infernal.”

“The fruits of last night’s feasting,” murmured the steward, with a smile.

“Therefore come I in his stead to see the carrying out of his commands and demands,” continued his fat wife.

“Hearing is obeying,” said Abdullah, salaaming.

The auctioneer interrupted, “Have you, oh gracious one, the names of those invited to the sale that they may enter and the sale begin?”

“Yeh, here be the list,” replied Alcolom.

Mukbill took the list and read off the names. The gates were opened, and a motley throng poured into the slave market. Slave boys bearing mats and bags of gold preceded the buyers, and arranged comfortable places for them upon the ground. An elderly man with white beard chuckled as he as he looked at some of the slaves in the pens. A short and fussy fat lady buyer carefully inspected all she could see, and then directed her slave boys to place her bags of gold on the ground before her. The sound of tom-toms filled the air. Then Mukbill struck upon a drum to command silence.

“All those bidden then are here,” he inquired.

“Yeh, all that be on the list,” replied Abdullah. “Yet, oh gracious lady, your lord’s guest of yesternight, the Chinese merchant, Chu Chin Chow, is without and prays for admittance.”

“Yeh, my lord did bid him to the selling. Let him enter.”

Abdullah went to the gates, and called loudly, “The merchant, Chu Chin Chow of Shanghai, China is bidden to the sale.”

A rickshaw drawn by two Chinese coolies appeared. In the seat, fanning himself as usual, his rich Oriental robes not even dust-stained by travel, was Chu Chin Chow, or Abu Hasan, the robber of mankind. The rickshaw stopped, a servant placed a footstep before him, and Chu descended in stately dignity. He bowed low before Alcolom as she reclined in her litter. "May I have speech with you, oh head wife of my honorable and honored host?" he asked softly.

Alcolom made a sign for her attendants to withdraw.

"Are you willing to aid me in this robbing of your lord?" continued Chu.

"Yeh, verily, if you will swear by Allah to rob me afterward," she replied.

"Rob you, oh lady?"

"Yeh, of my lord Kasim," she said, fiercely. "I hate him."

Chu Chin Chow raised his hands solemnly. "I swear by the Koran to rob you in the end," he murmured.

"When will be the end, oh Chu Chin Chow?"

"When your lord has naught for me to rob save life itself."

"Then by the Bestower of life and love, will I quicken the end by feeding your ears with my knowledge of his buying and selling," cried Alcolom.

"Then hearken." Chu's voice dropped to a whisper. "You must consent to all I ask, and when this market is at an end, you are to command Abdullah's guard of scimitars to attend you to your palace. That done, the rest will be my care and caring. Bid the sale begin."

Alcolom struck a gong hanging before her. "Ho, Abdullah. Bring forth the slaves. Display their points unto the buyers, and let the sale begin."

The buyers leaned forward eagerly to get the best positions from which to view the slaves, and chattered among each other in great excitement. Abdullah went to the slave pens and opened them one by one. Beating his tom-tom, Abdullah described each of the slave girls as they came forward. Some black, some brown, some Oriental from China and Japan, others from the Nubian country, from Egypt and Ninevah.

The first lot of slaves passed in review. Mukbill struck his gong. "Zahrat-al-Kulub and the desert dancers, come into the ring," commanded Abdullah.

With a wild, shrill cry and many strange yells, a dozen of the desert girls sprang over the bars of their pens and leaped into the ring, their hair flying wildly, their bodies panting and twisting as they gyrated this way and that, keeping time to a strange weird music that seemed to come from the tom-toms. Behind them came Zahrat-al-Kulub herself, dark, fierce, sullen, yet strangely beautiful.

The buyers crowded around eagerly to inspect the desert women.

“For Zahrat-al-Kulub and the desert women, what is bid?” asked Mukbill.

The short fat lady raised her hand. “Before we bid for the desert women, oh Mukbill, let them display their gifts,” she cried, in a shrill voice. “Yeh, make them display their gifts,” added the chorus of other buyers.

Mukbill pounded upon his gong for silence. “Zahrat-al-Kulub and the desert women, display your gifts,” he commanded.

Then began a scene of almost indescribable color, life and motion, as the wild desert women danced madly in an orgy of animation, whirling, throbbing, twisting their bodies, throwing themselves prostrate upon the ground to keep in rhythm with the strange music of the tom-toms; and above all else, as they shouted in their wild dance, could be seen the sullen, grim figure of Zahrat-al-Kulub, the secret slave girl of the robber sheik, who had betrayed to him the secret of this slave selling which brought out so many beautiful slaves and so much wealth on the part of the buyers. It was indeed a rich harvest she had prepared for him, thought Zahrat-al-Kulub, as she stood in the center of the slave market of El Kabar and faced the sinister Abu Hasan, the robber of mankind.

The Raid on the Slave Market

As the dance of the desert women ended, and they threw themselves prostrate upon the floor, a perfect Babel of noise ensued. “Five thousand dinar,” cried one buyer. “A thousand more,” cried another. “I’ll bid ten thousand for the lot,” shouted another. “Two hundred more than that,” yelled the little fat lady buyer at the top of her voice. The shouts and cries made it difficult to understand anything.

The drum of the auctioneer made all pause. Then was heard the voice of Chu. “Nay, hold,” he cried. “Put all the lots together, all the slaves, and I will bid against the buyers. What do you say, oh Mukbill?”

“Nay, it is against all law and custom to alter the proceedings of the sale as set down by him who sells,” protested the fat lady buyer.

“Yeh, it is against all law,” admitted Mukbill. “Were Kasim Baba here—”

The gong from Alcolom’s palanquin sounded. “I speak for Kasim Baba,” she cried. “Do as Chu Chin Chow asks.”

Vainly the buyers wailed their protest; vainly they cried it was against the law. The auctioneer ordered that all the slaves be placed together in one lot. The fat lady buyer rushed from one buyer to another. “We join together, eh? And bid against this stranger from Shanghai? Yeh, we put all our money together, and I will make the bids.”

The fat lady buyer looked over the assembled slaves as they lay on the ground before her. “Then for the lot, what say you to thirty thousand dinar?” she cried, triumphantly.

Chu fanned himself. “I bid two score thousand dinar,” he said, calmly.

“Forty thousand bid,” droned Mukbill. “Throw your money down.”

“Nay,” said Chu, “I give my bond.” The buyers shouted in derision. A bond—for such slaves as these? The man was mad.

“No bonds are taken here,” cried the fat lady buyer. “Naught but good Persian gold.”

The gong from Alcolom’s litter rang again. “I speak for Kasim Baba,” she cried. “I take this merchant’s bond.”

The buyers broke out in a wail of protest. “Oh, gracious one, will you take our bond also?” asked one.

“Nay, naught but gold from you,” replied Alcolom. “I know Chu Chin Chow’s worth, but yours I know not.”

“Forty thousand bid,” cried the auctioneer. “Another ten,” yelled the fat lady buyer.

“Fifty thousand,” droned the auctioneer. “Hold,” commanded Chu, raising his voice. “How many thousand dinar have these buyers in good Persian gold?”

The buyers chatted together anxiously. The fat lady figured. “Two hundred and ninety thousand dinar, and some two hundred odd,” she said.

“And will you bid the lot?” asked Chu.

“Yeh, yeh, if need be.”

“I bid then, for the lot of slaves, two hundred and ninety thousand dinar,” said Chu, sonorously. “And two hundred more,” cried the lady buyer, amid much chatter.

“Throw your money down before you,” commanded Chu.

“I bid one dinar more than you,” cried Chu. The buyers clenched their fists and cursed the Chinese merchant. “Have you nothing more left?” cried Chu, mockingly.

A buyer turned to Alcolom. “Will you not, oh gracious lady, take our bond?”

“Naught but gold from you.” Alcolom shook her head.

“These jewels then I add,” cried the lady buyer, pulling off many rings. “Bought from Kasim Baba not two months since for twenty thousand dinar.”

Alcolom laughed contemptuously. “From Kasim Baba? Worth then but a third the sum you did pay. I will reckon seven thousand dinar.”

The auctioneer droned out the figures as the jewels were added to the bags of gold before the buyers. “Two hundred and ninety-seven thousand, two hundred and one dinar bid.”

“And one dinar more,” cried Chu Chin Chow, solemnly.

The buyers broke into a chorus of lamentations. “By Allah, we are finished. We can bid no more.”

“Then the slaves are yours, oh Chu Chin Chow, for two hundred and ninety-seven thousand, two hundred and two dinar more. Where be your bond?”

Abu Hasan, alias Chu Chub Chow, bowed gravely from his seat on the rickshaw. "My spoken word," he said simply.

The buyers broke into loud and derisive laughter. "Yep," they cried, "His spoken word—"

The gong from Alcolom's palanquin sounded again. "I speak for Kasim Baba. I do accept this merchant's spoken word," she said.

"Yep—now Allah save your lord," cried the buyers. Abdullah summoned the guard of scimitars, and with a smile, Alcolom was borne away from the slave market. She waved her hand in parting to the robber chieftain. As the slaves gathered in small groups, Chu signalled for Zahrat to come to him.

"Now I have bought you, Zahrat-al-Kulub, and you are mine again," he said.

"And will you keep your oath and give me and my lover freedom?" asked the girl, tensely.

"Was that my oath?" "Yeh."

"Nay I swore to reward you befitting the service you have rendered," replied the robber sheik.

"Yeh, that till my death we should live surrounded by wealth uncountable. But wealth I crave not, only freedom and the desert and my love."

"Too great a reward for a loose, babbling tongue," frowned Chu. "You did betray me yesterday night to Alcolom and to your fellow slave Marjanah. For service such as that, the reward is death. But I will show you mercy and keep my oath. Until the end of life, you and your lover shall live chained in my cave, midst wealth uncountable."

"Nay then, son of Satan, I will betray you here then in the market place," cried Zahrat, fiercely. "Hear ye, all of ye. This is no Chinese merchant you have been bartering with. It is Abu Hasan of Khorasan, the robber sheik."

Chu fanned himself lazily. The assembled buyers paused in dismay, afraid to move.

"The woman is mad," cried the buyers, "she is mad."

"Nay, it is you who are mad," commanded Abu Hasan, rising majestically in his rickshaw and facing the buyers as they sought to conceal their bags of gold. "I am indeed Abu Hasan, of Khorasan."

The buyers grovelled in the dust. "Allah protect us," they wailed.

"Why cry to Allah?" demanded Zahrat. "Here stands the wolf alone, that has robbed you all for years. Yet you fear him. Then I, the desert woman, will avenge your wrongs. Abu Hasan, I am thy death."

With upraised dagger she sprang toward the robber chieftain, who scarcely moved. Yet ere she could strike, Chu waved his fan toward her. There was a flash, a sharp explosion and Zahrat dropped upon her knees, half-blinded and stricken.

“Your stroke has failed, my desert woman,” said Chu, calmly. “Now, buyers, place all the bags of gold upon my carriage. I am but one—but remember there are forty more.”

From outside the slave market, singing their strange chant, came the forty members of his band, all heavily armed. They filed into the ring, collected the bags of gold, and then escorted their chief to the gates.

“Bring Zahrat-al-Kulub to the cave,” commanded Chu Chin Chow. Two of his band took her by the arms. She faced the robber sheik defiantly.

“I have failed this time, Abu Hasan,” she cried, bitterly. “Yet fate, which never lies, has written in the sand that I shall be your death. ’Tis written in the sand, Abu Hasan, my fate and thine.”

A Mean Street in Bagdad

The humble home of Ali Baba was in one of the poorest and meanest streets in the city of Bagdad. Beggars, peddlers, itinerant musicians, bean-sellers, merchants, all crowded and jostled each other in the narrow thoroughfare in front of the mud and clay house of Ali Baba, where dwelt the partner of his joys and sorrows, Mabubah.

Upon the roof, watching the strange and motley crowd that ebbed and flowed past the doorway, was a strange and uncommon figure—Bostan, the negro maid of Mabubah, she who spoke a strange gibberish, which only her mistress could understand. Born and raised in some distant southern country, transported as a slave to Bagdad, Bostan was a queer half-witted servant, whose inarticulate sounds had meaning for the ears of her mistress alone.

Mabubah, pounding the beans in an earthen bowl in front of her humble home, saw the negro girl on the roof of the house, eating a banana. Even as she looked, the girl threw the skin of the fruit at a young boy who was helping his father to carry a load of beans. The boy looked up, and the negro wench smiled.

“What ho, Bostan,” cried Mabubah, angrily. “Thou mumbling daughter of poverty and pots.” Bostan murmured something in reply.

“Yeh, I did call you. Why are you on the roof lazing and gazing away your hours? Are you casting eyes on the youth of Bagdad, oh daughter of loveliness?” Bostan indignantly said something, frowning as she did so.

“Watching for you master, Ali, eh?” repeated Mabubah. “What time of day is it?” Strange guttural sounds came from the negro girl’s throat.

“As late as that, eh, and Ali not home yet?” declared Mabubah, perfectly understanding the gibberish talk. “That feast of Kasim Baba’s last night has made him forgetful of his household duties.” Bostan laughed and said something that seemed to choke her.

“And if Ali did go out weighed down with wine at sunrise, what’s that to you?” cried Mabubah, defending her lord from Bostan’s accusation. “Keep a civil tongue in your head, of daughter of volubility [*talkativeness*]. Have I picked you out of the gutter to grace my household at the wages of one meal per day and a litter of straw to lie upon under the porch, for you to talk to me so of my longings and belongings? Come down from the roof, daughter of ignorance.”

Bostan disappeared inside the house. Mabubah again pounded the beans. Presently the unkempt little negro girl appeared by her side, and said something in her guttural and native dialect. Mabubah turned to her angrily.

“Nay, and if you say such a thing to me again, I will have no compassion on you, but will turn you from my door even as a worthless woman. What do you talk of loves and lovers? You whom I have housed in my abode of respecting and suspecting. Shame on you, Bostan.” The negro girl tried to say something in self defense.

“Well, the young man meant no harm by that,” declared Mabubah. “It is you who has thought ill of his words, and put meaning in them where no meaning lies.” Once more Bostan made a few remarks which sounded like the barking of a dog. Mabubah surveyed her with disappointment and dismay.

“You can laugh at thoughts of such iniquity?” she protested. What if the son of the bean-seller did liken you to a vegetable? You must have led him to such a thought by your evil, subtle conversation.” Bostan again laughed, and spoke in gibberish.

“Peace, you shameless one,” continued Mabubah. “Go and see if your master Ali be yet staggering down the street. I ask you not your opinion of the weather. Such is the reward of charity. Awah, awah.”

Slowly the wife of Ali went in the house, as the negro girl ran laughing down the street. The tide of humanity flowing through this portion of Bagdad surged around the house and to the stalls on either side where merchants were displaying their goods. The bean-sellers crying their wares, the silk vendors and the water carriers, all made up a mass of human beings racing through the narrow thoroughfare even as water surges through a millrace. “Beans, beans, beans,” cried the bean-seller. “Never a dish of flesh or fish, but beans, beans, beans.”

Ali Baba and the Bags of Gold

Through the mean street of Bagdad, pushing aside all the lesser dregs of humanity, roughly shouldering the bean-sellers and the merchants out of the way, came the rickshaw and the Chinese escort of the great Mandarin, Chu Chin Chow. Upon the floor of his carriage lay many bags of gold. Jewels sparkled on his fingers, and his servants carried many more bags of gold—all the rich loot from the raid on the slave market.

Behind the rickshaw, escorted by two armed Chinese who made sure that she could not escape, walked Zahrat-al-Kulub, the desert woman, the prisoner of the brigand, Abu Hasan of Khorasan.

In front of the very house of Ali Baba, the rickshaw paused, as through the crowd came Khuzaymah, one of the chief aids of the robber sheik, who bowed low to salute his chief.

“Greeting, oh Chief,” he murmured, softly. “Come hither, Khuzaymah?” directed Abu Hasan, beckoning to his lieutenant. “You have performed my bidding?”

“Yeh, oh master. Zahrat-al-Kulub’s lover is now chained and gagged in the lower cave.”

Abu Hasan chuckled and turned to the slave girl who had paused when the rickshaw stopped. “Good. Do you hear, Zahrat? Your lover is waiting for you.”

“Take her, and chain her likewise in the cave of jewels above his head. At midnight, oh my dearest flower, you shall see your lover and have speech with him, and tell him of the great mercy shown you by Abu Hasan, whom you did betray to mine enemies. Have you no words with which to thank me, oh my flower of the desert?”

Zahrat looked at him scornfully. “No words of mine can alter the decree of fate,” she cried. “Allah, the All-seeing One, who has made me to see, has written in the desert sands that death shall yet befall thee and thy band because of me. And lest you doubt that which I now foretell, let that fortune teller show you how and where and when you will meet your doom, oh Abu Hasan of Khorasan, you whose word is worthless as the grass of the desert.”

Abu Hasan frowned. He clenched his fists in anger. Then he composed himself with an effort. “Enough, thy say is said,” he cried. “Away with her to the cave, where she and her lover shall henceforth live midst wealth uncountable.”

The Chinese coolies moved forward with the rickshaw. Chi Chin Chow was whirled from sight, which close behind him, guarded by two armed Chinamen, went the slave girl, Zahrat-al-Kulub. The fortune teller, who had heard part of the prophecy of Zahrat, laughed.

Down the mean street, singing as he came, maudlin, half drunk, yet still half sober, appeared Ali Baba. Dancing with joy, he pranced up to the entrance of his humble home, just in time to meet the aged Mabubah as she came forth from the door.

“Allah’s blessings on thee, oh head wife of a Grand Wazir that is to be,” cried Ali Baba, dancing around her. Mabubah reached for a bamboo pole with which to hit him. “Thou hog of drunkenness,” she said, angrily “where is your wood? Have I not pounded here hour after hour waiting but for your pieces of fuel to boil your meal to fill and swell thy worthless carcass? And now you come with talk of Grand Wazirs. I’ll you before the Wazir of Police, you rogue.”

“Nay, I bring you pieces, oh my sweet pomegranate blossom,” cried Ali, hilariously. “Pieces of gold. Never more shall we talk of beans, but of rich flesh and fish, of sweet-meats and rare fruit, and rarer wines.” “Nay, you are mad, or drunk.”

“What ho, Nur-al-Huda, and you too, Marjanah,” called Ali, running to the corner of the street. Around the house came the two young lovers, leading a donkey laden with many bags tied upon his back. “Now will we reveal our wealth unto this mother of sourness and dourness,” said Ali, boastfully, as he unfastened one of the bags of gold.

“Thou drunken rogue,” protested Mabubah. “Have I not enough to do to clean your hovel, but you must bring in your ass to help soil our courtyard?”

Ali carefully spread a cloth upon the ground, and then emptied a great heap of golden coins upon it. Squatting beside the bag, he ran his hands through the golden coins, looked up at the amazed Mabubah, and smiled. “Golden coins,” he cried. “Gold—gold, thou wife of wealth.”

Mabubah fell upon her knees to examine the coins. “Gold?” she cried, in wonder.

“Yeh, and vast sums of the same where this gold did come from,” added Marjanah.

“And jewels of wondrous value,” cried Nur-al-Huda.

“And yet more and more—do you hear the chink of it? And do you see these other bags, all filled with golden coins?” shouted Ali.

“Where did you get this?” asked the overwhelmed Mabubah.

“Allah is bountiful, oh mother of inquisitive desire,” declared Ali, solemnly. “Do you hear it chink?”

“Yeh,” cried Mabubah, picking up a handful of coins and letting them drop one by one. “One—two—three—four.”

“Nay,” cried Ali. “You can count until doomsday, yet you will never reach the end of the sudden wealth that has come to your all-knowing husband. Forty time forty thousand and yet you will never reach the end, oh wife of a Grand Wazir that is to be.”

In the Silk Bazaar of Bagdad

Laden with much gold, Ali Baba and the two young people, Nur-al-Huda and the singing slave girl Marjanah, made their way promptly to the silk bazaar of Bagdad in order to purchase fitting raiment as became their new station in life.

Ali personally selected gorgeous garments, with a great towering turban of checkered silk and trimmed with many plumes. The younger people were more modest in their selections but Ali scattered gold broadcast [*spread widely*] through the silk market until all marvelled at the display of wealth of the former beggar of Bagdad.

Then, as they reclined upon rich divans in front of the silk stall, Nur-al-Huda surveyed his father in admiration, and said: "Now that you are rich, oh father of fathers, you will be having your own harem.

"Yeh," responded Ali, proudly. "And palaces of ivory and ebony, and hammans [*bathhouses*] of flawless marble, and feasts such as Kasim's feast night upon night, and then I shall be a Wazir of Wazirs."

"Or can you not become even a Chu Chin Chow of China," suggested Marjanah.

"Yeh, or even a Chu Chin Chow," agreed Ali, laughingly. "No harem will be finer than mine, and I'll have plenty of wives, none of them old, either, like Mabubah. All young ones."

But Nur-al-Huda thought of other things and rose to his feet. "Come, oh father, end your dreaming and your buying. 'Tis close upon the hour of sunset prayer, and we must hasten to Kasim's house."

"But wherefore, oh son of haste?" protested Ali.

"To pay him the forty thousand pieces which you did bid last night for my Marjanah, and which we have counted into these bags," replied the boy.

But Ali was not yet ready to leave the silk stall. "First would I purchase me yet more brave apparel that I may fill the eye of Alcolom," he said.

"Nay, Ali," explained Marjanah. "It is not what she sees upon you but what she knows within you, which touches the heart of a woman. There lies the difference, as the poet has said. 'Man loves the woman, but the love of the woman is for the love of the man.' Oh, Nur-al-Huda, tell me yet again that you will ever love your Marjanah?"

"Oh, listen to her," wailed Ali, sadly.

"How many thousand times have you heard my answer?" said Nur-al-Huda, tenderly taking her in his arms.

"Yeh," laughed Marjanah, but does a woman ever tire of hearing what she fears to be untrue? Will you devote your life to me, and always care for me? Are you sure you will not forsake me soon?"

Nur-al-Huda closed her questioning lips with a kiss, whereat Ali Baba raised his hands to Allah, and cried: "The ways of a woman are indeed beyond the wit of man to understand. Here are you, Marjanah, before marriage, sweet as the sugar cane, pliable as the willow twig, yet when you have attained your desires, your sugar sweetness will turn to vinegar, your yielding and bending to carking [*fretting*] and barking."

"Nay, but it will not be so with me," answered Marjanah, tenderly clinging to her beloved. "All the rest of my days I will be his soothing wife. I will chase worries from him, I will be ever gay and never doleful, I will chatter and I will laugh only when my lord pleases."

Ali made a wry face. "The same thing my Mabubah told me before we did wed," he protested.

"Oh, how I love my Nur-al-Huda," said Marjanah, softly.

"And how I hate my Mah-babubah," mocked Ali, shaking his head.

Ali Baba Pays His Debt

Once more in Kasim Baba's palace a feast was spread. It was the night after he had entertained the Chinese merchant, and though Kasim had been grievously ill all day, he had left his bed to give another feast to celebrate his recovery. Also, this was the night when his poor brother, Ali Baba, must pay the forty thousand dinar for the slave girl, Marjanah, or else his son, Nur-al-Huda, would lose the object of his heart's delight.

"What entertainment have you provided for the feast tonight, Abdullah?" Kasim Baba, seated with the fair Alcolom, surveyed the dishes arrayed most temptingly.

"There be a troupe of Persian players," replied the chief steward, "who will present the tragic history and most moving picture of the woman who had a lover and a jealous husband. Is it your pleasure to pass your judgment upon their art before the feast?"

"Yeh, let them appear," replied the miserly Kasim.

But in the midst of the dancing and the revels of the players, there came an interruption in the shape of a gorgeously attired stranger, wearing silken robes of the richest hues, who came down the steps of the palace and into the great dining hall. Kasim looked at him in amazement. Alcolom gave a startled cry—yet doubted her own senses.

The gorgeous stranger prostrated himself before Kasim Baba, and cried mockingly: "All hail, to the Grand Wazir that is to be?"

"Who be this stranger?" asked Baba, in amazement.

"None other than Ali Baba the first," replied the newcomer, grandly.

"Ali," shrieked Alcolom. "Ali Baba, how wondrously fine you are looking."

"The man is drunk," muttered Kasim Baba. "Why have you cast off your rags, and whence this rich array of costume the like of which even I have never worn?"

Ali surveyed himself proudly, turning to display to Alcolom the wonders of his most gorgeous regalia. Then he gave a signal, and down the steps came the slave girl, Marjanah, followed by Nur-al-Huda, both splendidly attired in wonderful costumes of rare silks and satins. Nur-al-Huda carried two bags of gold in his hand, and these he placed at the feet of his astonished uncle.

“For your answer, open these bags of gold and count them,” commanded Ali.

“Where have you got all this wealth?” cried Kasim Baba, as his servants poured out the great number of golden coins that meant freedom and happiness to Marjanah. “You have stolen it.”

“Nay, but here is your gold,” continued Ali. “Last night I did pledge my word to pay you forty thousand golden pieces for the freedom of Marjanah. Here I tender payment, so the jade may be happy with my worthless son Nur-al-Huda. Take then your gold, you miserly scarce-crow, and worry not with Ali.”

Kasim Baba struck a gong to summon his guards. “The secret of this gold you will tell me, or else I summon the Wazir of Police,” he cried, shrilly. “Unless you tell me the truth, you shall rue the day you did bring me this gold.” In his excitement, Kasim Baba spluttered and stuttered, for he suffered from an affectation of speech that made him speak with difficulty.

Ali Baba laughed. “Nay, thou miserly brother,” he said carelessly. “I have naught to conceal. After all, there is gold enough for both, for I did leave plenty of it there behind me. Come, I will whisper the secret.

And Ali Baba, half drunk with wine, whispered into his brother’s ear the secret of the cactus grove and the hidden store of wealth therein. Whereat the miserly Kasim Baba, hastily excusing himself from the feast, made plans to go at once to the cactus grove, and watch until the robbers should leave the cave, so that he also might open the rock with the magic word and plunder the notorious brigand, Abu Hasan, of his ill-gotten wealth.

The fair Alcolom, gazing with love and admiration at her Ali Baba, bade him take the seat at the feast so hurriedly vacated by the avaricious Kasim Baba, who at once set forth with many mules for the cactus grove.

Left alone at the feast which Kasim had prepared and which he was too avaricious to devour, when once he had scented the gold in the robber’s cave, Ali Baba and the joyous Alcolom gave themselves over to unrestrained drinking and feasting. Marjanah and Nur-al-Huda, now that the slave girl was free to become the wife of her beloved, had hastily taken their departure, and Ali revelled in the palace of his brother with a thousand slaves to wait upon him, and pour him wine. And there beside him, was the fair and beautiful Alcolom, she whom he so much admired.

“Oh, Alcolom, thou precious one,” murmured Ali, drinking more wine.

“Oh, Ali. What would Mabubah say could she but see us feasting thus,” answered Alcolom, handing him an almond pattie.

Ali Baba made a grimace. “Nay, the old cat-fish is counting her golden pieces,” he muttered. Alcolom leaned toward him in an alluring manner. “Those golden pieces with which you shall purchase me into your harem?” she asked.

Ali Baba quaffed another goblet of wine, and beamed upon her. “Thou timid giraffe,” he whispered. “You who sways with an elephantine roll.”

Alcolom placed a bit of candy between the lips of Ali. “Thy breath smells ambergris and perfumery,” she murmured.

“And thy lips, oh Alcolom, are sugar to the taste, and carnelian [*red-orange*] to see.”

“And thy face, oh Ali, shames the noonday brilliancy.”

“My Alcolom,” murmured Ali, gazing into his cup and finding it empty. “I am drunk with the excess of thy beauty.”

“Oh my beautiful Ali, thy breath is musk and thy cheek a rose.”

“Nay, my sweet Alcolom, thy teeth are pearls and thy lips drop wine.”

“Ah,” sighed Alcolom, the ravisher of hearts, “Never have I known a night more blessed than this one.”

In the Cave with Zahrat

Kasim Baba, the miserly merchant, rushed at full speed toward the cactus grove with half a dozen donkeys, hoping to reach the cave and speak the magic words which would bring to him even more wealth than he had ever dreamed of.

Yet before Kasim Baba could reach the turquoise idol beneath which was the magic rock, Marjanah and Nur-al-Huda had sped there quickly on foot, hoping to secure some of the rich jewels and more gold before Kasim Baba could come and make away with all. Fortunately they found the robbers absent. The rock rose, and they were in the cave again, in the wonderful cave of jewels, where all the brilliancy of the universe seemed reflected from the glowing oil lamps which the robber chief, Abu Hasan, had left lighted to guide them back into the cave upon their return from the night's forage.

“Now we are here, oh beloved daughter of cleverness, unfold your plan,” cried Nur-al-Huda, panting after the run through the cactus grove with Marjanah.

“Here we will wait, by the entrance, until we hear Uncle Kasim approaching the mouth of the cave,” explained Marjanah.

“And afterwards?”

“Do you remember his stuttering and spluttering?”

“Yeh, but what of that?”

“Oh, silly one,” cried Marjanah. “Do you think he will ever twist his tongue around the magic words, ‘Open, oh Sesame’? He will even hiss until doomsday, but he will never pronounce the words.” “Well?” asked her lover.

“When we hear him hissing thus, I will whisper the words ‘Open, oh Sesame.’”

“Yeh, and the rock will open, and Kasim will descend, and find us here in the cave.”

“Nay, dearly beloved,” whispered Marjanah. “Oh simple one, we will hide in the dark recesses, and as he enters, steal out silently, and whisper yet again, ‘Shut, oh Sesame,’ leaving him locked below, a prisoner.”

“By Allah, you are as wise as you are beautiful,” cried Nur-al-Huda, admiringly.

Marjanah’s keen ears detected a sound. “Hush,” she cried, softly. “Did you not hear something moving?” “Where?” asked Nur-al-Huda.

“There, in the corner, by those heaps of gems,” cried Marjanah. A cry—a moan—there it is again. See—it is a woman chained to the rock. See her moving.”

The two young people rushed forward. Zahrat-al-Kulub, chained to the rock, a gag between her lips, almost fell forward into their arms. Quickly they released the gag, and led her to a soft rug on which she could rest, though still chained to the rock.

“Zahrat—my fellow slave—how came you here?” cried Marjanah.

Zahrat clenched her fists with anger. “This is the work of Abu Hasan, the brigand. He chained me here, planning to make me live midst wealth uncountable until I die. And beneath my feet, in another yet deeper cavern, he holds my desert lover a prisoner, also chained to a rock.”

“But we will free you, Zahrat, and aid him also to escape,” cried Nur-al-Huda.

“Awah, these chains are thick, you have no file, no tool to force them, and the magic word which opens the lower cave I know not.”

“Let us with speed to Bagdad then for help,” suggested Marjanah.

“Nay, first fulfill thy plan I overheard and trap old Kasim Baba,” replied the desert woman. “At midnight, now close at hand, the robbers will return, and find him in the cave.” “And slay him?”

“A just reward for all his years of cruelty and crime,” cried Zahrat, bitterly. “He is a beast of prey, even as Abu Hasan. he has caused many to drain the cup of death that he may wax the richer. But tonight the wolf will slay the jackal.”

Marjanah clapped her hands with joy. “And set my mistress Alcolom free,” she said, happily.

“Then leave me here while you trap old Kasim, and later can you, Nur-al-Huda, return and file off these chains. Hasten now, for Kasim Baba may arrive at any moment. Fear not for me—Abu Hasan has sworn by the Koran never to harm me, and it is written in the sands, I am to be his death. Begone—”

The Death of Kasim Baba

Above, at the entrance to the cave, Kasim was trying to utter the magic words that should cause the face of the rock to open. But his lips could form naught but a hissing sound, even as Marjanah had foretold, and the rock remained closed before him.

Then did Marjanah, in the cave below, speak the magic words: "Open, oh Sesame."

The face of the rock lifted itself and a shaft of moonlight pierced the dark recesses of the cave. Marjanah and her lover, Nur-al-Huda, withdrew themselves into the shadows as Kasim entered the mouth of the cave. When he had reached the cave's floor, Marjanah and Nur-al-Huda swiftly and secretly ascended.

"Shut, oh Sesame," Marjanah whispered as they stood once more outside the cave. Then the face of the rock closed down and Kasim was a prisoner.

"What was that which whispered?" Kasim muttered, looking round him fearfully. Then his eyes fell upon the heaps of precious stones. "What spirit has laid these treasures here!" he cried, forgetting his fears.

And in very truth it was a sight to cause a man to forget aught else. For there were jewels rich and rare of all sizes and sorts—jewels beyond compare; rubies of blood-red hue; turquoises blue; opals of rainbow tint; diamonds with white fire glint; emeralds of deepest green; pearls, lustrous, clean; topaz that flamed and flared; amethysts' purple glare. And amidst these countless jewels lay myriads of gold coins, the sight of which made the mouth of Kasim water. He began to drag the bags of gems and gold from their places, uttering eager cries the while. Then to his wild cries of delight the echoes of the cave cried in answer, and once again fear laid hands upon his soul.

"'Tis the robbers, coming back to their cave of wealth!" he whispered, and as he whispered the echoes whispered back a hundredfold. Then dire terror seized his heart. He ran upwards toward the mouth of the cave and vainly strove to utter the magic words.

"Open, oh S-s-s-s—!" And the echoes answered him: "S-s-s-s—!"

Whereupon to his distorted mind, the spirits of all the jewels, and of the gold and the silver, rose from their resting-places, and sang and danced around him, casting direful gleams of many-hued light upon him. Now he was nearly distracted with fear. Once again he strove to utter the magic words.

"Open, oh S-s-s-s—!" And once again the echoes answered him: "S-s-s-s—!"

Then as the echoes died away, there came another sound, the sound of men's voices from above, singing a strange, mysterious song.

"The robbers!" Kasim shrieked. "The robbers!" And even as he cried aloud the voice of Abu Hasan came from above. "Open, oh Sesame."

The shaft of moonlight pierced the darkness of the cave anew. With a cry of despair Kasim flung himself into the shadows to hide. Abu Hasan entered, followed by his band of forty thieves, with drawn scimitars, and bearing flaring torches and sacks of plunder. When they had descended Hasan bid his men unloose the gag from Zahrat.

“Unblind her eyes!” he commanded, “that she may gaze upon this new wealth that I bring her. Unbind her lips, that she may praise the bringer!” When they had unbound the lips and eyes of Zahrat-al-Kulub, Hasan turned and spoke unto her mockingly.

“How now, my desert flower, have you no word of greeting for him who showers such riches on thee to comfort thee in thy loneliness?”

“Nay, I have not been lonely, Abu Hasan!” Zahrat made reply.

“Yeh, so! Have you been listening to the music of your lover’s groans—your lover who is imprisoned in the cave beneath you?”

“Nay, I heard him not!” said Zahrat. “Yet I heard the spirits of the cave singing and dancing.” “So! so!” mocked Hasan. “Did they affright you?”

“Nay, I felt no fear. They did not dance to me but to him.” “Him?”

“Yeh, to him who has your secret, to him who came to rob you, Abu Hasan! To him who dragged about those sacks of gems and gold.”

Hasan turned around, and for the first time saw the sacks that Kasim had dragged from their places. “Now by Satan!” he cried in wrath, “how came these here?”

“By him to whom the spirits danced and sang,” said Zahrat. “A jackal that still lurks in the shadows of your cave, oh wolf of wolves!”

“A jackal, say you?” Hasan answered fiercely. “The wolves will smell him out!” As the robbers began to move around the cave, sniffing the air as they went, Kasim, overcome by terror, ran forth from his hiding-place and flung himself at Abu Hasan’s feet.

“Mercy! I mercy crave!” he screamed.

“Seek it,” said Hasan, “within your grave. You are trapped, oh Kasim Baba, and must die!”

“Allah protect me!” Kasim screamed again. “What will you do?”

For answer, Abu Hasan drew his scimitar and the men of his band gathered around him. Thus did Kasim Baba of Bagdad, the mean and crafty, die in the cave of the robbers, a victim to his own greediness and his lust for gold. And following the custom of the band of Abu Hasan in dealing with a traitor, the body of the miser was cut in four pieces and left in the cave.

The Cobbler of Bagdad

In the great Bazaar of the city of Bagdad, Mustafa, the cobbler, sat before his stall stitching and singing. Suddenly he looked up. Before him stood the beautiful slave girl, Zahrat-al-Kulub, whom Marjanah and Nur-al-Huda had set free from the robbers' cave after Kasim had perished and the robbers were gone.

"Allah's blessing on thee, Oh father of stitches!" Zahrat said.

"And on thee, Oh daughter of light and delight!" answered Mustafa. "Why do you seek the cobbler's stall? If you would have stitched up a love-pierced heart you must wend your way elsewhere."

"Yeh!" Zahrat made reply, "my heart has been pierced in very sooth, but the mending of it is in other hands. But stitch you naught but sandal and slippers?"

"Nay, I stitch shrouds for burial when Allah wills."

Zahrat looked around her to see that none observed them. "That is the why and wherefore of my coming," she said. "Can you likewise stitch up your tongue in silence?"

"Yeh, with stitches of gold, Oh daughter of inquisitive questionings!"

"Then may we arrive at a bargaining." She revealed a gold piece which she held in her hand. "Do you see this gold?"

Mustafa took the piece and bit it between his teeth. "Allah!" said he. "Such a piece surpasses my earnings for many moons and more."

"Yet shall it be yours, and yet one more, when you have ended the work I have to offer you," Zahrat said.

The slave girl then explained that a wealthy merchant had been slain and his body cut into four pieces and the cobbler was required to sew the pieces together again. After much bargaining they started on the journey to the merchant's house. Zahrat first insisting that the cobbler must have his eyes covered so that he would not know the house to which he was being led.

Even as they passed from the Bazaar, a water carrier with many jars of water to sell came upon the scene. It was Abu Hasan in disguise, with members of his band following to ascertain what had become of the slave they had left chained to the rock, and also the secret of the disappearance of the body of Kasim Baba. Abu Hasan insisted that someone had discovered the secret of the cave and that the lives and safety of his men and himself were in danger.

Abu Hasan sent messengers in every direction to search for tidings of Kasim Baba in an effort to learn if the secret of his disappearance had been discovered. Thus it happened that shortly thereafter some of his men came to him with tidings of Mustafa, the cobbler who had been spending much gold, shortly after he came from the house where laid Kasim Baba. It required but a short time for the shrewd Abu Hasan to learn from the cobbler of the body that he had sewed together again after it had been cut into four pieces. Neither of them noticed that the cobbler in his turn had been followed by Zahrat, who had seen the cobbler talking with the water carrier, whom she instantly recognized as Abu Hasan. She stood behind a pillar and listened to their conversation.

“And the house where you did cobble—where lies it?”

Mustafa shook his head. “I was given gold with which to cobble up my tongue!”

“Here be gold to take out the stitches!” said Hasan, giving the cobbler gold. “Where is this house?”

“Nay, I cannot say!” Mustafa answered. “I was led there by the hand, with my eyes bound up in a kerchief. Yet methinks I could find it again.”

“How?” asked Hasan. “Give me your direction and I will give you yet more gold.”

Mustafa looked about him and spoke low. “As I was led into the street after my cobbling [*of Kasim Baba*] was finished, I put my hand behind my back and drew a cross with blue chalk upon the door.” “And the street?” asked Hasan.

Mustafa shut his eyes and wrinkled his forehead in thought. “I turned to the left and I turned to the right—and yet to the right—and once to the left—and the door is marked with a cross of blue.” He drank a deep draught of the wine.

“And the place from which you started in your blindness?” Hasan questioned.

“My stall here in this street,” answered Mustafa. He rose as he spoke and moved somewhat unsteadily to his stall. And even as he did so, Zahrat-al-Kulub, who had heard all, turned and crept away from the Bazaar.

But Mustafa sat by his stall and mumbled to himself his cobbler’s song. Hasan beckoned to the two robbers in the wine seller’s stall.

“He turned to the left and then to the right, and yet to the right and once to the left and the door is marked with a cross of blue,” Hasan told them. “So get you in haste, Musab, and find the door, and when you have found it bring me word again!”

“Hearing is obeying!” Musab answered, and sped upon his quest.

“And do thou, Khuzaymah,” Hasan commanded the other robber, “stay where you are and keep suspicious eyes! The rest with me—till sunset!”

Then did Hasan wend his way through the Bazaar, uttering as he went the cry of the water-carrier.

The Fashion Show of Mabubah

In the gorgeous Bazaar of Bagdad, before the silk stalls, stood Mabubah, the withered wife of Ali Baba, accompanied by her faithful slave, Bostan. With many bags of gold, she had come to the Bazaar to make her purchases.

“What have you in the latest fashion of Bagdad?” she asked the stall-keeper.

“Oh lady of riches,” the stall-keeper answered, eyeing Mabubah’s fat purse, “I can show you wares such as none other in Bagdad can display. Silks and brocades of every hue and texture; damaskry fine as spiders’ weaving, and fashions from every city of the East. If the bringer of good fortune will deign to step within!”

“Nay,” said Mahbubah. “I prefer to see your offerings in the light of day.”

“You say right, Oh lady of wisdom! If you can but spare the time I will pass before you a score of different forms and fashions from which you can make a choice.”

“Yeh, that would please mine eye!” Mabubah answered. “I will await your display.”

The stall-keeper gave a bow and retired within his stall. And as Mabubah waited, there entered Ali, a little wine-stained and weary.

“Where have you been since yester eve?” Mabubah shrilled.

“My own affairs,” said Ali.

“Yeh! and you smell of musk and myrrh! You have been with Alcolom!”

“And a supper fit for a Krisa King!” said Ali.

“What have you to say?” Mabubah croaked evilly.

“Say! say!” Ali laughed. “You cat-fish! You shrunken camel-hump! You are no longer queen of my harem! Alcolom, the ravisher of hearts, reigns in your stead!”

Before Mabubah could answer him angrily, there came forth from the silk stall numberless girls clad in the most sumptuous draperies. The sight of the silks softened Mabubah’s wrath.

“Which costume finds favor in your eyes, Oh lady?” the stall-keeper asked as the girls passed before her. Bostan made some remark in gibberish, and Mabubah smiled.

“Yeh,” Mahbubah smirked, “you advise well. I buy them all!”

“Oh Allah!” Ali groaned.

“What sum do you require?” Mabubah asked of the stall-keeper.

“From thee, Oh gracious lady, but five thousand dinar!”

“Five thousand dinar!” Ali groaned again.

“Count out the gold yourself!” Mabubah said, throwing her purse at the stall-keeper’s feet. And yet once again Ali groaned.

“And where do you live, Oh lady of great ordering?” the stall-keeper asked, overcome with delight.

“My lord will furnish you with directions,” Mabubah made reply, pointing with her finger at Ali. “This very day we leave our present mansion for a somewhat larger which he is seeking. Is it not so, my lord?” she asked of Ali.

“Allah alone knows!” Ali answered. Then to the stall-keeper he said: “Yeh! I will give you directions where to send these goods.”

“Then will I hie me home and await your coming, oh my husband!” said Mabubah.

“Allah keep thee in his eye!” the stall-keeper said, smiling and salaaming to Mabubah as she went.

Then to Ali, left alone and rueful, there entered his son Nur-al-Huda, together with Marjanah. “Oh Ali, we have sought for you all over Bagdad!” Marjanah said. “Where have you been?”

“I feasted with Alcolom till dawn, waiting for my brother Kasim,” said Ali. “But as he came not, I took my leave of Alcolom and am on my way to refresh me at the hamman.”

“Know you not,” Marjanah asked, “that Kasim stole forth ere midnight with a dozen mules to reach the cave before you and leave us naught?”

“Oh Allah!” Ali cried. “I shall say my say on his return!”

“He has returned!” Marjanah said. “Yeh,” said Nur-al-Huda. “Dead! killed!”

“Glory be to Allah!” said Ali.

“Listen Ali!” Marjanah pursued. “Twixt middle night and dawn we found your brother in the cave, slaughtered—quartered! We took him to your house, with yet more sacks of gold, and hid all in the cellar.”

“Yeh,” Nur-al-Huda added “and when your wife fared forth upon her marketing, Zahrat-al-Kulub fetched a cobbler who stitched the body up, and so we buried it outside the gates. And none but we and Zahrat know aught.”

Before Ali could make reply the stall-keeper did bring forth the silken draperies that Mabubah had chosen.

“Your purchases are ready and await your instructions,” he said to Ali.

“Yeh!” answered Ali. “Send them to Alcolom at Kasim Baba’s mansion.” He turned and laughed at the wonderment which was written on the faces of Marjanah and Nur-al-Huda. “They be Mabubah’s purchases which now shall go to Alcolom. For I am master, in my brother Kasim’s stead, of his palace and of his wife Alcolom, the ravisher of hearts. Come, let us speed thither! Tomorrow night will we hold the wedding of thee, Nur-al-Huda, my son! Come!”

With light hearts they sped away to Kasim Baba’s palace, there to make all ready for the wedding. And thus all plans were made for the wedding which was to be celebrated the next evening in the palace of Kasim Baba, which now, by the death of its former owner, had become the home of the poor brother, Ali.

The Oil Merchant from Jerusalem

When the messengers sent forth by Abu Hasan had returned to him to report the results of their search, they astonished him by stating that every house on either side from end to end of the street was marked with a cross of blue, for Zahrat, hearing of the scheme by which the cobbler had marked the house, had taken blue chalk and placed a chalk mark upon the door of every house in the street. Just as Hasan was venting his rage upon the members of his luckless band, and declaring that his plans were being foiled by the wit of someone else in Bagdad, Zahrat came into view.

She came right up to the supposed water-carrier and said: "Wherefore do you seek for me, Abu Hasan?" Every man started in fear and laid his hand on his dagger hilt.

"So you are here!" Hasan said angrily. "Are you not afraid of my vengeance?"

"Nay, I fear you not," Zahrat answered. "Yet will I bargain with you for my lover's freedom." "What have you to offer?" "Your safety." "How?"

"I know what you do not—the holder of the secret of your cave. If I reveal to you his name will you set my lover free?"

"The word that opens his cave is graven on this amulet round my neck," said Hasan. The secret of that word you shall know if you but serve us faithfully."

"The holder of your secret," said Zahrat, "is Ali Baba, the brother of him you slew last night." "Ali Baba! The wine-bibbing babbler of Bagdad!"

"If you believe it not, ask his wife Mahbubah."

"Yeh!" quotes Khuzaymah, he who had sat in the wine-seller's stall to watch, "that can I testify. For this same Mabubah has been in the Bazaar this say spending gold as water on gauds and trinkets."

Hasan turned once more to Zahrat. "Do none other know?" he asked.

"Nay, that can I not answer for. Ali is a babbler as you say, and the secret may have spread. Yet have I a plan whereby to seal the mouths of all who have heard his babblings."

"Unfold your plan!" Hasan commanded.

"To-morrow night," said Zahrat, "they hold a wedding feast at Kasim Baba's house. Come at moonrise, robed as an oil merchant from Jerusalem, with all your forty followers each hidden within a jar. One or two jars of oil in sooth you'll take as caution against the curious. Obtain permission to store them in the orchard till dawn. Then when all the guests are gathered for the dance, give you a signal and all creep forth and slay!"

"How do I know you will not play us false?" asked Hasan.

"Hold you not still my lover hostage?" Zahrat answered. "When all is over and death has danced his dance, then only shall I claim from you, Abu Hasan, the word that sets him free. Do you agree?" "By the Koran!" Hasan swore.

"Amen!" said Zahrat. And all the forty robbers said, "Amen."

The End of Abu Hasan

Once more the palace of Kasim Baba in Bagdad was alive with merriment and feasting. For now Ali Baba, the new owner of this magnificent palace, reigned in his brother's stead, and all was happiness and gayety. That very night was to be celebrated the marriage of Marjanah, the beautiful girl who had formerly been a slave, and Nur-al-Huda, the son of the new owner of the palace. Preparations had been made to decorate the orchard so that the ceremony could take place in the open air.

As it drew toward evening and the appointed hour of the feast, Abdullah, the steward, came to Ali with news that an oil merchant from Jerusalem with asses laden with forty jars of oil, craved permission to pass the night and store the jars in the orchard until dawn. "Tell him he may store his oil without a payment!" Ali answered. "And bid the stranger to the wedding feast, Abdullah! The more the merrier in this time of lamenting." He spoke in mockery, pretending to grieve for the loss of his brother Kasim.

Abu Hasan, disguised as an oil merchant from Jerusalem, stored his forty oil jars in the orchard of Kasim Baba's palace. And within each jar a robber lurked, awaiting the signal of their chief to come forth and slay at the time appointed. But Zahrat-al-Kulub had followed close behind, ready for the carrying out of the plan she had devised to rid the world of Abu Hasan and his forty thieves. When she came secretly to the orchard she found there the forty oil-jars, and Abdullah, the steward. "Whence come those jars?" she asked of Abdullah.

"An oil merchant from Jerusalem has my lord's consent to store them here till dawn," Abdullah answered. Zahrat looked around her, then whispered in Abdullah's ear: "What do you think these jars contain?" "The finest olive oil from Palestine."

"Nay!" Zahrat whispered again, "each jar contains a man!"

"Allah preserve thy wits!" Abdullah laughed. "You are mad! Even now a jar of that same oil is boiling in the kitchen!"

"By Allah! I speak true!" Zahrat replied. "List, Abdullah!" She went to one of the jars and rapped upon the lid thereof. Then came a voice from within the jar saying: "Is it time, oh Sheik?" And in a voice that was like the voice of Hasan, Zahrat answered: "Not yet!"

Abdullah fell upon his knees in terror. "Allah! Allah!" he moaned. "In every jar the same," Zahrat whispered to him. "The merchant from Jerusalem is Abu Hasan of Khorasan, and within these jars are his forty thieves. Come now, rise and go! Bring your men with pots filled with boiling oil and pour some in each jar. And as you pour in the oil, sing all of you to drown their cries. Make haste!"

"Yeh!" said Abdullah. "Allah is knowing." and he sped away to do as Zahrat had bid him.

Scarce was he gone than there came the sound of furtive footsteps. Zahrat concealed herself behind the jars as there entered Abu Hasan in the guise of an oil merchant from Jerusalem. Hasan looked all about him, then went to one of the jars, and rapped upon the lid thereof, even as Zahrat had done. Then once again came a voice saying: "Is it time, oh Sheik?" And Hasan answered: "Not yet! There is a wedding feast tonight here in this orchard—the orchard of him who has our secret—Ali Baba. When all are gathered and the gates are shut I give the signal we arranged—the Song of the Scimitar. Then joining in the chorus, cut your way out and slay! You understand?"

Then from all the jars the voices rose as one, saying: "We understand, oh Sheik!" "Till then peace be unto you!" said Hasan, and passed out of the orchard.

Then came Abdullah and his men with pots of boiling oil. And through the lid of each jar in the orchard they poured the boiling oil, singing the while that the cries of the forty robbers within the jars might not be heard. And when it was done there was none of the forty thieves alive to tell the tale. "All dead!" said Zahrat, knocking on all the jars, from which now there came no sound. "Now only one remains—Abu Hasan of Khorasan!"

At the time appointed Nur-al-Huda and his bride Marjanah, and all the guests, with Ali Baba and Alcolom, came to the orchard for the wedding feast. To them entered Abu Hasan, in the guise of the Jerusalem merchant. He spoke aloud to Ali. "Before the ceremony commences I claim the right of a stranger guest to greet the bridegroom and the bride with song, the like of which none here has ever heard before, nor will ever hear again."

He began to sing the Song of the Scimitar. But when none of the robbers leapt forth at the given signal, then Hasan turned and gazed upon the silent jars, and his face grew paler than the moonlight. As he gazed, from behind the jars arose Zahrat-al-Kulub and moved toward him. "Nay, I will sing a song to thee, oh stranger guest!" she said, "the like of which thou has heard before, but will never hear again." She sang the song of Chu Chin Chow of China. As she sang she moved ever closer to him, till of a sudden she drew her dagger and plunged it into his heart. Then there was a great outcry. But Zahrat tore off the disguise of the oil merchant and cried:

"I have slain the enemy of man, Abu Hasan of Khorasan!" Zahrat knelt and took from Hasan's neck the amulet on which was graven the word that would open the cave where her lover was imprisoned. "Now do I go to set my lover free!" she cried, rising. "He and I will haste us to the desert of Almara, where together we shall live in love and happiness for evermore! Yeh!"

As the wedding ceremony was about to begin, through the crowd of guests came Mabubah, attired in gorgeous raiment which ill became her ill-favored face. Ali Baba, his arm about the ravishing Alcolom, was just about to imprint a kiss upon the fair lady of his choice when Mabubah plucked him by the arm and cried: "I am here." Ali Baba turned and gazed at his Mabubah and let forth a cry of pain.

"Did I not say, give a man luck and throw him into the sea?" he said in dismay. "I would sacrifice all these riches if only I could escape from my Mabubah. Farewell Alcolom. It is not to be. On with the wedding feast and may the young people be happier than is Ali Baba, the Grand Wazir that is not to be!"

CHU CHIN CHOW — THE END.