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**"THE THIEF OF BAGDAD"**  
BY AHMED ABDULLAH

Based on Douglas Fairbanks' Fantasy of the Arabian Nights, by Elton Thomas

The Mongol turned and joined the other two Princes who were busy answering the Caliph's questions as to the Why and Wherefore of the extraordinary happening.

"I am grateful—so grateful!" exclaimed the happy father, fondling his daughter's hand. "Grateful to all of you!"

"Do not forget that most of your gratitude belongs to this little magic apple!" suggested the Mongol. "With its help I restored life to your charming daughter. Life! The greatest gift in the world! Ah!" he bowed deeply before the Caliph—"the greatest rarity in the world! I found it! Be pleased, O delightful Zobeid, to accept it as a present!" He gave the magic fruit to Zobeid, the Princess' faithful Arab slave girl; and once more addressed the Caliph: "I have succeeded! I found and brought back the most marvelous treasure on earth! And now, according to your and your daughter's pledge, I claim her as my own—my bride—my wife!"

"Fair and just!" admitted the Caliph of Bagdad; but his words as well as Zobeid's exclamation of horror and consternation were swallowed in the Indian's angry:

"Why—the pretensions of this Mongol are absolutely preposterous! Saved Zobeid's life, did he! By Shival There is hardly a Brahmin or holy fakir in Hindustan who is not familiar with Sanjivivida—the science of restoring the dead to life!"

"Pardon me," sneered the Mongol, "but why did you not use this marvelous science?"

"Partly because, in my excitement and grief, I did not happen to think of it; and partly because, knowing that Zobeid would marry me, I did not wish to rob you of the glory of having cured—ah!" he smiled like the cat that has stolen the cream—"the future Queen of India. For I claim Zobeid's hand. Here—as he gave the magic crystal to Zobeid—"is the greatest rarity on earth! Without its help we would not have known of Zobeid's terrible plight! She is mine—mine—mine!"

"There is something in what you say," admitted the Caliph. He turned to his daughter, "Zobeid, I really believe that he is right and that—"

"Wait a moment! Just wait a moment!" cut in the Prince of Persia. "A fiddlestick for magic globe and magic apple! Valuable—I grant. Also interesting. But it was my magic flying carpet which brought us here in time to save the Princess' life. Here—as he spread the rug in front of the couch—"is the greatest treasure, the rarest gift in the Lord Allah's Creation! By its token I claim your daughter's hand, O Caliph of all the Faithful!"

"By the honor of my beard," said the latter. "The Persian, too, is right!"

"But, father dear! I am an obedient daughter. Still—I cannot marry the three of them, can I?"

"Hardly!" admitted the Caliph. "Then—what shall I do!"

"You are mine!" cried the Indian. "Mine!" exclaimed the Persian. "Mine! Mine own!" growled the Mongol.

They surrounded the Caliph, clamoring, arguing, quarreling, protesting. They drew him to one side while the Princess, obeying a sudden impulse, turned to Zobeid.

"Quick!" she whispered. "Before they notice! Ask the magic crystal to show us what Ahmed is doing."

Zobeid was sitting cross-legged in front of the couch, her back to the others so that they could not see. She spoke low words to the crystal. She stared into it. Then she looked up excitedly.

"Heaven-Born!" came her sibilant murmur. "The Thief of Bagdad is on his way home!"

"Oh—" Zobeid forced back the exclamation.

"Yes. He flies. Flies through the air—mounted on a grey. White hooves with shiny silver wings! Over valleys, he flies—and mountain—and stream—and forest—and desert! West he flies—home—to Bagdad—astride his great, winged horse!"

Zobeid laughed aloud with happiness. She called to the Caliph: "Father! Father, dear!"

"Yes, little daughter?" he asked, turning. "What is it?"

"Here am I," she laughed again, "like a donkey between three bundles of hay—and I do not know how to choose."

"Not a very flattering comparison to yourself," smiled the Caliph of Bagdad.

"Nor to my three suitors, I am afraid Zobeid went on, "for they represent the three bundles of hay. Without the Indian's crystal, they could not have known of my plight. Without the Persian's carpet, they could not have come here so quickly. And without the Mongol's apple, they could not have cured me. Which of the three shall I choose?"

"If you choose one, the other two will object," replied her father, wearily. "They have already defamed me with their arguing and counter-arguing, their accusations and counter-accusations." He sighed. "Oh—I am so tired!"

"So am I," said the Princess. "Let us all go to sleep. Tomorrow will be time enough to decide."

"A good idea, daughter!"

Still grumbling, the three Princes assented. They left the apartment. But the Mongol, after bowing good-night to Zobeid, stopped for a moment near the window, as if wishing to look at the glorious view of Bagdad, golden and green beneath the setting sun. Three times he waved his handkerchief. He smiled thinly, cruelly, as almost immediately from a tower nearby an immense, triangular, red-and-gold flag was dipped—three times—in answer. He knew that flag. The battle flag of his race. It was stiff with gold; stiffer with gore.

Whatever the morrow's decision, Zobeid would be his. It would come soon. Bagdad would fall asleep. And then his Mongol warriors jumping to arms—the attack!

Again he bowed before the Princess, and left.

Alone with Zobeid, Zobeid stared into the magic crystal; stared into it to her heart's content.

(To Be Continued.)

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