

# KISMET

## The Story

The professional beggars ply their trade outside the mosque in ancient Baghdad. It is Omar, the Poet, who discovers that Hajj, the oldest beggar, has gone to Mecca. Omar impersonates Hajj and in consequence is kidnapped by the brigand Jawan, whose son had been stolen as the result of a curse put upon him many year ago by the real Hajj. But the versatile sham Hajj hoodwinks Jawan into giving him a bag of gold by professing to lift the curse and restore the lost son. Hajj gives the gold to his beautiful daughter Marsinah, telling her she can buy the house she covets and bedeck herself in silks and trinkets. He, however, falls foul of the Wazir's police and is arrested for being in possession of a purse stolen by Jawan. Meanwhile in the Bazaar, Marsinah has cast her rags and been transformed by delicate finery, baubles, bangles and beads. She is observed by the Caliph, who is moving incognito among his subjects. The Caliph falls in love with Marsinah and follows her to the garden of her dream house where, as strangers in paradise, they kiss and promise to meet again at moonrise.

The Wazir is in dire financial straits and his beautiful, crafty wife, Lalume, has negotiated an immense gift of gold from an Asiatic Prince, subject to the Caliph being persuaded to marry his three daughters - diminutive oriental Princesses. When Hajj is brought before the Wazir for sentence, the amorous Lalume takes a fancy to him and contrives a delay of execution, during which Jawan is brought in by the police. His presence proves the innocence of 'Hajj', whom he denounces as a fraud for failing to restore his son. No sooner has he done so than he recognises, by means of an amulet, that the Wazir is in fact his missing son. It does not suit the Wazir to acknowledge so disreputable a parent, so he callously sends Jawan to his death. He does not fear being cursed by Hajj until the Caliph unexpectedly arrives and tells him he has chosen a bride, so the visiting Princesses can return home. The Wazir is then convinced that Hajj has uncanny powers and offers to make him an Emir if he will remove the bride-to-be and enable him to secure the Asian gold.

Aided and abetted by Lalume, Hajj escapes. He finds Marsinah in her garden waiting for her mysterious lover. Fearing for her safety he forces her into hiding just before the Caliph comes to claim her as his bride. The Caliph is told by an observer that Marsinah had left the garden with another man. Highly pleased with the turn of events and attributing them to Hajj, the Wazir makes him an Emir. That gives Hajj the opportunity to flirt with Lalume and to put Marsinah in her charge among the women of the harem. The Caliph instructs the Wazir to trace his lost love, but is persuaded to peep, unobserved, into the women's quarters where to his amazement he sees Marsinah. His joy is quickly turned to grief when the Wazir lies to him that she is one of his own wives. At that the Caliph capitulates and promises to choose a wife from the candidates for his hand, including the Asian Princesses, at a Diwan that very night. To cover his lie the Wazir falsifies the records by entering his supposed

marriage to Marsinah a month ago. She swears to kill herself if he takes her in marriage. In the course of the Diwan the Wazir compliments Hajj on his feat of magic in putting the Caliph's beloved in his own harem. He tells him of the marriage he forced upon her and casually mentions her name is Marsinah, and her vow to kill herself. Hajj is dumbfounded, but his agile brain evolves a plan.

He calls to the Caliph that he will throw a magic plaque into the pool and when retrieved by the Wazir it will bear the name of the bride-to-be. The Wazir is cajoled into diving for the plaque and producing a substitute one with the name of an Asian Princess scribbled on it. Jocularly, Hajj gets the Wazir to raise his foot, which he seizes, holding him immersed until drowned.

He defends his action by getting the Caliph unwittingly to condemn to death the person who took away his beloved with a lie. Hajj has merely carried out that sentence. When he escapes and returns with Marsinah, the lovers recognise each other in disbelief and delight. The Caliph takes her for his only wife. And Hajj passes sentence upon himself for his crime of drowning the Wazir. It is to take Lalume to an oasis far away and toil constantly to remove all grief from her heart.