

Once upon a time, there was a rich Caliph in Baghdad. He was very famous because he was wise and kind. One morning he sent his servant, Abdul, to the market to buy some fruit. As Abdul was walking through the market, he suddenly felt very cold. He knew that somebody was behind him. He turned round and saw a tall man, dressed in black. He couldn't see the man's face, only his eyes. The man was staring at him, and Abdul began to shiver.

'Who are you? What do you want?' Abdul asked.

The man in black didn't reply.

'What's your name?' Abdul asked nervously.

'I . . . am . . . Death,' the stranger replied coldly and turned away.

Abdul dropped his basket and ran all the way back to the Caliph's house. He rushed into the Caliph's room.

'Excuse me, master. I have to leave Baghdad immediately,' Abdul said.

'But why? What's happened?' the Caliph asked.

'I've just met Death in the market,' Abdul replied.

'Are you certain?' said the Caliph.

'Yes, I'm certain. He was dressed in black, and he stared at me. I'm going to my father's house in Samarra. If I go at once, I'll be there before sunset.'

The Caliph could see that Abdul was terrified and gave him permission to go to Samarra.

The Caliph was puzzled. He was fond of Abdul and he was angry because Abdul had been badly frightened by the stranger in the market. He decided to go to the market and investigate. When he found the man in black, he spoke to him angrily.

'Why did you frighten my servant?'

'Who is your servant?' the stranger replied.

'His name is Abdul,' answered the Caliph.

'I didn't want to frighten him. I was just surprised to see him in Baghdad.'

'Why were you surprised?' the Caliph asked.

'I was surprised because I've got an appointment with him . . . tonight . . . in Samarra!'