

Death Comes to Baghdad

-a retelling of an ancient Sufi parable

A wealthy merchant in Baghdad sent his young servant to the marketplace to purchase provisions. Shortly later, the servant returned looking panic-stricken.

"Master!" he cried. "You must lend me your best horse immediately, so that I may flee to Damascus and thereby escape my fate."

"What has happened?" asked the merchant.

"I went to the marketplace and I saw Death standing there among the stallholders!" exclaimed the servant. "First, he made a hostile gesture at me, and then he started walking toward me! I beg you, please, lend me your best horse so that I may flee to Damascus and escape."

The merchant, being a kind and generous man, did exactly as his servant asked. He bid the terrified young man well and watched as the servant fled toward Damascus.

Then the merchant's curiosity got the best of him, and he walked down to the marketplace to investigate the servant's story. It was there that he witnessed a curious sight. Death was indeed standing in the crowd.

The merchant approached Death, intent upon questioning the hooded figure. "Why did you make a hostile gesture at my servant?" asked the merchant.

"I made no gesture of hostility," replied Death. "I was simply very surprised to see him, for I have an appointment with him tonight... in Damascus."

