

Olivier Aymar

*Once Upon a Time,  
Zazaki Tales*

Tales



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**Once Upon A Time, Zazaki Tales**

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

## **Aymar O.**

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Born in 1960, Olivier Aymar has a PhD in history, specialising in the history of the Kurds and Zazas. In this book, he presents eight traditional folk tales of kindness, goodness, courage, compassion and other such qualities. Eight short initiatory stories in which the various characters outdo themselves, revealing their courage and bravery and acting like true heroes of ancient mythical days.

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**Translated by Mary Molliné**

## **Introduction**

It is true that most people have never heard of the Zazas and yet they do indeed exist. The Zazas are the descendants of the Anatolian and Mesopotamian civilizations. Their ancestors were first the Sumerians, then the Hattis, the Hittites, the Luwians, the Hurrians, the Parthians and the Sasanians. Just after the invasion of the Zazanid (Sasanid) Empire in 634 A.D., the Zazas' country was repeatedly invaded by the Arabs, then the Seljuqs, the Mongols, Genghis Khan and Timur, the Persians and the Turks.

After 1514, the Zazas were decimated by the Ottoman Sultans and the Kurds. From this date forward, the Zazas disappeared from the pages of history and their History, culture, language and ethnicity were attributed to the Kurds who fought hand in hand with the Ottoman Turks up until 1940. The tales you will read in this book are part of the oral culture of the Zazas.

## The King

One day, a king called his three daughters to his side and asked his eldest daughter, “How much do you love me, my child?”

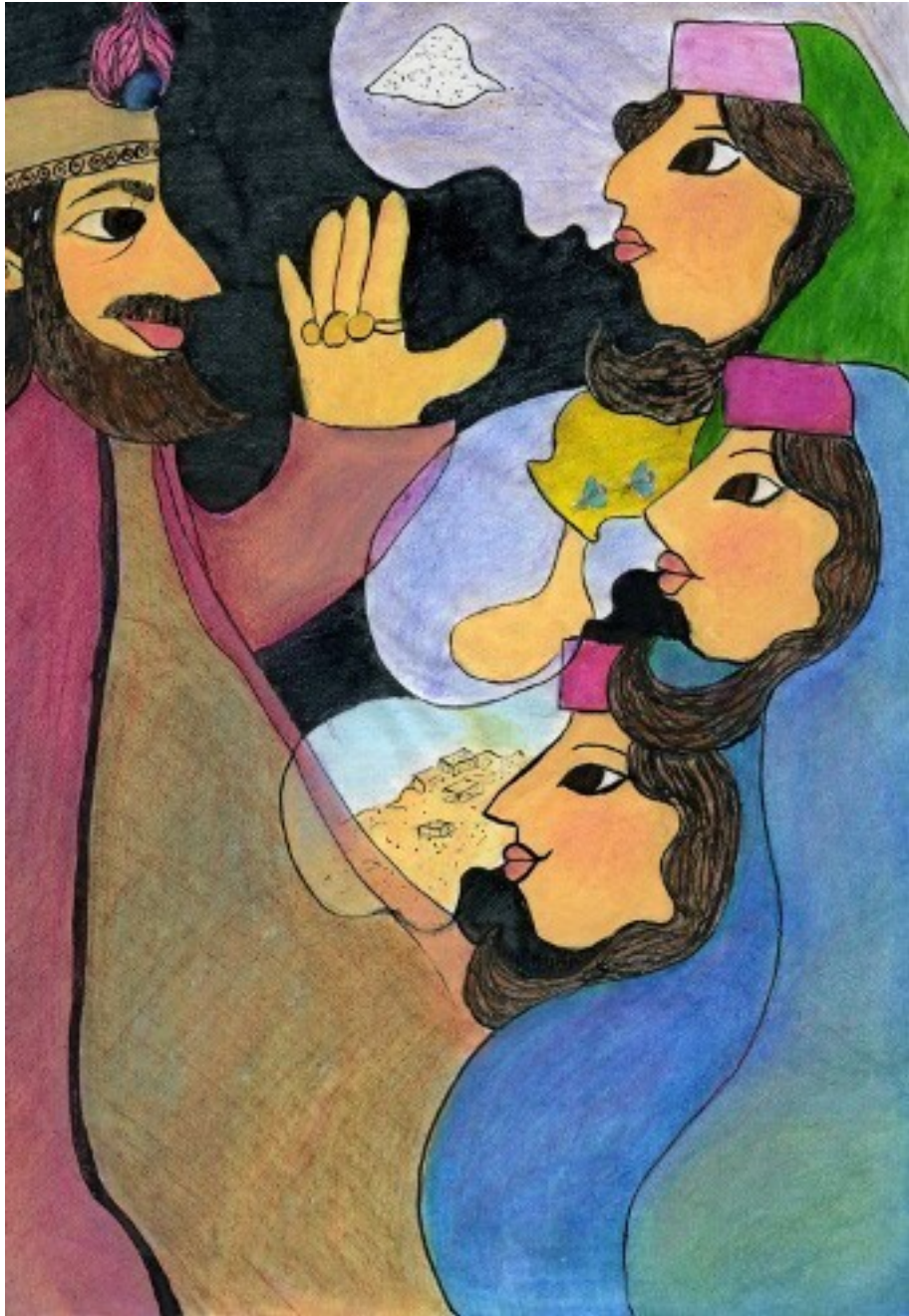
His daughter answered, “Father, I love you as much as sugar.”

The king was reassured. “Good,” he thought, “that means she loves me very much.” He turned to his second daughter, “And you, my child, how much do you love me?”

“I love you as much as honey.”

The king was thrilled. “Excellent,” he thought, “she, too, loves me very much.”

When the youngest daughter’s turn came, she answered, “Father, I love you as much as I love salt.” The king was not expecting such an answer. He felt offended. Thinking he was loved as much as salt, that is to say, not at all, he withdrew to his chamber to reflect upon a solution for this offense. After a while, he decided to send his “cursed” daughter away from his court.



He called two of his servants and said to them, “Take my youngest daughter and give her to the laziest man in the kingdom.”

The next morning, the two servants took the young girl and set off in search of the laziest man in the kingdom. Along the way, they saw a man lying under a date palm with his mouth wide open, hoping the dates would fall into it on their own.

The two servants stopped, thinking they could not possibly find a lazier man than this one.

They called out to him, “Hey, you there! Can you hear us?”

“Yes, what do you want?”

“We bring one of the king’s daughters to be your wife.”

“Very well, send her over here,” answered the man, and the two servants left the girl with the man and returned to the palace.

The lazy man's name was Memet. He was so lazy that he hardly ever rose from his mattress. His mother would carry him on his mattress every morning to the shade of a date palm, and every evening she would bring him home. This had been going on for a very long time.

His new wife refused to accept her husband's condition. She asked her mother-in-law, "Why do you carry him every morning and every evening like that?"

Her mother-in-law answered, "What can I do, daughter? God has given me a lazy son; all I can do is put up with it."

The king's daughter thought about it. She told herself that this had to stop and that a solution had to be found. That very evening she said to her husband, "My dear husband, you know that in order to live, you are going to have to work. Otherwise we shall soon have nothing left to eat."

Her husband answered, "But my dear, I do not know how to work."

"That is not a problem, you will learn! You will start by going to buy a rope, then you will go to the marketplace to work as a porter. You do not need any training for that."

Her husband said nothing. The next morning, he bought a rope and went to the marketplace.

A man hailed him. "You there, porter!" Memet ran to him.

"Yes sir?"

"Carry these sacks of flour to my house, while I look for some other porters to carry the rest of the sacks."

"Yes sir," responded Memet, and he immediately set to work.

While the man was looking for other porters, Memet made several trips and carried all the sacks. When the man came back with two other porters, he did not see any sacks. He asked Memet where they were.

"I brought them to your house, sir!"

The two other porters took an instant dislike to this newcomer who was stealing all the work. They decided to warn all the other porters, who immediately held a meeting in order to find a solution. They unanimously decided to pay Memet a certain sum on the condition that he stop working as a porter.

They went to Memet and said to him, "We will give you a sum of money if you stop working here as a porter." Memet, delighted, accepted this proposal. He took the money and returned home. When he arrived, he showed the money to his wife, saying, "Look, dear, look how much I earned today!"

Upon seeing how much he had earned in a single day, his wife was both happy and astonished. She asked her husband, "How did you earn so much money in one day?"

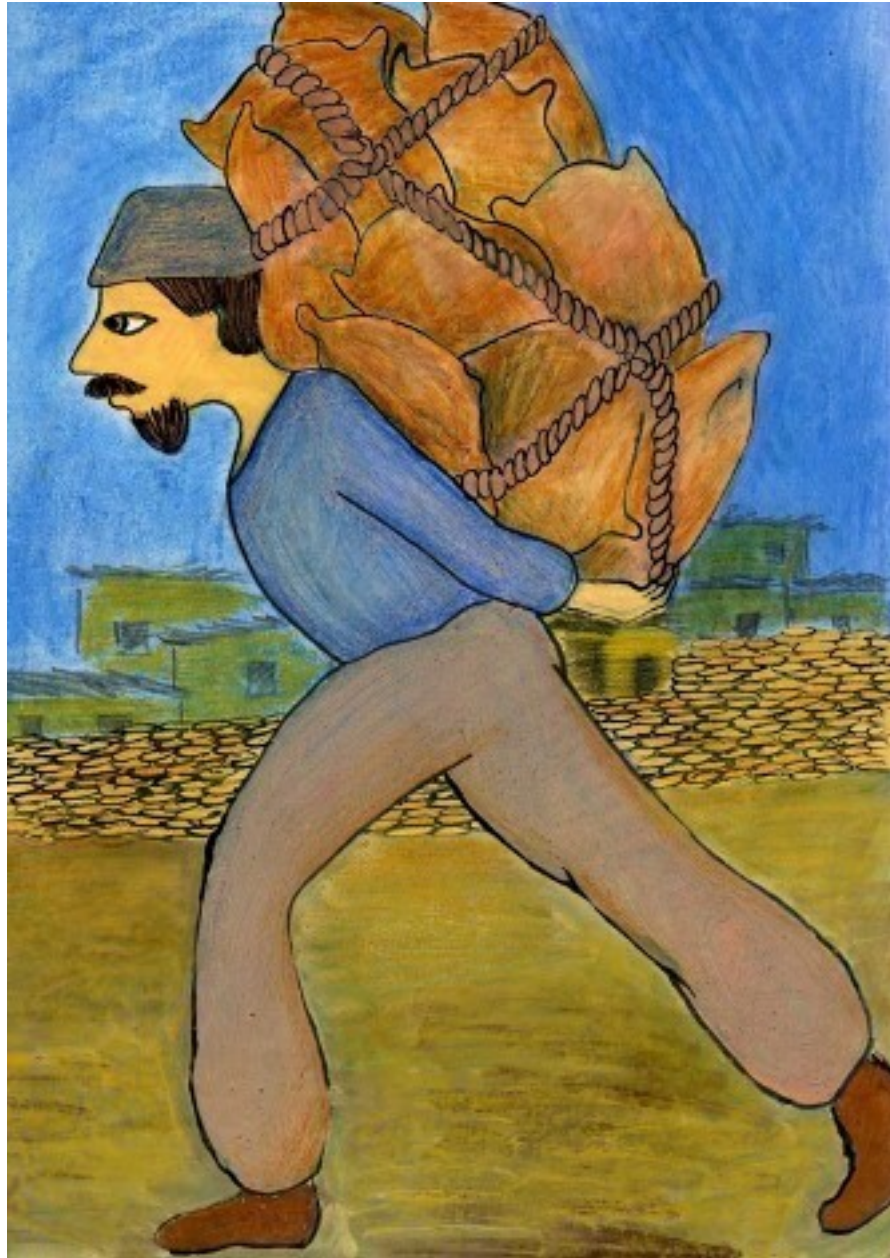
"The other porters gave it to me so that I would stop working as a porter," he answered.

Delighted with her husband's success, she responded, "Since you can no longer work as a porter, you are now going to work at a construction site."

The next morning, Memet went to a worksite, where the foreman immediately hired him as a mason's hand. Memet worked all day without a word of complaint. When the mason asked for mortar, he gave it to him right away, when he asked for cement, he gave him that, too. In this way, he accomplished an amount of work that several hands would normally not have been able to accomplish. His energy and zeal worried the other workers. They thought that if he kept on like that, there would soon be no work left for them. They, too, came to the conclusion that it would be best to give him a sum of money so he would stop working on the site.

Once again, Memet, delighted, took the money and returned home, where he said to his wife, "Look, dear, they have paid me not to work again."

His wife was very happy to see her husband come home with so much money, but she did not want him to stay home and do nothing. So she said, "This time, you are going to buy a horse and work as a traveling merchant. You will sell candy, shoes, socks, clothing and other little things from town to town and village to village."



“Very well,” answered Memet.

The next day, Memet went to buy a horse and some knickknacks, then he set off to travel from town to town and from village to village.

On his way, he came to a well where many other merchants were waiting for water. To get water, someone had to go down to the bottom of the well to ask the guard to turn on the tap. No one there dared to go down into the well. Seeing this, Memet offered his services and they immediately tied him to a rope and let him down. At the bottom, Memet found an old man and two women sitting on a couch.

The old man, upon seeing Memet, asked him, “What are you doing here, my boy?”

“I came to turn on the tap,” answered Memet. “A great number of caravan drivers are waiting for water up there.” The old man explained to him that in order to turn the tap on, he first had to answer a question. If the answer was correct, he would turn it on, but if not, he would not.

A bit perplexed, Memet responded, “Very well, what is your question?”

“It is a very simple question. Tell me which of my two wives I prefer.”

Disconcerted, Memet thought about it, then answered, “That depends on your taste. They are both beautiful. You could easily prefer one or the other.”

The old man was satisfied with this response and asked his dark wife to go get a pomegranate in the garden for his visitor. She went to the garden and came back with two pomegranates, which she gave to Memet, saying, “If you ever come back, bring me a ball of yarn.”

Memet took the pomegranates and climbed back up the well. A few minutes later the old man turned on the tap and the merchants were able to quench their thirst. In order to reward Memet for his kindness, the merchants each gave him some money.

Memet immediately sent the two pomegranates full of the silver and gold coins the merchants had given him to his wife. Then, with one of the merchants whose name was Ali, he went to the nearest city. While Ali was taking a nap at the foot of the wall, Memet set off to visit the city. As he walked through the streets, he saw an ox that a man was leading by a rope tied to his horns. Memet approached the man and asked him shyly, “Excuse me, sir, where are you taking this ox?”

“I am taking it to be slaughtered.”

“May I come with you?” asked Memet.

“If you want to!” Memet followed the man to a mosque where he took out his knife, slaughtered the ox and skinned it. Then he said to Memet, “Lie down on the hide to see if it is big enough.”

Memet did not realize the man’s intentions and did as he said. Scarcely had he lain down on the hide when the man covered him with it and gave him a violent blow with his whip. Memet landed at the top of the minaret of the mosque. When he opened his eyes and saw himself at the top of a minaret with no stairs, he could see no way to get down.

But suddenly he heard a voice. Looking down, he saw the man who had sent him to the top of the minaret. “What is up there?” asked the man.

“All sorts of things!” answered Memet. “Gold, silver, jewels, silks...”

“Then hurry up and send them down to me,” said the man.

Suddenly, a stork landed on the minaret and said to Memet, “Don’t worry, I am going to help you get down.”

“How can you help me?”

The stork answered, “I shall go down slowly and you will follow me, putting your feet exactly where I put mine. We will make it all the way down.” Memet was not sure whether to believe the stork, but he followed its instructions and soon reached the ground. When he saw Memet on his way down, the man fled.

Once he was on the ground, Memet hastened to find his companion, Ali. When Ali saw him, he asked him where he had been. Without going into too much detail, Memet explained that he gone to see the city. They set off together to find a caravansary for the night.

The next morning, Memet disguised himself and returned to the place where he had seen the man leading an ox the day before. After a few minutes, along came the man leading another ox by the horns. Memet approached and spoke to him, “Sir!”

“Yes?”

“Where are you leading this ox?”

“I am taking it to be slaughtered.”

“May I come with you?”

“If you want to.” Memet went with him and they came to the same place as the day before. The man took out his knife, slaughtered the ox, skinned it, and told Memet to lie down on the hide to see if it was big enough.

Memet answered, “I do not know how to lie down. Show me how. You lie down first so I can see how, and then I will know what to do.”

As soon as the man lay down, Memet covered him with the hide and gave it a blow with his whip and the man landed on the minaret.

Memet called out to him, “What is up there?”

“Diamonds, gold, jewels, silver...” responded the man.

“Then hurry up and send them down!” The man threw down everything he could reach. Memet filled several bags then placed them on his horses’ backs and went to find his friend Ali.

As they were leaving the city, Memet remembered the old woman at the bottom of the well who wanted a ball of yarn. He did not wish to leave without buying it for her, so he said to his friend, “Excuse me, Ali, I forgot my staff at the caravansary, wait for me here, I am going to go get it. I’ll be right back.”

Ali answered, “It doesn’t matter, I will buy you another staff.”

“No,” said Memet. He ran to the city, bought a ball of yarn, and came back to Ali.

Together, they set off for the well to get water for themselves and their horses. When they reached it, Memet saw the caravan drivers discussing who would go down to turn on the tap. Once again, he offered to go, so they tied a rope around him and let him down. When he reached the bottom, Memet greeted the old man and his two wives.

The old man asked him, “What do you want, young man?”

“I have come to ask you to turn on the tap, for all the caravan drivers are thirsty and they are waiting up above.” Just as before, the old man told him he was going to ask a question and if the answer was satisfactory, he would turn the tap on and otherwise he would not.

“Tell me which of these two wives I prefer.”

Memet answered, “It depends on your good pleasure. You could prefer either one.” Satisfied with this answer, the old man told his white wife to go get two pomegranates in the garden for their guest. She brought back four. Memet gave the ball of yarn to the dark wife, took his pomegranates, and climbed back up the well. Once again, the merchants all gave him money.

Memet took the money, the pomegranates, and the twelve bags of gold, silver and diamonds and returned home.

When he reached his village, he did not recognize it. Many changes had been made. When he had left there were only a few houses. Now the village was so big it looked like a city.

Memet was unable to find his house and asked some villagers to lead him to it. They led him to his new house that looked like a castle. He discovered that his wife was now living in a huge palace and that she had about a hundred servants.

The treasures he brought with him made his wife even richer. She was able to rival even with her father who had driven her from his court simply because she had said she loved him as much as salt. Many years had gone by since and her father had forgotten her.

In order to prove to her father the love she had always borne him, she decided to invite him to her kingdom. When the king received the message from this unknown princess, he told the messenger sent to deliver the message, “I am a king and I only travel with my entire court. Is your princess capable of receiving my men?”

The princess’ messenger responded, “That will be no problem for the princess, Your Highness.”

Intrigued by the power of this unknown princess, the king accepted the invitation and made the journey with his court. When he arrived at the palace, he immediately realized how powerful she was. She welcomed him with the greatest honors and gave him one of her reception rooms to stay in. She then had the best possible dishes made, and to show her father that loving someone like salt is no idle talk, she decided to have them all prepared without salt, all except the soup.

At supper time, everyone sat down to eat. The king picked up his spoon and began to eat, but he was only able to swallow one small bite of each dish. Finally, he came to the soup, and ate the entire bowl. The princess said to him, “Your Highness, why did you choose to eat the soup, even though you had all the best dishes in the world before you?”

The king answered her, “These dishes cannot be called good, none of them have any salt. That is why I wasn’t able to eat them. But this bowl of soup was salted, and I found it ten times better than

any of the other dishes.” At that very moment, he recalled the words of his daughter whom he had driven from his court, but he avoided mentioning it.

After the meal, the king and the princess began to talk about various things. The king stopped and said to the princess, “One day, I asked my three daughters how much they loved me. The youngest one said she loved me as much as salt, and I did not understand what that meant. I thought it was an offense to my rank, so I drove her from my court. After what has just happened, I understand now that she loved me very much.”



The moment he admitted his mistake, his daughter revealed her true identity and the father and daughter united their two kingdoms. They became the most powerful rulers and spent the rest of their lives living happily on their lands.

## The Shepherd

There was once a shepherd who lived in a village with his wife and child. As time went on, the shepherd's son grew to be a young man.

One day, he said to his father, "Father, I would like you to go ask the king for his daughter's hand for me."

His father was astonished and felt the need to explain a few things to him. "The king's daughter, for you? That's impossible! I am nothing but a village shepherd and I simply cannot go see the king to ask him for his daughter's hand for my son. The king will never agree to that."

His son would hear none of it. He insisted, and so as not to disappoint his son, the father agreed to go speak to the king.

The next morning, he set off for the palace. When he arrived, his presence was announced to the king, who had his servants show him in. The shepherd thus found himself before the king.

"Well, shepherd, what is your problem?"

"Excuse me, my lord, for disturbing you at such a time, but I had to come see you."

"Have no fear, shepherd, tell me what is troubling you."

Reassured, the shepherd began, "My king, I have a son, and he wishes to marry your daughter. I have therefore come to ask you for her hand for him."

The king thought about this for a moment, then said, "Shepherd, go see my daughter. If she agrees, then you have my blessing. If not, then that will be the end of it."

The shepherd was taken to where the king's daughter lived and explained to her why he had come. After thinking the matter over, the king's daughter responded that she was willing to marry the shepherd's son. Satisfied, the shepherd returned home and immediately set about preparing for the wedding.

A few days later, just when a delegation was about to set off to bring back the king's daughter, the shepherd's son had a dream in which he saw a wise man who begged him not to marry the king's daughter, telling him that he was rather to marry a girl who lived in another village. When he awoke, the shepherd's son ran to the delegation and informed everyone that he no longer wished to marry the king's daughter.

His father was furious at this unexpected news, and he said to his son, "How dare you say such a thing? The king is going to banish us from the village!"

"Be that as it may," responded his son, "I can no longer marry his daughter!" Then he leapt onto his horse and rode out of the village. As he rode, he came upon two men.

"Where are you going?" he asked them.

"Nowhere in particular. We are looking for work."

"May I ride with you for a bit?"

"You are welcome to join us!"



The three young men thus rode on together.

Suddenly, an old man appeared before them and asked one of them, “Where are you going?”

“Nowhere in particular. We are looking for work.”

The old man took a pen from the pocket of his cloak and gave it to one of them. To the other, he gave a coin, then he turned to the shepherd’s son. “And what about you? Where are you going?”

“I am going to marry a girl who lives in a far-off village.”

The old man said to him, “The girl you are talking about just died today! When you reach the village, you will see everyone mourning. Ask her parents for her clothes, then go to her grave. Say a prayer and she will come back to life. As soon as she comes back to life, take her to her home and ask her parents for her hand. If they say yes, marry her; if not, then return home alone.”

The shepherd’s son told the old man he understood.

When he reached the village gate, he heard weeping and crying. He went to question a villager. “Why all these cries?”

“Because the daughter of one of the villagers has just died.”

“Where is her parents’ house?”

“Over there. You see, over there where all those people are.” He immediately went to the house where a crowd was gathered. He stood before the door and called the girl’s mother.

She came to the door and asked, “What do you want, young man?”

“I want you to give me the clothes your daughter was wearing the day she died.”

Everyone found his request quite strange and urged her not to give him anything at all. But the mother was touched and gave the young man the clothes he had asked for. He took the girl’s clothes and went straight to her grave, placed them on it, and said a prayer.



The girl came out of the tomb and put on the clothes. He gave her his hand. They both returned to the village and went to her parents' house. Seeing their son return with the young man, all the villagers began to sing and dance to celebrate her resurrection.

The young man told her parents that he wished to marry their daughter. They immediately agreed, and the two got married and went to live in another village.

Several years went by, and one day the old man who had met the three young men came to see what had become of them. He started by going to see the young man to whom he had given a coin. When he reached the land where the man lived, he saw that he had become wealthy and respectable. In his house, there were so many people that there was hardly anywhere to sit. The old man succeeded in finding a corner near the door and he stayed there listening to the people's conversations. Around midnight, everyone left to go home. Only the master of the house and the old man were left in the room.

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