



# Monkeys and Monsters

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Jalal ud-Din Muhammad was the name Mughal Emperor Akbar was born with; it was also the name of a man clinging for life to a sewage pipe, hanging from the side of a five storey building in the middle of the night in a dingy neighbourhood inside the city that was first established in the name of Akbar's son.

The Jalal ud-Din relevant to us, the one hanging from a pipe, was a thief as you might have already guessed. He has been a thief for as long as he can remember. In fact, his earliest memory of stealing is his earliest memory ever. He had stolen a single sandal from the mosque, and having realised his mistake after running two blocks with one foot bare, he got caught when he came back to steal the second one. He got his first bad beating that day, and attributes this incident to the fact that he never entered a mosque again.

Jalal, or Jalaila, as the local populace liked to call him, was no longer hanging precariously from a pipe. He had found some footing on a narrow ledge just above someone's window, which let him rest his hands for a while. He still had to keep hold of the pipe, but this gave him the sweet relief of having something solid underneath him, and also the opportunity to question his decisions in life especially the one that put him in this position. Jalal had overheard someone in the market

one day saying how they were getting a paint job on the outside of their building, and were scared one of the workers might reach in and steal something. That gave him the idea to scale buildings using pipes, so he spent the next week scaling walls in the dark, looking for open windows where he could put a hand in and grasp in the dark for the cold metal of a smartphone or a laptop. He limited his climbing to first floors and second floors to make sure it was safe and there was a quick escape, and scored a pretty decent mobile phone on the second night. He'd had no luck since, and even had a couple of close calls when his hand made contact with human flesh. Jalal realised that for this to go somewhere, he had to go high. Thus he ended up on a fifth floor ledge, grasping through an open window where he hit his hand upon the ultimate prize—a laptop.

What Jalal didn't calculate was that the ascent in a steep climb isn't nearly as difficult as the descent, especially if you had a 4 kg laptop to carry. And this gross miscalculation was the reason Jalal was in this predicament, stuck fifty feet in the air on a 10 inch concrete ledge holding a pipe that was possibly passing excrement inside, although it did feel surprisingly cool on the outside, Jalal noted. He dared to look down once to calculate the scope of his troubles, but was met with a terror pointedly unrelated to pipes. A young boy who

often shared the shade of the same sheet of plastic in one of the local *tongs*, whose name was Tarek, was walking down the dark road with a beaming flashlight dancing in front of him. Tarek lived with his brother's family, whom Jalal knew since the time they had a baby girl and everyone in the neighbourhood was given a pack of sweets, and memorably for Jalal, even he wasn't forgotten.

By the time Jalal realised this job was not going to end smoothly, the flashlight had danced across his face once before coming back to stop. "I knew I'd find you climbing some wall like some monkey, you scumbag," Tarek's voice echoed in the empty darkness, "I saved up for 6 months to buy that phone, I'm not going to let you take it away!"

For one crazy moment, Jalal began to think about all the phones he'd stolen in his life but then he realised, it had to be the most recent one, otherwise how would they know to look at the walls? Jalal replied with a loud whisper, "Well, I'm sorry. I'm a thief, and a thief's gotta steal!" Tarek didn't look convinced, "If you had to steal, you should have stolen from some other man's window, I'm not moving an inch until you give me back my phone."

"Well, I'm stuck up here, and you're down there," Jalal shrugged, "and it doesn't look like I'm going to be able to move any time soon. If you want your phone, you need to help me get down." "Why

would I do that? Why wouldn't I wait for everyone to wake up and then beat the answer out of you?" Tarek jeered.

"Yeah, you wouldn't do that in normal circumstances, would you?" Jalal was suddenly very calm, "But what if I knew something that you wouldn't want me to know? What if I saw something you wouldn't want anyone to see?" "What do you mean?" Tarek barked.

"You know exactly what I'm talking about," Jalal gave him a look of hatred more searing than anything he knew he was capable of, "Your brother and his wife let you stay with them and go to college and this is how you repay them? How can you do that to their family? What were you doing in that room in the middle of the night, you monster?"

Tarek looked angry at first and wanted to shout something back, but then his eyes began to betray his fear. Jalal was calm again as he said, "Go get a ladder and some rope from your garage, tell your security guard I asked for it and to see me later," and as Tarek began to take a step backward, Jalal adjusted his grip on the pipe and added, "and remember not to ever show me your face again."

*Azmin Azran is what you would find if you took a bunch of human beings and made a new one out of their median characteristics. He's so average he's a mathematical anomaly. Send money at azminazran@gmail.com*