

*Tales from the  
Thousand and One Nights*

TRANSLATED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

N. J. DAWOOD

ENGRAVINGS ON WOOD FROM

ORIGINAL DESIGNS BY

WILLIAM HARVEY



PENGUIN BOOKS

## THE PROLOGUE



### *The Tale of King Shahriyar and his Brother Shahzaman*

It is related – but Allah alone is wise and all-knowing – that long ago there lived in the lands of India and China a Sassanid king who commanded great armies and had numerous courtiers, followers, and servants. He left two sons, both renowned for their horsemanship – especially the elder, who inherited the kingdom of his father and governed it with such justice that all his subjects loved him. He was called King Shahriyar. His younger brother was named Shahzaman and was king of Samarkand.

The two brothers continued to reign happily in their kingdoms, and after a period of twenty years King Shahriyar felt a great longing to see his younger brother. He ordered his Vizier to go to Samarkand and invite him to his court.

The Vizier set out promptly on his mission and journeyed many days and nights through deserts and wildernesses until he arrived at Shahzaman's city and was admitted to his presence. He gave him King Shahriyar's greetings and informed him of his master's wish to see him. King Shahzaman was overjoyed at the prospect of visiting his brother. He made ready to leave his kingdom, and sent out his tents, camels, mules, servants, and retainers. Then he appointed his Vizier as his deputy and set out for his brother's dominions.

It so happened, however, that at midnight he remembered a present which he had left at his palace. He returned for it unheralded, and entering his private chambers found his wife lying on a couch in the arms of a black slave. At this the world darkened before his eyes; and he thought: 'If this can happen when I am scarcely out of my city, how will this foul woman



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act when I am far away?' He then drew his sword and killed them both as they lay on the couch. Returning at once to his retainers, he gave orders for departure, and journeyed until he reached his brother's capital.

Shahriyar rejoiced at the news of his approach and went out to meet him. He embraced his guest and welcomed him to his festive city. But while Shahriyar sat entertaining his brother, Shahzaman, haunted by the thought of his wife's perfidy, was pale and sick at heart. Shahriyar perceived his distress, but said nothing, thinking that he might be troubled over the affairs of his kingdom. After a few days, however, Shahriyar said to him: 'I see that you are pale and care-worn.' Shahzaman answered: 'I am afflicted with a painful sore.' But he kept from him the story of his wife's treachery. Then Shahriyar invited his brother to go hunting with him, hoping that

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the sport might dispel his gloom. Shahzaman declined, and Shahriyar went alone to the hunt.

While Shahzaman sat at one of the windows overlooking the King's garden, he saw a door open in the palace, through which came twenty slave-girls and twenty Negroes. In their midst was his brother's queen, a woman of surpassing beauty. They made their way to the fountain, where they all undressed and sat on the grass. The King's wife then called out: 'Come Mass'ood!' and there promptly came to her a black slave, who mounted her after smothering her with embraces and kisses. So also did the Negroes with the slave-girls, revelling together till the approach of night.

When Shahzaman beheld this spectacle, he thought: 'By Allah, my misfortune is lighter than this!' He was dejected no longer, and ate and drank after his long abstinence.

Shahriyar, when he returned from the hunt was surprised to see his brother restored to good spirits and full health. 'How is it, my brother,' asked Shahriyar, 'that when I last saw you, you were pale and melancholy, and now you look well and contented?'

'As for my melancholy,' replied Shahzaman, 'I shall now tell you the reason: but I cannot reveal the cause of my altered condition. Know then, that after I had received your invitation, I made preparations for the journey and left my city; but having forgotten the pearl which I was to present to you, I returned for it to the palace. There, on my couch, I found my wife lying in the embrace of a black slave. I killed them both and came to your kingdom, my mind oppressed with bitter thoughts.'

When he heard these words, Shahriyar urged him to tell the rest of his story. And so Shahzaman related to him all that he had seen in the King's garden that day.

Alarmed, but half in doubt, Shahriyar exclaimed: 'I will not believe that till I have seen it with my own eyes.'

'Then let it be given out,' suggested his brother, 'that you intend to go to the hunt again. Conceal yourself here with me, and you shall witness what I have seen.'

Upon this Shahriyar announced his intention to set forth

on another expedition. The troops went out of the city with the tents, and King Shahriyar followed them. And after he had stayed a while in the camp, he gave orders to his slaves that no one was to be admitted to the King's tent. He then disguised himself and returned unnoticed to the palace, where his brother was waiting for him. They both sat at one of the windows overlooking the garden; and when they had been there a short time, the Queen and her women appeared with the black slaves, and behaved as Shahzaman had described.

Half demented at the sight, Shahriyar said to his brother: 'Let us renounce our royal state and roam the world until we find out if any other king has ever met with such disgrace.'

Shahzaman agreed to his proposal, and they went out in secret and travelled for many days and nights until they came to a meadow by the seashore. They refreshed themselves at a spring of water and sat down to rest under a tree.

Suddenly the waves of the sea surged and foamed before them, and there arose from the deep a black pillar which almost touched the sky. Struck with terror at the sight, they climbed into the tree. When they reached the top they were able to see that it was a jinnce of gigantic stature, carrying a chest on his head. The jinnce waded to the shore and walked towards the tree which sheltered the two brothers. Then, having seated himself beneath it, he opened the chest, and took from it a box, which he also opened; and there rose from the box a beautiful young girl, radiant as the sun.

'Chaste and honourable lady, whom I carried away on your wedding-night,' said the jinnce, 'I would sleep a little.' Then, laying his head upon her knees, the jinnce fell fast asleep.

Suddenly the girl lifted her head and saw the two Kings high in the tree. She laid the jinnce's head on the ground, and made signs to them which seemed to say: 'Come down, and have no fear of the jinnce.'

The two Kings pleaded with her to let them hide in safety, but the girl replied: 'If you do not come down, I will wake the jinnce, and he shall put you to a cruel death.'

They climbed down in fear, and at once she said: 'Come, pierce me with your rapiers.'

Shahriyar and Shahzaman faltered. But the girl repeated angrily: 'If you do not do my bidding, I will wake the jinnce.'

Afraid of the consequences, they proceeded to mount her in turn.

When they had remained with her as long as she desired, she took from her pocket a large purse, from which she drew ninety-eight rings threaded on a string. 'The owners of these,' she laughed triumphantly, 'have all enjoyed me under the very horn of this foolish jinnce. Therefore, give me your rings also.'

The two men gave her their rings.

'This jinnce,' she added, 'carried me away on my bridal night and imprisoned me in a box which he placed inside a chest. He fastened the chest with seven locks and deposited it at the bottom of the roaring sea. But he little knew how cunning we women are.'

The two Kings marvelled at her story, and said to each other: 'If such a thing could happen to a mighty jinnce, then our own misfortune is light indeed.' And they returned at once to the city.

As soon as they entered the palace, King Shahriyar put his wife to death, together with her women and the black slaves. Thenceforth he made it his custom to take a virgin in marriage to his bed each night, and kill her the next morning. This he continued to do for three years, until a clamour rose among the people, some of whom fled the country with their daughters.

At last came the day when the Vizier roamed the city in search of a virgin for the King, and could find none. Dreading the King's anger, he returned to his house with a heavy heart.

Now the Vizier had two daughters. The elder was called Shahrazad, and the younger Dunyazad. Shahrazad possessed many accomplishments and was versed in the wisdom of the poets and the legends of ancient kings.

That day Shahrazad noticed her father's anxiety and asked him what it was that troubled him. When the Vizier told her of his predicament, she said: 'Give me in marriage to this King: either I shall die and be a ransom for the daughters of Moslems, or live and be the cause of their deliverance.'

He earnestly pleaded with her against such a hazard; but

Shahrazad was resolved, and would not yield to her father's entreaties.

'Beware,' said the Vizier, 'of the fate of the donkey in the fable:

*The Fable of the Donkey, the Ox,  
and the Farmer*

'THERE was once a wealthy farmer who owned many herds of cattle. He knew the languages of beasts and birds. In one of his stalls he kept an ox and a donkey. At the end of each day, the ox came to the place where the donkey was tied and found it well swept and watered; the manger filled with sifted straw and well-winnowed barley; and the donkey lying at his ease (for his master seldom rode him).

'It chanced that one day the farmer heard the ox say to the donkey: "How fortunate you are! I am worn out with toil, while you rest here in comfort. You eat well-sifted barley and lack nothing. It is only occasionally that your master rides you. As for me, my life is perpetual drudgery at the plough and the millstone."

'The donkey answered: "When you go out into the field and the yoke is placed upon your neck, pretend to be ill and drop down on your belly. Do not rise even if they beat you; or if you do rise, lie down again. When they take you back and place the fodder before you, do not eat it. Abstain for a day or two; and thus shall you find a rest from toil."

'Remember that the farmer was there and heard what passed between them.

'And so when the ploughman came to the ox with his fodder, he ate scarcely any of it. And when the ploughman came the following morning to take him out into the field, the ox appeared to be far from well. Then the farmer said to the ploughman: "Take the donkey and use him at the plough all day!"



'The man returned, took the donkey in place of the ox, and drove him at the plough all day.

'When the day's work was done and the donkey returned to the stall, the ox thanked him for his good counsel. But the donkey made no reply and bitterly repented his rashness.

'Next day the ploughman came and took the donkey again and made him labour till evening; so that when the donkey returned with his neck flayed by the yoke, and in a pitiful state of exhaustion, the ox again expressed his gratitude to him, and praised his sagacity.

'"If only I had kept my wisdom to myself!" thought the donkey. Then, turning to the ox, he said: "I have just heard my master say to his servant: 'If the ox does not recover soon, take him to the slaughterhouse and dispose of him.' My anxiety for your safety prompts me, my friend, to let you know of this before it is too late. And peace be with you!"

'When he heard the donkey's words, the ox thanked him and said: "Tomorrow I will go to work freely and willingly." He ate all his fodder and even licked the manger clean.

'Early next morning the farmer, accompanied by his wife, went to visit the ox in his stall. The ploughman came and led out the ox, who, at the sight of his master, broke wind and frisked about in all directions. And the farmer laughed so, he fell over on his back.'

When she heard her father's story, Shahrazad said: 'Nothing will shake my faith in the mission I am destined to fulfil.'

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So the Vizier arrayed his daughter in bridal garments and decked her with jewels and made ready to announce Shahrazad's wedding to the King.

Before saying farewell to her sister, Shahrazad gave her these instructions: 'When I am received by the King, I shall



send for you. Then, when the King has finished his act with me, you must say: "Tell me, my sister, some tale of marvel to beguile the night." Then I will tell you a tale which, if Allah wills, shall be the means of our deliverance.'

The Vizier went with his daughter to the King. And when the King had taken the maiden Shahrazad to his chamber and

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had lain with her, she wept and said: 'I have a young sister to whom I wish to bid farewell.'

The King sent for Dunyazad. When she arrived, she threw her arms round her sister's neck, and seated herself by her side.

Then Dunyazad said to Shahrazad: 'Tell us, my sister, a tale of marvel, so that the night may pass pleasantly.'

'Gladly,' she answered, 'if the King permits.'

And the King, who was troubled with sleeplessness, eagerly listened to the tale of Shahrazad:

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the ring on her finger and was about to rub the seal, when he drew his sword and struck her through the neck. With a piercing scream she dropped dead to the ground.

The young Prince hurried to his father's chamber and roused him from his sleep. Ma'aruf praised his son for his bravery and recovered the ring from his wife's finger. Then he called out to his attendants and ordered them to take the body and bury it in the grounds of the palace. Such was the end of Fatimah.

King Ma'aruf reigned through many joyful years, until he was visited by the Destroyer of all earthly pleasures, the Leveller of mighty kings and humble peasants.

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Now during this time Shahrazad had borne King Shahriyar three sons. On the thousand and first night, when she had ended the tale of Ma'aruf, she rose and kissed the ground before him, saying: 'Great King, for a thousand and one nights I have been recounting to you the fables of past ages and the legends of ancient kings. May I make so bold as to crave a favour of your majesty?'

The King replied: 'Ask, and it shall be granted.'

Shahrazad called out to the nurses, saying: 'Bring me my children.'

Three little boys were instantly brought in; one walking, one crawling on all fours, and the third sucking at the breast of his nurse. Shahrazad ranged the little ones before the King and, again kissing the ground before him, said: 'Behold these three whom Allah has granted to us. For their sake I implore you to spare my life. For if you destroy the mother of these infants, they will find none among women to love them as I would.'

The King embraced his three sons, and his eyes filled with tears as he answered: 'I swear by Allah, Shahrazad, that you were already pardoned before the coming of these children. I loved you because I found you chaste and tender, wise and eloquent. May Allah bless you, and bless your father and mother, your ancestors, and all your descendants. O, Shahrazad, this thousand and first night is brighter for us than the day!'

Shahrazad rejoiced; she kissed the King's hand and called down blessings upon him.

The people were overjoyed at the news of Shahrazad's salvation. Next morning King Shahriyar summoned to his presence the great ones of the city, the chamberlains, the



nabobs, and the officers of his army. When they had all assembled in the great hall of the palace, Shahriyar proclaimed his decision to spare the life of his bride. Then he called his Vizier, Shahrazad's father, and invested him with a magnificent robe of honour, saying: 'Allah has raised up your daughter to be the salvation of my people. I have found her chaste, wise, and eloquent, and repentance has come to me through her.'

Then the King bestowed robes of honour upon the courtiers and the captains of his army, and gave orders for the decoration of his capital.

The city was decked and lighted; and in the streets and market-squares drums rattled, trumpets blared and clarions

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sounded. The King lavished alms on the poor and the needy, and all the people feasted at the King's expense for thirty days and thirty nights.

Shahriyar reigned over his subjects in all justice, and lived happily with Shahrazad until they were visited by the Destroyer of all earthly pleasures, the Annihilator of men.

*Now praise and glory be to Him who  
sits throned in eternity above the  
shifts of time; who, changing all things,  
remains Himself unchanged; who alone is  
the Paragon of all perfection. And  
blessing and peace be upon His chosen  
Messenger, the Prince of Apostles, our  
master Mohammed, to whom we  
pray for an auspicious*

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