

Stories from The Arabian Nights

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MAKUR

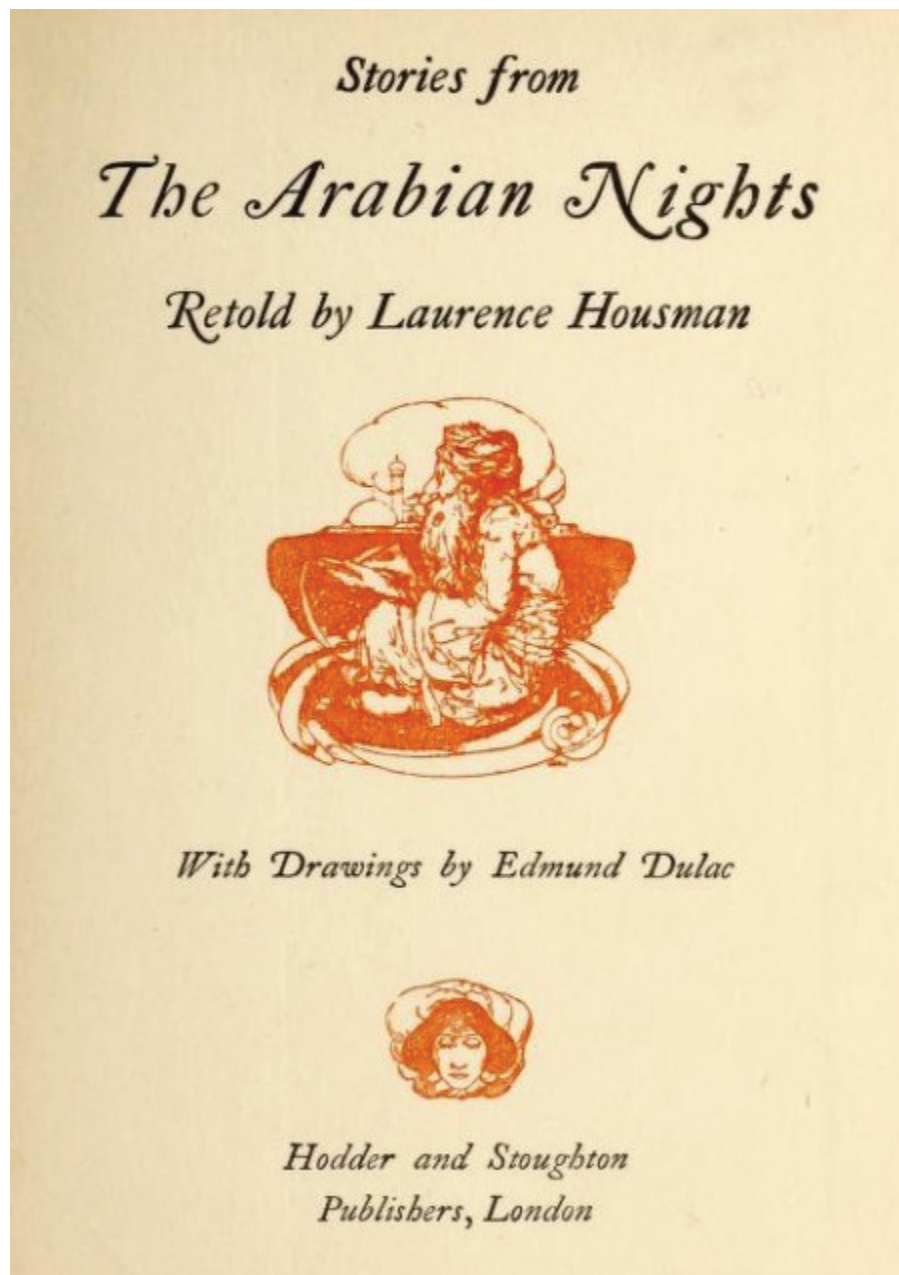


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A Journey into The Arabian Nights



Cover of Stories from The Arabian Nights

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Preface



PREFACE

Scheherazadè, the heroine of the Thousand and one Nights, ranks among the great story-tellers of the world much as does Penelope among the weavers. Procrastination was the basis of her art; for though the task she accomplished was splendid and memorable, it is rather in the quantity than the quality of her invention—in the long spun-out performance of what could have been done far more shortly—that she becomes a figure of dramatic interest. The idea which binds the stories together is greater and more romantic than the stories themselves; and though, both in the original and in translation, the diurnal interruption of their flow is more and more taken for granted, we are never quite robbed of the sense that it is Scheherazadè who is speaking—Scheherazadè, loquacious and self-possessed, sitting up in bed at the renewed call of dawn to save her neck for the round of another day. Here is a figure of romance worth a dozen of the prolix stories to which it has been made sponsor; and often we may have followed the fortunes of some shoddy hero and heroine chiefly to determine at what possible point of interest the narrator could have left hanging that frail thread on which for another twenty-four hours her life was to depend.

Yes, the idea is delightful; and, with the fiction of Scheherazadè to colour them, the tales acquire a rank which they would not otherwise deserve; their prolixity is then the crowning point of their art, their sententious truisms have a flavor of ironic wit, their repetitions become humorous, their trivialities a mark of light-hearted courage; even those deeper indiscretions, which Burton has so faithfully recorded, seem then but a wise adaptation of vile means to a noble end. And yet we know that it is not so; for, as a matter of fact, the “Arabian Nights Entertainment” is but a miscellany gathered from various sources, of various dates, and passing down to us, even in its collocated form, under widely differing versions. None but scholars can know how little of the unadulterated originals has come into our possession; and only those whose pious opinions shut their eyes to obvious facts can object in principle to the simplification of a form which, from the point of view of mere story-telling, can so easily be bettered. Even the more accurate of the versions ordinarily available are full of abridgment, alteration, and suppression; and if you have to eliminate Scheherazadè and select your stories mainly with a view to illustration, then you have very largely done away with the reasons for treating tenderly that prolixity which in an impatient age tends to debar readers from an old classic.

And so, in the present version, whoever shall care to make comparison will find that the original material has been treated with considerable freedom in the direction of brevity, and with an almost uniform departure from the exact text, save where essentials of plot or character or local colour required a closer, accuracy. In the case also of conflicting versions, there has been no reluctance to choose and combine in order to secure a livelier result; and a further freedom has sometimes been taken of giving to an incident more meaning and connexion than has been allowed to it in the original. That is, perhaps, the greatest license of all, but it is the one that

does least harm in formal result; for no one can read the majority of the tales in their accepted versions without perceiving that, as regards construction and the piecing of event with event, they are either incredibly careless or discredibly perfunctory. We have to reckon with them as the product of a race keenly alive to the value of colour and pictorial description, but a race whose constructive imagination was feeble and diffuse, lacking almost entirely that great essential for the development of art in its finer forms—the economy of means toward ends.

But because they contain, though at a low pressure, the expression of so much life, habit and custom, so many coloured and secluded interiors, so quaint a commingling of crowds, so brilliant and moving a pageantry of Eastern mediævalism, because of all these things the “Arabian Nights” will still retain their perennial charm. Those of us who read are all travelers; and never is our traveling sense so awakened perhaps, as when we dip into a book such as this where the incredible and the common-place are so curiously blended, and where Jinn and Efreet and Magician have far less interest for us now than the silly staring crowds, and the bobbing camels in the narrow streets, and Scheherazadè spinning her poor thin yarn of wonders that she may share for another night the pillow of a homicidal maniac.

THE FISHERMAN AND THE GENIE

There was once an old fisherman who lived in great poverty with a wife and three children. But though poorer than others he ever toiled in humble submission to the decrees of Providence, and so, at the same hour each day, he would cast his net four times into the sea, and whatever it brought up to him therewith he rested content.

One day, having cast for the first time, he found his net so heavy that he could scarcely draw it in; yet when at last he got it to shore all that it contained was the carcase of an ass.

He cast a second time, and found the draught of the net even heavier than before. But again he was doomed to disappointment, for this time it contained nothing but a large earthenware jar full of mud and sand. His third attempt brought him only a heap of broken old bottles and potsherds: fortune seemed to be against him. Then, committing his hope to Providence, he cast for the fourth and last time; and once more the weight of the net was so great that he was unable to haul it. When at last he got it to land, he found that it contained a brazen vessel, its mouth closed with a leaden stopper, bearing upon it the seal of King Solomon.

The sight cheered him. "This," thought he, "I can sell in the market, where I may get for it enough to buy a measure of corn; and, if one is to judge by weight, what lies within may prove yet more valuable."



And there in its midst stood a mighty Genie

Thus reckoning, he prised out the stopper with his knife, and turning the vessel upside down looked for the contents to follow. Great was his astonishment when nothing but smoke came out of it. The smoke rose in a thick black column and spread like a mist between earth and sky, till

presently, drawing together, it took form; and there in its midst stood a mighty Genie, whose brows touched heaven while his feet rested upon ground. His head was like a dome, his hands were like flails, and his legs like pine trees; his mouth was black as a cavern, his nostrils were like trumpets, his eyes blazed like torches, and his wings whirled round and over him like the simoom of the desert.

At so fearful a sight all the fisherman's courage oozed out of him; but the Genie, perceiving him, cried with a loud voice, "O, Solomon, Prophet of God, slay me not, for never again will I withstand thee in word or deed!"

"Alas!" said the fisherman, "I am no prophet; and as for Solomon, he has been dead for nearly two thousand years. I am but a poor fisherman whom chance has knocked by accident against thy door."

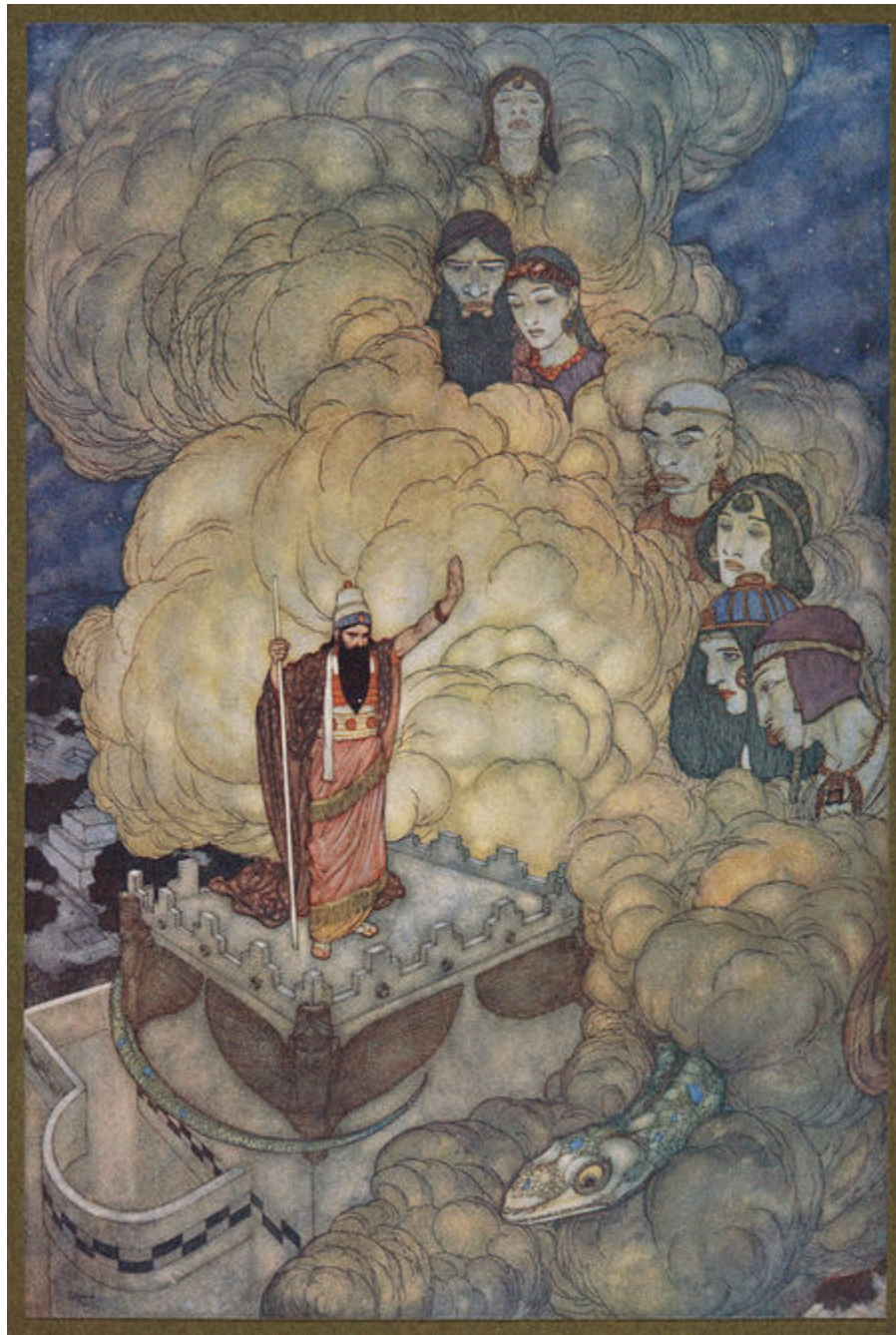
"In that case," answered the Genie, "know that presently thou wilt have to die."

"Heaven forbid!" cried the fisherman; "or, at least, tell me why! Surely it might seem that I had done thee some service in releasing thee."

"Hear first my story," said the Genie, "then shalt thou understand."

"Well, if I must!" said the fisherman, resigning himself to the inevitable; "but make it short, for truly I have small stomach left in me now for the hearing of tales."

"Know, then," said the Genie, "that I am one of those spirits which resisted the power and dominion of Solomon; and when, having brought into submission all the rest of my race, he could not make me yield to him either reverence or service, he caused me to be shut up in this bottle, and sealing it with his own seal cast it down into the depths of the sea.



When having brought into submission all the rest of my race

“Now when I had lain there prisoner for a hundred years, I swore in my heart that I would give to the man that should release me all the treasures attainable in heaven or earth. But when none came to earn so great a reward in all the hundred years that followed, then I swore that I would give to my liberator earthly riches only; and when this gift also had lain despised for yet another hundred years, then would I promise no more than the fulfilment of three wishes. But thereafter finding that all promises and vows were vain, my heart became consumed with rage, and I swore by Allah that I would only grant to the fool that should release me his own choice of the most cruel

form of death by which he should die. Now therefore accept that mercy which I still offer and choose thy penalty!"

When the fisherman heard this he gave himself up for lost, yet he did not the less continue by prayer and supplication to entreat the Genie from his purpose. But when he found that there was no heart left in him to be moved, then for the first time he bestirred his wits, and remembering how that which is evil contains far less wisdom than that which is good, and so falls ever the more readily into the trap prepared for it, he spoke thus: "O Genie, since thou art determined on my death, there is yet a certain thing touching thine honour that I would first know. So, by the Ineffable Name, which is the seal of Solomon, I will ask thee one question, and do thou swear to answer it truly."

The Genie was ready enough to give the oath as desired. Then said the fisherman, "How is it that one so great as thou art, whose feet o'er-step the hills and whose head out-tops the heaven—how can such an one enter into so small a vessel to dwell in it? Truly, though mine eyes tell me I have seen it, I cannot any longer believe so great a marvel."

"What?" cried the Genie, "dost thou not believe what I have already told thee?"

Not till I have seen it done can I believe it," said the fisherman.

Thereupon, without more waste of words, the Genie, drawing his limbs together and folding himself once more in a thick veil of smoke, descended from his vast altitude into the narrow neck of the brazen vessel till not one shred or film of him remained to view. Then the fisherman with a quick hand replaced the leaden stopper, and laughing, cried to the Genie, "Choose now, thou in thy turn, by what manner of death thou wilt die."

The Genie, hearing himself thus mocked, made violent efforts to escape; but the power of the seal of Solomon held him fast, and the fisherman, ceasing not all the while to revile him for the treachery and baseness which were now to receive their due reward, began to carry the vessel back to the sea's brink. "Now," said he, "thou shalt return to the place whence I drew thee! And here on the shore I will build myself a hut, and to every fisherman that comes near I will say, 'Look that you fish not in these waters, for herein lies bound a wicked genie that has sworn to put to a cruel death whoever dares to release him.'"

"Nay, nay," cried the Genie, "I did not mean what I said! Ask of me now, and I will give you all the treasures that the world contains, or that your heart can find in it to desire, if only you will set me free!"

The fisherman, being of a mild spirit and with no heart for revenge, sat down to consider what he should do, and all the while the imprisoned Genie continued to appeal to him for compassion with loud promise and lamentation. So at last, the fisherman, having the fear of God before his eyes, after he had extracted from the Genie a most solemn vow to leave him unharmed, drew out the stopper of lead and released him.

No sooner was he out and restored to his true form than the Genie, turning himself about, lifted his foot and with his full strength smote the brazen vessel far out to sea; and the fisherman, beholding that act, began to repent him of his mercy and to tremble again for dear life.

But the Genie, seeing his fear, broke into huge laughter, and striding on ahead of him cried, "Come, fisherman, and follow me, for now I will lead you to fortune!"

Meekly at his heels went the old fisherman, and leaving behind them the habitations of men they ascended a mountain and entered upon a desert tract guarded by four hills, in the centre of which lay a broad lake. Here the Genie stopped, and pointing to a place where fish were swimming in

abundance bade the fisherman cast in his net. The fisherman did as he was told, and when he drew in his net he found that it contained four fish each of a different colour, a red, a white, a blue, and a yellow: never in his life had he seen the like of them. The Genie bade him take and offer them to the Sultan, assuring him that if he did so they should bring him both fortune and honours. Then he struck the ground with his foot, and immediately the earth opened its mouth and swallowed him as the dry desert swallows the rain.

The fisherman, wondering no less at his safe deliverance than at the marvel of these occurrences, made his way in haste to the city; and there presenting himself at the palace he begged that the four fish might be laid at the Sultan's feet, as a humble offering from the poorest of his subjects.

No sooner had the monarch seen them, so strange of form and so brilliant and diverse in hue, than his longing to taste of them became strongly awakened; so, by the hand of his Vizier, he sent them to the cook to be prepared forthwith for the royal table. As for the poor fisherman, he received no fewer than four hundred pieces of gold from the Sultan's bounty, and returned to his family rejoicing in an affluence which surpassed his utmost expectations.



No sooner had the monarch seen them, so strange of form and so brilliant and diverse in hue.

INTERACTIVE EXERCISE



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The cook meanwhile, proud of an opportunity to exhibit her culinary skill on dainties so rare, scaled and cleaned the fish and laid them in a frying-pan over the fire. But scarcely had she done so when the wall of the kitchen divided, and there issued forth from it a damsel of moon-like beauty richly apparelled, holding a rod of myrtle in her hand. With this she struck the fish that lay in the frying-pan, and cried—

“O fish of my pond,
Are ye true to your bond?”

And immediately the four fishes lifted their heads from the frying fat and answered—

“Even so, the bond holds yet;
Paid by thee, we pay the debt.
With give and take is the reckoning met.”

Thereupon the damsel upset the pan into the fire and retired through the wall in the same way that she had come, leaving the four fish all charred to a cinder.



Whereupon one upset the pan into the fire

The cook, beholding her labour thus brought to naught, began to weep and bewail herself, expecting no less than instant dismissal, and was still loud in her lamentations when the Vizier arrived to see if the fish were ready.



Recalling the fisherman by a swift messenger

On hearing her account of what had occurred, the Vizier was greatly astonished, but feared to bring so strange a report to the Sultan's ears while the cravings of the royal appetite were still unsatisfied; so recalling the fisherman by a swift messenger, he bade him procure in all haste four more fish of the same kind, promising to reward him according to the speed with which he accomplished the task. So spurred, and by the additional favour of fortune, the fisherman fulfilled his mission in an astonishingly short space of time; but no sooner was the second lot of fish placed upon the fire in the Vizier's presence than once again the wall opened, and the damsel, appearing as before, struck the frying-pan with her rod, and cried—

“O fish of my pond,
Are ye true to your bond?”

And immediately the fish stood up on their tails in the frying fat and replied—

“Even so, the bond holds yet;
Paid by thee, we pay the debt.
With give and take is the reckoning met.”

Whereupon she upset the pan into the fire and departed as she had come.

The Vizier, perceiving that so strange an event might no longer be kept from the royal knowledge, went and informed the Sultan of all that had occurred; and the monarch, as soon as he had heard the tale, now rendered more eager for the satisfaction of his eyes than he had previously

been for the indulgence of his appetite, sent for the fisherman, and promised him yet another four hundred pieces of gold if he could within a given time procure four more fishes similar to those he had already brought on the previous occasions. If the fisherman had been prompt at the Vizier's bidding, he made even greater speed to fulfil the royal command, and before the day was over—this time in the presence of the Sultan himself—four fish, of four diverse colours like to the first, were cleaned and laid into the pan ready for frying. But scarcely had they touched the fat when the wall opened in a clap like thunder, and there came forth with a face of rage a monstrous negro the size of a bull, holding in his hand the rod of myrtle. With this he struck the frying-pan, and cried in a terrible voice—

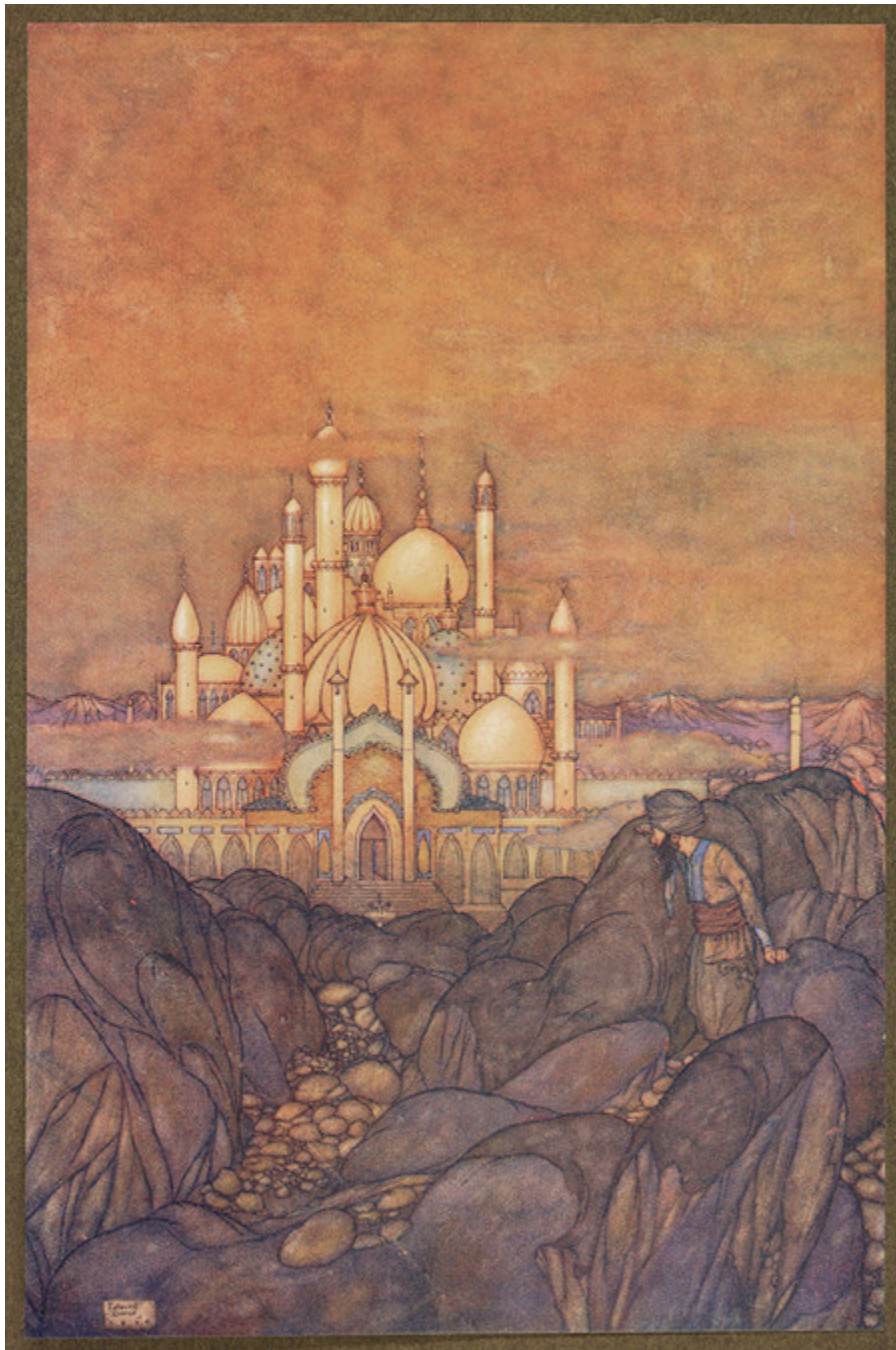
“O fish from the pond,
Are ye true to your bond?”

And when the fish had returned the same answer that the others had made before them, without more ado the negro overturned the pan upon the fire and departed as he had come.

When the Sultan's eyes had seen that marvel, he said to his Vizier, “Here is mystery set before us! Surely these fish that talk have a past and a history. Never shall I rest satisfied until I have learned it.” So causing the fisherman to be brought before him, he inquired whence the fish came. The fisherman answered, “From a lake between four hills upon the mountain overlooking the city.” The Sultan inquired how many days' journey it might be, and the fisherman replied that it was but a matter of a few hours going and returning. Then to the Sultan and his court it seemed that the old man was mocking them, for none had heard tell of any lake lying among the hills so near to that city; and the fisherman, seeing his word doubted, began to fear that the Genie was playing him a trick; for if the lake were now suddenly to vanish away, he might find his fortunes more undone at the end than at the beginning.

Yet the Sultan, though his Vizier and all his court sought to dissuade him, was firmly resolved on putting the matter to the proof; so he gave orders that an escort and camping tents should be immediately got ready, and, with the fisherman to guide, set forth to find the place that was told of.

And, sure enough, when they had ascended the mountain which all knew, they came upon a desert tract on which no man had previously set eyes; and there in its midst lay the lake filled with four kinds of fish, and beyond it stretched a vast and unknown country.



He arrived within sight of a palace of shining marble

At this sight, so mysterious and unaccountable, of a strange region lying unbeknownst at the gates of his own capital, the monarch was seized with an overwhelming desire to press forward in solitary adventure to the discovery of its secret. To the cautious counsels of his Vizier he turned a deaf ear; but since it would not be safe for his subjects to know of his departure on an errand so perilous, it was given out that he had been stricken by sudden sickness. The door of the royal tent

was closed, and at the dead of night the Sultan, admitting none but the Vizier into his confidence, set out secretly on his adventure.

Journeying by night and resting by day, he arrived on the third morning within sight of a palace of shining marble which, with its crowd of domes and minarets, stood solitary among the hills. No sign of life was about it, and when he drew near and knocked at the gates none came to answer him. Then, finding the doors unfastened, he took courage and entered; and advancing through chambers where gold lay as dust, and by fountains wherein pearls lay poured out like water, he found only solitude to greet him.

Wandering without aim among innumerable treasures unguarded and left to waste, the Sultan grew weary, and sat down in an embrasure to rest. Then it seemed to him that not far off he could hear a sorrowful voice chant verses of lamentation. Following the sounds with wonder he came to a curtained doorway, and passing through found himself in the presence of a fair youth richly dressed, seated upon a couch and bearing upon his countenance tokens of extreme grief and despondency. To the Sultan's proffered greeting the youth returned salutation, but did not stir from his seat. "Pardon me," he said, "for not rising; but my miserable condition makes it impossible." Having said this he again broke into doleful lamentation; and when the Sultan inquired as to the cause of so many tears, "See for yourself," he cried, "what I am now made into!" And lifting the skirt of his robe he revealed himself all stone from his waist to the soles of his feet, while from the waist upwards he was as other men. Then as he observed upon his visitor's countenance the expression of a lively curiosity and astonishment, "Doubtless," he went on, "as you now know the secret of my miserable condition you will wish also to hear my story." And he related it as follows:—

INTERACTIVE EXERCISE



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THE STORY OF THE KING OF THE EBONY ISLES



The Queen of the Ebony Isles

“My father was king of the city which once stood about this palace. He was lord also of the Ebony Isles that are now the four hills which you passed on your way hither. When I succeeded to the throne upon his death, I took to wife my own cousin, the daughter of my uncle, with whom I lived for five years in the utmost confidence and felicity, continually entertained by the charm of her conversation and the beauty of her person, and happy in the persuasion that she found in me an equal satisfaction.



Supposing me asleep they began to talk

“One day, however, it chanced, in the hour before dinner when the queen was gone to bathe and adorn herself, that I lay upon a couch beside which two female slaves sat fanning me; and they, supposing me to be asleep, began to talk concerning me and their mistress. ‘Ah!’ said one, ‘how little our lord knows where our mistress goes to amuse herself every night while he lies dreaming!’ ‘How should he know?’ returned the other, ‘seeing that the cup of wine which she gives him each night contains a sleeping-draught, that causes him to sleep sound however long she is absent. Then at daybreak when she returns she burns perfumes under his nostrils, and he waking and finding her there guesses nothing. Pity it is that he cannot know of her treacherous ways, for surely it is a shame that a king’s wife should go abroad and mix with base people.’



The cup of wine which she gives him each night contains a sleeping-draught.

“Now when I heard this the light of day grew dark before my eyes; but I lay on and made no sign, awaiting my wife’s return. And she coming in presently, we sat down and ate and drank together according to custom; and afterwards, when I had retired and lain down, she brought me with her own hands the cup of spiced wine, inviting me to drink. Then I, averting myself, raised it to my lips, but instead of drinking, poured it by stealth into my bosom, and immediately sank down as though overcome by its potency, feigning slumber. Straightway the queen rose up from my side, and having clothed herself in gorgeous apparel and anointed herself with perfumes, she made her way secretly from the palace, and I with equal secrecy followed her.

“Soon, passing by way of the narrower streets, we arrived before the city gates; and immediately at a word from her the chains fell and the gates opened of their own accord, closing again behind us as soon as we had passed. At last she came to a ruined hut, and there entering I saw her presently with her veil laid aside, seated in familiar converse with a monstrous negro, the meanest and most vile of slaves, offering to him in abject servility dainties which she had carried from the royal table, and bestowing upon him every imaginable token of affection and regard.

“At this discovery I fell into a blind rage, and drawing my sword I rushed in and struck the slave from behind a blow upon the neck that should have killed him. Then believing that I had verily slain him, and before the queen found eyes to realize what had befallen, I departed under cover of night as quickly as I had come, and returned to the palace and my own chamber.

“On awaking the next morning I found the queen lying beside me as though nothing had happened, and at first I was ready to believe it had all been an evil dream; but presently I perceived her eyes red with weeping, her hair dishevelled, and her face torn by the passion of a grief which she strove to conceal. Having thus every reason to believe that my act of vengeance had not fallen short of its purpose, I held my tongue and made no sign.

“But the same day at noon, while I sat in council, the queen appeared before me clad in deep mourning, and with many tears informed me how she had received sudden news of the death of her father and mother and two brothers, giving full and harrowing details of each event. Without any show of incredulity I heard her tale; and when she besought my permission to go into retirement and mourn in a manner befitting so great a calamity, I bade her do as she desired.

“So for a whole year she continued to mourn in a privacy which I left undisturbed; and during that time she caused to be built a mausoleum or Temple of Lamentation—the same whose dome you see yonder—into which she withdrew herself from all society; while I, believing the cause of my anger removed and willing to humour the grief which my act had caused her, waited patiently for her return to a sane and reasonable state of mind.

“But, as I learned too late, matters had not so fallen: for though in truth the negro was grievously wounded, being cut through the gullet and speechless, it was not the will of Heaven that he should die; and the queen having by her enchantments kept him in a sort of life, no sooner was the mausoleum finished than she caused him to be secretly conveyed thither, and there night and day tended him, awaiting his full recovery.

“At length, when two years were over and her mourning in no wise abated, my curiosity became

aroused; so going one day to the Temple of Lamentation I entered unannounced, and placing myself where I might see and not be seen, there I discovered her in an abandonment of fond weeping over her miserable treasure whose very life was a dishonour to us both. But no sooner in my just resentment had I started to upbraid her, than she—as now for the first time realizing the cause of her companion's misfortune—began to heap upon me terms of the most violent and shameful abuse; and when, carried beyond myself, I threatened her with my sword, she stood up before me, and having first uttered words of unknown meaning she cried,—

‘Be thou changed in a moment’s span;
Half be marble, and half be man!’



She went on to vent her malice upon the city and islands

And at the word I became even as you see me now—dead to the waist, and above living yet bound. Yet even so her vengeance was not satisfied. Having reduced me to this state she went on to vent her malice upon the city and islands over which I ruled, and the unfortunate people who were my

subjects. Thus by her wicked machinations the city became a lake, and the islands about it the four hills which you have seen; as for the inhabitants, who were of four classes and creeds, Moslems, Christians, Jews, and Persians, she turned them into fish of four different colours: the white are the Moslems, the red are Persian fire-worshippers, the yellow are Jews, and the blue Christians. And now having done all this she fails not every day to inflict upon me a hundred lashes with a whip which draws blood at every stroke: and when these are accomplished she covers my torn flesh with hair-cloth and lays over it these rich robes in mockery. Of a surety it is the will of Heaven that I should be the most miserable and despised of mortals!"



Began to heap upon me terms of the most violent and shameful abuse

Thus the youth finished his story, nor when he had ended could he refrain from tears. The Sultan also was greatly moved when he heard it, and his heart became full of a desire to avenge such injuries upon the doer of them. "Tell me," he said, "where is now this monster of iniquity?" "Sir,"

answered the youth, "I doubt not she is yonder in the mausoleum with her companion, for thither she goes daily so soon as she has measured out to me my full meed of chastisement: and as for this day my portion has been served to me, I am quit of her till to-morrow brings, the hour of fresh scourgings."



Thus by her wicked machinations the city became a lake

Now when this was told him the Sultan saw his way plain. "Be of good cheer," he said to the youth,

“and endure with a quiet spirit yet once more the affliction she causes thee; for at the price of that single scourging I trust, by the will of Heaven, to set thee free.”

So on the morrow the Sultan lay in close hiding until sounds reached him which told that the whippings had begun; then he arose and went in haste to the mausoleum, where amid rich hangings and perfumes and the illumination of a thousand candles, he found the black slave stretched mute upon a bed awaiting in great feebleness the recovered use of his sawn gullet. Quickly, with a single sword-stroke, the avenger took from him that poor remnant of life which enchantment alone had made possible: then having thrown the body into a well in the courtyard below, he lay down in the dead man’s place, drawing the coverlet well over him. Soon after, fresh from her accustomed task of cruelty, the enchantress entered, and falling upon her knees beside the bed she cried, “Has my lord still no voice wherewith to speak to his servant? Surely, for lack of that sound, hearing lies withered within me!” Then the Sultan, taking to himself the thick speech of a negro, said, “There is no strength or power but in God alone!”

On hearing those words, believing that her companion’s speech was at last restored to him, the queen uttered a cry of joy! But scarcely had she begun to lavish upon him the tokens of her affection when the pretended negro broke out against her in violent abuse. “What!” he cried, “dost thou expect favour at my hands, when it is because of thee that for two years I have lain dumb and prostrate? How darest thou speak to me or look for any recompense save death! Nay!” he went on in answer to her astonished protests, “have not the cries and tears and groans of thy husband kept me continually from rest: and has not Heaven smitten me for no other reason than because thou wouldst not cease from smiting him? So has the curse which thou didst seek to lay upon him fallen doubly upon me.”

“Alas!” cried the enchantress, “have I unknowingly caused thee so great an ill? If it be so, then let my lord give command, and whatever be his desire it shall be satisfied.”

Then said the Sultan, “Go instantly and release thy husband from spell and torment: and when it is done, return hither with all speed.”

Thus compelled, in great fear and bewilderment and sorely against her will, the queen sped to the chamber in the palace where her husband lay spell-bound. Taking a vessel of water she pronounced over it certain words which caused it instantly to boil as though it had been set on a fire: then throwing the water over him, she cried—

“Spell be loosed, and stone grow warm,
Yield back flesh to the human form.”

And immediately on the word his nature came to him again, and he leaped and stood upon his feet. But the queen’s hatred towards him was by no means abated. “Go hence quickly,” she cried, “since a better will than mine releases thee! But if thou tarry or if thou return, thou shalt surely die!” Thankful for his deliverance the youth stayed not to question, but departing went and hid himself without, while the queen returned in haste to the mausoleum where her supposed lover awaited her. There, eager for restoration to favour, she informed him of what she had done, supposing that to be all.

“Nay,” said the other, still speaking with the thick voice of a negro; “though thou hast lopped the branch of the evil thou hast not destroyed the root. For every night I hear a jumping of fishes in the lake that is between the four hills, and the sound of their curses on thee and me comes to disturb

my rest. Go instantly and restore all things to their former state, then come back and give me thy hand and I shall rise up a sound man once more."



Great was the astonishment of the Vizier and the Sultan's escort

Rejoicing in that promise and the expectations it held out to her of future happiness, the queen went with all speed to the border of the lake. There taking a little water into her hand, and uttering strange words over it, she sprinkled it this way and that upon the surface of the lake and the roots of the four hills, and immediately where had been the lake a city appeared, and instead of fishes inhabitants, and in place of the four hills four islands. As for the palace it stood no longer removed far away into the desert but upon a hill overlooking the city.

Great was the astonishment of the Vizier and the Sultan's escort which had lain encamped beside the lake to find themselves suddenly transported to the heart of a populous city, with streets and walls and the hum of reawakened life around them; but a greater and more terrible shock than this awaited the queen upon her return to the mausoleum to enjoy the reward of her labours. "Now," she cried, "let my lord arise, since all that he willed is accomplished!"

"Give me thy hand!" said the Sultan, still in a voice of disguise; "come nearer that I may lean on thee!" And as she approached he drew forth his sword which had lain concealed beside him in the bed, and with a single blow cleft her wicked body in twain.

Then he rose and went quickly to where in hiding lay the young king her husband, who learned

with joy of the death of his cruel enemy. He thanked the Sultan with tears of gratitude for his deliverance, and invoked the blessings of Heaven upon him and his kingdom. “On yours too,” said the Sultan, “let peace and prosperity now reign! And since your city is so near to mine, come with me and be my guest that we may rejoice together in the bonds of friendship.”

“Nay,” answered the young king, “that would I do willingly, but your country lies many a day’s journey from my own. I fear the breaking of the spell which held me and my subjects has brought you further than you wished.”

It was in fact true that the Ebony Isles had now returned to the place from which they had originally come. The Sultan put a smiling face upon the matter: “I can well put up with the tedium of my journey,” said he, “if only you will be my companion. Nay, let me speak frankly to one whose demeanour in affliction has won my heart; I am childless and have no heir. Come with me and be my son, and when I am dead unite our two kingdoms under a single ruler.” The young king, who had conceived for his deliverer an equal affection, could not withstand so noble and generous an offer: and so with a free exchange of hearts on both sides the matter was arranged.

After a journey of some months the Sultan arrived again at his own capital, where he was welcomed with great rejoicings by the people, who had long mourned over his strange and unexplained absence.

As for the old fisherman who had been the immediate cause of the young king’s deliverance the Sultan loaded him with honours and gave his daughters in marriage to sons of the blood royal, so that they all continued in perfect happiness and contentment to the end of their days.

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Appendix

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