

Arabian Nights: Prologue

March 27, 2009 by Editor

In the chronicles of the ancient dynasty of the Sassanidae, who reigned for about four hundred years, from Persia to the borders of China, beyond the great river Ganges itself, we read the praises of one of the kings of this race, who was said to be the best monarch of his time. His subjects loved him, and his neighbors feared him, and when he died he left his kingdom in a more prosperous and powerful condition than any king had done before him. The two sons who survived him loved each other tenderly, and it was a real grief to the elder, Schahriar, that the laws of the empire forbade him to share his dominions with his brother Schahzeman. Indeed, after ten years, during which this state of things had not ceased to trouble him, Schahriar cut off the country of Great Tartary from the Persian Empire and made his brother king.

Now the Sultan Schahriar had a wife whom he loved more than all the world, and his greatest happiness was to surround her with splendour, and to give her the finest dresses and the most beautiful jewels. It was therefore with the deepest shame and sorrow that he accidentally discovered, after several years, that she had deceived him completely, and her whole conduct turned out to have been so bad, that he felt himself obliged to carry out the law of the land, and order the grand-vizir to put her to death. The blow was so heavy that his mind almost gave way, and he declared that he was quite sure that at bottom all women were as wicked as the sultana, if you could only find them out, and that the fewer the world contained the better. So every evening he married a fresh wife and had her strangled the following morning before the grand-vizir, whose duty it was to provide these unhappy brides for the Sultan. The poor man fulfilled his task with reluctance, but there was no escape, and every day saw a girl married and a wife dead.

This behaviour caused the greatest horror in the town, where nothing was heard but cries and lamentations. In one house was a father weeping for the loss of his daughter, in another perhaps a mother trembling for the fate of her child; and instead of the blessings that had formerly been heaped on the Sultan's head, the air was now full of curses.

The grand-vizir himself was the father of two daughters, of whom the elder was called Scheherazade, and the younger Dinarzade. Dinarzade had no particular gifts to distinguish her from other girls, but her sister was clever and courageous in the highest degree. Her

father had given her the best masters in philosophy, medicine, history and the fine arts, and besides all this, her beauty excelled that of any girl in the kingdom of Persia.

One day, when the grand-vizir was talking to his eldest daughter, who was his delight and pride, Scheherazade said to him, "Father, I have a favour to ask of you. Will you grant it to me?"

"I can refuse you nothing," replied he, "that is just and reasonable."

"Then listen," said Scheherazade. "I am determined to stop this barbarous practice of the Sultan's, and to deliver the girls and mothers from the awful fate that hangs over them."

"It would be an excellent thing to do," returned the grand-vizir, "but how do you propose to accomplish it?"

"My father," answered Scheherazade, "it is you who have to provide the Sultan daily with a fresh wife, and I implore you, by all the affection you bear me, to allow the honour to fall upon me."

"Have you lost your senses?" cried the grand-vizir, starting back in horror. "What has put such a thing into your head? You ought to know by this time what it means to be the sultan's bride!"

"Yes, my father, I know it well," replied she, "and I am not afraid to think of it. If I fail, my death will be a glorious one, and if I succeed I shall have done a great service to my country."

"It is of no use," said the grand-vizir, "I shall never consent. If the Sultan was to order me to plunge a dagger in your heart, I should have to obey. What a task for a father! Ah, if you do not fear death, fear at any rate the anguish you would cause me."

"Once again, my father," said Scheherazade, "will you grant me what I ask?"

"What, are you still so obstinate?" exclaimed the grand-vizir. "Why are you so resolved upon your own ruin?"

But the maiden absolutely refused to attend to her father's words, and at length, in despair, the grand-vizir was obliged to give way, and went sadly to the palace to tell the Sultan that the following evening he would bring him Scheherazade.

The Sultan received this news with the greatest astonishment.

"How have you made up your mind," he asked, "to sacrifice your own daughter to me?"

"Sire," answered the grand-vizir, "it is her own wish. Even the sad fate that awaits her could not hold her back."

"Let there be no mistake, vizir," said the Sultan. "Remember you will have to take her life yourself. If you refuse, I swear that your head shall pay forfeit."

"Sire," returned the vizir. "Whatever the cost, I will obey you. Though a father, I am also your subject." So the Sultan told the grand-vizir he might bring his daughter as soon as he liked.

The vizir took back this news to Scheherazade, who received it as if it had been the most pleasant thing in the world. She thanked her father warmly for yielding to her wishes, and, seeing him still bowed down with grief, told him that she hoped he would never repent having allowed her to marry the Sultan. Then she went to prepare herself for the marriage, and begged that her sister Dinarzade should be sent for to speak to her.

When they were alone, Scheherazade addressed her thus:

“My dear sister; I want your help in a very important affair. My father is going to take me to the palace to celebrate my marriage with the Sultan. When his Highness receives me, I shall beg him, as a last favour, to let you sleep in our chamber, so that I may have your company during the last night I am alive. If, as I hope, he grants me my wish, be sure that you wake me an hour before the dawn, and speak to me in these words: “My sister, if you are not asleep, I beg you, before the sun rises, to tell me one of your charming stories.” Then I shall begin, and I hope by this means to deliver the people from the terror that reigns over them.” Dinarzade replied that she would do with pleasure what her sister wished.

When the usual hour arrived the grand-vizir conducted Scheherazade to the palace, and left her alone with the Sultan, who bade her raise her veil and was amazed at her beauty. But seeing her eyes full of tears, he asked what was the matter. “Sire,” replied Scheherazade, “I have a sister who loves me as tenderly as I love her. Grant me the favour of allowing her to sleep this night in the same room, as it is the last we shall be together.” Schahriar consented to Scheherazade’s petition and Dinarzade was sent for.

An hour before daybreak Dinarzade awoke, and exclaimed, as she had promised, “My dear sister, if you are not asleep, tell me I pray you, before the sun rises, one of your charming stories. It is the last time that I shall have the pleasure of hearing you.”

Scheherazade did not answer her sister, but turned to the Sultan. “Will your highness permit me to do as my sister asks?” said she.

“Willingly,” he answered. So Scheherazade began.

The Fisherman and The Jinni

There was a poor fisherman, who had a wife and three children in his family. He used to cast his net in seawater to catch fish for his livelihood. He had made a rule to cast his net only four times a day and never exceeded the set limit.

One day the fisherman went on his day’s work. He threw his net in the seawater. After sometime when he tried to pull it out, he could not do so. He was overjoyed thinking that some big fish fallen in his net and its heavy weight had made it difficult to pull the net. The rejoiced fisherman removed his shirt, dived in the sea and pulled out the net with much effort. However, the fisherman was disappointed to find a dead jackass in his net, which had torn the net. The fisherman exclaimed in grief, “It seems, there is no justice left in the world of Allah!”

After a while, he overcame his grief and disappointment and cast his net again in the name of Allah. When he tried to fetch it out, the net appeared heavier than before and it refused to move up. The fisherman was again hopeful of getting a big fish in his net., He at once dived down and fetched the net out. However, the fisherman was shattered to see the sight. There was a big mud filled pitcher trapped inside the net. The fisherman pleaded with the Almighty his bad luck and plight. He then prayed to the God and cast his net for the third time. This time, when the fisherman pulled out his net, he found it filled with potsherds and broken glass pieces.

The fisherman's sorrow knew no bound. With eyes fixed up towards the heaven, he complained, "O Almighty, you know that I cast my net only four times a day. I have already thrown it thrice and you did not give me anything. O Allah the great, kindly provide me at least something for my daily bread this time."

Saying like this, the morose fisherman cast his net for the fourth time. The net sank and the fisherman allowed it to settle. After waiting for sometime, the fisherman tried to pull it up. However, even after applying all his might, he could not bring it out. The annoyed fisherman cried aloud and said, "In the court of Allah there is no justice and power remained!"

With all his disappointment and vexation, he dived to bring his net up. Finally, he brought it out and found a cucumber shaped jar of brass. The jar seemed filled with something. Its mouth was shut with a leaden cap, which was stamped with a seal ring of Lord Sulayman, the son of David.

The fisherman rejoiced to find it. He thought, "If I sell this wonderful jar in the brass-market, it will certainly fetch me ten golden dinars." He further thought, "Before selling the jar in the market, I must open it and see the content inside."

The fisherman then took a knife and put his effort to loose the lid from the jar. He worked on it till he could remove the lid from the jar. However, he was greatly surprised to find nothing inside. As he was wondering over the empty jar, a conspicuous sight jolted him. A thick vapour started coming out of the jar and it spiralled towards the high sky. The thick vapour condensed and took the shape of a huge ifrit. So huge was he that his head was touching the cloud while his feet were on the ground. He looked horrifying. His head was like a dome, hands looked similar to pitchforks, legs resembled very tall poles, mouth was enormous as a cave, teeth were like big boulders and two eyes appeared like burning lamps. The poor fisherman trembled with fear. For a few moments, he could not understand what to do and what to say. The ifrit looked at the fisherman and cried, "Sulayman, you are not God but only the prophet of God. O prophet, please do not slay me. I will not say or do anything against you."

The fisherman said. 'O Ifrit! Sulayman, the prophet of Allah whom you are calling had died one thousand and eight hundred years ago. Our world is in its last stage. Tell me your story and apprise me of the reason for which you entered into this jar.'

When the Satan heard the fisherman, he said, "There is only one God in this world. O Fisherman, cheer up for a while and be prepared to die."

The fisherman replied, "What harm have I done to you for which you want to kill me? I rescued you from the deep sea and freed you from this jar."

But the evil spirit said, "Tell me only how do you want to die?"

The fisherman begged, "Please tell me what my fault is."

The ifrit said, "O Fisherman! I will tell you my story." The jinni then began his tale – Once I spoke and worked against Sulayman, David's son. The prophet sent his Wazir Asaf to arrest me. When he brought me before Sulayman, he asked me to abide by his order, which I refused. So he took a jar, closed me inside and sealed it with the mark of his name. He then ordered the jar to be thrown in the middle of the sea. In the deep ocean, I remained there for hundred years. During this period of time, I said to myself that whoever rescued me from

the sea and freed me from the jar, I would make him rich forever. However, no one came to free me. When the next century began, I vowed, "I shall present the whole world's riches to the person who frees me." Still no one rescued me and I remained lying in this deep ocean for the next four hundred years. After that, I decided, "I shall fulfil any one wish of the person, who comes to set me free." Yet, no one came and I remained there in the deep ocean. My fury knew no bound when no one came to rescue me for such a long period of time. In the state of extreme rage, I said, "Now onwards whoever frees me from this jail, will be killed by me. But he will have the death of his choice." Now you have freed me after one thousand eight years. So as per my vow, be prepared for getting slain by me. However, O Fisherman, you can avail of your choicest death."

Hearing the story of ifrit, the fisherman said, "O Jinni, I did not come to free you. Do not slay me. Please allow me to live my life. If you kill me, God will send some one else to slay you." The ifrit replied, "There is no use talking on this issue. In any case, you have to die. Just tell me which way you would prefer to die."

The poor fisherman tried many ways to persuade the jinni and begged for his life several times but the ifrit was not ready to bestow any kindness. He was adamant on slaying the fisherman. Seeing it futile to expect any sympathy from the jinni, the fisherman thought, "He is a jinni, whereas I am a human being. Allah has bestowed us the power to outwit any other creature with our shrewdness. I must use my intelligence and get rid of him."

The fisherman said, "Are you all set to slay me?" The jinni answered in affirmation. The fisherman again asked, on the name of God. I ask you a question and expect an honest answer from you." The ifrit asked the fisherman to be quick in his question. The fisherman said, "O Jinni, I've a serious doubt that you were ever inside this small jar, which cannot even accommodate your hand or foot or any part of your body. How could a huge jinni like you remained inside this small jar?" The ifrit replied, "Don't you believe that I was inside this small jar?" The fisherman said, "No, I can't! I can believe only when I see you inside with my own eyes."

When jinni heard this, he at once transformed himself into vapour and entered into the jar gradually. The moment, the fisherman saw the ifrit fully inside, he hastily picked up the leaden cap and closed the mouth of the jar, thus seizing the jinni inside. The trapped jinni tried to escape from there but Solomon's ring did not allow him.

After realising that he was outwitted by the fisherman, the ifrit begged, "O fisherman allow me to go!" The fisherman replied, "No, Never! You are a devil. I'll throw you back into the sea so that you can live there till the judgement day."

Ifrit said, "O fisherman, please open the jar. I'll make you affluent." The fisherman replied, "You liar, I can't believe you. My position with you is similar to that of the Wazir of King Yuman, who was with the sage Duban." The ifrit asked, "Who were they and what was their story?" The fisherman began his tale.

The Story of King Yunan and the Sage Duban

KNOW, O 'Efrit, that there was, in former times, in the country of the Persians, a monarch 1
who was called King Yunan, possessing great treasures and numerous forces, valiant,
and having troops of every description; but he was afflicted with leprosy, which the
physicians and sages had failed to remove; neither their potions, nor powders, nor
ointments were of any benefit to him; and none of the physicians was able to cure him. At
length there arrived at the city of this king a great sage, stricken in years, who was called
the sage Duban: he was acquainted with ancient Greek, Persian, modern Greek, Arabic,
and Syrian books, and with medicine and astrology, both with respect to their scientific
principles and the rules of their practical applications for good and evil; as well as the
properties of plants, dried and fresh; the injurious and the useful: he was versed in the
wisdom of the philosophers, and embraced a knowledge of all the medical and other
sciences.

After this sage had arrived in the city, and remained in it a few days, he heard of the 2
case of the King, of the leprosy with which God had afflicted him, and that the physicians
and men of science had failed to cure him. In consequence of this information, he passed
the next night in deep study; and when the morning came, and diffused its light, and the
sun saluted the Ornament of the Good, 1 he attired himself in the richest of his apparel,
and presented himself before the King. Having kissed the ground before him, and offered
up a prayer for the continuance of his power and happiness, and greeted him in the best
manner he was able, he informed him who he was, and said, O King, I have heard of the
disease which hath attacked thy person, and that many of the physicians are
unacquainted with the means of removing it; and I will cure thee without giving thee to
drink any potion, or anointing thee with ointment. When King Yunan heard his words, he
wondered, and said to him, How wilt thou do this? By Allah, if thou cure me, I will enrich
thee and thy children's children, and I will heap favours upon thee, and whatever thou
shalt desire shall be thine, and thou shalt be my companion and my friend.—He then
bestowed upon him a robe of honour, and other presents, and said to him, Wilt thou cure
me of this disease without potion or ointment? He answered, Yes; I will cure thee without
any discomfort to thy person. And the King was extremely astonished, and said, O Sage,
at what time, and on what day, shall that which thou hast proposed to me be done?
Hasten it, O my Son.—He answered, I hear and obey.

He then went out from the presence of the King, and hired a house, in which he deposited his books, and medicines, and drugs. Having done this, he selected certain of his medicines and drugs, and made a goff-stick, with a hollow handle, into which he introduced them; after which he made a ball for it, skilfully adapted; and on the following day, after he had finished these, he went again to the King, and kissed the ground before him, and directed him to repair to the horse-course, and to play with the ball and goff-stick. The King, attended by his Emirs and Chamberlains and Wezirs, went thither, and, as soon as he arrived there, the sage Duban presented himself before him, and handed to him the goff-stick, saying, Take this goff-stick, and grasp it thus, and ride along the horse-course, and strike the ball with it with all thy force, until the palm of thy hand and thy whole body become moist with perspiration, when the medicine will penetrate into thy hand, and pervade thy whole body; and when thou hast done this, and the medicine remains in thee, return to thy palace, and enter the bath, and wash thyself, and sleep; then shalt thou find thyself cured: and peace be on thee. So King Yunan took the goff-stick from the sage, and grasped it in his hand, and mounted his horse; and the ball was thrown before him, and he urged his horse after it until he overtook it, when he struck it with all his force; and when he had continued this exercise as long as was necessary, and bathed and slept; he looked upon his skin, and not a vestige of the leprosy remained: it was clear as white silver. Upon this he rejoiced exceedingly; his heart was dilated, and he was full of happiness.

On the following morning he entered the council-chamber, and sat upon his throne; and the Chamberlains and great officers of his court came before him. The sage Duban also presented himself; and when the King saw him, he rose to him in haste, and seated him by his side. Services of food were then spread before them, and the sage ate with the King, and remained as his guest all the day; and when the night approached, the King gave him two thousand pieces of gold, besides dresses of honour and other presents, and mounted him on his own horse, and so the sage returned to his house. And the King was astonished at his skill; saying, This man hath cured me by an external process, without anointing me with ointment: by Allah, this is consummate science; and it is incumbent on me to bestow favours and honours upon him, and to make him my companion and familiar friend as long as I live. He passed the night happy and joyful on account of his recovery, and when he arose, he went forth again, and sat upon his throne; the officers of his court standing before him, and the Emirs and Wezirs sitting on his right hand and on his left; and he called for the sage Duban, who came, and kissed the ground before him; and the king rose, and seated him by his side, and ate with him, and greeted him with compliments: he bestowed upon him again a robe of honour and other presents, and after conversing with him till the approach of night, gave orders that five other robes of honour should be given to him, and a thousand pieces of gold; and the sage departed, and returned to his house.

Again, when the next morning came, the King went as usual to his council chamber, and the Emirs and Wezirs and Chamberlains surrounded him. Now there was, among his Wezirs, one of ill aspect, and of evil star; sordid, avaricious, and of an envious and malicious disposition; and when he saw that the King had made the sage Duban his friend, and bestowed upon him these favours, he envied him his distinction, and meditated evil against him; agreeably with the adage which saith, There is no one void of envy;—and another, which saith, Tyranny lurketh in the soul: power manifesteth it, and weakness concealeth it. So he approached the King, and kissed the ground before him, and said, O King of the age, thou art he whose goodness extendeth to all men, and I have an important piece of advice to give thee: if I were to conceal it from thee, I should be a base-born wretch: therefore, if thou order me to impart it, I will do so. The King, disturbed by these words of the Wezir, said, What is thy advice? He answered, O glorious King, it hath been said, by the ancients, He who looketh not to results, fortune will not attend him:—now I have seen the King in a way that is not right; since he hath bestowed favours upon his enemy, an upon him who desireth the downfall of his dominion: he hath treated him with kindness, and honoured him with the highest honours, and admitted him to the closest intimacy: I therefore fear, for the King, the consequence of this conduct.—At this the King was troubled and his countenance changed; and he said, Who is he whom thou regardest as mine enemy, and to whom I shew kindness? He replied, O King, if thou hast been asleep, awake! I allude to the sage Duban.—The King said, He is my intimate companion, and the dearest of men in my estimation; for he restored me by a thing that I merely held in my hand, and cured me of my disease which the physicians were unable to remove, and there is not now to be found one like to him in the whole world, from west to east. Wherefore, then, dost thou utter these words against him? I will, from this day, appoint him a regular salary and maintenance, and give him every month a thousand pieces of gold; and if I give him a share of my kingdom it were but a small thing to do unto him. I do not think that thou hast said this from any other motive than that of envy. If I didst what thou desirest, I should repent after it, as the man repented who killed his parrot.

Note 1. The Prophet Mohammad, who said “the sun never riseth until it hath saluted me.”
[\[back\]](#)

The Story of the Husband and the Parrot

THERE was a certain merchant, of an exceedingly jealous disposition, having a wife endowed with perfect beauty, who had prevented him from leaving his home; but an event happened which obliged him to make a journey; and when he found his doing so to be indispensable, he went to the market in which birds were sold, and bought a parrot, which he placed in his house to act as a spy, that, on his return, she might inform him of what passed during his absence; for this parrot was cunning and intelligent, and remembered whatever she heard. So, when he had made his journey, and accomplished his business, he returned, and caused the parrot to be brought to him, and asked her respecting the conduct of his wife. She answered, Thy wife has a lover, who visited her every night during thy absence,—and when the man heard this, he fell into a violent rage, and went to his wife, and gave her a severe beating.

1

The woman imagined that one of the female slaves had informed him of what had passed between her and her paramour during his absence: she therefore called them together, and made them swear; and they all swore that they had not told their master anything of the matter; but confessed that they had heard the parrot relate to him what had passed. Having thus established, on the testimony of the slaves, the fact of the parrot's having informed her husband of her intrigue, she ordered one of these slaves to grind with a handmill under the cage, another to sprinkle water from above, and a third to move a mirror from side to side, during the next night on which her husband was absent; and on the following morning, when the man returned from an entertainment at which he had been present, and inquired again of the parrot what had passed that night during his absence, the bird answered, O my master, I could neither see nor hear anything, on account of the excessive darkness, and thunder, and lightning, and rain. Now this happened during summer: so he said to her, What strange words are these? It is now summer, when nothing of what thou hast described ever happens.—The parrot, however, swore by Allah the Great that what she had said was true; and that it had so happened: upon which the man, not understanding the case, nor knowing the plot, became violently enraged, and took out the bird from the cage, and threw her down upon the ground with such violence that he killed her.

2

But after some days, one of his female slaves informed him of the truth; yet he would not believe it, until he saw his wife's paramour going out from his house; when he drew his sword, and slew the traitor by a blow on the back of his neck: so also did he to his treacherous wife; and thus both of them went, laden with the sin which they had committed, to the fire; and the merchant discovered that the parrot had informed him truly of what she had seen; and he mourned grievously for her loss.

3

When the Wezir heard these words of King Yunan, he said, O King of great dignity, what hath this crafty sage—this man from whom nought but mischief proceedeth—done unto me, that I should be his enemy, and speak evil of him, and plot with thee to destroy him? I have informed thee respecting him in compassion for thee, and in fear of his despoiling thee of thy happiness; and if my words be not true, destroy me, as the Wezir of Es-Sindibad was destroyed.—The King asked, How was that? And the Wezir thus answered:—