

# *The Perfidious Vizier*

Folk-Lore And Legends: Oriental

Arabic

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A king of former times had an only son, whom he contracted in marriage to the daughter of another king. But the damsel, who was endowed with great beauty, had a cousin who had sought her in marriage, and had been rejected; wherefore he sent great presents to the vizier of the king just mentioned, requesting him to employ some stratagem by which to destroy his master's son, or to induce him to relinquish the damsel. The vizier consented. Then the father of the damsel sent to the king's son, inviting him to come and introduce himself to his daughter, to take her as his wife; and the father of the young man sent him with the treacherous vizier, attended by a thousand horsemen, and provided with rich presents. When they were proceeding over the desert, the vizier remembered that there was near unto them a spring of water called Ez-zahra, and that whosoever drank of it, if he were a man, became a woman. He therefore ordered the troops to alight near it, and induced the prince to go towards it with him. When they arrived at the spring, the king's son dismounted from his courser, and washed his hands, and drank; and lo! he became a woman; whereupon he cried out and wept until he fainted. The vizier asked him what had befallen him, so the young man informed him; and on hearing his words, the vizier affected to be grieved for him, and wept. The king's son then sent the vizier back to his father to inform him of this event, determining not to proceed nor to return until his affliction should be removed from him, or until he should die.

He remained by the fountain during a period of three days and nights, neither eating nor drinking, and on the fourth night there came to him a horseman with a crown upon his head, appearing like one of the sons of the kings. This horseman said to him, "Who brought you, O young man, unto this place?"

So the young man told him his story; and when the horseman heard it, he pitied him, and said to him, "The vizier of thy father is the person who hath thrown thee into this calamity; for no one of mankind knoweth of this spring except one man." Then the horseman ordered him to mount with him. He therefore mounted; and the horseman said to him, "Come with me to my abode: for thou art my guest this night." The young man replied, "Inform me who thou art before I go with thee." And the horseman said, "I am the son of a king of the Jinn, and thou art son of a king of mankind. And now, be of good heart and cheerful eye on account of that which shall dispel thine anxiety and thy grief, for it is unto me easy."

So the young man proceeded with him from the commencement of the day, forsaking his troops and soldiers (whom the vizier had left at their halting-place), and ceased not to travel on with his conductor until midnight, when the son of the king of the Jinn said to him, "Knowest thou what space we have traversed during this period?"

The young man answered him, "I know not."

The son of the king of the Jinn said, "We have traversed a space of a year's journey to him who travels with diligence."

So the young man wondered thereat, and asked, "How shall I return to my family?" The other answered, "This is not your affair. It is my affair; and when thou shalt have recovered from thy misfortune, thou shalt return to thy family in less time than the twinkling of an eye, for to accomplish that will be to me easy." The young man, on hearing these words from the Jinnee, almost flew with excessive delight.

He thought that the event was a result of confused dreams, and said, "Extolled be the perfection of him who is able to restore the wretched, and render him prosperous!" They ceased not to proceed until morning, when they arrived at a verdant, bright land, with tall trees, and warbling birds, and gardens of surpassing beauty, and fair palaces; and thereupon the son of the king of the Jinn alighted from his courser, commanding the young man also to dismount. He therefore dismounted, and the Jinnee took him by the hand, and they entered

one of the palaces, where the young man beheld an exalted king and a sultan of great dignity, and he remained with them that day, eating and drinking, until the approach of night. Then the son of the king of the Jinn arose and mounted with him, and they went forth, and proceeded during the night with diligence until the morning. And lo! they came to a black land, not inhabited, abounding with black rocks and stones, as though it were a part of hell; whereupon the son of the king of men said to the Jinnee, "What is the name of this land?"

And he answered, "It is called the Dusky Land, and belongeth to one of the kings of the Jinn, whose name is Zul-Jenáheyn. None of the kings can attack him, nor doth any one enter his territory unless by his permission, so stop in thy place while I ask his permission." Accordingly the young man stopped, and the Jinn was absent from him for a while, and then returned to him; and they ceased not to proceed until they came to a spring flowing from black mountains. The Jinnee said to the young man, "Alight." He therefore alighted from his courser, and the Jinnee said to him, "Drink of this spring."

The young prince drank of it, and immediately became again a man, as he was at first, by the power of God (whose name be exalted!), whereas he rejoiced with great joy, not to be exceeded. And he said to the Jinn, "O my brother, what is the name of this spring?" The Jinnee answered, "It is called the Spring of the Women: no woman drinketh of it but she becometh a man; therefore praise God, and thank Him for thy restoration, and mount thy courser." So the king's son prostrated himself, thanking God (whose name be exalted!). Then he mounted, and they journeyed with diligence during the rest of the day until they had returned to the land of the Jinnee, and the young man passed the night in his abode in the most comfortable manner; after which they ate and drank until the next night, when the son of the king of the Jinn said to him, "Dost thou desire to return to thy family this night?"

The young man answered, "Yes."

So the son of the king of the Jinn called one of his father's slaves, whose name was Rájiz, and said to him, "Take this young man hence, and carry him upon thy shoulders, and let not the dawn overtake him before he is with his father-in-law and his wife."

The slave replied, "I hear and obey, and with feelings of love and honour will I do it." Then the slave absented himself for a while, and approached in the form of an 'Efreet.

And when the young man saw him his reason fled, and he was stupefied; but the son of the king of the Jinn said to him, "No harm shall befall thee. Mount thy courser. Ascend upon his shoulders." The young man then mounted upon the slave's shoulders, and the son of the king of the Jinn said to him, "Close thine eyes." So he closed his eyes, and the slave flew with him between heaven and earth, and ceased not to fly along with him while the young man was unconscious, and the last third of the night came not before he was on the top of the palace of his father-in-law.

Then the 'Efreet said to him, "Alight." He therefore alighted. And the 'Efreet said to him, "Open thine eyes; for this is the palace of thy father-in-law and his daughter." Then he left him and departed.

And as soon as the day shone, and the alarm of the young man subsided, he descended from the roof of the palace; and when his father-in-law beheld him, he rose to him and met him, wondering at seeing him descend from the top of the palace, and he said to him, "We see other men come through the doors, but thou comest down from the sky."

The young man replied, "What God (whose perfection be extolled, and whose name be exalted!) desired hath happened." And when the sun rose, his father-in-law ordered his vizier to prepare great banquets, and the wedding was celebrated; the young man remained there two months, and then departed with his wife to the city of his father. But as to the cousin of the damsel, he perished by reason of his jealousy and envy.

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