

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

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“The Story of King Shahryar and His Brother”

In the name of the Lord, the Compassionating, the
Compassionate!

Praise be to the Lord — the Beneficent King — the Creator
of the Universe — Lord of the Three Worlds — Who set up
the firmament without pillars in its stead — and Who
stretched out the Earth even as a bed — and grace and
prayer-blessing be upon our Lord praiseworthy — Lord of
apostolic men — and upon His family and companion train
— prayer and blessings enduring and grace which unto the
day of doom shall remain — amen! — O Thou of the Three
Worlds Sovereign! And afterward.

Verily the works and words of those gone before us have
become instances and examples to men of our modern day,
that folk may view what admonishing chances befell other
folk and may therefrom take warning; and that they may
peruse the annals of antique peoples and all that hath
betided them, and be thereby ruled and restrained. Praise,
therefore, be to Him who hath made the histories of the
past an admonition unto the present! Now of such
instances are the tales called “A Thousand Nights and a
Night,” together with their far-famed legends and wonders.
Therein it is related (but the Lord it is All-knowing of His
hidden things and All-ruling and All-honored and All-giving

and All-gracious and All-merciful!) that in tide of yore and in time long gone before, there was a King of the Kings of the Banu Sasan in the islands of India and China, a Lord of armies and guards and servants and dependents. He left only two sons, one in the prime of manhood and the other yet a youth, while both were knights and braves, albeit the elder was a doughtier horseman than the younger. So he succeeded to the empire, when he ruled the land and lorded it is over his lieges with justice so exemplary that he was beloved by all the peoples of his capital and of his kingdom. His name was King Shahryar, and he made his younger brother, Shah Zaman called, King of Samarkand in Barbarian land. These two ceased not to abide in their several realms and the law was ever carried out in their dominions. And each ruled his own kingdom with equity and fair dealing to his subjects, in extreme solace and enjoyment, and this condition continually endured for a score of years. But at the end of the twentieth twelvemonth the elder King yearned for a sight of his younger brother and felt that he must look upon him once more. So he took counsel with his Vizier about visiting him, but the Minister, finding the project unadvisable, recommended that a letter be written and a present be sent under his charge to the younger brother, with an invitation to visit the elder. Having accepted this advice, the King forthwith bade prepare handsome gifts, such as horses with saddles of gem-encrusted gold; Mamelukes, or white slaves; beautiful handmaids, high-breasted virgins, and splendid stuffs and costly. He then wrote a letter to Shah Zaman expressing his warm love and great wish to see him, ending with these words: "We therefore hope of the favor and affection of the beloved brother that he will condescend to bestir himself and turn his face usward. Furthermore, we have sent our Vizier to make all ordinance for the march, and our one and only desire it is to see thee ere we die. But if thou delay or disappoint us, we shall not survive the blow. Wherewith

peace be upon thee!" Then King Shahryar, having sealed the missive and given it to the Vizier with the offerings aforementioned, commanded him to shorten his skirts and strain his strength and make all expedition in going and returning. "Harkening and obedience!" quoth the Minister, who fell to making ready without stay and packed up his loads and prepared all his requisites without delay. This occupied him three days, and on the dawn of the fourth he took leave of his King and marched right away, over desert and hallway, stony waste and pleasant lea, without halting by night or by day. But whenever he entered a realm whose ruler was subject to his suzerain, where he was greeted with magnificent gifts of gold and silver and all manner of presents fair and rare, he would tarry there three days, the term of the guest rite. And when he left on the fourth, he would be honorably escorted for a whole day's march. As soon as the Vizier drew near Shah Zaman's court in Samarkand he dispatched to report his arrival one of his high officials, who presented himself before the King and, kissing ground between his hands, delivered his message. Hereupon the King commanded sundry of his grandees and lords of his realm to fare forth and meet his brother's Vizier at the distance of a full day's journey. Which they did, greeting him respectfully and wishing him all prosperity and forming an escort and a procession. When he entered the city, he proceeded straightway to the palace, where he presented himself in the royal presence; and after kissing ground and praying for the King's health and happiness and for victory over all his enemies, he informed him that his brother was yearning to see him, and prayed for the pleasure of a visit. He then delivered the letter, which Shah Zaman took from his hand and read. It contained sundry hints and allusions which required thought, but when the King had fully comprehended its import, he said, "I hear and I obey the commands of the beloved brother!" adding to the Vizier, "But we will not march till after the third

day's hospitality." He appointed for the Minister fitting quarters of the palace and pitching tents for the troops, rationed them with whatever they might require of meat and drink and other necessaries. On the fourth day he made ready for wayfare and got together sumptuous presents befitting his elder brother's majesty, and established his chief Vizier Viceroy of the land during his absence. Then he caused his tents and camels and mules to be brought forth and encamped, with their bales and loads, attendants and guards, within sight of the city, in readiness to set out next morning for his brother's capital. But when the night was half-spent he bethought him that he had forgotten in his palace somewhat which he should have brought with him, so he returned privily and entered his apartments, where he found the Queen, his wife, asleep on his own carpet bed embracing with both arms a black cook of loathsome aspect and foul with kitchen grease and grime. When he saw this the world waxed black before his sight and he said: "If such case happen while I am yet within sight of the city, what will be the doings of this damned whore during my long absence at my brother's court?" So he drew his scimitar, and cutting the two in four pieces with a single blow, left them on the carpet and returned presently to his camp without letting anyone know of what had happened. Then he gave orders for immediate departure and set out at once and began his travel; but he could not help thinking over his wife's treason, and he kept ever saying to himself: "How could she do this deed by me? How could she work her own death?" till excessive grief seized him, his color changed to yellow, his body waxed weak, and he was threatened with a dangerous malady, such a one as bringeth men to die. So the Vizier shortened his stages and tarried long at the watering stations, and did his best to solace the King. Now when Shah Zaman drew near the capital of his brother, he dispatched vaunt-couriers and messengers of glad tidings to announce his

arrival, and Shahryar came forth to meet him with his Viziers and emirs and lords and grandees of his realm, and saluted him and joyed with exceeding joy and caused the city to be decorated in his honor. When, however, the brothers met, the elder could not but see the change of complexion in the younger and questioned him of his case, whereto he replied: "Tis caused by the travails of wayfare and my case needs care, for I have suffered from the change of water and air! But the Lord be praised for reuniting me with a brother so dear and so rare!" On this wise he dissembled and kept his secret, adding: "O King of the Time and King of the Tide, only toil and moil have tinged my face yellow with bile and hath made my eyes sink deep in my head." Then the two entered the capital in all honor, and the elder brother lodged the younger in a palace overhanging the pleasure garden. And after a time, seeing his condition still unchanged, he attributed it is to his separation from his country and kingdom. So he let him wend his own ways and asked no questions of him till one day when he again said, "O my brother, I see thou art grown weaker of body and yellower of color." "O my brother," replied Shah Zaman, "I have an internal wound." Still he would not tell him what he had witnessed in his wife. Thereupon Shahryar summoned doctors and surgeons and bade them treat his brother according to the rules of art, which they did for a whole month. But their sherbets and potions naught availed, for he would dwell upon the deed of his wife, and despondency, instead of diminishing, prevailed, and leechcraft treatment utterly failed. One day his elder brother said to him: "I am going forth to hunt and course and to take my pleasure and pastime. Maybe this would lighten thy heart." Shah Zaman, however, refused, saying: "O my brother, my soul yearneth for naught of this sort, and I entreat thy favor to stiffer me tarry quietly in this place, being wholly taken up with my malady." So King Shah Zaman passed his night in the palace, and next

morning when his brother had fared forth, he removed from his room and sat him down at one of the lattice windows overlooking the pleasure grounds. And there he abode thinking with saddest thought over his wife's betrayal, and burning sighs issued from his tortured breast. And as he continued in this case lo! a postern of the palace, which was carefully kept private, swung open, and out of it is came twenty slave girls surrounding his brother's wife, who was wondrous fair, a model of beauty and comeliness and symmetry and perfect loveliness, and who paced with the grace of a gazelle which panteth for the cooling stream. Thereupon Shah Zaman drew back from the window, but he kept the bevy in sight, espying them from a place whence he could not be espied. They walked under the very lattice and advanced a little way into the garden till they came to a jetting fountain a-middlemost a great basin of water. Then they stripped off their clothes, and behold, ten of them were women, concubines of the King, and the other ten were white slaves. Then they all paired off, each with each. But the Queen, who was left alone, presently cried out in a loud voice, "Here to me, O my lord Saeed!" And then sprang with a drop leap from one of the trees a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight. He walked boldly up to her and threw his arms round her neck while she embraced him as warmly. Then he bussed her and winding his legs round hers, as a button loop clasps a button, he threw her and enjoyed her. On like wise did the other slaves with the girls till all had satisfied their passions, and they ceased not from kissing and clipping, coupling and carousing, till day began to wane, when the Mamelukes rose from the damsels' bosoms and the blackamoor slave dismounted from the Queen's breast. The men resumed their disguises and all except the blackamoor, who swarmed up the tree, entered the palace and closed the postern door as before. Now when Shah Zaman saw this conduct of his sister-in-

law, he said to himself: "By the Lord, my calamity is lighter than this! My brother is a greater King among the Kings than I am, yet this infamy goeth on in his very palace, and his wife is in love with that filthiest of filthy slaves. But this only showeth that they all do it and that there is no woman but who cuckoldeth her husband. Then the curse of the Lord upon one and all, and upon the fools who lean against them for support or who place the reins of conduct in their hands!" So he put away his melancholy and despondency, regret and repine, and allayed his sorrow by constantly repeating those words, adding, "'Tis my conviction that no man in this world is safe from their malice!" When suppertime came, they brought him the trays and he ate with voracious appetite, for he had long refrained from meat, feeling unable to touch any dish, however dainty. Then he returned grateful thanks to Almighty the Lord, praising Him and blessing Him, and he spent a most restful night, it having been long since he had savored the sweet food of sleep. Next day he broke his fast heartily and began to recover health and strength, and presently regained excellent condition. His brother came back from the chase ten days after, when he rode out to meet him and they saluted each other. And when King Shahryar looked at King Shah Zaman, he saw how the hue of health had returned to him, how his face had waxed ruddy, and how he ate with an appetite after his late scanty diet. He wondered much and said: "O my brother, I was no anxious that thou wouldst join me in hunting and chasing, and wouldst take thy pleasure and pastime in my dominion!" He thanked him and excused himself. Then the two took horse and rode into the city, and when they were seated at their ease in the palace, the food trays were set before them and they ate their sufficiency. After the meats were removed and they had washed their hands, King Shahryar turned to his brother and said: "My mind is overcome with wonderment at thy condition. I was desirous to carry thee with me to the

chase, but I saw thee changed in hue, pale and wan to view, and in sore trouble of mind too. But now, Alhamdulillah— glory be to God!— I see thy natural color hath returned to thy face and that thou art again in the best of case. It was my belief that thy sickness came of severance from thy family and friends, and absence from capital and country, so I refrained from troubling thee with further questions. But now I beseech thee to expound to me the cause of thy complaint and thy change of color, and to explain the reason of thy recovery and the return to the ruddy hue of health which I am wont to view. So speak out and hide naught!" When Shah Zaman heard this, he bowed groundward awhile his head, then raised it and said: "I will tell thee what caused my complaint and my loss of color. But excuse my acquainting thee with the cause of its return to me and the reason of my complete recovery. Indeed I pray thee not to press me for a reply." Said Shahryar, who was much surprised by these words, "Let me hear first what produced thy pallor and thy poor condition." "Know, then, O my brother," rejoined Shah Zaman, "that when thou sentest thy Vizier with the invitation to place myself between thy hands, I made ready and marched out of my city. But presently I minded me having left behind me in the palace a string of jewels intended as a gift to thee. I returned for it alone, and found my wife on my carpet bed and in the arms of a hideous black cook. So I slew the twain and came to thee, yet my thoughts brooded over this business and I lost my bloom and became weak. But excuse me if I still refuse to tell thee what was the reason of my complexion returning." Shahryar shook his head, marveling with extreme marvel, and with the fire of wrath flaming up from his heart, he cried, "Indeed, the malice of woman is mighty!" Then he took refuge from them with the Lord and said: "In very sooth, O my brother, thou hast escaped many an evil by putting thy wife to death, and right excusable were thy wrath and grief for such mishap, which never yet

befell crowned king like thee. By the Lord, had the case been mine, I would not have been satisfied without slaying a thousand women, and that way madness lies! But now praise be to the Lord Who hath tempered to thee thy tribulation, and needs must thou acquaint me with that which so suddenly restored to thee complexion and health, and explain to me what causeth this concealment." "O King of the Age, again I pray thee excuse my so doing!" "Nay, but thou must." "I fear, O my brother, lest the recital cause thee more anger and sorrow than afflicted me." "That were but a better reason," quoth Shahryar, "for telling me the whole history, and I conjure thee by the Lord not to keep back aught from me." Thereupon Shah Zaman told him all he had seen, from commencement to conclusion, ending with these words: "When I beheld thy calamity and the treason of thy wife, O my brother, and I reflected that thou art in years my senior and in sovereignty my superior, mine own sorrow was belittled by the comparison, and my mind recovered tone and temper. So, throwing off melancholy and despondency, I was able to eat and drink and sleep, and thus I speedily regained health and strength. Such is the truth and the whole truth." When King Shahryar heard this he waxed wroth with exceeding wrath, and rage was like to strangle him. But presently he recovered himself and said, "O my brother, I would not give thee the lie in this matter, but I cannot credit it till I see it with mine own eyes." "And thou wouldst look upon thy calamity," quoth Shah Zaman, "rise at once and make ready again for hunting and coursing, and then hide thyself with me. So shalt thou witness it and thine eyes shall verify it." "True," quoth the King. Whereupon he let make proclamation of his intent to travel, and the troops and tents fared forth without the city, camping within sight, and Shahryar sallied out with them and took seat a-midmost his host, bidding the slaves admit no man to him. When night came on, he summoned his Vizier and said to him, "Sit thou in my stead,

and let none wot of my absence till the term of three days.” Then the brothers disguised themselves and returned by night with all secrecy to the palace, where they passed the dark hours. And at dawn they seated themselves at the lattice overlooking the pleasure grounds, when presently the Queen and her handmaids came out as before, and passing under the windows, made for the fountain. Here they stripped, ten of them being men to ten women, and the King’s wife cried out, “Where art thou, O Saeed?” The hideous blackamoor dropped from the tree straightway, and rushing into her arms without stay or delay, cried out, “I am Sa’ad al-Din Saood!” The lady laughed heartily, and all fell to satisfying their lusts, and remained so occupied for a couple of hours, when the white slaves rose up from the handmaidens’ breasts and the blackamoor dismounted from the Queen’s bosom. Then they went into the basin and after performing the ghusl, or complete ablution, donned their dresses and retired as they had done before. When King Shahryar saw this infamy of his wife and concubines, he became as one distraught, and he cried out: “Only in utter solitude can man be safe from the doings of this vile world! By the Lord, life is naught but one great wrong.” Presently he added, “Do not thwart me, O my brother, in what I propose.” And the other answered, “I will not.” So he said: “Let us up as we are and depart forthright hence, for we have no concern with kingship, and let us overwander the Lord’s earth, worshiping the Almighty till we find someone to whom the like calamity hath happened. And if we find none then will death be more welcome to us than life.” So the two brothers issued from a second private postern of the palace, and they never stinted wayfaring by day and by night until they reached a tree a-middle of a meadow hard by a spring of sweet water on the shore of the salt sea. Both drank of it and sat down to take their rest. And when an hour of the day had gone by, lo! they heard a mighty roar and uproar in the middle of the main

as though the heavens were falling upon the earth, and the sea brake with waves before them and from it towered a black pillar, which grew and grew till it rose skyward and began making for that meadow. Seeing it, they waxed fearful exceedingly and climbed to the top of the tree, which was a lofty, whence they gazed to see what might be the matter. And behold, it was a Jinni, huge of height and burly of breast and bulk, broad of brow and black of blee, bearing on his head a coffer of crystal. He strode to land, wading through the deep, and coming to the tree whereupon were the two Kings, seated himself beneath it. He then set down the coffer on its bottom and out of it drew a casket with seven padlocks of steel, which he unlocked with seven keys of steel he took from beside his thigh, and out of it a young lady to come was seen, whiteskinned and of winsomest mien, of stature fine and thin, and bright as though a moon of the fourteenth night she had been, or the sun raining lively sheen. Even so the poet Utayyah hath excellently said— She rose like the morn as she shone through the night And she gilded the grove with her gracious sight. From her radiance the sun taketh increase when She unveileth and shameth the moonshine bright. Bow down all beings between her hands As she showeth charms with her veil undight. And she floodeth cities with torrent tears When she flasheth her look of levin light. The Jinni seated her under the tree by his side and looking at her, said: “O choicest love of this heart of mine! O dame of noblest line, whom I snatched away on thy bride night that none might prevent me taking thy maidenhead or tumble thee before I did, and whom none save myself hath loved or hath enjoyed. O my sweetheart! I would lief sleep a little while.” He then laid his head upon the lady’s thighs, and, stretching out hip legs, which extended down to the sea, slept and snored and snarked like the roll of thunder. Presently she raised her head toward the treetop and saw the two Kings perched near the summit. Then she softly

lifted off her lap the Jinni's pate, which she was tired of supporting, and placed it upon the ground, then, standing upright under the tree, signed to the Kings, "Come ye down, ye two, and fear naught from this Giant-Demon." They were in a terrible fright when they found that she had seen them, and answered her in the same manner, "the Lord upon thee and by thy modesty, O lady, excuse us from coming down!" But she rejoined by saying: "the Lord upon you both that ye come down forthright. And if ye come not, I will rouse upon you my husband, this Giant-Demon, and he shall do you to die by the illest of deaths." And she continued making signals to them. So, being afraid, they came down to her, and she rose before them and said, "Stroke me a strong stroke, without stay or delay, otherwise will I arouse and set upon you this Giant-Demon, who shall slay you straightway." They said to her: "O our lady, we conjure thee by the Lord, let us off this work, for we are fugitives from such, and in extreme dread and terror of this thy husband. How then can we do it in such a way as thou desirest?" "Leave this talk. It needs must be so," quoth she, and she swore them by Him who raised the skies on high without prop or pillar that if they worked not her will, she would cause them to be slain and cast into the sea. Whereupon out of fear King Shahryar said to King Shah Zaman, "O my brother, do thou what she biddeth thee do." But he replied, "I will not do it till thou do it before I do." And they began disputing about futtering her. Then quoth she to the twain: "How is it I see you disputing and demurring? If ye do not come forward like men and do the deed of kind, ye two, I will arouse upon you the Giant-Demon." At this, by reason of their sore dread of the Jinni, both did by her what she bade them do, and when they had dismounted from her, she said, "Well done!" She then took from her pocket a purse and drew out a knotted string whereon were strung five hundred and seventy seal rings, and asked, "Know ye what be these?" They answered her

saying, "We know not!" Then quoth she: "These be the signets of five hundred and seventy men who have all Futtered me upon the horns of this foul, this foolish, this filthy Giant-Demon. So give me also your two seal rings, ye pair of brothers." When they had drawn their two rings from their hands and given them to her, she said to them: "Of a truth this Giant-Demon bore me off on my bride night, and put me into a casket and set the casket in a coffer, and to the coffer he affixed seven strong padlocks of steel and deposited me on the deep bottom of the sea that raves, dashing and clashing with waves, and guarded me so that I might remain chaste and honest, quotha! that none save himself might have connection with me. But I have lain under as many of my kind as I please, and this wretched Jinni wotteth not that Destiny may not be averted nor hindered by aught, and that whatso woman willeth, the same she fulfilleth however man nilleth. Even so saith one of them: "Rely not on women, Trust not to their hearts, Whose joys and whose sorrows Are hung to their parts! Lying love they will swear thee Whence guile ne'er departs. Take Yusuf for sample, 'Ware sleights and 'ware smarts! the Devil ousted Adam (See ye not?) thro' their arts." Hearing these words, they marveled with exceeding marvel, and she went from them to the Giant-Demon, and taking up his head on her thigh as before, said to them softly, "Now wend your ways and bear yourselves beyond the bounds of his malice." So they fared forth saying either to other, "the Lord! the Lord!" and: "There be no Majesty and there be no Might save in the Lord, the Glorious, the Great, and with Him we seek refuge from women's malice and sleight, for of a truth it hath no mate in might. Consider, O my brother, the ways of this marvelous lady with an Giant-Demon, who is so much more powerful than we are. Now since there hath happened to him a greater mishap than that which befell us and which should bear us abundant consolation, so return we to our countries and

capitals, and let us decide never to intermarry with womankind, and presently we will show them what will be our action." Thereupon they rode back to the tents of King Shahryar, which they reached on the morning of the third day. And having mustered the Viziers and emirs, the chamberlains and high officials, he gave a robe of honor to his Viceroy and issued orders for an immediate return to the city. There he sat him upon his throne and, sending for the Chief Minister, the father of the two damsels who (The Lord-willing!) will presently be mentioned, he said, "I command thee to take my wife and smite her to death, for she hath broken her plight and her faith." So he carried her to the place of execution and did her die. Then King Shahryar took brand in hand and, repairing to the seraglio, slew all the concubines and their Mamelukes. He also swore himself by a binding oath that whatever wife he married he would abate her maidenhead at night and slay her next morning, to make sure of his honor. "For," said he, "there never was nor is there one chaste woman upon the face of earth." Then Shah Zaman prayed for permission to fare homeward, and he went forth equipped and escorted and traveled till he reached his own country. Meanwhile Shahryar commanded his Vizier to bring him the bride of the night that he might go in to her. So he produced a most beautiful girl, the daughter of one of the emirs, and the King went in unto her at eventide. And when morning dawned, he bade his Minister strike off her head, and the Vizier did accordingly, for fear of the Sultan. On this wise he continued for the space of three years, marrying a maiden every night and killing her the next morning, till folk raised an outcry against him and cursed him, praying the Lord utterly to destroy him and his rule. And women made an uproar and mothers wept and parents fled with their daughters till there remained not in the city a young person fit for carnal copulation. Presently the King ordered his Chief Vizier, the same who was charged with the

executions, to bring him a virgin, as was his wont, and the Minister went forth and searched and found none. So he returned home in sorrow and anxiety, fearing for his life from the King. Now he had two daughters, Scheherazade and Dunyazade, called, of whom the elder had perused the books, annals, and legends of preceding kings, and the stories, examples, and instances of bygone men and things. Indeed it was said that she had collected a thousand books of histories relating to antique races and departed rulers. She had purused the works of the poets and knew them by heart, she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts, and accomplishments. And she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred. Now on that day she said to her father: "Why do I see thee thus changed and laden with cark and care? Concerning this matter quoth one of the poets: "Tell whoso hath sorrow Grief never shall last. E'en as joy hath no morrow So woe shall go past." When the Vizier heard from his daughter these words, he related to her, from first to last, all that had happened between him and the King. Thereupon said she: "By the Lord, O my father, how long shall this slaughter of women endure? Shall I tell thee what is in my mind in order to save both sides from destruction?" "Say on, O my daughter," quoth he, and quoth she: "I wish thou wouldst give me in marriage to this King Shahryar. Either I shall live or I shall be a ransom for the virgin daughters of Muslims and the cause of their deliverance from his hands and thine." "the Lord upon thee!" cried he in wrath exceeding that lacked no feeding. "O scanty of wit, expose not thy life to such peril! How durst thou address me in words so wide from wisdom and unfar from foolishness? Know that one who lacketh experience in worldly matters readily falleth into misfortune, and whoso considereth not the end keepeth not the world to friend, and the vulgar say: 'I was lying at mine ease. Naught but my officiousness brought me unease'." "Needs must thou," she broke in, "make me a doer of this

good deed, and let him kill me an he will. I shall only die a ransom for others." "O my daughter," asked he, "and how shall that profit thee when thou shalt have thrown away thy life?" And she answered, "O my father, it must be, come of it what will!" The Vizier was again moved to fury and blamed and reproached her, ending with, "In very deed I fear lest the same befall thee which befell the bull and the ass with the husbandman." "And what," asked she, "befell them, O my father?" Whereupon the Vizier began

