

The 17th Night

thy head and wend they ways"; but he answered, "By Allah, I will not go until I hear the stories of these others." Then the lady, turning towards the Caliph and Ja'afar and Masrur, said to them, "Do ye also give an account of yourselves, you men!" Whereupon Ja'afar stood forth and told her what he had told the portress as they were entering the house; and when she heard his story of their being merchants and Mosul-men who had outrun the watch, she said, "I grant you your lives each for each sake, and now away with you all." So they all went out and when they were in the street, quoth the Caliph to the Kalandars, "O company, whither go ye now, seeing that the morning hath not yet dawned?" Quoth they, "By Allah, O our lord, we know not where to go." "Come and pass the rest of the night with us," said the Caliph and, turning to Ja'afar, "Take them home with thee and to-morrow bring them to my presence that we may chronicle their adventures." Ja'afar did as the Caliph bade him and the Commander of the Faithful returned to his palace; but sleep gave no sign of visiting him that night and he lay awake pondering the mishaps of the three Kalandar-princes and impatient to know the history of the ladies and the two black bitches. No sooner had morning dawned than he went forth and sat upon the throne of his sovereignty; and, turning to Ja'afar, after all his Grantees and Officers of state were gathered together, he said, "Bring me the three ladies and the two bitches and the three Kalandars." So the Ja'afar fared forth and brought them all before him (and the ladies were veiled); then the Minister turned to them and said in the Caliph's name, "We pardon you your maltreatment of us and your want of courtesy, in consideration of the kindness which forewent it, and for that ye knew us not: now however I would have you to know that ye stand in presence of the fifth^t of the sons of Abbas, Harun al-Rashid, brother of Caliph Musá al-Hádi, son of Al-Mansúr; son of Mohammed the brother of Al-Saffáh bin Mohammed who was first of the royal house. Speak ye therefore before him the truth and the whole truth!" When the ladies heard Ja'afar's words touching the Commander of the Faithful, the eldest came forward and said, "O Prince of True Believers, my story is one which, were it graven with needle-gravens upon the eye-corners were a warmer for whoso would be warned and an example for whoso can take profit from example."

The Eldest Lady's Tale



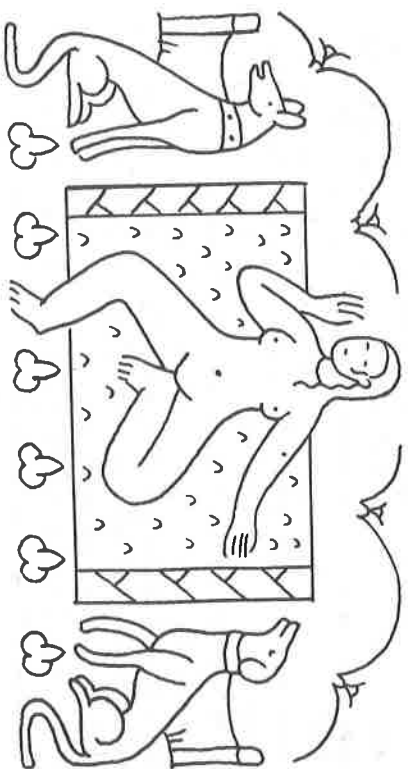
And Shahrzad perceived the dawn of day and ceased to say her permitted say. When it was the 17th night, she said,
It hath reached me, O auspicious King, that she stood forth before the Commander of the Faithful and began to tell

The Eldest Lady's Tale

Verily a strange tale is mine and 'tis this:—Yon two black bitches are my eldest sisters by one mother and father; and these two others, she who beareth upon her the signs of stripes and the third our procuratrix are my sisters by another mother. When my father died, each took her share of the heritage and, after a while my mother also deceased, leaving me and my sisters-german three thousand dinars; so each daughter received her portion of a thousand dinars and I the same, albe the youngest. In due course of time my sisters married with the usual festivities and lived with their husbands, who bought merchandise with their wives' monies and set out on their travels together. Thus they threw me off. My brothers-in-law were absent with their wives five years, during which period they spent all the money they had and, becoming bankrupt, deserted my sisters in foreign parts amid stranger folk. After five years my eldest sister returned to me in beggar's gear with her clothes in rags and tatters^t and a dirty old mantilla;^t and truly she was in the foulest and sorriest plight. At first sight I did not know my own sister; but presently I recognized her and said "What state is this?" "O our sister," she replied, "Words cannot undo the done; and the reed of Destiny hath run through what Allah decreed." Then I sent her to the bath and dressed her in a suit of mine own, and boiled for her a bouillon and brought her some good wine and said to her, "O my sister, thou art the eldest, who still standest to us in the stead of father and mother; and, as for the inheritance which came to me as to you twain, Allah hath blessed it and prospered it to me with increase; and my circumstances are easy, for I have made much money by spin-

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ning and cleaning silk; and I and you will share my wealth alike." I entreated her with all kindness and she abode with me a whole year, during which our thoughts and fancies were always full of our other sister. Shortly after she too came home in yet fouler and sorer plight than that of my eldest sister; and I dealt by her still more honourably than I had done by the first, and each of them had a share of my substance. After a time they said to me, "O our sister, we desire to marry again, for indeed we have not patience to drag on our days without husbands and to lead the lives of widows bewitched"; and I replied, "O eyes of me! ye have hitherto seen scanty weal in wedlock, for nowadays good men and true are become rarities and curiosities; nor do I deem your projects advisable, as ye have already made trial of matrimony and have failed." But they would not accept my advice and married without my consent: nevertheless I gave them outfit and dowries out of my money; and they fared forth with their mates. In a mighty little time their husbands played them false and, taking whatever they could lay hands upon, levanted and left them in the lurch. Thereupon they came to me ashamed and in abject case and made their excuses to me, saying, "Pardon our fault and be not wroth with us;† for although thou art younger in years yet art thou older in wit; henceforth we will never make mention of marriage; so take us back as thy handmaidens that we may eat our mouthful." Quoth I, "Welcome to you, O my sisters, there is naught dearer to me than you." And I took them in and redoubled my kindness to them. We ceased not to live



The Eldest Lady's Tale

after this loving fashion for a full year, when I resolved to sell my wares abroad and first to fit me a conveyance for Bassorah; so I equipped a large ship, and loaded her with merchandise and valuable goods for traffic, and with provant and all needful for a voyage, and said to my sisters, "Will ye abide at home whilst I travel, or would ye prefer to accompany me on the voyage?" "We will travel with thee," answered they, "for we cannot bear to be parted from thee." So I divided my monies into two parts, one to accompany me and the other to be left in charge of a trusty person, for, as I said to myself, "Haply some accident may happen to the ship and yet we remain alive; in which case we shall find on our return what may stand us in good stead." I took my two sisters and we went a-voyaging some days and nights; but the master was careless enough to miss his course, and the ship went astray with us and entered a sea other than the sea we sought. For a time we knew naught of this; and the wind blew fair for us ten days, after which the lookout man went aloft to see about him and cried, "Good news!" Then he came down rejoicing and said, "I have seen what seemeth to be a city as 'twere a pigeon." Heretofore we rejoiced and, ere an hour of the day had passed, the buildings showed plain in the offing and we asked the Captain, "What is the name of yonder city?" and he answered "By Allah I wot not, for I never saw it before and never sailed these seas in my life; but, since our troubles have ended in safety, remains for you only to land there with your merchandise and, if you find selling profitable, sell and make your market of what is there; and if not, we will rest here two days and provision ourselves and fare away." So we entered the port and the Captain went up town and was absent awhile, after which he returned to us and said, "Arise; go up into the city and marvel at the works of Allah with His creatures and pray to be preserved from His righteous wrath!" So we landed and going up into the city, saw at the gate men hending staves in hand; but when we drew near them, behold, they had been translated† by the anger of Allah and had become stones. Then we entered the city and found all who therein woned into black stones ensouled: not an inhabited house appeared to the espyer, nor was there a blower of fire.† We were awestruck at the sight and threaded the market streets where we found the goods and gold and silver left lying in their places; and we were glad

considered the place and lo! it was an oratory wherein was a prayer-niche[†] with two wax-candles burning and lamps hanging from the ceiling. In it too was spread a prayer-carpet whereupon sat a youth fair to see; and before him on its stand[†] was a copy of the Koran, from which he was reading. I marvelled to see him alone alive amongst the people of the city and entering saluted him; whereupon he raised his eyes and returned my salam. Quoth I, "Now by the Truth of what thou readest in Allah's Holy Book, I conjure thee to answer my question." He looked upon me with a smile and said, "O handmaid of Allah, first tell me the cause of thy coming hither, and I in turn will tell what hath befallen both me and the people of this city, and what was the reason of my escaping their doom." So I told him my story whereat he wondered; and I questioned him of the people of the city, when he replied, "Have patience with me for a while, O my sister!" and, reverently closing the Holy Book, he laid it up in a satin bag. Then he seated me by his side; and I looked at him and behold, he was as the moon at its full, fair of face and rare of form, soft-sided and slight, of well-proportioned height, and cheek smoothly bright and diffusing light; in brief a sweet, a sugar-stick,[†] even as saith the poet of the like of him in these couplets:—

*That night th' astrologer a scheme of planets drew,
And lo! a graceful shape of youth appeared in view:
Saturn had stained his locks with Saturninest jet,
And spots of nut-brown muck on rosy side-face blew:[†]
Mars tintured either cheek with tinct of martial red;
Sagittal spots from eyelids Sagittarius threw:
Dowered him Mercury with bright mercurial wit;
Bore off the Bear[†] what all man's evil glances grew:
Amazed stood Astrophil to sight the marvel-birth
When lowed low the Moon at full to buss the Earth.
And of a truth Allah the Most High had robed him in the rai-
ment of perfect grace and had purged and fringed it with a cheek
all beauty and loveliness, even as the poet saith of such an one:—
By his eyelids shedding perfume and his fine slim waist I
swear,
By the shooting of his shafts barbed with sorcery passing
rare;*

*By the softness of his sides,[†] and glances[†] lingering light;
And brow of dazzling day-tide ray and night within his
hair;
By his eyebrows which deny to who look upon them rest,
Now bidding now forbidding, ever dealing joy and care;
By the rose that decks his cheek, and the myrtle of its
moss,[†]
By jacinths bedded in his lips and pearl his smile lays bare;
By his graceful bending neck and the curving of his breast;
Whose polished surface beareth those granados, lovely
pair;
By his heavy hips that quiver as he passeth in his pride;
Or he resteth with that waist which is slim beyond com-
pare;
By the satin of his skin, by that fine unsullied spire;
By the beauty that containeth all things bright and de-
bonair;
By that ever-open hand; by the candour of his tongue;
By noble blood and high degree whereof he's hope and
heir;
Musk from him borrows muskiness she loveth to exhale
And all the airs of ambergis through him perfume the
air;
The sun, methinks, the broad bright sun, before my love
would pale
And sans his splendour would appear a paring of his
nail.[†]
I glanced at him with one glance of eyes which caused me a
thousand sighs; and my heart was at once taken captive-wise; so
I asked him, "O my lord and my love, tell me that whereof I
questioned thee"; and he answered, "Hearing is obeying! Know,
O handmaid of Allah, that this city was the capital of my father
who is the King thou sawest on the throne transfigured by Allah's
wrath to a black stone, and the Queen thou foundest in the
alcove is my mother. They and all the people of the city were
Magians who fire adored in lieu of the Omnipotent Lord[†] and
were wont to swear by love and heat and shade and light, and
the spheres revolving day and night. My father had ne'er a son
till he was blest with me near the last of his days; and he reared*

me till I grew up and prosperity anticipated me in all things. Now it so happened that there was with us an old woman well stricken in years, a Moslemah who, inwardly believing in Allah and His Apostle, conformed outwardly with the religion of my people; and my father placed thorough confidence in her for that he knew her to be trustworthy and virtuous; and he treated her with ever-increasing kindness believing her to be of his own belief. So when I was well-nigh grown up my father committed me to her charge saying:—Take him and educate him and teach him the rules of our faith; let him have the best instructions and cease not thy fostering care of him. So she took me and taught me the tenets of Al-Islam with the divine ordinances[†] of the Wuzu-ablution and the five daily prayers and she made me learn the Koran by rote, often repeating:—Serve none save Allah Al-mighty! When I had mastered this much of knowledge she said to me:—O my son, keep this matter concealed from thy sire and reveal naught to him lest he slay thee. So I hid it from him and I abode on this wise for a term of days when the old woman died, and the people of the city redoubled in their impiety[†] and arrogance and the error of their ways. One day, while they were as wont, behold, they heard a loud and terrible sound and a crier crying out with a voice like roaring thunder so every ear could hear, far and near, "O folk of this city, leave ye your fire-worshipping and adore Allah the All-compassionate King"; At this, fear and terror fell upon the citizens and they crowded to my father (he being King of the city) and asked him, "What is this awesome voice we have heard, for it hath confounded us with the excess of its terror?" and he answered, "Let not a voice fright you nor shake your steadfast spirit nor turn you back from the faith which is right." Their hearts inclined to his words and they ceased not to worship the fire and they persisted in rebellion for a full year from the time they heard the first voice; and on the anniversary came a second cry, and a third at the head of the third year, each year once. Still they persisted in their mal-practices till one day at break of dawn, judgment and the wrath of Heaven descended upon them with all suddenness, and by the visitation of Allah all were metamorphosed into black stones,[†] they and their beasts and their cattle; and none was saved save myself who at the time was engaged in my devotions. From that

day to this I am in the case thou seest, constant in prayer and fasting and reading and reciting the Koran; but I am indeed grown weary by reason of my loneliness, having none to bear me company." Then said I to him (for in very sooth he had won my heart and was the lord of my life and soul), "O youth, wilt thou fare with me to Baghdad city and visit the Olema and men learned in the law and doctors of divinity and get thee increase of wisdom and understanding and theology? And know that she who standeth in thy presence will be thy handmaid, albeit she be head of her family and mistress over men and eunuchs and servants and slaves. Indeed my life was no life before it fell in with thy youth. I have here a ship laden with merchandise; and in very truth Destiny drove me to this city that I might come to the knowledge of these matters, for it was fated that we should meet." And I ceased not to persuade him and speak him fair and use every art till he consented.—

And Shahrabad perceived the dawn of day and ceased to say her permitted say. When it was the 18th night, she continued,
It hath reached me, O auspicious King, that the lady ceased not persuading with soft speech the youth to depart with her till he consented and said "Yes." She slept that night lying at his feet and hardly knowing where she was for excess of joy. As soon as the next morning dawned (she pursued, addressing the Caliph), I arose and we entered the treasures and took thence whatever was light in weight and great in worth; then we went down side by side from the castle to the city, where we were met by the Captain and my sisters and slaves who had been seeking for me. When they saw me they rejoiced and asked what had stayed me, and I told them all I had seen and related to them the story of the young Prince and the transformation wherewith the citizens had been justly visited. Hereat all marvelled, but when my two sisters (these two bitches, O Commander of the Faithful) saw me by the side of my young lover they jealousy on his account and were wroth and plotted mischief against me. We awaited a fair wind and went on board rejoicing and ready to fly for joy by reason of the goods we had gotten, but my own greatest joy-ance was in the youth; and we waited awhile till the wind blew fair for us and then we set sail and fared forth. Now as we sat talking, my sisters asked me, "And what wilt thou do with this

handsome young man?" and I answered, "I purpose to make him my husband!" Then I turned to him and said, "O my lord, I have that to propose to thee wherein thou must not cross me; and this it is that, when we reach Baghdad, my native city, I offer thee my life as thy handmaiden in holy matrimony, and thou shalt be to me baron and I will be femme to thee." He answered, "I hear and I obey; thou art my lady and my mistress and whatso thou doest I will not gainsay." Then I turned to my sisters and said, "This is my gain; I content me with this youth and those who have gotten aught of my property let them keep it as their gain with my good will." "Thou sayest and doest well," answered the twain, but they imagined mischief against me. We ceased not spooning before a fair wind till we had exchanged the sea of peril for the seas of safety and, in a few days, we made Bassorah-city, whose buildings loomed clear before us as evening fell. But after we had retired to rest and were sound asleep, my two sisters arose and took me up, bed and all, and threw me into the sea: they did the same with the young Prince who, as he could not swim, sank and was drowned and Allah enrolled him in the noble army of Martyrs.† As for me would Heaven I had been drowned with him, but Allah deemed that I should be of the saved; so when I awoke and found myself in the sea and saw the ship making off like a flash of lightning, He threw in my way a piece of timber which I bestrided, and the waves tossed me to and fro till they cast me upon an island coast, a high land and an uninhabited. I landed and walked about the island the rest of the night and, when morning dawned, I saw a rough track barely fit for child of Adam to tread, leading to what proved a shallow ford connecting island and mainland. As soon as the sun had risen I spread my garments to dry in its rays; and ate of the fruits of the island and drank of its waters; then I set out along the foot-track and ceased not walking till I reached the mainland. Now when there remained between me and the city but a two hours' journey be- hold, a great serpent, the bigness of a date-palm, came fleeing towards me in all haste, gliding along now to the right then to the left till she was close upon me, whilst her tongue lolled ground-wards a span long and swept the dust as she went. She was pursued by a Dragon† who was not longer than two lances, and of slender build about the bulk of a spear and, although her terror

lent her speed, and she kept wriggling from side to side, he overtook her and seized her by the tail, whereat her tears streamed down and her tongue was thrust out in her agony. I took pity on her and picking up a stone and calling upon Allah for aid, threw it at the Dragon's head with such force that he died then and there; and the serpent opening a pair of wings flew into the lift and disappeared from before my eyes. I sat down marvelling over that adventure, but I was weary and, drowsiness overcoming me, I slept where I was for a while. When I awoke I found a jet-black damsel sitting at my feet shampooing them; and by her side stood two black bitches (my sisters, O Commander of the



Faithful!). I was ashamed before her† and, sitting up, asked her, "O my sister, who and what art thou?" and she answered, "How soon hast thou forgotten me! I am she for whom thou wroughtest a good deed and sowedest the seed of gratitude and slewest her foe; for I am the serpent whom by Allah's aidance thou didst just now deliver from the Dragon. I am a Jimiyah and he was a Jim who hated me, and none saved my life from him save thou. As soon as thou freedest me from him I flew on the wind to the ship whence thy sisters threw thee, and removed all that was therein to thy house. Then I ordered my attendant Marids to sink the ship and I transformed thy two sisters into these black bitches; for I know all that hath passed between them and thee; but as for the youth, of a truth he is drowned." So saying, she flew up with me and the bitches, and presently set us down on the terrace-roof of my house, wherein I found ready stored the whole of what property was in my ship, nor was aught of it missing. "Now (continued the serpent that was), I swear by all engraven on the seal-ring of Solomon† (with whom be peace!) unless thou deal to each of these bitches three hundred stripes every day I will come and imprison thee forever under the earth." I answered, "Hearkening and obedience!" and away she flew. But

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before going she again charged me saying, "I again swear by Him who made the two seas flow[†] (and this be my second oath) if thou gainsay me I will come and transform thee like thy sisters." Since then I have never failed, O Commander of the Faithful, to beat them with that number of blows till their blood flows with my tears, I pitying them the while, and well they wot that their being scourged is no fault of mine and they accept my excuses. And this is my tale and my history! The Caliph marvelled at her adventures and then signed to Ja'afar who said to the second lady, the Portress, "And thou, how earnest thou by the welts and wheals upon thy body?" So she began

The Tale of the Portress

Know, O Commander of the Faithful, that I had a father who, after fulfilling his time, deceased and left me great store of wealth. I remained single for a short time and presently married one of the richest of his day. I abode with him a year when he also died, and my share of his property amounted to eighty thousand dinars in gold according to the holy law of inheritance.[†] Thus I became passing rich and my reputation spread far and wide, for I had made me ten changes of raiment, each worth a thousand dinars. One day as I was sitting at home, behold, there came in to me an old woman[†] with lantern jaws and cheeks sucked in, and eyes rucked up, and eyebrows scant and scald, and head bare and bald; and teeth broken by time and mauled, and back bending and neck-nape nodding, and face blotched, and rheum running, and hair like a snake black-and-white-speckled, in complexion a very fright, even as saith the poet of the like of her:—

*Ill-omened hag! unshriven be her sins,
Nor mercy visit her on dying bed:
Thousand head-strongest he-mules would her guiles,
Despite their bolting, lead with spider thread.*

And as saith another:—
*A hag to whom th' unlawful lawfullest
And witchcraft wisdom in her sight are grown:
A mischief-making brat, a demon-maid,
A whorish woman and a pimping crone.[†]*

When the old woman entered she salamed to me and kissing the

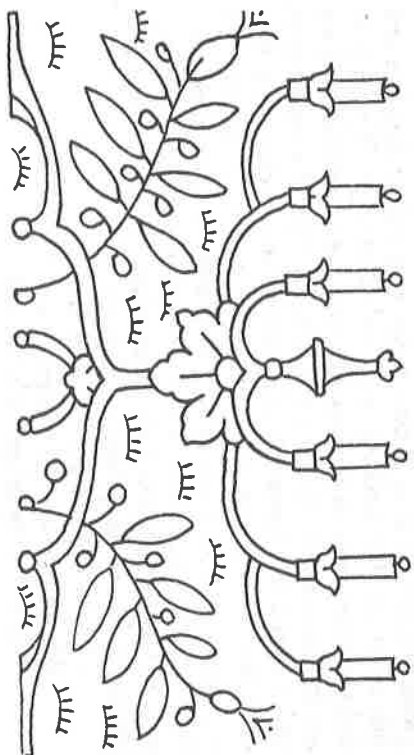
The Tale of the Portress

ground before me, said, "I have at home an orphan daughter and this night are her wedding and her displaying.[†] We be poor folks and strangers in this city knowing none inhabitant and we are broken-hearted. So do thou earn for thyself a recompense and a reward in Heaven by being present at her displaying and, when the ladies of this city shall hear that thou art to make act of presence, they also will present themselves; so shalt thou comfort her affliction, for she is sore bruised in spirit and she hath none to look to save Allah the Most High." Then she wept and kissed my feet reciting these couplets:—

*Thy presence bringeth us a grace
We own before thy winsome face:
And wert thou absent ne'er an one
Could stand in stead or take thy place.*

So pity gat hold on me and compassion and I said, "Hearing is consenting and, please Allah, I will do somewhat more for her; nor shall she be shown to her bridegroom save in my raiment and ornaments and jewelry." At this the old woman rejoiced and bowed her head to my feet and kissed them, saying, "Allah requite thee weal, and comfort thy heart even as thou hast comforted mine! But, O my lady, do not trouble thyself to do me this service at this hour; be thou ready by supper-time,[†] when I will come and fetch thee." So saying she kissed my hand and went her ways. I set about stringing my pearls and donning my brocades and making my toilette, little recking what Fortune had in womb for me, when suddenly the old woman stood before me, simpering and smiling till she showed every tooth stump, and quoth she, "O my mistress, the city madams have arrived and when I apprized them that thou promisedest to be present, they were glad and they are now awaiting thee and looking eagerly for thy coming and for the honour of meeting thee." So I threw on my mantilla and, making the old crone walk before me and my handmaidens behind me, I fared till we came to a street well watered and swept neat, where the winnowing breeze blew cool and sweet. Here we were stopped by a gate arched over with a dome of marble stone firmly seated on solidest foundation, and leading to a Palace whose walls from earth rose tall and proud, and whose pinnacle was crowned by the clouds,[†] and over the doorway were writ these couplets:—

Ye 18th Night



*I am the wone where Mirth shall ever smile;
The home of Joyance through my lasting while:
And 'mid my court a fountain jets and flows,
Nor tears nor troubles shall that fount defile:
The marge with royal Nu'umari's bloom is dight,
Myrtle, Narcissus-flower and Chamomile.*

Arrived at the gate, before which hung a black curtain, the old woman knocked and it was opened to us; when we entered and found a vestibule spread with carpets and hung around with lamps all alight and wax candles in candelabra adorned with pendants of precious gems and noble ores. We passed on through this passage till we entered a saloon, whose like for grandeur and beauty is not to be found in this world. It was hung and carpeted with silken stuffs, and was illuminated with branches, sconces and tapers ranged in double row, an avenue abutting on the upper or noble end of the saloon, where stood a couch of juniper-wood encrusted with pearls and gems and surmounted by a baldquin with mosquito-curtains of satin looped up with margarites. And hardly had we taken note of this when there came forth from the baldquin a young lady and I looked, O Commander of the Faithful, upon a face and form more perfect than the moon when fullest, with a favour brighter than the dawn gleaming with saffron-hued light, even as the poet sang when he said:—

*Thou pacest the palace a marvel-sight,
A bride for a Kird's or Kaiser's night!*

Ye Tale of the Portress

*W antons the rose on thy roscate cheek,
O cheek as the blood of the dragon's bright!
Slim-waisted, languorous, sleepy-eyed,
With charms which promise all love-delight:
And the fire which atires thy tiar'd brow
Is a night of woe on a morn's glad light.*

The fair young girl came down from the estrade and said to me, "Welcome and well come and good cheer to my sister, the dearly-beloved, the illustrious, and a thousand greetings!" Then she recited these couplets:—

*An but the house could know who cometh 'twould rejoice,
And kiss the very dust whereon thy foot was placed;
And with the tongue of circumstance the walls would say,
'Welcome and hail to one with generous gifts engraced!'*

Then sat she down and said to me, "O my sister, I have a brother who hath had sight of thee at sundry wedding-feasts and festive seasons: he is a youth handsomer than I, and he hath fallen desperately in love with thee, for that bounteous Destiny hath garnered in thee all beauty and perfection; and he hath given silver to this old woman that she might visit thee; and she hath contrived on this wise to foregather us twain. He hath heard that thou art one of the nobles of thy tribe nor is he aught less in his; and, being desirous to ally his lot with thy lot, he hath practised this device to bring me in company with thee; for he is fain to marry thee after the ordinance of Allah and his Apostle; and in what is lawful and right there is no shame." When I heard these words and saw myself fairly entrapped in the house, I said, "Hearing is consenting." She was delighted at this and clapped her hands;† whereupon a door opened and out of it came a young man blooming in the prime of life, exquisitely dressed, a model of beauty and loveliness and symmetry and perfect grace, with gentle winning manners and eyebrows like a bended bow and shaft on cord, and eyes which bewitched all hearts with sorcery lawful in the sight of the Lord; even as saith some rhymet describing the like of him:—

*His face as the face of the young moon shines
And Fortune stamps him with pearls for signs.†
And Allah favour him who said:—
Blest be his beauty; blest the Lord's decree*

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Who cast and shaped a thing so bright of blee:

All gifts of beauty he conjoins in one;

Lost in his love is all humanity;

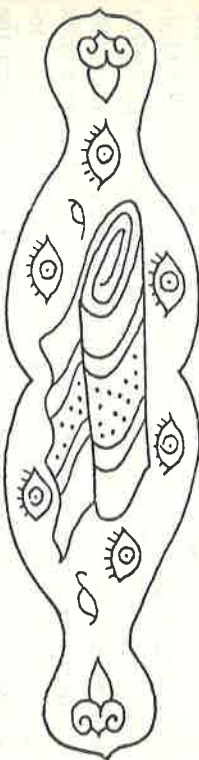
For Beauty's self inscribed on his brow

"I testify there be no Good but he!"

When I looked at him my heart inclined to him and I loved him; and he sat by my side and talked with me a while, when the young lady again clapped her hands and beheld, a side-door opened and out of it came the Kazi with his four assessors as witnesses; and they saluted us and, sitting down, drew up and wrote out the marriage contract between me and the youth and retired. Then he turned to me and said, "Be our night blessed," presently adding, "O my lady, I have a condition to lay on thee." Quoth I, "O my lord, what is that?" Whereupon he arose and fetching a copy of the Holy Book presented it to me saying, "Swear hereon thou wilt never look at any other than myself nor incline thy body or thy heart to him." I swore readily enough to this and he joyed with exceeding joy and embraced me round the neck while love for him possessed my whole heart. Then they set the table[†] before us and we ate and drank till we were satisfied; but I was dying for the coming of the night. And when night did come he led me to the bride-chamber and slept with me on the bed and continued to kiss and embrace me till the morning—such a night I had never seen in my dreams. I lived with him a life of happiness and delight for a full month, at the end of which I asked his leave[†] to go on foot to the bazar and buy me certain especial stuffs and he gave me permission. So I donned my mantilla and, taking with me the old woman and a slave-girl,[†] I went to the klan of the silk-mercens, where I seated myself in the shop-front of a young merchant whom the old woman recommended, saying to me, "This youth's father died when he was a boy and left him great store of wealth; he hath by him a mighty fine[†] stock of goods and thou wilt find what thou seekest with him, for none in the bazar hath better stuffs than he." Then she said to him, "Show this lady the most costly stuffs thou hast by thee"; and he replied, "Hearkening and obedience!" Then she whispered me, "Say a civil word to him!" but I replied, "I am pledged to address no man save my lord." And as she began to sound his praise I said sharply to her, "We want naught of thy sweet speeches; our wish

The Cafe of the Portress

is to buy of him whatsoever we need, and return home." So he brought me all I sought and I offered him his money, but he refused to take it saying, "Let it be a gift offered to my guest this day!" Then quoth I to the old woman, "If he will not take the money, give him back his stuff." "By Allah," cried he, "not a thing will I take from thee: I sell it not for gold or for silver, but I give it all as a gift for a single kiss; a kiss more precious to me than everything the shop containeth." Asked the old woman, "What will the kiss profit thee?" and, turning to me, whispered, "O my daughter, thou hearest what this young fellow saith? What harm will it do thee if he get a kiss from thee and thou



gettest what thou seekest at that price?" Replied I, "I take refuge with Allah from such action! Knowest thou not that I am bound by an oath?"[†] But she answered, "Now whist! just let him kiss thee and neither speak to him nor lean over him, so shalt thou keep thine oath and thy silver, and no harm whatever shall befall thee." And she ceased not to persuade me and importune me and make light of the matter till evil entered into my mind and I put my head in the poke[†] and, declaring I would ne'er consent, consented. So I veiled my eyes and held up the edge of my mantilla between me and the people passing and he put his mouth to my cheek under the veil. But while kissing me he bit me so hard a bite that it tore the flesh from my cheek,[†] and blood flowed fast and faintness came over me. The old woman caught me in her arms and, when I came to myself, I found the shop shut up and her sorrowing over me and saying, "Thank Allah for averting what might have been worse!" Then she said to me, "Come, take heart and let us go home before the matter become public and thou be dishonoured. And when thou art safe inside the house feign sickness and lie down and cover thyself up; and I will bring thee powders and plasters to cure this bite withal, and thy wound will be healed at the latest in three days." So after a while I

arose and I was in extreme distress and terror came full upon me; but I went on little by little till I reached the house when I pleaded illness and lay me down. When it was night my husband came in to me and said, "What hath befallen thee, O my darling, in this excursion of thine?" and I replied, "I am not well: my head aches badly." Then he lighted a candle and drew near me and looked hard at me and asked, "What is that wound I see on thy cheek and in the tenderest part too?" And I answered, "When I went out to-day with thy leave to buy stuffs, a camel laden with firewood jostled me and one of the pieces tore my veil and wounded my cheek as thou seest; for indeed the ways of this city are strait." "To-morrow," cried he, "I will go complain to the Governor, so shall he gibbet every fuel-seller in Baghdad." "Allah upon thee," said I, "burden not thy soul with such sin against any man. The fact is I was riding on an ass and it stumbled, throwing me to the ground; and my cheek lighted upon a stick or a bit of glass and got this wound." "Then," said he, "to-morrow I will go up to Ja'afar the Barmaki and tell him the story, so shall he kill every donkey-boy in Baghdad." "Wouldst thou destroy all these men because of my wound," said I, "when this which befel me was by decree of Allah and His destiny?" But he answered, "There is no help for it"; and, springing to his feet, plied me with words and pressed me till I was perplexed and frightened, and I stuttered and stammered and my speech waxed thick and I said, "This is a mere accident by decree of Allah." Then, O Commander of the Faithful, he guessed my case and said, "Thou hast been false to thine oath." He at once cried out with a loud cry, whereupon a door opened and in came seven black slaves whom he commanded to drag me from my bed and throw me down in the middle of the room. Furthermore, he ordered one of them to pinion my elbows and squat upon my head; and a second to sit upon my knees and secure my feet; and drawing his sword he gave it to a third and said, "Strike her, O Sa'd, and cut her in twain and let each one take half and cast it into the Tigris;† that the fish may eat her; for such is the retribution due to those who violate their vows and are unfaithful to their love." And he redoubled in wrath and recited these couplets:

An there be one who shares with me her love,

*I'd strangle Love tho' life by Love were slain;
Saying, O Soul, Death were the nobler choice,
For ill is Love when shared 'twixt partners twain.*

Then he repeated to the slave, "Smite her, O Sa'd!" And when the slave who was sitting upon me made sure of the command he bent down to me and said, "O my mistress, repeat the profession of Faith and bethink thee if there be any thing thou wouldst have done; for verily this is the last hour of thy life." "O good slave," said I, "wait but a little while and get off my head that I may charge thee with my last injunctions." Then I raised my head and saw the state I was in, how I had fallen from high degree into lowest disgrace; and into death after life (and such life!) and how I had brought my punishment on myself by my own sin; whereupon the tears streamed from mine eyes and I wept with exceeding weeping. But he looked on me with eyes of wrath, and began repeating:—

*Tell her who turneth from our love to work it injury sore,
And taketh her a fine new love the old love tossing o'er:
We cry enough o' thee ere thou enough of us shalt cry!
What past between us doth suffice and happily something
more.†*

When I heard this, O Commander of the Faithful, I wept and looked at him and began repeating these couplets:—

*To severance you doom my love and all unmoved remain;
My tear-sore lids you sleepless make and sleep while I
complain:
You make firm friendship reign between mine eyes and
insomny;
Yet can my heart forget you not, nor tears can I restrain:
You made me swear with many an oath my troth to hold
for aye;
But when you reigned my bosom's lord you wrought me
traitor-bane:
I loved you like a silly child who wots not what is Love;
Then spare the learner, let her not be by the master slain!
By Allah's name I pray you write, when I am dead and
gone,
Upon my tomb, This died of Love whose senses Love had
tá en:*

The 18th Night

Then haply one shall pass that way who fire of Love hath
felt,
And treading on a lover's heart with ruth and woe shall
melt.

When I ended my verses tears came again; but the poetry and the weeping only added fury to his fury, and he recited:—

*'Twas not satiety bade me leave the dearling of my soul,
But that she sinned a mortal sin which clipt me in its clip:
She sought to let another share the love between us twain,
But my True Faith of Unity refuseth partnership.'*

When he ceased reciting I wept again and prayed his pardon and humbled myself before him and spoke him softly, saying to myself, "I will work on him with words; so haply he will refrain from slaying me, even though he take all I have." So I complained of my sufferings and began to repeat these couplets:—

*Now, by thy life and wert thou just my life thou hadst
not taken,
But who can break the severance-law which parteth lovers
twain!*

*Thou loadest me with heavy weight of longing love, when I
Can hardly bear my chemisette for weakness and for pain:
I marvel not to see my life and soul in ruin lain:
I marvel much to see my frame such severance-pangs
sustain.*

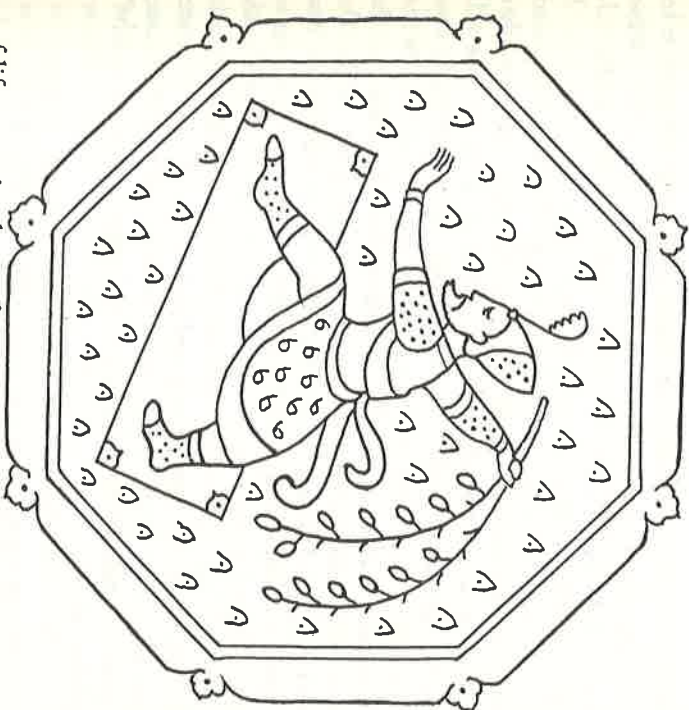
When I ended my verse I wept again; and he looked at me and reviled me in abusive language,[†] repeating these couplets:—

*Thou wast all taken up with love of other man, not me;
'Twas thine to show me severance-face, 'twas only mine to
see:*

*I'll leave thee for that first thou wast of me to take thy
leave
And patient bear that parting blow thou borest so pa-
tiently:*

*Even as thou soughtest other love, so other love I'll seek,
And make the crime of murdering love thine own atrocity.*
When he had ended his verses he again cried out to the slave,
"Cut her in half and free us from her, for we have no profit of
her." So the slave drew near me, O Commander of the Faithful,
and I ceased bandying verses and made sure of death and, despair-

The Tale of the Poortress



ing of life, committed my affairs to Almighty Allah, when behold, the old woman rushed in and threw herself at my husband's feet and kissed them and wept and said, "O my son, by the rights of my fosterage and by my long service to thee, I conjure thee pardon this young lady, for indeed she hath done nothing deserving such doom. Thou art a very young man and I fear lest her death be laid at thy door; for it is said:—Whoso slayeth shall be slain. As for this wanton (since thou deemest her such) drive her out from thy doors, from thy love and from thy heart." And she ceased not to weep and importune him till he relented and said, "I pardon her, but needs must I set on her my mark which shall show upon her all my life." Then he bade the slaves drag me along the ground and lay me out at full length, after stripping me of all my clothes;[†] and when the slaves had so sat upon me that I could not move, he fetched in a rod of quince-tree and came down with it upon my body, and continued beating me on the back and sides till I lost consciousness from excess of pain, and I despaired of life. Then he commanded the slaves to take

me away as soon as it was dark, together with the old woman to show them the way and throw me upon the floor of the house wherein I dwelt before my marriage. They did their lord's bidding and cast me down in my old home and went their ways. I did not revive from my swoon till dawn appeared, when I applied myself to the dressing of my wounds with ointments and other medicaments; and I medicined myself, but my sides and ribs still showed signs of the rod as thou hast seen. I lay in weakly case and confined to my bed for four months before I was able to rise and health returned to me. At the end of that time I went to the house where all this had happened and found it a ruin; the street had been pulled down endlong and rubbish-heaps rose where the building erst was; nor could I learn how this had come about. Then I betook myself to this my sister on my father's side and found her with these two black bitches. I saluted her and told her what had betided me and the whole of my story and she said, "O my sister, who is safe from the despite of Time and secure? Thanks be to Allah who has brought thee off safely"; and she began to say:—

Such is the World, so bear a patient heart

When riches leave thee and when friends depart!

Then she told me her own story, and what had happened to her with her two sisters and how matters had ended; so we abode together and the subject of marriage was never on our tongues for all these years. After a while we were joined by our other sister, the procuratrix, who goeth out every morning and buyeth all we require for the day and night; and we continued in such condition till this last night. In the morning our sister went out, as usual, to make her market and then befel us what befel from bringing the Porter into the house and admitting these three Kalandar-men. We entreated them kindly and honourably and a quarter of the night had not passed ere three grave and respectable merchants from Mosul joined us and told us their adventures. We sat talking with them but on one condition which they violated, whereupon we treated them as sorted with their breach of promise, and made them repeat the account they had given of themselves. They did our bidding and we forgave their offence; so they departed from us and this morning we were unexpectedly summoned to thy presence. And such is our story! The

Caliph wondered at her words and bade the tale be recorded and chronicled and laid up in his muniment-chambers.—

And Shahrazad perceived the dawn of day and ceased saying her permitted say. When it was the 19th night, she continued,

It hath reached me, O auspicious King, that the Caliph commanded this story and those of the sister and the Kalandars to be recorded in the archives and be set in the royal muniment-chambers. Then he asked the eldest lady, the mistress of the house, "Knowest thou the whereabouts of the Ifritah who spelled thy sisters?" and she answered, "O Commander of the Faithful, she gave me a ringlet of her hair saying—Whenas thou wouldst see me, burn a couple of these hairs and I will be with thee forthright, even though I were beyond Caucasus-mountain." Quoth the Caliph, "Bring me hither the hair." So she brought it and he threw the whole lock upon the fire. As soon as the odour of the burning hair disspread itself, the palace shook and trembled, and all present heard a rumbling and rolling of thunder and a noise as of wings and lo! the Jimiyah who had been a serpent stood in the Caliph's presence. Now she was a Moslemah, so she saluted him and said, "Peace be with thee O Vicar of Allah"; whereunto he replied, "And with thee also be peace and the mercy of Allah and His blessing." Then she continued, "Know that this damsel sowed for me the seed of kindness, wherefore I cannot enough requite her, in that she delivered me from death and destroyed mine enemy. Now I had seen how her sisters dealt with her and felt myself bound to avenge her on them. At first I was minded to slay them, but I feared it would be grievous to her, so I transformed them to bitches; but if thou desire their release, O Commander of the Faithful, I will release them to pleasure thee and her for I am of the Moslems." Quoth the Caliph, "Release them and after we will look into the affair of the beaten lady and consider her case carefully; and if the truth of her story be evinced I will exact retaliation from him who wronged her." Said the Ifritah, "O Commander of the Faithful, I will forthwith release them and will discover to thee the man who did that deed by this lady and wronged her and took her property, and he is the nearest of all men to thee!" So saying she took a cup of water and muttered a spell over it and uttered words there was no understanding; then she sprinkled some of the water over the

faces of the two bitches, saying, "Return to your former human shape!" whereupon they were restored to their natural forms and fell to praising their Creator. Then said the Ifritah, "O Commander of the Faithful, of a truth he who scourged this lady with rods is thy son Al-Amin brother of Al-Maamun;† for he had heard of her beauty and loveliness and he played a lover's stratagem with her and married her according to the law and committed the crime (such as it is) of scourging her. Yet indeed he is not to be blamed for beating her, for he laid a condition on her and swore her by a solemn oath not to do a certain thing; however, she was false to her vow and he was minded to put her to death, but he feared Almighty Allah and contented himself with scourging her, as thou hast seen, and with sending her back to her own place. Such is the story of the second lady and the Lord knoweth all." When the Caliph heard these words of the Ifritah, and knew who had beaten the damsel, he marvelled with mighty marvel and said, "Praise be to Allah, the Most High, the Almighty, who hath shown his exceeding mercy towards me, enabling me to deliver these two damsels from sorcery and torture, and vouchsafing to let me know the secret of this lady's history! And now by Allah, we will do a deed which shall be recorded of us after we are no more." Then he summoned his son Al-Amin and questioned him of the story of the second lady, the portress; and he told it in the face of truth; whereupon the Caliph bade call into presence the Kazis and their witnesses and the three Kalandars and the first lady with her sisters-german who had been ensorcelled; and he married the three to the three Kalandars whom he knew to be princes and sons of Kings and he appointed them chamberlains about his person, assigning to them stipends and allowances and all that they required, and lodging them in his palace at Baghdad. He returned the beaten lady to his son, Al-Amin, renewing the marriage contract between them and gave her great wealth and bade rebuild the house fairer than it was before. As for himself he took to wife the procuratrix and lay with her that night: and next day he set apart for her an apartment in his Serraglio, with handmaidens for her service and a fixed daily allowance. And the people marvelled at their Caliph's generosity and natural beneficence and princely wisdom; nor did he forget to send all these histories to be recorded in his annals.



FOOTNOTES

Page 102—Line 32. The name of this celebrated successor of Nineveh, where some suppose The Nights were written, is orig. *Meorūḡān* (middle-gates) because it stood on the way where four great highways meet. The Arab. form "Mausil" (the vulgar "Mausil") is also significant, alluding to the "junction" of Assyria and Babylonia. Hence our "muslin."

Line 34. This is Mr. Thackeray's "nose-bag." I translate by "walking-shoes" the Arab "Khuff" which are a manner of loose boot covering the ankle; they are not usually embroidered, the ornament being reserved for the inner shoe.

Page 103—Line 15. i.e. Syria (says Abulfeda) the "land on the left" (of one facing the east) as opposed to Al-Yaman the "land on the right." Osmani would mean Turkish, Ottoman. When Bernard the Wise (Bohn, p. 24) speaks of "Bagada and Axiam" (Mabillon's text) or "Aximarr" (still worse), he means Baghdad and Ash-Shām (Syria, Damascus), the latter word puzzling his Editor. Richardson (*Dissert.* lxvii.) seems to support a hideous attempt to derive Shām from Shāmat, a mole or wart, because the country is studded with hillocks! Al-Shām is often applied to Damascus-city whose proper name Dimishk belongs to books: this term is generally derived from Dimāshik b. Kālī b. Mālik b. Sham (Shem). Lee (*Ibn Batūṭah*, 29) denies that ha-Dimishki means "Eliezer of Damascus."

Line 16. From Oman=Eastern Arabia.

Line 19. Arab. "T amar Hannā" lit. date of Henna, but applied to the flower of the eastern privet (*Lamsonia inermis*) which has the sweet scent of freshly mown hay. The use of Henna as a dye is known even in England. The "myrtle" alluded to may either have been for a perfume (as it is held an anti-intoxicant) or for eating, the bitter aromatic berries of the "As" being supposed to flavour wine and especially Raki (raw brandy).