



The Thousand and One Nights

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It has been related to me, O happy King, said Shahrazád, that there was a certain merchant who had great wealth, and traded extensively with surrounding countries; and one day he mounted his horse, and journeyed to a neighbouring country to collect what was due to him, and, the heat oppressing him, he sat under a tree, in a garden, and put his hand into his saddle-bag, and ate a morsel of bread and a date which were among his provisions. Having eaten the date, he threw aside the stone, and immediately there appeared before him an 'Efreet, of enormous height, who, holding a drawn sword in his hand, approached him, and said, Rise, that I may kill thee, as thou hast killed my son. The merchant asked him, How have I killed thy son? He answered, When thou atest the date, and throwest aside the stone, it struck my son upon the chest, and, as fate had decreed against him, he instantly died.

Merchant and Jinnee

The merchant, on hearing these words,⁶ exclaimed, Verily to God we belong, and verily to Him we must return! There is no strength nor power but in God, the High, the Great! If I killed him, I did it not intentionally, but without knowing it; and I trust in thee that thou wilt pardon me.—The Jinnee answered, Thy death is indispensable, as thou hast killed my son:—and so saying, he dragged him, and threw him on the ground, and raised his arm to strike him with the sword. The merchant, upon this, wept bitterly, and said to the Jinnee, I commit my affair unto God, for no one can avoid what He hath decreed:—and he continued his lamentation, repeating the following verses:—

Time consists of two days; this, bright; and that, gloomy: and life, of two moieties; this, safe; and that, fearful. Say to him who hath taunted us on account of misfortunes, Doth fortune oppose any but the eminent? Dost thou not observe that corpses float upon the sea, while the precious pearls remain in its furthest depths? When the hands of time play with us, misfortune is imparted to us by its protracted kiss. In the heaven are stars that cannot be numbered; but none is eclipsed save the sun and the moon. How many green and dry trees are on the earth; but none is assailed with stones save that which beareth fruit! Thou thoughtest well of the days when they went well with thee, and fearest not the evil that destiny was bringing.

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