



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The history of the young King of the Black Islands

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"You must know, my lord," once said a wretched prisoner, "that my father, Mahmoud, was the King of this land. This is the kingdom of the Black Islands. It is named after the four small neighboring mountains. There used to be islands in front of those mountains, and the capital where my father, the King, lived was located where the lake is now. The rest of my story will let you know how all this happened. Just listen:

"My father, the King, died when he was seventy years old. I had barely succeeded him when I got married. The lady I chose as my royal consort was my cousin. I had many reasons to be satisfied with her affection, and on my part I loved her with so much tenderness that nothing could surpass the harmony of our bond. This lasted for five years, but then I noticed that the Queen no longer loved me.

One day, after dinner, I lay down on a sofa to rest. The Queen was taking a bath. Two of her ladies came to me and sat at my head and feet. They had fans to beat off the heat and to keep the flies from troubling me. They thought I was asleep and spoke in whispers. But I had only closed my eyes and was not asleep, so I heard all their conversation.

One said to the other, "How is it possible that the Queen does not love such a lovable prince?" "That's certainly strange," her companion replied, "I don't understand the reason, and I can't imagine why she goes out every night and leaves him alone. Is it possible that he doesn't notice?"

"Alas!" said the first, "how could he notice? Every evening she mixes the juice of a special herb into his drink. This makes him sleep so soundly all night that she has all the time she wants to go wherever she likes. When the day begins, she comes back and wakes him up with the scent of something she puts under his nose."

"You can imagine, my lord, how surprised I was by this conversation and what a nasty feeling it gave me. Yet, however much it affected me, I had enough self-control to pretend that nothing was wrong. So I pretended to wake up without having heard a word.

The Queen came back from the bath, we ate together, and she offered me a cup of the liquid that I was accustomed to drink. But instead of bringing the cup to my mouth, I went to an open window, threw the water out quickly so that she didn't notice, and returned.

Shortly thereafter, thinking I was asleep, she got up and whispered so loudly that I could hear her clearly: "Sleep soundly and never wake up again!" After saying that, she got dressed and left the room.

As soon as my wife, the Queen, was gone, I quickly got up and followed her so quickly that I soon heard the sound of her feet in front of me. I walked softly behind her. She passed several gates that opened for her as she uttered some magic words. The last gate she opened was that of a garden, which she entered. I stopped at this gate so that she would not see me as she passed by. Then I made sure, as far as the dark night allowed, that I could see her. I saw her enter a small wood whose paths were lined with thick bushes. I went there via another path, and while hiding behind the bushes, I saw her walking there with a man.

Of course, I listened as attentively as possible and heard her say to the man, "I don't deserve to be accused of not being diligent enough. You know the reason very well. But if all the proofs of affection that I have given you are not enough to convince you of my sincerity, I am willing to give you even more decisive proofs. You just have to order me, you know my power. I will, if you desire it, turn this great city and this magnificent palace into terrifying ruins inhabited only by wolves, owls, and ravens before sunrise. If you wish, I will build all the walls even stronger than the Caucasus Mountains, up to the limits of the inhabitable world. Speak only a word, and everything will be changed."

When the Queen finished this conversation, she and her companion reached the end of the walk. They turned around and walked past me. I had already drawn my knife, and when the man was next to me, I struck him in the neck and brought him to the ground. I concluded that I had killed him. Quickly, I retreated so that the Queen wouldn't see me.

The wound I had inflicted on her companion was fatal. But through her enchantments, she kept the man in a state where it couldn't be said if he was dead or alive. As I crossed the garden to return to the palace, I heard the Queen lamenting loudly. Judging by her crying and the amount of grief she had, I was glad I had spared her life. Once I reached my apartment, I went to bed, and satisfied that I had punished the villain, I fell asleep.

The next morning, I got up and dressed. Then I consulted with my counselors. When I returned, the Queen arrived. She was dressed in mourning, her hair was disheveled, and a part of it was torn. She said, "I come to Your Majesty to beg you not to be surprised to see me in this state. My great grief is caused by the

information I have just received about three disturbing events."

"Unfortunately, how sad, what happened, Madam?" I asked. "The death of the Queen, my dear mother," she replied, "the death of the King, my father, killed in battle, and the death of one of my brothers, who fell from a cliff."

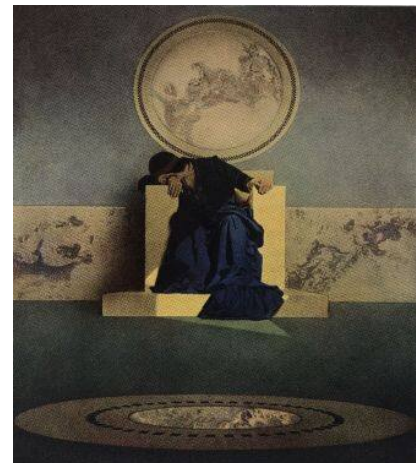
I was not dissatisfied that she used these events to conceal the true cause of her grief. "Madam," I said, "I don't blame you, I assure you that your grief touches my heart. I would be surprised if you were not sad about such disastrous events. Cry, all your tears are proof of your tenderness, but I hope that time and understanding will ease your grief."

She withdrew to her apartment, where she spent a whole year in mourning, completely surrendered to her grief. At the end of that period, she begged me for permission to build a cemetery for herself within the boundaries of the palace. She told me that she would stay there until the end of her life. I agreed, and she built a stately building and called it the Palace of Tears. When it was finished, she had the man she was still caring for brought there. Until now, she had always prevented his death through the potions she had given him. Even when he was in the Palace of Tears, she still brought him a drink every day.

But with all her enchantments, she could not heal the man. He was no longer able to walk or take care of himself. Furthermore, he had also lost his speech and showed no sign of life except that he was still there.

Every day the Queen visited him twice. I was well aware of this, but pretended not to know. While she couldn't see me, I heard her speak to the wounded scoundrel: "It pains me to see you in this condition. I feel the torment you must be enduring myself. But dear Soul, I speak to you constantly, and you do not answer me. How long will you remain silent? Please speak, even one word. Unfortunately, the only enjoyable moments of my life are the ones I spend here with you, sharing your grief."

At these words, which she sighed out, I lost all patience. I emerged and went to her and said, "Madam, you have wept enough now. It is time to give up this sorrow. It dishonors both of us, you have forgotten too much what you owe to me and to yourself." "Your Majesty," she said, "if you still have any kindness or compassion for me, I beg you not to restrain me. Allow me to endure my sorrow, which cannot even be taken away by time."



When I noticed that my protest, instead of making her feel her duty, only

worsened her fear, I stopped speaking and withdrew. She continued to visit the scoundrel every day for two years, giving herself over to grief and despair.

I went to the Palace of Tears a second time, while she was still there. I hid again and heard her call out, "It has been three years now that you have not spoken a word to me. You never respond to the proofs of my devotion, such as complaints and sighs. Is it due to insensitivity or contempt? Tell me by what miracle you have become the guardian of the rarest treasure the world has ever known."

I must confess, my Lord, that I was furious about what she said, because in reality, this adored mortal was absolutely not what you would think he was. He was a scoundrel. I was so angry about what I heard that I emerged again and shouted at the grave, "Oh, grave! Why don't you swallow this man up?"

Hardly had I uttered these words when the Queen, who was sitting with the man, burst into rage and exclaimed, "Shameful it is. You are the cause of my sorrow. Do not think I do not know that. I have lied about that all this time. It was your barbaric hand that brought the man I love into this deplorable state. And you are also so cruel as to insult me."

"Yes," I said angrily, "I gave that man what he deserved. And I should have treated you the same way. I now regret not having done so. I have been too good to you." As I spoke these words, I drew my knife and raised my hand to punish her. But she remained steadfast and looked at me with a mocking smile and said, "Control your anger." At the same time, she spoke words that I did not understand and added later, "By my enchantments, I now command you to become half marble and half human." And immediately, my Lord, I became what you see now, a dead man among the living, and a living man among the dead.

After this cruel sorceress, who was not worthy of the name Queen, had transformed me and brought me to this room, she destroyed my capital city through another spell. The city was very prosperous and densely populated. She destroyed the houses, public places, and markets, making the place become the lake and the desert plain that you have seen. The fish with four colors represent the four types of inhabitants of different religions who lived in the city. The white fish represents Muslims, the red fish represents Persians, the blue fish represents Christians, and the yellow fish represents Jews. The four small hills were the four islands of the kingdom. I learned all of this from the sorceress who, to add to my misery, told me of the consequences of her anger. But this is not all. The destruction of my kingdom and the metamorphosis of my person were not enough revenge. She visits me every day and then gives me one hundred lashes on my bare shoulders until I am covered in blood. When she is finished with this part of my punishment, she throws a rough goat hair cover over me, and then this brocade garment, not to honor me, but to mock me."

When he came to this part of his story, the young King could hardly hold back his tears. The Sultan himself was so moved by the story that he could not find words of comfort. Soon after, the young King, lifting his eyes to the sky, cried out: "Mighty Creator of all things, what is your judgment? I endure my misfortunes with patience, for it is your will that things must be as they are, but I hope that your infinite goodness will ultimately reward me."

The Sultan, deeply moved by this poignant story, longed to avenge the suffering of the unfortunate Prince. He said, "Tell me where this treacherous sorceress retreats and where I can find that wicked villain who has already been buried before his death." "My Lord," replied the Prince, "the man is, as I have already told you, housed in the Palace of Tears. He is in a magnificent tomb built in the shape of a dome. This palace is located near the castle, on the side where the gate is placed.

As for the Queen, I cannot tell you exactly where she retreats, but every day at sunrise, she goes to visit him. First, she performs her bloody revenge on me, against which I cannot defend myself. She brings him the potion with which she has prevented his death until now, and always complains that he has never spoken to her since he was injured."

"Prince," said the Sultan, "your condition is so sad. Your misfortune deeply affects me. No one has ever experienced anything so extraordinary! I will not fail to exact the revenge you are entitled to."

In the subsequent conversation with the young Prince, the Sultan told him who he was and why he had entered the castle. He then told him how they could take revenge. They made a plan but waited to execute it until the next day. The Sultan went to sleep, but the young Prince stayed awake. Since the enchantment, he could no longer sleep.

The next morning, the Sultan rose at dawn and prepared to carry out his plan by going to the Palace of Tears. He found that it was illuminated with candles of white wax, and a delightful fragrance rose from the various incense burners made of fine gold. As soon as he saw the bed where the man lay, he drew his knife and took his life. He dragged his body to the courtyard of the castle and threw it into a well. After this, he lay in the man's bed, placed his knife under the blanket, and waited to finish his task.

Shortly thereafter, the Queen arrived. She first entered the room of her husband, the King of the Black Islands, undressed him, and with unprecedented cruelty gave him a hundred lashes. The cries of the unfortunate Prince filled the palace. He begged her to have mercy on him. But she did not stop until she had given him the usual number of lashes. "You had no mercy either," she said, "so you should not expect any from me."

After the sorceress had given her husband one hundred lashes with a whip, she covered him with the goatskin and the brocade robe again. Then she went to the Palace of Tears. As she approached the bed where she thought the man lay, she lamented and wept again: "Alas! My sun, my life, will you always remain silent? Are you determined to let me die without giving me the comfort of hearing your voice?"

The Sultan pretended to wake up from a deep sleep and answered, in the tone of the villain: "There is no power or might except in God." At these words, the sorceress let out a loud cry of joy. "My dear Lord," she exclaimed, "is it true? Am I not imagining it? Is it certain that I hear you and that you are speaking to me?"

"Oh, unhappy woman," said the Sultan, "are you worthy of my answer?" - "Alas!" answered the Queen, "why do you ask me that?" - "The cries," answered the Sultan, "the groans and tears of your husband, whom you treat with so much humiliation and barbarity every day, prevent me from sleeping day and night. If you had set him free, I would have long since recovered and regained the use of my speech. This is the cause of my silence, about which you constantly complain."

"Well," said the sorceress, "to calm you down, I am willing to obey your orders. Do you want me to set him free?" - "Yes," answered the Sultan, "hurry and set him free so that I am no longer disturbed by his moaning and groaning." The sorceress immediately left the Palace of Tears. She took a cup of water, spoke some words over it, causing it to boil as if it had been on the fire. Then she went to the young King, threw the water on him, and said, "The Creator of all things has formed you as you are now. If He is angry with you, do not change. But if you are in this condition only because of my spells, then take your natural form again and become who you were before."

She had barely spoken these words when the Prince had taken on his old form again and stood up. He had returned, thanks to God. The sorceress said to him, "Disappear from this castle and never return, otherwise it will be your death."

The young King, who had no choice, left without saying another word. He retreated to a remote place where he patiently waited for what would happen next. Meanwhile, the sorceress returned to the Palace of Tears and, thinking she was still talking to her beloved husband, said, "My dear, I have done what you needed. Nothing now prevents you from getting up and giving me the satisfaction that I have missed for so long."

The Sultan, still speaking as the man, said, "What you have done is not yet enough for my healing. You have only removed part of the evil. You must cut the evil at the root." "My beautiful husband," replied the Queen, "what do you mean by the root?" - "Bad woman that you are," answered the Sultan, "do you not

understand that I am referring to the city and its inhabitants, and the four islands destroyed by the enchantments? Every night at midnight, the fish lift their heads out of the lake and call for revenge against you and me. A fisherman came to tell me this. This is the true cause of the delay in my healing. Go quickly, restore things to their former state, and on your return, I will give you my hand, and you will help me get up."

The sorceress, filled with hope by these words, exclaimed with joy, "My Heart, my Soul, you will soon be well again, for I will immediately do what you command." So she went straight to the edge of the lake, took a little water in her hand, sprinkled it, and recited some magic words over the fish and the lake. The city was also immediately restored. The fish became men, women, and children, Muslims, Christians, Persians, and Jews, just as they had been before. Everyone had regained their natural form, and they all lived together in the city. The houses and shops were immediately filled with people and goods, just as they had been before the enchantment. The Sultan's servants, who were in the largest square of the city, were amazed to suddenly find themselves in the middle of a large, beautiful, densely populated city again.

Once the sorceress had accomplished this miraculous change, she returned to the Palace of Tears to receive her reward. "My best Lord," she cried, "I have done everything you asked of me, I now pray that you get up and give me your hand." - "Come closer," said the Sultan, still speaking as the man. She approached. "You are not close enough," he continued, "come closer." She obeyed. Then he stood up and grabbed her arm so suddenly that she had no time to see who he was. He cut her in half with a blow of his dagger so that one half of her body fell in one direction and the other half rolled in the other direction. When he had done this, he left the body where it was, left the Palace of Tears, and went to find the young King of the Black Islands, who was waiting for him with great impatience. "Prince," he said, embracing him, "be happy, you have nothing to fear from now on. Your cruel enemy is dead."

The young Prince returned, thanks to the Sultan, and was very grateful to him. In return, the Sultan gave him a long life and happiness. "From now on," said the Sultan, "you may peacefully live in your capital, except if you accompany me to mine, which is nearby. You will be welcome there and receive as much honor as in your own kingdom." "Mighty Majesty, to whom I owe so much," replied the King, "do you think you are near your capital?" - "Yes," said the Sultan, "I know it's no more than four or five hours' journey." - "But it takes you a whole year to return," said the Prince. "I do indeed believe that you came here from your capital in the time you mentioned, because mine was under a spell. But since the spell has been removed, things have changed. However, this will not prevent me from following you to the ends of the earth to prove to you for my whole life that you are my savior. I am ready to accompany you and leave my kingdom

without regret."

The Sultan was extremely surprised when he realized how far he was from his land, and he could not imagine how that could have happened, but the young king of the Black Islands convinced him without any doubt. Then the Sultan replied: "It doesn't matter. The effort to return to my own land is sufficiently compensated by the satisfaction of having you as a son. Since you honor me by accompanying me, and since I have no child, I consider you as such and appoint you from this moment as my heir and successor."

The young Prince then began to prepare for his journey, which was completed in three weeks. This was to the great regret of his court and subjects, who then agreed to receive one of his closest relatives as their ruler.

Finally, the Sultan and the young Prince began their journey, with a hundred camels loaded with invaluable treasures from the treasury, followed by fifty handsome horsemen. They had a pleasant journey. When the Sultan, who had sent couriers to inform them of his delay and the adventure he had experienced, approached his capital, the chief officers came to greet him. They assured him that his long absence had not changed his kingdom. The inhabitants also came out in great crowds, received him with cheers, and celebrated with joy for several days.

The day after his arrival, the Sultan informed his courtiers of the adoption of his son, the King of the four Black Islands, who was willing to leave a great kingdom to accompany and live with him. As a reward for their loyalty, he gave the courtiers gifts according to their rank. And as for the fisherman? Since he was the first cause of the young Prince's liberation, the Sultan bestowed on him an abundant fortune, which made him and his family happy for the rest of their lives.

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