



Ririro

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The Story of Prince Agib

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I was born as the son of a king. When my father died, I ascended to the throne and governed my subjects justly and kindly. Additionally, I enjoyed taking sea voyages to the islands. I therefore boarded a fleet of ten ships and took enough provisions for a whole month.

I was at sea for twenty days when a headwind arose. However, in the morning the sea became calm again. We arrived at an island where we stayed for two days, cooked and ate some provisions. Then we continued our journey, and after another twenty days at sea, we found ourselves in unknown waters. The lookout had to climb up the mast to look around. When he came back down, he said: "I saw fish floating on the surface of the water to my right; and as I looked toward the middle of the sea, I saw something in the distance, sometimes black and sometimes white."

When the captain heard this, he threw his turban on the deck, pulled the hairs out of his beard, and said, "Alas, I must warn you that our end is near. No one will escape it." Then he began to cry; and we all lamented our fate in the same way. I wanted to know what the lookout had seen.

"Oh my Lord," he replied, "know that we have deviated from our course since the beginning of the headwind, which was followed by the calm sea, causing us to be stranded for two days. Since that time, we have strayed from our course for twenty-one days. We now have no wind to guide us back from the fate that awaits us.

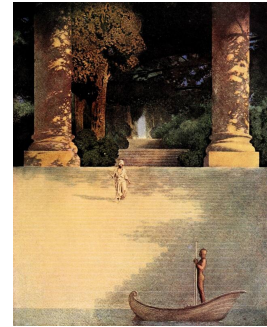
Tomorrow we will come to a mountain of black stone called the "loadstone." The current is now carrying us towards it with great force. The ships will break into pieces, and every nail in them will fly towards the mountain and attach itself to it. God has given a secret property to the stone by which all iron is attracted to it. Since ancient times, large numbers of ships have been destroyed by the influence of that mountain.

At the top of the mountain is a copper dome. On top of the dome stands a horseman on a copper horse, holding a copper spear in his hand. On his chest hangs a tablet of lead, on which mysterious names and talismans are engraved. As long, O king, as this horseman remains on the horse, every ship that approaches will be destroyed, along with everyone on it. And all the iron will

stick to the mountain. No one will be safe until the rider falls from the horse." The captain cried again after this. We were all convinced that our end was inevitable. And each of us said goodbye to his friend.

The next morning we approached the mountain; the current carried us towards it with great force. When the ships were very close to it, they fell apart. All nails and everything else made of iron flew off them towards the "loadstone." It was almost the end of the day when this happened. Some of us drowned and some escaped. No one knows what happened to those who survived.

As for myself, God spared me. I placed myself on a plank, and the wind and waves cast the plank on the mountain. When I landed, I found a path, hewn into the rock, leading to the top. "In the name of God!" I cried, said a prayer, and began the climb. Soon God calmed the wind, so that I safely reached the top.



I was overjoyed at my escape, and immediately entered the dome, thanking God for my rescue. After falling asleep, I heard a voice say to me: "O son of Khasib, when you awake, dig under your feet, and you will find a bow of copper and three arrows of lead inscribed with talismans. Take the bow and arrows and shoot the rider who sits atop the dome, and relieve humanity of this great torment. For when you have shot the rider, he will fall into the sea. The bow will also fall, so bury it in that same spot. As soon as you have done this, the sea will rise until it reaches the top of the mountain. Then a boat will appear with a man aboard. He will row toward you with an oar. Board the boat with him, but do not speak the name of God. He will take you to a safe sea in ten days. There you will find someone who will take you to your city. All this will happen if you do not speak the name of God."

When I woke up from my sleep, I jumped up and did as the voice had instructed. I shot the rider, and he fell into the sea. I dropped the bow from my hand and buried it. Then the sea became restless and rose to the top of the mountain. After waiting there for a while, I saw a boat in the middle of the sea coming toward me. I praised God, whose name is exalted, and when the boat came to me, I saw a man inside. Without saying a word, I boarded the boat, and the man rowed me over the sea for ten consecutive days until we arrived at the safe islands.

Full of joy, I cried out: "There is no deity greater than this God! God is very great!" And as soon as I did this, the man threw me out of the boat, and the boat sank into the sea. When I reached the boat, I found a copper man in it, with a lead tablet on his chest, engraved with names and talismans.

Since I could swim, I swam until nightfall. In this dangerous situation, I prayed to God but gave myself up for lost. But the sea rose with the power of the wind, and a wave, like a huge castle, threw me onto the shore.

I climbed up the bank, laid down my clothes to dry, and fell asleep. The next morning, I found a piece of land covered with trees. As I walked around it, I discovered that I was on a small island in the middle of the sea. I said to myself, "Every time I escape from one disaster, I fall into another that is even worse." While I thought about my misfortune and longed for death, I suddenly saw a ship.

I immediately got up and climbed into a tree and saw that the ship was coming to the coast with ten men carrying axes. They went to the center of the island, dug in the ground, and lifted a hatch. Then they returned with a barrel from which they took bread and flour, which they prepared with butter and honey. They walked back and forth between the ship and the hatch until they had taken all the supplies from the ship.

Then people came out of the hatch, dressed in beautiful clothes. In their midst was an old sheik, weakened and exhausted by his advanced age. He was accompanied by a graceful young man. He was fresh and slim like a fresh twig, and he bewitched and captivated every heart with his beauty. The company went to the hatch and went inside.

They stayed downstairs for about two hours. After that, the sheikh and his entourage came out, but not all the young men came out with them. They first refreshed the earth and then boarded the ship. Then the ship set sail. Shortly after that, I climbed down from the tree and went to the excavation. I removed the earth, and when I entered the hatch, I saw a wooden staircase. Downstairs, I found a beautiful dwelling, decorated with silk carpets; and there was a young man sitting on a high mattress, surrounded by sweet-smelling flowers and fruits.

When he saw me, his face turned pale with fear. But I said, "Be calm, O my Master, you have nothing to fear. I am a man, and the son of a King, just like yourself. Fate has brought me to you to cheer you up in your loneliness." When the boy heard me speak to him and was convinced that I was someone like him, he was very happy with my arrival. His color returned, and he said, "O my Brother, my story is wonderful. My father is a jeweler. People traveled on his command, and he had intercourse with Kings. But he was never blessed with a son. My father dreamed that he would soon have a son, but his son's life would be short, and he woke up very sad.

Soon after that, my mother gave birth to me, and my father was very pleased. However, the astrologers came to him and said, "Your son will live only fifteen years, his fate is determined by the fact that there is a mountain in the sea

called the "Loadstone Mountain." On it sits a rider on a copper horse with a lead tablet around his neck. When the rider is thrown from his horse, your son will be killed. The person who is to kill him is the one who will throw the rider down. His name is King Agib, the son of King Khasib."

My father was very sad about this. When I was almost fifteen years old, the astrologers came again and told him that the rider had fallen into the sea and that he had been thrown down by King Agib, the son of King Khasib. When he heard that, he made this dwelling for me and left me here until the completion of the term, of which there are now only ten days left. He did all this out of fear that King Agib would kill me."

I was very surprised about this and said to myself, "I am King Agib, the son of King Khasib, and it was me who threw the rider down. But, by Allah, I will not kill him or harm him." Then I said to the young man, "If it is God's will, you have nothing to fear, I will stay with you to serve you, and I will go with you to your father. I will beg him to send me back to my land." The boy was happy with my words, and I talked to him until late at night. Then I made his bed and slept close to him. And in the morning, I brought him water to wash his face. He said to me, "May God give you all blessings. If I escape from King Agib, my father will reward you abundantly." - "Never," I replied, "may the day never come that brings you misfortune!" I then served him refreshments, and after we ate together, we spent the day in cheerful conversation.

I stayed with him for nine days, and on the tenth day, the youth was very happy that he was safe and said to me, "Oh my brother, would you please be so kind as to heat some water so I can wash myself and change my clothes?" "With pleasure," I replied, and I got up to do so. Then the youth went inside somewhere where I could not see him. After he had washed and changed his clothes, he lay down on the mattress to rest. Then he said, "Oh my brother, will you cut a watermelon for me and mix the juice with some sugar?" So I got a melon and asked him, "Oh my master, where is the knife?" "Look, here it is," he replied, "on the shelf above my head." I hurriedly jumped up and took the knife, but by God's command, my foot slipped, and I fell on the boy. The knife went into his body, and he died immediately. When I realized he was dead and that I had killed him, I let out a loud cry. I struck myself in the face and tore my clothes, saying, "This is a disaster! Oh my Lord, I beg your forgiveness. I declare my innocence to you! If only I had died before him!"

While I was thinking all this, and had replaced the hatch, I returned to my initial location and looked out over the sea. The boat that I had seen before was approaching. At this point, I said to myself, "Soon the men will come out of the hatch and find the dead youth, and they will also kill me." So I climbed a tree and hid among the leaves and sat there until the ship arrived. Then the sheikh

and his men went ashore and went straight to the hatch and removed the soil. They were surprised that the soil was moist. When they descended the steps, they discovered that the boy was lying on his back, with a face that shone with beauty, although he was dead. He was dressed in white and clean clothing and had a knife in his body.

They all cried, and the father knelt beside him and wept desperately. Finally, he recovered and came out. The men carried the body of the boy. Then they took everything that was in the underground dwelling back to the ship and left. I hid during the day in a tree and walked over the open part of the island at night. I did this for two months. After three months, to my great joy, the land on the west side dried up. I now hoped for an escape. I crossed the dry channel and saw the glow of a fire in the distance. It turned out to be a palace with plates of red copper reflecting the sun. As I approached, I saw the sheikh with ten young men who were all blind in one eye. This surprised me greatly. As soon as they saw me, they greeted me and asked about my story.

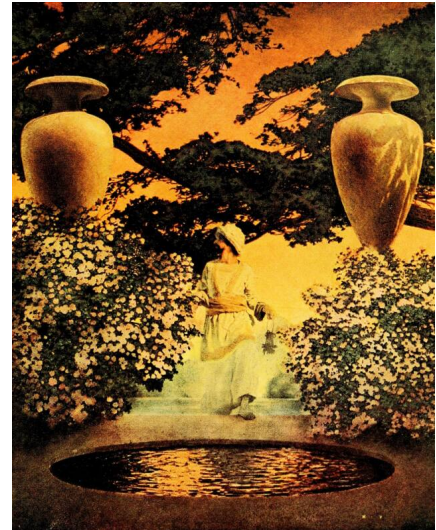
They brought me to the palace where I saw ten benches, each with a blue mattress, and each of the young men sat on one of these benches while the sheikh took his place on a smaller one. Then they said, "Sit down, young man, but do not ask questions about our condition or about the fact that we are blind in one eye." Then the sheikh got up and brought some food for each of them, and also for me. Then we had some wine. After we had eaten and drunk, it was time to sleep. The young men said to the sheikh, "Bring us our usual supply," whereupon the sheikh got up, went into a cupboard, and brought out ten covered trays on his head. He placed them on the ground, lit ten candles and stuck one on each tray. After he had done this, he removed the cloths and there appeared ashes mixed with finely pounded charcoal.

The young men rolled up their sleeves to above the elbow, blackened their faces, slapped their cheeks, and cried out, "We rested at ease, and our impudent curiosity did not let us remain so." They continued in this way until morning, when the sheikh brought them some warm water, and they washed their faces and put on other clothes.

When I witnessed this behavior, my mind was confused and my heart was so fearful that I forgot my own troubles. I asked why they did this, whereupon they looked at me and said, "O young man, do not ask anything that does not concern you. It is better to remain silent, for silence is the most secure." I stayed with them for a whole month and every night they did the same thing. Finally, I said to them, "I beg you in the name of Allah to calm my mind and tell me why you do this. And why do you say, 'We rested at ease, and our shameless curiosity did not let us remain so!'" "If you do not want to tell us, I will leave and go my own way." When they heard these words, they replied, "We have not hidden this

matter from you, but we do not tell it to you out of concern for you, so that you do not become like us and suffer the same fate that has befallen us." But I said, "You must tell me." "We give you good advice," they said, "and accept it and respect it, otherwise you will also become blind in one eye like us." But I persisted in my request, whereupon they said, "O young man, if this happens to you, know that you will be banished from our company."

They all stood up, took a ram, slaughtered and skinned it, and said to me, "Take this knife and skin the ram yourself. We will sew it and then you must leave. A bird named the Roc will come to you, grab you with its talons, fly you away, and lay you down on a mountain. Cut open the skin with this knife and step out, and the bird will fly away. As soon as it has departed, you must get up. Then, after half a day's journey, you will see a palace, enveloped in red gold, adorned with various gems such as emeralds and rubies. When you enter the palace, you will encounter the same fate as we did. Our access to that palace was the cause of our blindness in one eye."



They sewed me in the skin and entered their palace. Soon after, a huge white bird came, grabbed me, and flew me away, laying me on the mountain. I then cut open the skin and stepped out. The bird flew away as soon as it saw me. I quickly got up and walked to the palace. When I entered, I saw forty young maidens in a room above, beautiful as the moon and magnificently dressed. As soon as they saw me, they cried, "Welcome! Welcome! Oh our Master and our Lord! We have been waiting for you for a month. All praise to God who has brought us someone worthy of us." After they greeted me, they placed me on a mat and said, "From this day on, you are our master and prince, and we are your handmaidens and completely under your authority." They brought me some refreshments, and when I had eaten and drunk, they sat with me full of joy and happiness. As night approached, they all gathered around me and laid out fresh and dried fruits and other delicious delicacies and wine for me. One of the lovely ladies began to sing while the other played the lute.

The wine cups went around, and I was so happy that every other concern was erased from my mind, and I cried out, "This is truly a delightful life!" I spent the night with as much pleasure as I had never experienced before. The next morning, I bathed. Then I was given luxurious clothing and ate delicious food again.

So I lived with them for a whole year, but on the first day of the new year, they sat around me and began to weep, saying, "Farewell." "What disaster has befallen you?" I asked. "You break my heart with your sorrow." They replied, "We have encountered many people, but never anyone like you. May God not deprive us of your company." And they wept again. I said to them, "I want to know why you are crying." "You," they answered, "are the cause; but if you pay attention to what we tell you, we will never be separated. But if you act contrary to this, we will be separated forever. Our hearts whisper to us that you do not heed our warning." "Tell me," I said, "and I will follow your instructions."

And they replied: "If you ask about our history, know that we are the daughters of kings. It has been our custom to come together here for many years. Every year we are absent for a period of forty days, and then we return. We eat, drink, and celebrate for a year. This is our tradition. Now we fear that you will ignore our instructions while we are away. We will give you the keys to the palace, one hundred keys belonging to one hundred cabinets. Open each of these, and entertain yourself, and eat and drink, and refresh yourself. Open everything except for the cabinet that has a door of red gold. If you open it, a separation between you and us will result. We therefore urge you to do as we say and be patient." When I heard this, I swore to them that I would never open the cabinet.

I stayed alone in the palace, and as evening fell, I opened the first cabinet. When I entered it, I found a mansion surrounded by a heavenly garden with green trees, full of ripe fruit. Birds sang and a river flowed. My heart was reassured by the sight, and I wandered among the trees, smelling the fragrance of the flowers and listening to the chatter of the birds. After admiring the beautiful colors of the apple, I smelled the sweet-scented quince and saw the plum that shone like a ruby. Then I left and, after locking the door, opened the next cabinet. Inside, I found a spacious piece of land planted with numerous palm trees, and with a river that flowed between rose bushes. I saw jasmine, marjoram, narcissus, and tropical flowers. The fragrances were spread in all directions by the wind. I locked the door of the second cabinet and opened the third. Inside, I found a large hall, paved with marble and with precious minerals and gemstones. There were wooden cages with singing birds inside. There were even more birds on the branches of the trees.

My heart was happy, my problems were gone, and I slept there until morning. Then I opened the door of the fourth cabinet, and inside, I found a large building in which forty cabinets with open doors were located. When I entered these, I saw pearls, rubies, emeralds, and other precious jewels. Amazed, I said: "Such beautiful things as these are never found in the king's treasury. But now I am the king, and all these treasures are mine, by the grace of God."

So I amused myself, going from one place to another, until thirty-nine days had

passed and I had opened the doors of all the cabinets except the forbidden one. My heart was very curious about this hundredth cabinet. The devil prompted me to open it. I was no longer patient, although there was only one day left of the agreed time. So I walked to the cabinet and opened the door. When I entered, I smelled a special fragrance. The fragrance unconsciously overwhelmed me, and I fell to the ground. Finally, I recovered and continued. I found the floor covered with saffron and the place was lit by golden lamps and candles that smelled delicious. I also saw a black horse. In front of him was a crib of white crystal filled with cleaned sesame. Another crib was filled with rose water infused with musk. His saddle was made of red gold.

I said to myself in amazement, "This must be an animal with extraordinary qualities." And, tempted by the devil, I led him outside and mounted him, but he did not move from his spot. I kicked him with my heel, but still he did not move. So I took a whip and struck him with it. As soon as he felt the blow, he let out a sound like thunder, and, spreading his wings, he flew high into the air with me. Then he landed on the roof of another palace and threw me off his back. With a heavy blow from his tail on my face, he knocked out my eye and left me there.

Thus I became blind in one eye. Then I remembered the predictions of the ten young men. The horse spread his wings again and soon disappeared. I stood up, angry about the misfortune I had brought upon myself. I walked up to the terrace and covered my eye with my hands, for it was very painful. Then I went downstairs. I soon discovered, by the ten benches in a circle, and the eleventh in the middle, smaller than the rest, that I was in the castle where the Roc bird had carried me.

The ten young men entered shortly thereafter, accompanied by the sheikh. They did not seem surprised to see me, nor about the loss of my eye. They said, "We are sorry that we cannot congratulate you on your return, as we would like to, but we are not the cause of your misfortune." - "I would do you an injustice," I replied, "to blame you. Only I am to blame." - "If," they said, "it is a comfort to the sorrowful to know that others also suffer, then in us you have this relief from your misfortune. All that has happened to you, we have also endured. We would still be enjoying ourselves if we had not opened the golden door when the princesses were absent. You have not been wiser than we, and you have undergone the same punishment.

We would like to receive you in our company to join us in the penance to which we are obliged and of which we do not know the duration. But the reasons that make this impossible we have already given you. Therefore, depart and go to the court of Baghdad, where you will meet the person who will decide your fate." After they had explained the way to me, I departed with a sad heart and one weeping eye. After God had given me a safe journey, I arrived in Baghdad,

having shaved my beard and become a beggar monk. His name is exalted, but the purpose of all this is still hidden in darkness.

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