

STORY OF THE LABOURER AND THE FLYING CHAIR

In former times there lived at Bagdad a curly-pated avaricious fellow, who worked hard under an herb-seller, and by dint of penuriousness became possessed of fifteen golden dinars. He laboured all day upon half a clove of garlic and a dry crust, and then retired to his lodging, lighted his lamp, ate the remainder of his garlic and crust, placed before him his fifteen dinars, and amused himself with counting them over and over till the middle of the night, when he buried them under his mat, and laid himself down to sleep. This was his constant custom.

One day he said to himself, "I will walk to the caravanserai of Khalil." It happened to be Monday. He sat down in the square, when lo, a broker passed by, carrying a chair of wood, which he offered for sale at seventeen dinars. The labourer offered fourteen, upon which the broker said, "Give me earnest, while I consult the owner." He gave him a dinar, and the broker presently returned and said, "Give me the money." The labourer paid it down, and took the chair to his lodging, where he prepared his supper, lighted his lamp, and ate his dry crust. Then he examined his chair, and sat down upon it, but found no amusement in it, compared to the counting of his beloved dinars. After much inward repentance, he said to himself, "Foolish fellow that I am! I had money which cured my sorrow and grief, and produced me, pleasure and amusement; but, from my cursed folly, I have given it for this wooden chair, which neither profits nor amuses me, but rather disgusts me. I will go to the broker and abuse him, and demand back its value, saying, 'Either tell me the properties of the chair, or give me back my money!'"

Thus he remained fretting and complaining till morning, when he arose and went to the market, where the broker was standing. He began to abuse him, and said, "Tell me the properties of the chair, and in what consists its advantage."

The broker was much alarmed, and replied, "I know not its properties, for I am only a broker, and merely receive the proper commission of a fifth part; but come with me to the owner, and ask him what virtue it contains, for the profit was his."

The broker went with the labourer to the owner of the chair, who was a Jewish magician; and said to him, "Tell us wherein is the advantage of the chair, or give back the money."

The Jew replied, "The property of the chair is this. Whoever sits in it must take a green switch in his hand, and strike upon it, commanding it to convey him wherever he chooses, and it will do so in an instant."

When the labourer heard this, he said, "I have been wishing for such a curiosity as this all my life;" and ran as fast as he could to his lodging. When night came, he seated himself in his chair, struck it with a green switch, as directed,

and said, "Convey me to the terrace of the Sultan's palace." Instantly the chair ascended to the heavens, until he heard the angels singing their praises to God in the Milky Way. Then it descended gradually, until it alighted on the terrace of the king's palace.

The labourer descended from the terrace into a court, through a window of which he saw a light, and finding the door of the apartment open, he entered. Here he beheld the king's daughter lying upon a divan, and appearing as beautiful as the full moon. He approached, and kissed her hands, upon which she started up in terror, and saw the labourer, a tall and brawny fellow, standing before her with a drawn dagger in his hand.

She cried out, "Who are you?" And the labourer answered, "I am Azrael, the angel of death, and am come to take your soul, and those of your father and mother, and of all the viziers and generals."

When the princess heard this, she shook with fear, her hair stood on end, and she exclaimed, "Alas, alas, for what crime hast thou come so suddenly upon us?"

He replied, "It is solely on thy account, for love of thee; but if thy father will grant my request, I will spare thee and all their lives."

"Let me know thy wishes," returned the princess, "for my father would gratify a thousand, rather than die."

The labourer then cried out, "If thy father will marry me to thee, I will spare all your lives; but if not, I will seize thy soul, and the souls of thy father and motherland of all the nobles, viziers, and generals in a single day."

The princess promised compliance, upon which he returned to his chair, struck it with the switch, and said, "Convey me to my own house." It ascended as before to the sky, and the princess viewed his departure with astonishment, and believed that he was really Azrael, the angel of death. She went to her mother, and informed her of what he had said. The queen related the adventure to the Sultan, who consulted his viziers, and told them of the threats of Azrael, and of his demand of the princess in marriage. The viziers exclaimed, "Save us, save us; and if you make Azrael your son-in-law, the sovereigns of the world will bow to your authority." The Sultan then sent for the Kadi and witnesses, and immediately executed the deed of marriage for his daughter to Azrael, the angel of death.

On the following night the labourer ascended in his chair, and repaired to the princess's apartment, when she showed him the marriage deed, and said, "When shall we celebrate the nuptials?"

Azrael replied, "I will not appear during the preliminary festivities, nor until the evening of the wedding, which shall be on Friday, so hasten the preparations."

Having said this he departed, and ascended in his chair in sight of the princess till the height concealed him from view. She now informed her parents of the pleasure of Azrael not to appear till the wedding night, and the Sultan commanded the nuptial festivities to be prepared.

While the usual ceremonies were going on at the palace, the artful labourer

employed a carpenter to fix a wooden canopy over his chair, in the form of a dome, which he covered over with stripes of green yellow and red silk, and placed lanterns all over it, in which he could fix candles. He then put on a green vest, and a crown set with pearls and diamonds, which he had stolen from the palace of the Sultan.

On the appointed evening, the labourer sat down in his chair, arranged his candles, and took with him a quantity of sulphur. Then he commanded the chair to ascend, and to descend gradually into the court of the palace, where they were celebrating the nuptial ceremonies. The chair rose swiftly to such a height that the labourer could hear the angels praising God. Then he lighted the candles in the lanterns, and gently descended. The Sultan, the viziers, the great officers of state, and the whole assembly now beheld Azrael, the angel of death, descending from the sky in his green vest; and flashes of light, caused by the sulphur, darted from the illuminated chair.

The Sultan rose out of respect, and the nobles and viziers bowed down, and said, "May this good fortune and pre-eminence be auspicious to our sovereign!" Azrael now alighted in the midst of the assembly, when the Sultan and all present prostrated themselves before him. He commanded them to depart, and rising in his machine, retired to the apartment of the princess. He remained with her in the utmost bliss, forgot the garden of the herb-seller, and his mean lodging, and did not imagine that anything might happen to disturb his felicity.

Some days after this, a cook-maid, looking for something to light her fire on the terrace of the palace, found the labourer's chair, which she took away and converted into fuel. At length recollecting the machine, he wished to remove it into the palace for safety, but on searching the terrace, could not find it, upon which, in the extravagance of his grief, he tore his beard, cursed his stars, and scattered dust upon his head.

The princess observing his conduct, said, "What has happened to my lord? If I have displeased him, let him pardon me."

The labourer roughly inquired, "Who has taken away my chair, and everything belonging to it?"

The princess replied, "I do not know;" and immediately inquired after it, when the cook confessed, saying, "I broke it to pieces and burnt it, but I did not know that it belonged to Azrael, the angel of death." Upon this, the princess brought a chair of gold, set with pearls and precious stones, from her father, and said, "Accept this in the place of yours, which is irrecoverable."

But her husband was not to be pacified, and exclaimed angrily, "Do you think that I value an earthly chair? Mine was a heavenly one." He continued to storm; the princess was terrified, and the unfortunate cook was punished.

The anger of the labourer, however, only proceeded from fear of his own safety, for he had observed some of the princess's attendants who knew him looking at him curiously; and he feared that his real character would be discovered. Indeed, they

had already informed the viziers of their suspicions in regard to Azrael, the angel of death. He now saw no resource but to creep out of the palace by stealth under cover of the night, and to return to his former lodging, which he reached in safety. He locked his door, and wept and lamented over his lost grandeur, till he was near perishing with hunger and thirst, and the fear of being discovered.

While he was in this situation, suddenly his room shook, the walls opened, and a monstrous genius appeared, whose feet reached to the depth of the earth, and his head to the clouds. At the sight of him the labourer shook in his clothes, and said, "Alas, my death is inevitable!"

The genius exclaimed, "Knowest thou me? I will destroy thee; but choose what death thou wilt die."

The labourer said in a faint voice, "My lord, who art thou?"

The genius replied, "I am the servant of that chair which conducted thee to such glory, dignity and honour; for all which thy return was to expose me to the burning sun and the wind, till they took the chair and burnt it in the fire."

When the labourer heard these words he started up; but immediately knelt down and kissed the feet of the genius, saying, "Forgive me, my lord; pardon me, O my master, and God will also forgive thee. It is true that if thou shouldst put me to death, I am deserving of it; and death would be more pleasing to me than disgrace, after I have called myself Azrael, the angel of death. I dread the vengeance of the Sultan, and I am enraptured with my wife; but I am in the power of God and of myself."

When the genius heard this speech, and beheld the distress of the labourer, he was moved with compassion, and gave him a cap and a ring, saying, "Take care of these, and do not lose them, or thy life will be taken away, in whatever country thou mayst be."

The labourer took them, and said, "My lord, what are their properties?"

The genius replied, "When thou puttest the cap upon thy head, thou wilt be invisible to all eyes; and as for the ring, when distress shall attend thee, press it, and I will come to thee instantly, and execute all thy commands."

The labourer expressed his thanks, and kissed the hands of the genius, who then vanished from his sight, leaving the labourer, whom he found in such distress, highly delighted with his good fortune.

When morning broke, the labourer put on his cap, and walked through the most frequented streets, but no one saw him or spoke to him. At this he was much pleased, and went on to the Sultan's palace, into which he passed unseen. He passed through all the apartments, till he reached those of his wife who was sitting alone, but could not perceive him till he pulled off his cap, when she ran to him in great joy, kissed his hands and feet, and embraced him, saying, "Where has my lord and master been during his absence? Alas, my lord!"

He replied in the character of Azrael, the angel of death, "I was employed last night in taking the souls of a thousand men."

The princess said, "How hadst thou such power?" And he answered, "I was

assisted by my children." She then said, "Surely, my lord, you must be weary and hungry with such labour," to which he assented. Then she set before him cordials of various sorts, which he drank greedily, and she told him the names of each. Next she offered him various kinds of meats, of which he ate till he was satisfied. The princess then brought out wines, and he drank till his spirits were perfectly recovered; after which they retired to rest.

The labourer remained for some days happy with his wife, when one day when the Sultan was sitting with his viziers, they conversed on various subjects, and at length began to discuss the marriage of the princess. Some of the attendants of the princess, who had seen the labourer at the herb-seller's, and knew him, had informed the viziers of their suspicions; and the latter said to the Sultan, "It has been reported to us that your Majesty's son-in-law is not Azrael, the angel of death, but a gardener's labourer, which, if true, is a disgrace to the dignity of monarchs." The Sultan answered, "I cannot believe this without proof;" upon which the viziers returned, "If you desire proof of our suspicions, it is now the season of winter: require of him some fresh apples, and if he fulfils your request, we shall be convinced that he is Azrael, and that dishonour will not attend you among sovereigns."

The Sultan then went to his daughter, and said, "I am indisposed, and the physicians have prescribed for me some fresh apples, as the only medicine that can remove my disorder; and I therefore request that Azrael will procure for me four sorts of apples."

She replied, "Most willingly," and immediately informed her husband, who said, "To hear is to obey; but I am ashamed of so small a matter." Upon this the princess retired to inform her father that his request should be gratified.

The labourer now pressed his ring, and the genius appeared, saying, "What dost thou want?"

The labourer replied, "I want nothing but some fresh apples."

The genius disappeared for an instant, and then returned with a large cloth full of apples of every sort, and of different degrees of ripeness. A third part were yellow, a third part red, and a third part white. The genius said to the labourer, "Canst thou conceive how far I have travelled for these apples?" To which he replied, "No." The genius said, "These apples grow in the country of the genii, upon trees which are not bare of fruit the whole year round;" and having said this, he disappeared.

At this instant the princess returned from visiting her father, and beheld before her husband a great quantity of apples, of such beautiful sorts as she had never before seen; upon which she said, "My father only requested a few, and here is a camel's load!" Then she fell down and kissed her husband's hands and feet, and sent for the Sultan, before whom she strewed the apples. When he saw them he was astonished, and said to the husband, "I have reigned in my kingdom forty years, and apples have been constantly brought me from Syria; but I have never beheld such as these."

Then he thanked his son and daughter, and taking up as much of the fruit as he was able to carry, went into his hall of audience, and said to the viziers, "Behold these apples! Have you ever seen the like during your whole lives?"

The viziers were confounded, and said to the Sultan, "If your daughter's husband was not possessed of supernatural power, he could not have accomplished this matter."

When the Sultan heard this, he was exceedingly rejoiced.

Not long after this, the Sultan wished to amuse himself, and went into the streets of the capital in the disguise of a Persian merchant. He walked to the caravanserai of Khalil, and sat down in one of the shops, when a broker passed with a female slave, crying,

"Who will buy the moon of her age? Who will buy a resplendent sun? Who will purchase a treasure for treasure?"

The merchants now gathered round the broker, who uncovered the face of the slave, and the place became illuminated with the splendour of her beauty, The Sultan instantly fell in love with her. When the merchants began to bid at two hundred dinars, and did not stop till they had offered seven hundred, the sultan at once bid a thousand, and ten dinars as a commission to the broker, which was accepted.

The Sultan conveyed the beautiful slave to the palace, and found her in every way accomplished. She suddenly took out a purse of brocade, from which she poured a hundred and twenty small pieces of ivory and ebony, which she fitted together to form a lute. Then she fixed the strings, and taking some thing very small from her pocket, struck with it upon the lute in twenty-four different modulations. The Sultan was astonished, and was so enraptured with her skill and the melody of her voice that he gave himself up entirely to her society.

It happened one night that the prince of the red genii, who was celebrating the nuptials of his son, and had collected all the requisites for festivity on the occasion, was soaring in the air, when he heard the sound of the beautiful slave's voice, which charmed him. He entered the palace, and remained there invisible, until all were asleep, when he took up the slave in his arms, flew with her to his own palace, and placed her among the most honourable guests assembled to celebrate the marriage. Then he gently awoke her, and entreated her to sing and play, which she did so exquisitely as to charm and astonish all the genii.

Among the guests was a monstrous afreet, who fell so deeply in love with her that he resolved to possess her, and while the sultan of the red genii and the guests were engaged in the bridal procession, he suddenly seized the slave in his arms, flew away, and then descended to his cave in the Seventh Earth.

When the Sultan awoke, and missed the beautiful slave, he eagerly inquired after her, but no one could give him any intelligence, upon which he tore his beard, rent his clothes, wept bitterly, and remained in his chamber without attending the divan.

When the troops came to pay their respects, and missed him, they said, "He

is dead, and they have concealed his death from us;" upon which they demanded their arrears of pay, and began to be riotous in the city.

The chief vizier now requested an audience, and being admitted to the presence of the Sultan, kissed the ground before him, and said, "Your majesty is given up to grief, while the troops are preparing to plunder the city. You remain concealed, and they suppose you to be dead. If this report should reach your enemies, they will march against your capital, and take it. Rise up then, compose your countenance, and show yourself to the troops, that they may be satisfied."

Upon this, the Sultan repaired to the divan, and the generals and troops attended. They paid their obeisance, their minds were appeased at the sight of the Sultan, and they withdrew quietly.

The vizier now addressed the Sultan, saying, "What can be the cause of your majesty's excessive sorrow?"

The Sultan then informed the vizier how he had lost the beautiful slave, and had been unable to obtain any intelligence concerning her.

Upon this the vizier said to himself, "What have I to do but to draw the pretended Azrael into this misfortune? If he cannot repair it, I shall easily compass his ruin." He therefore said to the Sultan: "Why should you grieve, my lord, when Azrael is so near you? If he has taken her life he will inform you, or else he will doubtless be able to tell you if she is concealed anywhere."

The Sultan then sent for his daughter, and requested her to ask her husband about the beautiful slave, which she readily promised, and immediately went and informed Azrael of the loss. He replied, "To hear is to obey;" and the princess returned to her father.

During her absence, he pressed the ring, and the genius appeared, and said, "What are your commands?" He informed him of the loss of the slave, and his wish to recover her, when the genius promised to find her, and vanished.

The genius immediately consulted his wife, who informed him that the king of the red genii had carried her away during the celebration of his son's nuptials. He then repaired to the Red King; but he assured him that he had lost her, and could not find her. At length the genius of the chair discovered that the afreet had carried her away to the Seventh Earth. When the Red King heard of it, he attended him with his followers to the afreet's cave, where they found the slave bound with four chains.

The genius of the chair instantly unbound her, took her on his back, and mounted into the air, where he encountered and slew the afreet after an obstinate contest. He then carried her to the labourer, who thanked him for his kindness, and took her to the princess.

When the princess saw the slave, she was overjoyed, and communicated the glad tidings to her father, who hastened to Azrael, kissed his feet, and blessed him for his assistance. He then retired to his own apartments with his beloved mistress, where he secluded himself for some time without admitting any one to his presence.

When the Sultan's neglect of public business became known abroad, a hostile prince suddenly invaded the country, and met with no opposition until he encamped under the walls of the capital, in which disorder and confusion arose.

The vizier now informed the Sultan of the critical position of his affairs, and when he asked his advice, replied, "Be not alarmed, O king, for is not Azrael, the angel of death, your son-in-law? He need only take the life of the invading prince, and his army will instantly disperse."

The Sultan replied, "You have spoken truly," and immediately went to his daughter, to whom he said, "If your husband will free me from this enemy, I will resign the crown to him, and become his subject."

The princess informed her husband, who said, "To hear is to obey. Let the Sultan set his mind at ease, and, God willing, he shall see what will happen."

The labourer waited till evening, when he put on his cap, pressed his ring, and when the genius appeared, demanding his pleasure, he asked for armour and weapons. The genius vanished for a moment, and then returned with armour as strong as rock, and weapons to match. Azrael put them on; and attended by the genius, who was also invisible, proceeded to the invader's camp about midnight, where they dealt their blows so powerfully on all sides, that the sleeping awakened in consternation, and those who were awake stood up in alarm, but could not see from whence the attack came. At length the army fled in confusion; brother forgot brother, and the son forgot his father; all were anxious only for their own safety, and slew one another. Nothing was seen but flying heads, falling horses, and expiring bodies. Those who preferred safety, fled, and those who stood their ground, were slain.

The labourer, attended by the genius, then entered the tent of the invading prince, whom he found with his slaves in the utmost alarm at the surprise of the camp. As he was invisible, he seized the prince in his arms, and threw him into a great chest which stood in the tent, and locked him up, while the genius disarmed the slaves. Next he examined the tents, and found them full of jewels and valuable effects, which he loaded upon camels and porters belonging to the prince. Lastly, he collected all the horses, tents, and camp equipages, in which the genius assisted him.

When the morning dawned, lo, the plain was cleared from the enemy, and the Sultan ventured from the city to look for his son-in-law, whom he soon perceived advancing with his spoils; horses, mules, camels, and porters all heavily laden, and obedient to his orders. The Sultan was surprised to see only Azrael among such a convoy, for the genius was invisible. He exulted beyond measure, and with his viziers, nobles, and generals, bowed down and kissed the ground before his son-in-law, conducted him respectfully into the city, as if he had been one of his slaves, and seated him upon the throne of his kingdom.

Azrael now ordered the captive prince to be taken from the chest, in which he was nearly stifled. Being rubbed with vinegar and perfumes, he recovered, but only to find himself in the hands of his enemies. The Sultan commanded him to

be confined in one of the towers of the palace, and ordered rejoicings to be made throughout his dominions. He then gave himself up entirely to the company of his fair slave, and resigned his kingdom to his son-in-law, until death, the destroyer of all, divided them.



[Previous](#) 

[Home](#)

 [Next](#)