

## *Shaitan the Devil and his Forty Daughters*

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THERE once lived a man, Safa by name, who tired of his dull life and decided to see the world. So he bade farewell to his wife and family and set off in search of adventure.

Whether he was long in his search I cannot tell you, but one day he arrived at the shores of a great lake just in time to see a beautiful white swan fall into the clutches of a black witch. However much the swan screeched and flapped its wings, it could not tear itself free.

Without a thought to himself, Safa dashed forward with a loud shout, putting the witch to flight. Of course the swan was more grateful than words can tell; he had saved its life and now it would reward him.

'Beyond this lake, beyond the seven hills,' it said, 'live my sisters. Sit upon my back and we shall fly to them.'

Safa sat astride the white swan and off they flew over the lake and the seven hills until they came to the swan's sisters — who were overjoyed to welcome the man who had saved their dear sister. They treated him most kindly, gave him honey and kumis and presented him with a small box.

'Take this small token as a reward,' the eldest sister said. 'But mark my words well: do not open it before you reach home. If you do, you will regret it most bitterly.'

After he had left the sisters, Safa was overcome by a burning curiosity about the box; and it grew stronger and stronger.

'What can be in this box that I must not open it on my way?' he wondered.

He journeyed on and on but, in the end, he could not contain his curiosity any longer; he halted in a forest glade and opened the box...

Glory be to Allah!

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In an instant there appeared in the glade a market stall selling ribbons and jade, cushions and carpets, jewels and porcelain. And from every side came merchants hurrying to the stall, bargaining for the merchandise and paying Safa good coin. Soon he had so much money that he had nowhere to put it all!

At first he was overjoyed at the stall and the wares and the money. But he could hardly stand forever trading in the forest. And when he tried to shut the box, he could not. More and more merchants arrived and more and more money poured through his hands. Finally he sank to his knees, cursing himself for disobeying the white swan. Why had he opened the box before reaching home?

Even as he cursed his weakness, from out of nowhere appeared an old, old man with a long grey beard.

'Why do you grieve so, my son?' he asked Safa.

Safa explained.

'Perhaps I can help you,' said the old grey-beard. 'But I make one condition: you must give me what you have at home about which you know nothing.'

Safa was puzzled: what could he have at home about which he knew nothing? Though he pondered long and hard, he could think of no answer to the riddle.

'All right,' he said. 'I shall give you that of which you speak. Only do help me quickly.'

'Mind your promise,' warned the old man.

With these words, the old man shut the lid of the box ... and all the trinkets and jade, the merchants and money, the stall and all the wares disappeared inside.

Thankfully Safa took up his box and continued on his way; he had wanted to thank the old grey-beard, but the man had vanished as though the earth had swallowed him up.

In truth the old man was none other than Shaitan the Devil! And the promise he had extracted from Safa was one he would bitterly regret.

When Safa arrived home, his wife met him joyfully; for, while Safa

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had been on his journey, his wife had borne him a son – a strong and handsome lad, the image of his bold father. At once Safa realized what he had done: with tears of anguish, he told his wife of the vow he had made to the old man in the forest.

Yet, as the years went by, and the boy grew up, they forgot the pact with the Devil ... until one day old grey-beard appeared before Safa.

‘Remember your vow, Safa,’ he said. ‘It’s time for you to part with your son.’

Next day Safa told his son about the magic box, of the old man and of his promise.

‘Never mind, Ata,’ said his son. ‘Since you’ve given your word you must keep it.’

So the youthful jigit took leave of his father and mother and went on his way to keep the appointment with the Devil. When he reached the lakeside, he sat down on a rock to await his fate. All of a sudden he heard a fluttering of wings above him, and down to the lake flew a flock of white swans. Not noticing the young man, they settled on the water and began to frisk and play in the shallows near the shore. Thinking of catching one of these graceful birds, the jigit crept towards them and seized one in his strong arms; at once the other birds flew off in alarm, leaving behind their poor trapped sister – the youngest and most graceful of the swans.

To the jigit’s surprise, the swan addressed him in a human voice, ‘Please let me go; if you do I shall help you.’

She shook her wings and turned into a beautiful maiden. Addressing the jigit once more, she said:

‘I am the youngest daughter of Shaitan to whom your father made his vow. My father lives on human flesh and means to eat you; but you can be saved if you obey my words. The moment Shaitan goes to eat you, ask at once for some work ...’

With that the lovely swan girl waved her graceful arms and soared up to the heavens.

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No sooner was she out of sight than the terrible Shaitan himself appeared at the lakeside to claim his victim. Seeing the jigit, he snatched him up and carried him off to his palace in the depths of the forest. He was about to devour him when the boy, recalling the swan girl's advice, spoke up boldly:

'Give me some work to do; I'm not ready to be eaten yet.'

'All right,' said Shaitan grudgingly. 'I'll give you work: you shall chop down this forest in one night and arrange logs in bundles ready for sale. When you've sold them all, buy rye with the money and sow it on the cleared ground. That same night, you must gather in the harvest, grind the corn and store the hay in my barn. If you fail, you will be eaten immediately!'

Shaitan left the jigit wondering how he would set about his impossible task. However, towards evening he was visited by the swan girl, daughter of Shaitan. Hearing of the task her father had set, she said:

'Do not grieve, my friend; I'll see to it myself. Meanwhile lie down and sleep soundly till morning.'

As soon as the jigit was asleep, the swan girl went out onto the porch and whistled softly; at her call all the jinns of the forest gathered about her ready to do her bidding.

To each the girl gave orders and it was not long before all the work was done – exactly as her father had commanded. The instant the cocks began to crow the jinns scattered as if they had never been.

When the sun was already up, Shaitan arrived and saw to his amazement that all was indeed done as he had ordered.

'Clearly this is no ordinary mortal!' he thought. And, addressing the boy, he said, 'You have passed your first test. Now you shall have a second: in one night you must carry the water from one lake to another in a sieve!'

As soon as Shaitan had gone the swan girl appeared and asked what it was her father had asked. When she learned of the new task, she again summoned all the jinns of the forest and gave each his orders to fetch the water. The sun had not yet risen when all the water had been taken

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from one lake to another; the cocks crowed and the jinns vanished — the work complete.

Shaitan was amazed and very angry. But he now thought of something the lad could never do: bridle and tame a certain stallion from his stables.

‘Should you succeed in this impossible task,’ he said, ‘you shall wed my youngest daughter.’

Once the Devil had gone, the jigit hurried to meet the swan girl and tell her of his new task.

‘This is much harder,’ she said. ‘My father will turn himself into that untamed stallion. But there is one way you may bridle him: first you must get the blacksmith to make you a forty-ton iron lash and the tanner to make you a forty-ton leather bridle.’

When the hammer lash and the leather bridle were ready, the jigit went to the stables and found the untamed stallion of which Shaitan had spoken. Sparks and fire poured from his nostrils, his mane shook like an angry sea and he pounded the ground with his hoofs, letting no one near him.

Keeping out of reach of the stamping hoofs, the jigit quickly darted forward and dealt the stallion a sharp blow with his forty-ton lash. That quietened the steed who no longer kicked his hoofs or tossed his mane. In an instant the jigit had fitted the forty-ton bridle and led him from the stables.

As the jigit sprang upon his back and gave both flanks the heavy lash, the stallion raced forward bucking and twisting, snorting and rearing, trying to throw his rider to the ground and trample upon him. But, no matter what he did, the jigit clung on and would not be unseated.

After a long battle, the stallion had to submit and returned tamely to the stables. The jigit dismounted, locked the stable doors and went to the swan girl to tell her of his success.

‘Tomorrow,’ she said, ‘my father will turn his forty daughters into doves and will ask you to pick me out from among them. You should point to the one that flies nearest to you.’



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On the morrow, as she had said, Shaitan called the jigit to him and pointed to a flock of doves.

'You see those doves,' he said; 'among them is my youngest daughter. If you can pick her out, you will be saved and you may take her as your wife.'

Straining his eyes, the jigit would certainly not have known had not a small white dove flown close to his head. At once he cried:

'There is your youngest daughter! The small white dove.'

Shaitan flew into a rage, guessing that his daughter had told the jigit how to recognize her. Not keeping to the bargain, Shaitan prepared another test for his daughter's hand.

That evening the youngest daughter came to the jigit and told him:

'Tomorrow morning my father will again ask you to find me among my sisters. We shall be playing the kurai for you to dance. And, when my sisters stop to watch you, I shall continue the tune – that is how you will recognize me.'

And so it was; the next day Shaitan called the jigit to him and pointed to his forty daughters.

'Should you pick out my youngest daughter,' he said, 'you shall take her as your wife. But should you fail, then you will pay with your life.'

The forty maidens were all dressed exactly alike and each held a kurai. At a sign from their father, they put the instruments to their lips and began to play.

'Well, jigit,' said Shaitan, 'which of these girls is my youngest daughter?'

But the jigit did not answer; instead he began to dance to the exciting music. All the girls stopped and stared in admiration as he whirled about them – all, that is, save one who continued to play. Stealing a glance at the solitary player, the young jigit continued his dancing and, when the music finally stopped, he went up to the girl and announced triumphantly:

'This is Shaitan's youngest daughter!'

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'You couldn't know that by yourself!' shouted Shaitan in a rage. 'She must have helped you. Now I shall teach you both a lesson!'

Immediately he gave orders for the jigit and his youngest daughter to be thrown into the dungeon. But the daughter was again too smart for her father: during the night she changed herself into a fly and flew out of the dungeon. Then, turning back into a young girl, she ran to the threshing floor and, gathering up two sheaves of corn, took them back to the dungeon. The guard had dozed off and did not notice her bringing the strange bundles into the cell.

Placing the sheaves on the floor of the cell, she covered them with her cloak and spat upon the pile.

'Now, dear friend,' she said, 'we must linger here no longer; it is time for us to flee.'

This time she turned both the jigit and herself into flies and together they flew from the dungeon into the fresh night; then, taking their former shapes, they hastened to make good their escape.

Next day at dawn the executioner went down to the cell to waken the prisoners. Seeing the bundles lying on the dungeon floor, he shouted:

'Hey you! Are you still asleep?'

'Yes, we are still sleeping!' answered the spit on top of the sheaves of corn.

'I shall soon be taking the heads off your shoulders!' called the executioner.

'Yes, we know that well,' came back the voice.

Thus the conversation went for as long as the spit upon the sheaves stayed moist. The executioner kept putting his questions until, after a time, he got no reply – the spit had all dried up.

'What, fallen asleep again, have you?' he shouted. 'Then I'll have to wake you up!'

With these words, he opened the cell door, entered the dungeon and gave the bundle of clothes such a blow with his axe that pieces of hay flew everywhere – making him cough and sneeze. It was only then that he realized he had been tricked! Rushing to Shaitan, he informed him

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that the prisoners had escaped, leaving the two sheaves of corn in their place.

Shaitan was furious; at once he sent his men in pursuit of the fleeing pair. By this time, however, the girl and the jigit had put a great distance between themselves and the palace. But Shaitan's men were soon hard on their heels. Hearing the thunder of horses' hoofs behind her, the girl said:

'Shaitan's men are almost upon us; quick, we must hide!'

And she turned herself into a mosque and the jigit into an old muezzin; so that, when the riders came up, they bowed respectfully and asked the old muezzin:

'Have you seen a girl and a jigit pass this way?'

'No,' replied the muezzin. 'Many years have I served in this mosque, and never have I set eyes on a girl and a jigit.'

Shaitan's men returned to the palace empty-handed and told their master they had come upon nobody but an old muezzin in a mosque. Shaitan fell upon his men in a fury, cursing them for their stupidity.

'Camel dung!' he fumed. 'That muezzin and the mosque were the fugitives you were after! Ride back as fast as the wind, seize that muezzin and smash the mosque.'

But, when the riders arrived at the spot on which the mosque had stood, they discovered no mosque and no muezzin. So they galloped on. The girl and the jigit had taken their former shapes and hurried on their way. As soon as the girl heard the thunder of hoofs, she cried:

'Shaitan's men are behind us once again; quick, we must hide!'

This time she turned the jigit into a shepherd and herself into a flock of sheep; so that, when the men rode up, they were again deceived.

'Hey there, shepherd,' they shouted. 'Did you see a girl and a jigit pass this way?'

'I've tended my flocks here for many years,' replied the old shepherd, 'but I've never set eyes on the girl and young man of whom you speak. They have not passed this way, I assure you.'

Once more the riders had to return unsuccessful to their master. This

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time they reported that ~~they~~ had met no one but an old shepherd tending a flock of sheep. Shaitan was even more angry than before and cursed his men more violently. Then he jumped upon his steed and set off himself in pursuit of the fleeing pair.

By this time the girl and the jigit had taken their former shapes and were running on; but Shaitan was soon on their heels and would surely have caught them had the girl not heard him and realized the danger they were in. In a flash she turned herself into a sea and the jigit into a golden fish. And, as Shaitan rode up to the sea, he cried in triumph:

'I've got you now! You won't escape me this time!'

Plunging into the water, he began to swim after the golden fish. But he did not catch the fish. Neither did he catch his daughter. For the sea dragged him down and down and down . . . and drowned him.

Afterwards the girl and the jigit changed back into human form and rode on Shaitan's steed to the jigit's native aul. How happy his mother and father were to greet their son and his young bride-to-be. Soon they were wed and lived a long life of peace and harmony.

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