

## **The Story of 'Ala al-Din and The Magic Lamp**

**From a translation by Husain Haddawy,**

*The Arabian Nights II*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1995

### **'Ala al-Din is a street urchin in China.**

In a large and rich kingdom of China, there lived a poor tailor named Mustafa. His son, 'Ala al-Din, would spend the whole day playing with street children. When he was old enough to learn a trade, his father took him into his shop and began to show him how to use a needle, but neither sweet talk nor punishment was able to curb 'Ala al-Din's flightiness. Grieved at being unable to inspire responsibility in his son, Mustafa fell ill and died. 'Ala al-Din's mother closed the shop and tried to support herself and her son by spinning cotton. 'Ala al-Din continued his delinquent way of life until he was fifteen years old.

### **A magician from Africa seeks out 'Ala al-Din.**

One day, as 'Ala al-Din was playing with a group of children, an African magician stopped him and asked, "Son, was not your father called Mustafa the tailor?" 'Ala al-Din confirmed this and informed the magician that Mustafa had died. The magician embraced 'Ala al-Din and cried out, "I am your long-lost uncle, and your father was my good brother."

### **The magician brings gifts to 'Ala al-Din and his mother, and takes the boy on a long walk, until they arrive at a mysterious cave.**

Later, the magician arrived with gifts and food, explaining to 'Ala al-Din's mother, "Forty years ago, I left this country. After I traveled the most beautiful cities, I went to Africa where I have since lived." Then he asked 'Ala al-Din, "What do you do? Do you have a profession?"

'Ala al-Din's mother lamented, "His father did all he could to teach him his trade, but failed. I despair of his amounting to anything."

The magician replied, "If you wish, I will establish a shop for you and set you up to live honourably."

Two days later, the magician led 'Ala al-Din through one of the gates of the city, across the open country, to a place between two mountains, and said, "Under this stone there is hidden treasure that will make you richer than the greatest king. Lift the stone up. At the bottom of these steps, you will find three large halls with vessels full of gold and silver. At the end of the third hall, there is a garden planted with fine trees loaded with fruits. Across the garden, you will find a lighted lamp. Bring the lamp to me. You may gather as many fruits of the garden as you please." The magician drew a ring off his finger and put it on one of 'Ala al-Din's, telling him that it would serve as protection. 'Ala al-Din then went down into the cave in search of the lamp. The cave was full of wonders, but 'Ala al-Din was particularly drawn to the shiny fruits hanging off the trees.

**'Ala al-Din retrieves the lamp, picks some jeweled fruit, and is abandoned by the magician.**

After retrieving the lamp, he stopped in the garden and took several fruits of each colour and kind. Back to the mouth of the cave, the magician was waiting for him impatiently, and insisted that 'Ala al-Din hand him the lamp before coming out of the cave. 'Ala al-Din refused. The magician flew into a terrible rage, and cast a spell to cover the opening of the cave.

**Buried for three days in the cave, 'Ala al-Din is saved by the Jinn of the Ring.**

'Ala al-Din, buried alive, was certain he would die there alone. On the third day of his entrapment, throwing himself on the mercy of Allah, he inadvertently rubbed the ring that the magician had placed on his finger. A jinn, a demon of enormous size and dreadful look, rose before him and asked, "What do you wish?" 'Ala al-Din asked to be set free and immediately the earth opened.

**'Ala al-Din returns home to his mother, who accidentally summons the Jinn of the Lamp.**

After recovering from this ordeal, 'Ala al-Din showed the lamp and the fruits to his mother, and said, "I will sell the lamp, and buy us food." His mother had begun to rub the lamp clean when a hideous demon of gigantic size appeared and asked her with a thundering voice, "What do you wish?"

'Ala al-Din took the lamp and replied, "Bring me something to eat," and the jinn immediately brought 12 covered silver plates full of excellent food.

**'Ala al-Din sees the Princess Bard al-Budur and falls in love with her.**

One day, 'Ala al-Din seized an opportunity to observe Princess Bard al-Budur, who was engaged to be married to the grand vizier's son, at the baths without her veil. Until that moment he had never seen any woman's face except his mother's. In amazed ecstasy, he told his mother, "I have fallen in love with Princess Bard al-Budur. I have decided to ask the king for her hand in marriage."

**The Jinn of the Lamp produces many riches, transforming 'Ala al-Din and his mother; after some travail, 'Ala al-Din wins the princess.**

Ala al-Din's mother was initially astonished by her son's ambition, but, soon enough, with the help of the Jinn of the Lamp, 'Ala al-Din appeared in front of the king, impressing the monarch with his fine clothes, caskets of jewels, and entourage of servants—and boldly asked for the princess' hand.

Wanting his son to marry the princess, however, the grand vizier begged the king not be too easily swayed by 'Ala al-Din's proposal and gift of flawless jewels, and requested that his son be given three months to produce a more impressive gift. However, the king doubted that the vizier's son would present a more valuable gift, and though he granted the vizier's request, he also accepted 'Ala al-Din's proposal.

Two months later, the princess and the vizier's son were married. For two nights following their wedding, 'Ala al-Din commanded the Jinn of the Lamp to transport the bride and bridegroom in their bed to his room, to prevent the consummation of the marriage. Each night, the vizier's son was rendered helpless and locked in a small bathroom, while 'Ala al-Din slept beside the princess with his back turned to her and a sword between them to protect her honor. Each morning, the bride and bridegroom were returned home at daybreak. Because the princess and vizier's son could neither explain nor endure the strange events, the marriage was dissolved.

On the third month, the king agreed to allow the princess to marry 'Ala al-Din if he could produce "40 large basins of heavy gold, full to the brim of jeweled fruit, and carried by a similar number of black slaves, led by forty white slaves, young, handsome, well-built, and magnificently dressed." So, 'Ala al-Din took the lamp, rubbed it, and asked the demon to fulfill the king's demands.

**The Jinn of the Lamp builds a palace overnight, and the princess and 'Ala al-Din live happily together.**

'Ala al-Din and Princess Bard al-Budur were married and lived happily in a magnificent palace, built by the Jinn of the Lamp, on the grounds of the king's palace. 'Ala al-Din, by his affable manner and his generosity, won the affection of the people and was more beloved than the king himself.

**The magician performs geomancy and discovers that 'Ala al-Din is still alive. Through trickery the magician regains the magic lamp and transports the princess and the palace to Africa.**

The African magician, who had unintentionally given 'Ala al-Din the means of raising himself to a high fortune, discovered through geomancy that instead of having died in the cave, 'Ala al-Din was a prince, living in great splendour, married to a princess, respected and honoured. He burned red with rage, and set out to seize 'Ala al-Din's lamp.

It was 'Ala al-Din's misfortune that he had gone hunting for eight days just then, because the next day the magician went to 'Ala al-Din's palace and began to cry out: "New lamps for old! Who would like to exchange old lamps for new ones?" and Princess Bard al-Budur, who was not aware of the great value of the lamp, made the trade. The magician commanded the Jinn of the Lamp to transport him immediately, along with 'Ala al-din's palace and all the people in it, to Africa.

**The king threatens to behead 'Ala al-Din, giving him 40 days to find the palace. Suicidal, 'Ala al-Din accidentally summons the Jinn of the Ring and is transported to his lost palace and beloved.**

The king was shocked to find his daughter and her palace missing. He threatened to cut off 'Ala al-Din's head in 40 days if the princess was not returned to him. 'Ala al-Din was overcome by despair and prepared to kill himself. While bathing he rubbed the magic ring, calling forth its Jinn. In desperation, he asked

the demon to save his life a second time, either by telling him where the palace was or by transporting it instantly back to its former location.

The Jinn of the Ring replied, "What you demand of me is not in my power, for I am only the slave of the ring. You must address yourself to the slave of the lamp."

So, 'Ala al-Din asked only to be transported to his palace, and was taken to Africa, where he and his princess devised a plan to poison the magician, retrieve the lamp, and return home to China.

### **Together 'Ala al-Din and his princess outsmart the magician, kill him, and summon the Jinn of the Lamp to return them to China.**

Soon after the magician drank a glass of poisonous wine that Princess Bard al-Budur prepared for him, he fell on his back, lifeless. 'Ala al-Din went to the body of the magician, opened his vest, pulled out the lamp, rubbed it, and the demon appeared.

'Ala al-Din commanded the Jinn of the Lamp to carry the entire palace back to the same spot from where it had vanished. Immediately the palace was transported to China.

The next morning the king rejoiced that 'Ala al-Din's palace was returned. He went to the palace and saw the magician's corpse. Thus 'Ala al-Din escaped for the second time the almost inevitable danger of losing his life. But this was not the last, for he was to face death a third time.

### **The magician's brother attempts to avenge his death.**

When the magician's younger brother learned of the magician's sad fate, he resolved to avenge his death and set out to China, where he heard of a virtuous, holy woman called Fatima, who could perform wonders and miracles, but had withdrawn from the world. One night, he went to the holy woman, overpowered her, stole her clothing, and then strangled her to death.

'Ala al-Din was away hunting for six days when the princess made the false Fatima's acquaintance and invited "her" to live in the palace. Having earned the princess's trust, and knowing that this advice would lead to 'Ala al-Din's demise, the magician said, "If this palace had a Rukh's egg suspended from the middle of the dome, it would be the wonder of the universe."

Finding his princess disenchanted upon his return, her husband acted quickly to restore her cheer. 'Ala al-Din rubbed his lamp and said, "Demon, there lacks a Rukh's egg to be suspended from the middle of the dome... repair this deficiency."

The demon replied with a voice that would make any man tremble, "Is it not enough that I and my companions have done everything for you, but you ask me, out of an unparalleled ingratitude, to bring you my master and to hang him from the middle of the dome? This attempt deserves that you, your wife, and your palace be immediately reduced to ashes. You are lucky that the request does not come directly from you, but instead from the brother of the magician whom you exterminated as he deserved. He is in your palace, disguised in the clothes of

Fatima the holy woman, whom he strangled. His intention is to kill you, therefore you should take care of yourself.”

Without hesitation, 'Ala al-Din returned to the princess's apartment and said that he was overcome with a headache. The princess summoned the false Fatima, and when “she” arrived, 'Ala al-Din asked for healing prayers. The disguised magician advanced toward 'Ala al-Din with a dagger hidden in his gown, and as he drew it, 'Ala al-Din seized his hand, pierced him in the heart with his own dagger, and threw him on the floor, exposing the brother's disguise.

**The king dies and 'Ala al-Din assumes the throne.**

A few years later, the king died in very old age; as he did not have any male children, Princess Bard al-Budur succeeded him and transferred the supreme power to 'Ala al-Din. They reigned together for many years and left behind an illustrious progeny.

*Condensed by Rhonda Robbins and Charlotte Stoudt*