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# THE NEW DAY

An Arabian Play

*By*

William T. Demarest

1918







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WM. T. DEMAREST, MAMARONECK, NEW YORK

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no 1

# THE NEW DAY

An Arabian Play in One Act and Two Scenes

BY WILLIAM T. DEMAREST

## Cast of Characters:

*Harith*—A Bedouin Sheikh.

*Faithala*—His Wife.

*Musalla*—His Daughter.

*Suzanne*—His Younger Daughter.

*Tarafa*—His Son.

*Cecil Roberts*—British Captain.

*Tom*—British Private.

*Hassein*—King of Hasa.

SCENE: A Bedouin camp in the Kingdom of Hasa, Arabia. A suitable stage setting may be provided by hanging the entire stage with drapery of a light, neutral tint. The entrance of a tent may be formed by looping back the drapery R. U., a few tall palms being grouped nearby. One other entrance is required, L. U., which may remain closed by the drapery except when characters are passing through, when it can be held back. A number of large cushions with bright colored covers lie near the entrance to tent.

LIGHTS: At the beginning of the play the light should be yellow from L, gradually changing to reddish to give the effect of sunset. At the beginning of the second scene blue light should be thrown from R, to give the effect of moonlight, with a red glow still showing from L. Shortly after the entrance of the King (Scene 2), the red light should die out, leaving the stage lighted only by moonlight. Within the tent a dim red light should be seen throughout the play.

TIME: A few years hence. Late afternoon and early evening.

## SCENE ONE

The curtain discloses Faithala seated on cushions at the entrance to the tent, sewing on a piece of highly colored embroidery. Occasionally she looks up from her work and off L, as though expecting someone. There should be a pause of about ten seconds after curtain rises before the first speech.

MUSALLA (*off stage R*):

Is it not time my father had returned?

FAITHALA:

He said he would be gone at most five days  
From his departure. Yet I see him not,  
Although the fifth sun nears the desert sands.  
(*Shades her eyes with hands and looks to L.*)

MUSALLA (*off stage R*):

Perhaps our King has bade him stay and help  
To drive away the Turks. My brother too.

FAITHALA:

The Turks have all been driven out or killed.  
That task is finished, and 'tis Allah's will  
That they shall nevermore harass our land.

MUSALLA (*enters R*):

Some say the Turkish tyrants still would rule  
Except for aid the British soldiers gave.

(*Seats herself facing audience, near Faithala*)

FAITHALA:

I've heard thy father say that it is so.  
He and his tribesmen fought for many years  
To free our land from Turkish greed and crime  
With no avail, until the English came,  
Sent here by Allah, to release our bonds.  
Thus did we realize the dreams of years.



MUSALLA (*after a perceptible pause*):

I like the English; when I was at school  
I sometimes saw them—

FAITHALA (*sharply interrupting*):

When? How saw you them?

MUSALLA (*Innocently*):

I saw them from the window most of all;  
But one day there came one into the school;  
I liked him much.

FAITHALA (*much concerned*):

Did you have talk with him?  
I knew there would be danger in that school,  
'Twas not my wish that you should go at all.

MUSALLA:

What danger, mother? I do know of none.  
I spoke not to the officer, nor he  
To me, although I heard him talking to  
The teacher, and I liked his words and voice.  
He was a very noble, handsome man—  
I like to think of him.

FAITHALA (*firmly*):

That thou must not.  
The English are all unbelievers, we  
Have naught to do with them, nor they with us.

MUSALLA:

You said that Allah sent them to our aid.

FAITHALA:

We may not judge the ways of God. To work  
His will He chooseth many instruments;  
But infidels are not to be our friends.  
(*Again looks L with shaded eyes*)  
Thy father comes. Prepare his evening meal.  
(*Musalla rises and exit R. Faithala resumes sewing, showing agitation. After a moment Suzanne appears in tent entrance looking off L.*)

SUZANNE:

Why don't they hurry? They are very slow.

FAITHALA:

Patience; they'll soon be here.

SUZANNE (*petulantly*):

I wish I might  
See something of the world; it's stupid here.

FAITHALA:

Thy father saith the world's a sorry place;  
That there's no rest nor peace within its bounds.  
It's quiet here; learn then to be content.

SUZANNE (*impatiently*):

But thou dost plan to send me to the school?

FAITHALA:

Perhaps; that's for thy father to decide.

SUZANNE:

He said that I might go.

FAITHALA:

That was his mind,  
But I have that to tell him that may change  
His plan. Thou dost not need to go to school;  
I never went; there were no schools for girls  
When I was young, and yet my life's been blessed.  
I have a husband kind, and all I wish;  
Although I would I had another son.

SUZANNE:

Do not thy daughters serve? Musalla says  
That women rank in honor as do men  
In other lands. I wonder why not here.

HARITH (*off stage L*):

Do thou care for the camels and the goods  
Tarafa, I'll go forward to the tent.

(*Harith enters L.*)

FAITHALA (*rising and going to meet him*):

Thankful I am that Allah sent thee back,  
For I have longed and hoped for thy return.  
Come, sit and rest. Musalla will bring food.

(*Harith seats himself near tent. Faithala stands near him.*)

HARITH:

I've had a long and weary journey, but  
Thy greeting gives me rest.

(*Enthusiastically*) I saw our King...  
Hasa is blessed by him; courteous, gentle,  
Just and strong; a man to honor and revere.  
A friend to all, the enemy of none.

Well doth the poet say that this our land's

A Kingdom ruled by one so wise,  
So careful of the rights of man

To live and prosper there,  
He makes new laws, without disguise,  
Annulling Turkish bribes and lies;  
Casting injustice under ban;  
Striving by rules Mohammedan  
To banish wrong and care.

Along the cities' narrow ways,  
By sandy trails through deserts drear,  
Man once more lifts his head.

In mosques each bows low as he prays,  
Thankful that now have come the days  
Of independence from the fear  
That Turkish hands, with habits queer,  
Shall steal his daily bread.

FAITHALA:

Thou always saidst that Hassein was a man  
His followers could trust. Now he is King  
Who always was thy friend. Allah is great.

(*Suzanne has been drawing near to Harith as though inviting attention. Harith now has her sit beside him and puts his arm about her.*)

HARITH :

How hath our desert flower fared while we  
Have been away? Hath she been lonely too?

SUZANNE :

It seemed a long time since you went. I wish  
That I might travel far across the sand  
To see our King and the great city where  
He dwells.

HARITH :

The city's no fit place for thee  
Or any desert flower; it lacks the space,  
The freedom of the sands, and thou wouldst die  
For want of air and light. The King himself  
Would not have power to save thee from that fate.

SUZANNE :

And yet the city must have many girls.

HARITH :

It's true that thousands dwell there, but they're not  
Like desert flowers. They know not how to live  
For they were born to darkness and to crowds.

FAITHALA :

Suzanne hath told me that she longs for change.  
Some discontent hath crept within her heart.  
Perchance her sister tells her foolish tales  
She learned at school.

HARITH :

It may be so,  
And yet I cannot think the trouble deep  
Or serious; perhaps it's jealousy  
Or lonesomeness, because Tarafa's been  
Abroad with me, while she needs bide at home;  
But here he comes.

*(Enter Tarafa L, exit Faithala R.)*

HARITH :

Do thou come hither, son,  
And tell thy sister of thy wanderings,  
Across the sands and to the holy town.  
She hath been lonesome while thou wert away.

SUZANNE (*springs up and runs to Tarafa, embraces him*) :  
I have been very sad, for that I thought  
You would have stayed to help the King drive forth  
The wicked Turks. Musalla told me so.

TARAF A :

Had the King need of me I would have stayed.

SUZANNE (*playfully*) :

But you are back, and we can race across  
The sand and climb the date palms as we used  
To do. Let's have a merry time right now  
So that I may forget my lonesomeness.

TARAF A (*pushing Suzanne away and speaking with dig-  
nity*) :

This is no time for men to play, and I  
Am now a man.

SUZANNE (*laughing merrily and pointing at Tarafa*) :

Behold the aged man  
Who five short days ago was but a boy.  
Years must come quickly in the crowded town.  
Thou art a man indeed! Where is thy beard?

TARAF A (*after rubbing his hand dubiously over his chin*) :

Who told thee that a beard did make a man?  
For manhood comes through life's experience;  
From travel in the world; from seeing works  
Of men; from talking with one's noble King.

(*During this speech Suzanne laughs at him.  
Harith has been seated at the tent entrance watching  
and listening with amusement. As he speaks the  
young folks listen with deference.*)

HARITH:

That is not so. A boy becomes a man  
As doth a swelling bud become a flower.  
Today his life is set in boyhood's bounds,  
Then manhood comes, born in a space of time  
Unmeasurable. A little care or trust,  
A duty laid on him, or honor giv'n,  
Quickly unfolds the flower of his life  
And boyhood disappears. But manhood true  
Is never born of pride. A journey done;  
A meeting had; these never make a man  
When years continue to disclose the boy.  
Suzanne, thy brother hath no cares to stop  
His play. Provoke him, then, to race with thee.

SUZANNE:

Heed to our father's words, you foolish boy,  
Pretend no more with me that you have come  
To man's estate because you've been a score  
Of miles across the sand. You dare not race  
With me, because you've never caught me yet.

*(Gives Tarafa a push, he chases her, both exit L. Enter R Faithala and Musalla, the former bearing a folded rug which she spreads on ground near center of stage. Musalla bears a flat basket or tray with dates, bananas, small cakes and a bowl of cooked rice. She puts the tray with its contents in center of rug and places a cushion R and L of it. As these preparations are being made Faithala speaks:*

FAITHALA:

Thy food is ready; wilt thou come and eat?

HARITH *(rising from his seat by the tent and seating himself on the R cushion)*:

A weary day is short, if at its close  
Abundant fruit and grain invite the soul.

Thrice happy he who finds when toil is done,  
A home, a faithful wife, and children to  
Make glad his ageing heart.

(*Exit Musalla R.*)

What of the days  
That have been passed since last I supped at home?  
Tell me the news. (*Eats.*)

FAITHALA :

There's little to be told  
Save that we missed thy face. The days have passed  
Slow-footed, but with peace and such content  
As might be gained with thee away. Just now  
I have been troubled by some thoughts expressed  
By Musalla.

HARITH :

Our loyal daughter? How  
May aught she thinks or says disturb thy calm?

FAITHALA (*kneels on ground near food, facing audience,  
occasionally passing fruit to Harith as she speaks*):

She told me of an English officer  
Who visited the school at Basrah, where  
She learned to read and write. She looked on him  
And found him pleasant in her sight, Christian  
Although he is. Perchance no harm is done,  
And yet, I fear the school is no good place  
For Moslem maids, if stranger men may look  
On them, unveiled and unabashed. Suzanne  
Doth long to study at this school; perhaps  
This tale may change your plan to send her there.

HARITH :

'Tis not a pleasant tale, and yet, methinks,  
That dreadful war, that time that tried men's souls,  
Has made a change in thought as well as life,  
And hopes of freedom from convention's bounds

Have stirred the hearts of maids, who, once content  
To fill that place in life the Prophet told,  
Now seek to level barriers raised by race  
And creed; to find and tread forbidden paths.

*(Laughter is heard off stage L.)*

The children come; we'll speak of this again.

*(Enter L Suzanne and Tarafa, laughing and panting as though from running.)*

SUZANNE:

He could not catch me though he ran as fast  
As *boy* could run; until my breath gave out  
And made me stop.

TARAF A:

Do not believe her words;  
I could have caught her any time I chose;  
I swear it by the Prophet's beard.

SUZANNE:

'Tis well  
You have the Prophet's beard to borrow when  
You want to swear, your own would scarcely serve.

TARAF A (*embracing Suzanne*):

She is a minx, a vixen, and a tease,  
But I am glad that I can romp with her  
And do not have to be a man.

HARITH:

Come, eat,  
My son, the daylight fades, and soon the moon  
Will shed its silvery light across the sand.  
Then must we sleep to gain that rest we need  
To fit us for the morrow's work or play.  
So moves along our lives. Tasks of today  
Are parted but a little from the toil  
Tomorrow brings. A little space for rest



That Allah gives; for sleep that will renew  
Our strength of arm and mind, and this is life;  
Until our long rest comes, our work complete.

*(Tarafa seats himself on cushion opposite Harith and begins to eat. Enter Musalla with more fruit in small basket. Faithala and Musalla kneel on rug facing audience. Faithala passes fruit to Harith, while Musalla does the same for Tarafa. Suzanne seats herself on cushion at entrance to tent and arranges her hair, which has become disordered as she ran.)*

TARAF A:

The cakes are very good.

MUSALLA:

Indeed they are!

I know, for I did mix the meal myself,  
And would have cooked them too, had not the sun  
Sent forth such heat that I was glad to give  
To Selim, our good slave, the privilege  
Of finishing my task. He does not mind  
The heat.

FAITHALA:

Why should he, who was born  
Beneath the sun of Ethiopia?

HARITH:

Thou dost forget, good wife, that Afric's sun  
Is tempered by the forest's shade, just as  
The burden of our troubles and our cares  
Is lightened for us by the grace of God.

CAPTAIN R. *(off stage L.)*

It's no use to go further, Tom, we'll stop  
Right here and find out where we are.

*(All on stage jump to their feet, startled, looking L.)*

TARAFÄ:

Who's that?

HARITH (*to women.*)

Somebody comes! Retire before you're seen.  
(*Women exit R.*)

TOM (*off stage L:*)

Just as the Captain says, but I don't like  
These desert beggars, who would stick a knife  
Between your ribs to please their heathen god,  
As quick as look at you. We'd best go on.

TARAFÄ:

Who can it be?

HARITH:

Some Englishman astray.

CAPTAIN (*off stage L:*)

Nonsense: The Arab is not born who'd turn  
A stranger from his tent in need of food  
Or rest. You mix the Arabs and the Turks;  
You ought to know the difference by now.

TOM (*off stage:*)

Damned if they don't look just alike to me.

CAPTAIN (*off stage:*)

Look to the horses and I'll find our friends.

(*Harith walks slowly L, followed by Tarafa.  
Enter Captain L, being met near entrance by Harith.  
They bow ceremoniously.*)

HARITH:

I bid thee welcome and give Allah thanks  
For that His will hath brought thee here in time  
To share my evening meal. Be seated here.

(*Indicates cushion Tarafa had occupied, and takes  
his old place R. Tarafa gets another cushion from*

*near entrance of tent and seats himself on it at Harith's L, facing audience. Harith claps his hands as Captain seats himself. Enter R Faithala and Musalla, both veiled in oriental fashion, the eyes exposed. Musalla starts when she sees Captain and seems unable to keep from looking at him.)*

HARITH (to women:)

We have a guest. Bring all that he requires  
Should there be insufficient here, and see  
That food is sent forth to his servant, who  
Rests where their horses need his watchful eye.

*(They eat, the women attending as before. Musalla near Captain.)*

CAPTAIN:

Your kindness overwhelms me, for you know  
Not who I am, nor why nor whence I come.  
I'm Cecil Roberts, Captain, as you see.

*(Indicates uniform.)*

HARITH:

It is enough that evening finds you here  
Where I may offer shelter and such fare  
As we possess.

CAPTAIN:

I am not sure but that  
We've met before, now that I see you close.  
Were you not one of the supporters of  
King Hasein, when we whipped the Turks and drove  
Them north of Bagdad till they ran like sheep?

HARITH:

I and my friends were there to do our part,  
Which was a small one as compared with what  
The English did. And you were in that fight?

CAPTAIN :

A pain that grips my shoulder now and then  
Reminds me of those days.

HARITH (*to women* :)

Bring coffee here.

MUSALLA :

Suzanne prepares it and should have it here  
By now. I'll see if I can hurry her.

(*Exit R.*)

CAPTAIN :

A lovely voice. I wonder if the veil  
Conceals a face to match. These Arab maids  
Have little chance to demonstrate their charms.

(*To Harith* :)

I often wonder why your women are  
So closely guarded from the eyes of men.  
Were you to visit at my home you'd find  
My sisters comrades to young men, with  
Never thought of wrong. When they wear veils it's  
To enhance their charms, not to conceal them.

(*During Captain's speech Musalla and Suzanne enter R, the latter bearing a tray with small cups of very black coffee. Both are veiled. Suzanne passes cups to the three men. Musalla seats herself by tent and watches Captain.*)

HARITH :

'Tis difficult to say what brings about  
The laws and customs of a land. We think  
Our women should be shielded from the gaze  
Of any save their husbands, so they veil  
Their faces from the sight of other men.

CAPTAIN :

It is a pity, for I know their charm ;  
At least I saw some young girls in a school

Who had no cause to hide their faces from  
The sight of men. One in particular I  
Think of now and many times have thought of  
Since I saw her there at Bâsrah.

*(Musalla much agitated.)*

TOM (*off stage L:*)

Captain!

CAPTAIN:

What is it Tom?

TOM (*off stage:*)

The bay mare acts as though  
She'd had too long a run. Come look at her.

CAPTAIN:

I'll come at once. (*rising.*)

*(To Harith:)*

You'll pardon me, I trust,  
A soldier's horse is the best friend he has.

HARITH:

The man who cares not for his horse deserves  
No better than that none should care for him.  
Look to your friend, but quickly come again  
For that I like your talk and company.

*(Exit Captain.)*

CURTAIN.

End of Scene 1.

## SCENE TWO

SCENE: Same as in Scene 1, the light has changed, a red glow from L with blue light showing from R, simulating moonlight.

*(Curtain discloses Harith seated as before. The remainder of the food has been removed. Musalla is seated at tent entrance as before.)*

HARITH (*musingly*):

I sometimes think our fathers made mistake,  
Thinking of women as the slaves of men  
And nothing more. The times are changing and  
No longer can we live our lives alone,  
Untouched by customs from the West and North.  
Each race depends on others for its life,  
For freedom from oppression and deceit.  
No race is strong enough to stand alone,  
E'en so must customs universal grow.

*(During Harith's speech Musalla has clasped her hands and bowed her head upon them, shaken by emotion. As Harith ceases, she rises and goes slowly to him, finally throwing herself to the ground at his feet.)*

HARITH (*surprised*):

What's wrong with thee, my daughter, that thou  
shouldst,  
Thus humbly come to me. If a request thou hast,  
This is no way to bring it to my ears.  
Better that thou shouldst stand erect, as one  
Who doth expect to find my answer kind  
And fatherly.

*(Caresses her head with his hand.)*

*(Captain enters R as Harith speaks, stopping as he sees attitude of Musalla and Harith, doubtful whether or not to advance and disclose himself. He is surprised and perplexed as Musalla speaks.)*

MUSALLA :

Alas, I've that to ask,  
My father, that doth make me fear the words  
That thou shalt speak when thou hast heard my  
mind.  
My posture shows how much I fear thy wrath.

HARITH :

Speak on; I never have been vexed with thee,  
But when thou hast been wrong in word or deed  
I've tried to lead thee in a better path.

MUSALLA :

Thou hast been ever kind and good to me  
Else would I never dare to seek thee now.  
I am a woman grown, and love hath touched  
My heart. I come to ask that thou shouldst sell  
Me to that man whose image fills my mind.

HARITH (*startled and shocked*) :

Our maids do not select the men they wed;  
How canst thou ask that I should let thee choose?

MUSALLA :

My heart will not permit me to refrain.

HARITH :

Who is the man?

MUSALLA :

'Tis he to whom I heard  
Thee say not long ago that thou didst like  
His company.

HARITH (*becoming angry*) :

Thou meanst the Englishman?  
But him thou canst not think of since before  
This day thou never knew of him nor saw  
His face.

MUSALLA:

I saw him once before  
Nor ever can forget the moment sweet  
When he did look on me with his kind eyes.

HARITH (*very angry and rising quickly to his feet*):

So that is why he came; to seek thee out.  
He shall repent of this, and likewise learn  
That Moslem maids are not for Christian men.

MUSALLA (*beseechingly*):

Nay, father, thou art wrong——

CAPTAIN (*stepping forward and interrupting*):

I am perplexed  
And know not what to think of this I've heard.  
I never saw your daughter, honored Sheik,  
Except as I have seen her here, with you.  
Some madness must have seized her since I came.

HARITH:

How is this, daughter, who doth tell the truth?

MUSALLA:

We both speak truth, and I am much ashamed  
For that he heard my words to thee, yet did  
Not know that I am she he smiled at in  
The mission school so many months ago.  
'Twas then he saw my face; today 'tis veiled.  
(*Harith looks from Musalla to Captain perplexed.*)

CAPTAIN:

There was a maid within a school  
Whom I should seek, did I know where to look.

(*Pauses an instant, and then, exultingly*)

'Tis she! I know now why my pulse leaped  
When her sweet voice I heard, and met her eyes.

(*Steps impulsively toward Musalla with extended arms.*)



HARITH (*stepping between them*):

Enough! You are an honorable man  
Or else you would not wear the uniform  
That shows your country and your rank. I do  
Believe your words, yet must we all forget  
This madness that hath stirred our souls today.  
Daughter, I sorrow for thee and regret  
The day I placed thee where thy mother's care  
Was absent from thee. Go thou now to her.

(*Musalla goes slowly to R, weeping.*)

CAPTAIN:

You say I am an honorable man,  
Then you cannot refuse to grant me leave  
To plead my cause. I want to wed the maid——

HARITH (*interrupting*):

It may not be. So words of thine can change  
The fact; it needs no further argument.  
We Arabs do not think or feel as you.  
She will forget you, and you'll think no more  
Of her.

CAPTAIN:

You know not what it is to love!

HARITH:

I know far better than do you. Your love  
Is but the madness of a passing hour.  
The love we know endures; it's founded on  
The faith and customs of our race.

(*Enter King Hassein L.*)

HARITH (*prostrating himself*):

The King!

KING:

Arise, my friend, forget I am thy King,  
Remember only that I come tonight  
To seek for shelter that I know thou'lt give

To any wanderer who comes in need.  
Far from his throne a King is but a man.  
Happy that land which has a man for King!  
Who fits his throne, nor finds his dignity  
Supplied by fawning courtiers who make  
Him think he's great, though he a weakling be.

HARITH:

This land indeed hath for its King a man!  
All that I have is thine. I would 'twere more.  
My home is honored by the presence of  
My King!

KING:

A home has room for but one King.  
Here thou art he, and I am but thy guest.  
Another guest thou hast, do thou present him.

HARITH:

'Tis Captain Roberts of the British force.

KING:

One of that army brave that helped to rid  
Us of the Turk. I'm glad our paths met here.  
But as I came toward this place I thought  
I heard some words that passed between you two  
Not altogether friendly, but my ears  
Perhaps did play me false. I hope they did.

*(Harith and Captain look at each other dismayed.)*

CAPTAIN:

There was no quarrel, sir.

HARITH:

We but discussed  
A difference of view.

KING:

Let's seat ourselves  
And hear the point. While here I am no King,  
Yet may I sit as magistrate.

*(Musalla, who has been lingering near tent entrance, places cushions and the three men seat themselves C.)*

HARITH :

I'll let  
The Captain state the case, knowing that thou,  
An Arab and a Moslem, will be sure  
To side with me.

CAPTAIN :

Be not so sure, for this  
Is not a matter of a race or creed,  
But of two human hearts.

KING :

I pray you tell  
The tale. When I have learned the facts, I may  
Be glad to hear your arguments. Speak on!

HARITH (*to Captain*) :

Proceed.

CAPTAIN :

A Christian man, good Magistrate,  
Finds that he loves a Moslem maid, and she  
Confesses that her heart is lost to him.  
Her father steps between. Does he do right?

KING :

A bald and lifeless tale that is no tale.  
Let's have the circumstances and the cast.

*(To Harith)* :

I'd have you call your wife and daughters here,  
For I can see that this may be a case  
Wherein a women's jury may assist.

HARITH (*to Musalla*) :

Go bid thy mother and Suzanne to come,  
It is the King's command.

KING:

Nay, nay, good maid,  
The King's not here, I'm just thy father's friend.

*(Exit Musalla R. Enter Tarafa L, sees King  
and prostrates himself.)*

KING *(to Harith)*:

Thy son doth too much honor to thy guest.  
What would he do were he to meet the King?

*(laughs)*

*(To Tarafa)*:

Arise, my boy, thy manners are too good  
For desert sands; save them until the King  
Shall send for thee to dwell at court with him.

TARAFAT *(rising)*:

Thou art the King.

KING:

Not here, I'm but Hassein.

*(Enter the three women, veiled. The King rises  
to greet them, to the astonishment of Harith. All  
rise.)*

KING:

Good friends, we welcome you to hear a tale  
Wherein there lies some question I am asked  
To solve. Attend then closely to the words  
Our friend who serves another King shall speak,  
For I may ask thy judgment ere I give  
Mine own. But first I ask that you remove  
Your veils, for this is like a court of law  
Where none may hide his face.

HARITH *(protesting)*:

It is the law  
Of the Koran that women should be veiled.

KING:

The Prophet wrote for men, and in a day  
When women were their slaves. That day is past.  
Just for a moment think I am your King  
And heed to my command. Remove the veils!

*(Suzanne snatches veil from her laughing face. Musalla removes hers more slowly, looking at Captain, who moves forward the better to see her face. Faithala very slowly takes hers off, looking at Harith as though expecting displeasure.)*

HARITH (*resigned*):

One can but bow before the will of God,  
Who sometimes shows His wisdom in strange ways.

KING:

And now we'll all be seated, while we let  
The Captain tell his tale.

FAITHALA (*drawing back*):

It is not right.  
That women should be seated with the men.  
My daughters and myself will stand and hear.

KING (*smiling*):

A woman veiled must stand, but with the veil  
She takes off subjugation to the man,  
Is no more his inferior, becomes  
His equal and his friend; no longer slave.  
I pray you join us here.

*(points to cushions and seats himself.)*

*(Suzanne drops quickly to a seat. Harith and Tarafa more slowly but without hesitation. Musalla looks at Captain, who smiles assent, but himself remains standing. Musalla seats herself. Faithala also, but more slowly, shaking her head dubiously.)*

KING (*to Captain, when all are seated:*)  
We're ready now.

CAPTAIN:  
I wish that someone else could take my place,  
For I am sure that so much is at stake  
I'll not be able to do justice to  
My tale. Some months ago, perhaps a year,  
I went to Basrah and there visited  
A friend who keeps a school for Moslem girls.

KING:  
I know much to the credit of that place.

CAPTAIN:  
While there I saw a class of girls at work;  
I looked about the room and saw among  
The many maids one who was more than fair.  
Her eyes met mine, not once but many times,  
And when I left the place I carried forth  
A constant vision of that face and of  
The eyes that looked so clearly into mine.  
Had this been England I'd have found some way  
To meet this girl. Instead I tried to drive  
The vision and the mem'ry from my heart.

KING (*to Harith*):  
This is a man whom I could trust and love.

CAPTAIN:  
Today my orders sent me from Shaabar  
To ride across the desert to Riadh.  
I lost my way, and as the sun grew low  
Sought shelter and direction in this place  
Where I've been treated as an honored guest.  
*(bows to Harith)*

KING:  
Our host is known throughout the land as one  
Who hath a warm heart and an open door.

CAPTAIN :

Without design I overheard the words  
Which passed between Musalla and Harith,  
Wherein she asked her father to bestow  
Her hand on one she loved. I had no thought  
That I was anyway concerned, until  
I heard the maid say to her father that  
I was the one she loved. The rest you know;  
That she it is I've dreamed of ever since  
I saw her at the school. God has been good  
To lead me to her, and I cannot think  
But that He wills that she should be my wife.  
Harith dissents, and says it cannot be.

KING (*to Harith*) :

This question lieth closer to thy heart  
Than I had thought.

(*To Captain*)

We thank you for your tale;  
'Twas well and simply told. And now we'll hear  
Harith relate his thoughts. 'Tis plainly seen  
This problem hath disturbed him and distressed.  
(*Captain sits. Harith rises.*)

HARITH :

I can make no addition to the facts  
Our friend has stated; I believe them true.  
With you, my King, I often have conversed  
About the changes that have come upon  
Our land; Thou knowest that I welcome them.  
But this that touches close my family,  
My life, I cannot view as one apart.  
Perhaps you'll say my heart commands my head.

KING :

We know thy justice and thy judgment, good  
Harith; thy heart is noble, and thy mind  
The clearest that is found in all our realm.

HARITH :

The times have changed ; though yet the changes most  
Affect the superficial things of life.  
Religion finds its home within the depths  
Of human souls. A man may change his cloak,  
Donning a new one of a different hue  
Without a thought of change within his heart.

KING (*to Faithala*) :

He speaketh wisdom as he always doth.

HARITH :

But when he tries to change his faith, there stirs  
Within him some convulsion of the soul.  
And he becomes a different man, or else  
He is no man at all. In married life  
There should be found no difference of thought  
Affecting matters of the heart or soul ;  
Therefore I hold that happiness cannot  
Result from union where two faiths are found.  
There also is the difference in race,  
Which of itself should be enough to keep  
My daughter from this man ; and so I find  
My duty plain ; to hold her with me here.

(*seats himself.*)

KING :

We'll give our English friend a chance to meet  
This noble argument if he doth choose.

CAPTAIN :

It is a question of this maiden's heart  
Against the customs of a race and creed.  
No further word is needed. You decide.

KING :

Let us first listen while the women speak.  
Suzanne shall tell us what she thinks of this.



SUZANNE:

Must I get up as though to make a speech?  
(laughs)

KING:

Thy will is ours. We wait upon thy word.

SUZANNE (*rising*):

Then I'll stand up. I've sat here long enough.

HARITH:

Remember that thou speakest to the King.

SUZANNE (*smiling and bowing to King*):

You're such a nice old man that I forgot.

KING:

That is a compliment indeed, my child,  
But what is thy decision in this case?

SUZANNE:

I think it's not worth worrying about.  
You're just a lot of men making a fuss  
About a matter you know nothing of.  
When I'm a woman grown, I'll marry whom  
I please, and so would Musalla if she  
Had pluck enough. I hope Tarafa takes  
An English wife. I like their clothes and I  
Could copy hers. That's all I have to say.

(drops quickly to seat.)

KING (*patting her on the shoulder*):

Here's the new woman we hear talk about.  
But now we'll hear the thoughts of Musalla.

MUSALLA (*remaining seated*):

My thoughts are far too precious to express  
In words. My love overwhelms me and I pray

You all to pity me, for I shall die  
Of love, unless you let me go with him.

*(stretches arms toward Captain)*

KING:

Thou hast our pity, gentle Musalla,  
Each one of us hopes for thy happiness.  
We try to find the way 'twere best attained.  
Now we attend the while your mother speaks.

FAITHALA *(hesitatingly)*:

I am not one to speak before the King.

KING:

This is a court; I am a magistrate.

FAITHALA:

I cannot think that happiness is found  
Other than I have found it with my lord.  
My daughter would do well to heed his words.

KING *(rising. As he rises all stand)*:

The jury disagrees. I must decide.  
Harith, wilt thou abide by my decree?

HARITH:

I will, good King.

KING:

And thou, my English friend?

CAPTAIN:

I know your wisdom and your right to speak;  
And though I cannot promise that I'll be  
Content, I, too, shall honor your decree.

KING *(takes Musalla by the right hand and extends his left hand to Captain)*:

They say a King can do no wrong. I know

This King is doing right when he decides  
That you shall wed.

*(Pauses and looks around at the others. Harith raises his arms toward heaven for a moment, then bows his head.)*

'Tis not for me to say  
When this shall be. Musalla hopes it may  
Be very soon, after we have returned  
From Riadh where the Captain rides with me  
Tomorrow.

*(places Musalla's hand in Captain's)*

Now embrace thy bride.  
*(they embrace)*

CAPTAIN:

My love!

MUSALLA:

Oh, this is bliss of which I long have dreamed.

CAPTAIN:

I'll come to take you with me just as soon  
As my good horse can bring me from Riadh.

*(King is down stage C. Musalla and Captain R, Harith and Faithala up Stage C. Suzanne and Tarafa R, Suzanne teasing Tarafa.)*

KING *(to Captain)*:

Thou shalt be happy with thy Arab wife,  
For thou hast found that love knows neither race  
Nor creed. Your hearts have found a common  
speech,  
The universal language of the soul.

*(To Harith)*

Old friend, Harith, thou never wouldst permit  
Thy daughter to be wedded to a Turk;  
And yet the Turk and Arab have one faith.  
Herein thy logic failed.

(*To Suzanne*)

My good Suzanne  
I am too wise a man to prophesy  
What circumstances shall attend thy life,  
But I may venture this, that it shall be  
Purer and sweeter for that thou can'st laugh.

(*To audience*)

The world's at one in this new day. The walls  
Of thought and habit that have kept apart  
The nations, disappear. The people blend  
Into one race; the brotherhood of man  
Now rules the earth, where once was rivalry  
And greed. It is the plan and will of God.

CURTAIN.







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