



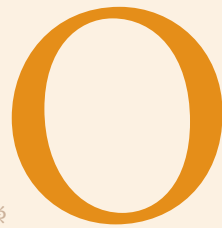
The Art of Speaking

ORAL STORYTELLING AMONG SYRIANS IN JORDAN



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Oral storytelling is a continued living tradition in Syria, practiced in cafes and gatherings of family and friends.¹ Stories, like the people who narrate and listen to them, change because of migration. Since 2011, close to 600,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Jordan.² Forced migration to Jordan has transformed story themes and how Syrian storytellers narrate them. Along with folklore, oral storytellers draw upon lived experiences, and recording oral stories brings the oral history of the storyteller into the historical record. Benmayor and Skotnes theorize that oral history reveals aspects of the migrating experience which might otherwise be ignored, and challenge “mono-causal, linear and economic theories” of migration, creating new ways to understand migration.³

For Syrian communities displaced to Jordan, oral storytelling communicates societal values, connects Syrians to a distinctly different past, and opens an alternative space for the storyteller to confront lived experiences. Limited civil society efforts have been made to celebrate this tradition. Instead, the storytellers themselves, who are predominantly Syrian women, negotiate its future. Oral stories reflect the rich history of storytelling in Syrian society, which extends to the pre-Islamic era. “Our society is a storyteller,” commented one interlocutor, emphasizing the centrality of stories to human experience.⁴ In a time when politics and media consistently deny the humanity of Syrians, stories highlight the creativity, humor, and resilience of storytellers and Syrian society.

Based on a series of semi-structured interviews with Syrian women living in Jordan and organizers of storytelling projects, as well as observation of oral storytelling sessions, this essay explores how Syrian storytelling traditions have changed because of Syrians’ forced displacement to Jordan. Participants’ names have been changed to ensure privacy unless otherwise indicated with an asterisk. Oral stories belong to popular literature; there is no singular author or owner. Zulaika Abu Risha, editor of *Timeless Tales: Folk Tales Told by Syrian Refugees*, comments, “I cannot say that these stories are Syrian stories—they are present in every region, with small or large differences depending on the narrator and the environment.”⁵ Furthermore, the borders between Syria and its neighbors are relatively recent, a reality reflected in the backgrounds of storytellers. Aisha Khalil al-Khalil,* one of the only storytellers from Syria active in Jordan, has family origins in Palestine and fled from the Yarmouk Refugee Camp outside of Damascus. For these reasons, this research focuses on oral stories narrated by Syrian refugee storytellers.

THE STORYTELLER IN SYRIA'S HISTORY

Understanding the history of storytelling within Syria is essential to grasping how this tradition has evolved

in Jordan. Before Islam, the storyteller, known as the *hakawati*, served as a news correspondent. With the advent of Islam, a new generation of *hakawati* spread the story of the Prophet Muhammad. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the storyteller appeared as an entertainer, and under Ottoman rule, the epics told by storytellers became available in print.⁶ Representations of the *hakawati* in popular culture are almost exclusively of a man wearing baggy black pants with a red fez atop his head. Traditionally, the *hakawati* memorizes stories and reads from books of epics. Each night, he recites a section of the epic, inviting listeners to return the following night. Al Nofra, a coffee shop in Damascus, has hosted a storyteller at evening gatherings for the past 300 years.⁷

Although storytelling continues at Al Nofra, even this institution has struggled to find talented storytellers. The Syrian government, both prior to the uprising and to this day, does not offer support to storytellers, contributing to the diminishment of this once popular art form.⁸ The scene of coffee shops and professional storytellers is only one aspect of oral storytelling traditions within Syria. While men dominate the scene of professional storytelling in Syria, women are the primary storytellers between family and friends. “All of our parties and gatherings consist of stories,” comments Hiba, a retired schoolteacher from Damascus who lives in Amman.⁹ Stories are transmitted through family gatherings, and many women who tell stories to their families do not consider themselves to be storytellers in the same sense as a *hakawati* in a coffee shop. Hiba sees herself as a storyteller within her own family, while Aisha, who tells stories to children in her community, is unsure if she is a storyteller.¹⁰ While there are no professional Syrian storytellers in Amman, the tradition of storytelling is alive within Syrian communities. The study of Syrian oral storytelling in Jordan requires broadening the definition of storyteller beyond professional performers to include female storytellers who share narratives in social gatherings.

STORIES AND FORCED MIGRATION

In the context of forced migration, stories and storytelling traditions have moved across borders. In *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Edward Said introduces Traveling Theory and argues that “theories and ideas travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another.”¹¹ When they emerge in new and different contexts, they have similarities to their original forms, but are mobile and in some way transformed and affected by this movement.¹² Said’s work concerns literary theory, but the principles of Traveling Theory can be applied to stories and storytelling. The Syrian war has displaced the tradition of Syrian storytelling to Jordan, a new context and environment. With these dramatic changes in family structure and environment, Syrian storytelling and oral stories themselves have changed in significant ways.

Because of the trauma of war and escape, many Syrian women have forgotten the stories they once memorized, leading to the loss of many Syrian stories. Umm Ahmed, a Syrian living in Amman



One of the few remaining professional Syrian storytellers in Damascus in 2010. yeowatzup, Wikimedia Commons 2010.

since 2014, declares, “Those who survived, forgot,” reflecting her lived experience.¹³ As a child, she loved hearing stories from her grandmother, who would visit her family for extended periods of time. She remembers, “Her stories were very wonderful. We would all ask her to tell more.” But when she came to Jordan, she forgot all the stories except for short and simple ones, attributing this memory loss to her traumatic experiences. Umm Ahmed’s experience with forgetting stories was echoed by other interlocutors, one of whom commented, “I swear, I memorized my mother’s stories. But in our context, I forgot them.”¹⁴ The relationship between Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and memory is well documented. Patients with PTSD often speak of memory loss with subjects unrelated to their trauma.¹⁵ For some families, their displacement to Jordan has led to an outright loss of the oral storytelling tradition.

For individuals who continue to practice oral storytelling in Jordan, the context is distinctly different. Jordan does not have cafes known for storytelling, like Al Nofra in Damascus. A storyteller from Palmyra commented on the absence of public places, such as cafes and parks, potential venues to transmit stories.¹⁶ However, because the tradition of oral storytelling is grounded in family gatherings, the separation of families presents an even greater fundamental change in Syrian storytelling traditions. “The Future of Syria,” a recent project by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), highlighted the gravity of family separation. Of 202 children interviewed, forty-three of them stated that one or more of their immediate family members were either dead, detained, or missing.¹⁷ Over 30% of Syrian households in Jordan are headed by women alone.¹⁸ The reality of family separation was reflected in interviews with Syrian women, many of whom recalled late nights spent with their extended families in Syria and lamented the impossibility of such events today. “The general sentiment or ambience amongst the family is different now, and there is a lack of psychological relaxation,” says

Hiba.¹⁹ Economic challenges in Jordan also make these family gatherings more rare. Syrian refugees, the majority of whom cannot work legally, work long hours in the informal sector, leaving little time for families to relax. Increasing numbers of Syrian women in Jordan have been forced to take on work outside the home to support their families.²⁰ Umm Ahmed contrasted her life in Syria, where her responsibilities were based in the home, with her reality in Jordan, where she is forced to seek out employment elsewhere. However, many other interlocutors worked outside the home before coming to Jordan.

Children's relationship to oral storytelling has been particularly affected by these changes in family structure and childhood experiences. While middle-aged storytellers have strong pre-war memories, youth today grew up during the war. Syrian women who had children prior to coming to Jordan emphasized how their own children never experienced childhood. Rania explained, "The past generation didn't have childhood. They didn't have happiness. Their childhood was only escaping."²¹ Because of the war, the youngest generation largely missed the chance to participate in and develop a love for the tradition of oral storytelling. Umm Ahmed's children spent most of their childhood sheltered underground and did not experience storytelling through family gatherings.

IMPORTANCE OF ORAL STORYTELLING IN SYRIAN COMMUNITIES

In the face of the loss of family structures and of their country, Syrian refugees are offered a powerful tool to communicate values through oral storytelling. Hiba used stories as a teaching tool with her children and within the classroom: "I determine the goal of the story and then I choose the words to serve the story."²² Umm Ahmed commented on the potential for stories to teach patience, a virtue that she says Syrians need as they wait for the war to end.²³ Stories supply lessons about bravery, goals, and wisdom, but they are also humorous and

imaginative, and can carve out a space for Syrian children to reconnect with their lost childhood. Shalabieh al-Hakawatieh notes, "Storytelling can create a space for imagination...we went to Syrian refugee camps several times, and we provided a space for childhood simply by creating a story."²⁴ Oral storytelling traditions offer manifold values to a young generation of Syrians in Jordan.

Storytelling is an important way to link the younger generation to the past, but television and phones often intervene as other forms of entertainment. Anand Vivek Taneja suggests, "If we cannot remember the ways in which the past was different from the present, we cannot imagine any other present than the one we live in, or any other futures than the grim, inexorable one we seem to be heading towards."²⁵ The way Syrians remember their past informs their vision of the future. Hiba said, "I hope that stories will reflect more hope and humanity, to link the child to the present because this situation will not last. The story must strengthen them and present them the reality that there is good and evil in life, and we must insist on the good."²⁶ In a recent report, many interlocutors suggested that intangible cultural heritage, including storytelling, can help Syrian children fill this gap in their knowledge of their homeland and "maintain a sense of what it means to come from Syria while in exile."²⁷ However, the youth's entertainment predominantly



Syrian women and children walk through the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. William Proby, Flickr 2012.

comes from television dramas and the internet. One commentator notes, “the older generation no longer tells, and the younger ones no longer listen.”²⁸ Some children lack an older family member with knowledge of stories, and there is often little interest from the younger generation. Imane, a mother from Homs, suggested that television shows have taken on the role of teaching children morals and values. Television shows and oral storytelling are not entirely disparate from each other; many interlocutors described series featuring folk tales. Similar to the epics told by the hakawati, Syrian television dramas known as musalsalat are released as nightly episodes during the month of Ramadan, and watching them is a communal and familial activity, like listening to stories. Despite the popularity of other forms of entertainment, most interlocutors in Jordan spoke of how much they themselves, as well as their children, enjoyed listening to stories, and family separation and displacement were said to be more significant challenges to oral storytelling.

The tradition of oral storytelling in the Middle East is enjoyed by adults as much as children. For the older generation, oral storytelling offers a space to process the events of the war. Several interlocutors observed that discussing folk tales helped them to recall their past and take their mind off al-ahadath, a term which some use to refer to the Syrian war. Other interlocutors commented that the act of telling stories puts their minds at peace or inspires them. Storytelling opens a space to discuss the events of the war from an indirect, often third-person perspective. In one storytelling session, Aisha told an emotional story about a woman who lost her husband and raised her children on her own, only to end up far away from them. Only when she finished narrating did she comment, “That was the story of my life, my story, me.”²⁹ Through storytelling, Aisha connects with a younger generation of children—her own grandchildren are in Syria. Aisha, and other interlocutors, also enjoy storytelling as a form of entertainment and a source of laughter.

CHANGING STORIES IN A CHANGED WORLD

Aisha’s infusion of her personal experience into oral storytelling reflects how stories themselves are changing because of forced displacement. Hiba states, “The crisis has created new stories, about war, arms, and killing.”³⁰ The stories told by Syrian women incorporate a long history of folklore but are also constantly evolving. Stories respond to the marginalization and isolation of Syrian refugees in their host country. Hiba suggests, “If we have a connection with our society, we speak our stories. But sometimes we don’t tell stories, or we change them because the society is against our story.”³¹ Hiba has hope, though, that the stories will someday represent a more peaceful reality: “We hope that God will help us return to our country, to hope and security, and the good stories.”³² This hope is expressed by many interlocutors, who anticipate that when their own circumstances change, stories will as well.

Oral stories, because of their flexibility, are profoundly affected by the environment around them. Zulaika Abu Risha, editor of *Timeless Tales: Folktales Told by Syrian Refugees*, states that the story is spoken for the audience and changes according to the goal of the storyteller and their circumstances.³³ She argues that oral stories are for any person to reshape as they see fit. She says, “the idea of ownership is not present in the sense that I (the storyteller or editor) cannot change the story.” Multiple interlocutors observed that “stories are a result of the environment” and emphasized that almost every aspect of their environment and lives differed in Jordan. Syrian oral storytellers in Jordan have begun to integrate aspects of their new environment and experiences into their stories, even as they anticipate returning to Syria.

PRESERVING AND CELEBRATING ORAL STORYTELLING

Few civil society efforts attempt to highlight storytelling traditions. Although not specifically focused on Syrian storytelling, the Hakaya Festival

takes place annually in Amman and aims to “reclaim the centrality of stories in the healthy growth of individuals and societies.”³⁴ The festival brings together artists from across the region and the world for a week of storytelling, performances, and workshops. In the past, Syrian storytellers and artists have been amongst the performers in these events, whose organizers have made efforts to bring storytelling to Syrian communities by organizing performances in refugee camps and neighborhoods with significant Syrian populations.³⁵

Another initiative, the al-Hakawati Project, aims to preserve oral storytelling, and produced the anthology *Timeless Tales: Folktales told by Syrian Refugees*, the most significant publication thus far to gather oral stories in the context of forced displacement. The bilingual anthology contains stories collected from displaced Syrian storytellers in Lebanon and within Syria.³⁶ Through a related project, a storyteller from Palmyra, living in Jordan, began performing in schools and community centers. The storyteller asks members of the audience to complete his stories or share their own, and in doing so demonstrates the similarities between Syrian and Jordanian culture. After his performance at a nursery school in Mafraq, a northern city where many Syrians live, the headmistress asked the mothers of Syrian pupils to share songs and nursery rhymes, to be taught alongside Jordanian songs, aiming to help children to transition to their new school and foster communication between Jordanian and Syrian students and teachers.³⁷ Along with Aisha, the storyteller from Palmyra is one of very few Syrians who tell stories in public places in Jordan, in part because of the limited number of initiatives like the al-Hakawati Project.

Beyond their potential contribution to society, there is also a need for these projects because of the manifold challenges to oral storytelling traditions. However, community organizations face a difficult landscape in their attempts to carry out such work. In the spring of 2018, the Al Balad

Theater, organizer of the Hakaya Project and partner in the al-Hakawati project, received an eviction notice from the owner of its building in downtown Amman, who plans to use the building as a commercial space. In a statement released after the eviction, the theater noted:

The eviction of Al Balad theatre from the building is not simply about a lease that ended, but rather a symptom of the battle waged against independent community initiatives...these initiatives find themselves confronted by commercial logic and market values without any protection, despite the official rhetoric vowing to support initiatives committed to provide spaces for youth to be creative and proactive.³⁸

The small number of organizations interested in Syrian storytelling and storytelling in general, coupled with a lack of support for organizations like the Al Balad theater, leave Syrian storytellers largely on their own to negotiate the future of oral storytelling.

CONCLUSION

The future of Syrian refugees living in Jordan, and the stories they tell, is largely unknown. One interlocutor reflected, “We don’t know the future or our own futures.”³⁹ Another woman commented, “there is only fear for the future of storytelling if peace does not return.”⁴⁰ No one knows when peace will return, and when it does, whether or not millions of Syrian refugees will be able to return to Syria. Hiba notes that the future of storytelling depends on the younger generation and warns, “sometimes the present eliminates the past.”⁴¹ Many Syrian interlocutors seemed confident that oral storytelling traditions would continue as they have for thousands of years, noting that oral storytelling is a flexible practice and one that has persisted for thousands of years through radical changes. Fadi Fayyad Skeiker, one of the few scholars to examine Syrian storytelling traditions from an academic perspective, refers to Abu Shadi, a former storyteller in Damascus, as “the last storyteller in Damascus.” Through his scholarship, Skeiker hopes “to shed light on and draw attention to his work and his

dying art.”⁴² A newspaper article refers to Abu Shadi as “The Hakawati of Damascus.”⁴³ This title excludes Syrian women within Syria, in Jordan, and around the world who continue to narrate stories to their family and friends. With limited attention from journalists, scholars, and civil society, these women are the primary practitioners of oral storytelling. Studying oral storytelling among Syrian communities in Jordan reveals that storytelling is not a dying art but rather a changing one. Through their courage to speak, even in the most challenging of circumstances, Syrian women sustain oral storytelling as a vibrant, dynamic, and very much living tradition.

While stories reflect the displacement of Syrian communities to Jordan, they also integrate a long history of folklore shared across the region and the world. Many stories feature Joha, a famous character appearing in many stories who seems silly but surprises the listener with his clever tricks. The woodcutter, another repeated character, works constantly but struggles to survive. An oppressive king appears frequently, threatening to cut off the heads of his subjects. Women also mentioned the stories of Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and the Boy Who Cried Wolf, tales that are told and read across the world. Inspiration for specific details often comes from local nature or agricultural products and mirrors the environment of the storyteller, but the vast overlap between oral stories across the world reminds the listener of common human experiences. Listening to oral stories told by Syrian refugees not only provides insight into this moment in their lives and in history but also serves as a powerful reminder of our shared humanity.

THE KING'S EARS

Originally told by Aisha Khalil al-Khalil from Yarmouk Refugee Camp, now living in Zarqa

Long ago in a faraway place, a King ruled over his land. None of his subjects knew that he had huge ears--his ears were his deepest secret, which he



Main street in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. UK DFID, Flickr

desperately wanted to hide from his people.

Every time a barber came to the castle to trim the King's hair, he would say, “O Great King, why are your ears so huge?” The King would command the Barber to finish cutting his hair. But when the Barber finished, the King would take him away and cut off his head, so that he could not share the King's deepest secret.

Hardly a single Barber remained in the entire Kingdom. Over ten Barbers had cut the King's hair, and each one of them exclaimed “Oh my! O Great King, why are your ears so huge?” Each barber met the same fate: the King cut off their heads. When the people heard that the King beheaded all the barbers, they said in shock, “Scarcely one Barber remains and still the King cuts off their heads!” They wondered why--because none of them had seen the King's ears or knew of the secret he hid.

The final lone Barber came to the castle. While he was trimming the King's hair, the King asked, “What do you see on my head?” The Barber was focused on the King's hair and did not respond. He didn't remark to him, “Why are your ears so huge?” The King asked again, “what do you see on my head?” The Barber replied this time and told him, “I didn't see anything on your head.”

The King asked, “But didn't you see my entire head?”

The Barber replied that he had. The King persisted and asked, "what about my ears?" The Barber told him, "O Great King, your ears are huge so that you can hear the concerns of the people." The King decided not to behead this Barber and told him that the haircut was finished. The Barber said once more, "O Great King, your ears are huge so that you can hear the concerns of the people. You listen to anyone who comes to express their concerns and speak about their oppression from any person or thing."

The King felt happy because of the Barber. He thought, "I want to honor this Barber." He decided to thank him by arranging his marriage to one of the maids in my court, who knew of his huge ears. The King swore, "I won't let him tell this secret to anyone." He instructed the woman to watch her new husband, to ensure that he would not tell the secret to any person. The King gave the Barber his new wife, and told him, "This woman is your reward, because you supported me and you are an excellent Barber." He told him to return to his house with his wife.

The woman from the court and the Barber married, and the Barber enjoyed his marriage very much. But he couldn't tell the secret to anyone: the King had sent the maid to watch the Barber. If he told the secret to anyone, she would report immediately to the King. The Barber's belly started to grow because the secret was hidden in his stomach and his heart. His stomach grew and grew and grew. As much as he wanted to, he couldn't let the secret escape. If he told the secret, the King would cut off his head. Every two or three days, the King sent for the maid and asked her, "Did you hear him say something?" She shook her head. He asked again, "No one has ever seen or heard or discovered the secret?" She confirmed to him, "No, never." He told her "very well. Keep your ears open and see if he tells the secret to anyone---even to you!" But she told him, "He's never even told me." The King sent her back to the Barber's house.

She returned to her home, where the Barber sat inside. This secret that he desperately tried to hide grew huge in his stomach. He decided he didn't have any choice except to find an abandoned well. He said, "I will find myself an abandoned well and put my head inside, and shout, "The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey.""

He went out and searched and searched for four or five days until he found an abandoned well. There was no water in the well or anything else, and nobody else within earshot. He put his head in the well and shouted, "The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey. The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey." His stomach started to shrink, and he kept screaming until it returned to its normal size. The secret was in the well, and the Barber kept shouting until he was sure that none of the secret was left. Feeling relieved, he returned to his house.

By chance, rain started to fall. The stream flowed and filled the well, and water started running from it. The water ran into the stream, which watered the grass and trees and all the plants. When the grass and trees blew in the wind, they too shouted, "The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey." They swayed back and forth, all the while shouting. A symphony of their voices filled the air. Each gust of wind spread their shouts further, but not a single person who heard the voices knew their origin. The King ordered his men, "Go and bring me the Barber!" When they found the Barber, he swore to the King, "O Great King, I did not tell your secret." The King did not believe him and demanded, "To whom did you tell my secret?" "I didn't tell anyone," promised the Barber.

The King said, "Listen. I hear everyone shouting." He knew that the trees and the grass and the bushes were shouting, "The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey." But the Barber told him once more, "I swear to God, I did not tell anyone." The King asserted, "Tell me the truth, or else I will cut off your

head.”

The Barber promised, “I swear to God I will tell you, O Great King,” and began his story. “I really didn’t tell anyone. But the more I tried to hide the secret, the more my stomach grew, and the secret was in my stomach and heart. My stomach grew as if I was pregnant. To whom did I want to tell the secret? There was nobody because I feared for my life, I feared the news would reach you.” The King prompted the Barber to continue. “I went to look in the forests, in the gardens, and I found an abandoned well, without any water. I put my head deep into the well and started shouting. I shouted until I emptied my heart and stomach, until not one bit of the secret remained, and then I returned to my house.”

The King nodded and told the Barber, “Very well. We are going to search for the well.” He took the Barber with him on his horses. They found the well and in fact, the grass still shouted, “The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey!” The Barber had told the truth.

Surrounded by the shouting grasses and trees, the King wondered, “What should we do with the water and grass and the trees that are shouting ‘the ears of the King are the ears of a donkey?’”

The Barber asked the King, “O Great King, how did I sin? I didn’t tell the secret to anyone, I just spoke into the well. It rained and the water flowed. The trees drank, the grass drank, and they started to shout. This was not my sin.”

“Truly, it was not your fault. This was in the hands of God,” agreed the King. The Barber hesitated, “But what is the solution?” The King gazed out over the grass, the trees, and the bushes, and returned his eyes to the Barber, who awaited his fate. He decided, “You will go and walk between the people, and tell them the story--all of it. Tell them that their King has huge ears so that he can hear the concerns of the

people, to listen to the oppressed and the hungry, to listen to the problems of any person.”

The Barber happily went out of the forest and walked between the people, telling them, “I swear to God, I went to cut the King’s hair and I found that his ears are huge, so that he can hear incredibly well, unlike ordinary people. He hears our voices, and any person who visits him, the King will welcome him. Any person who has doubts can express them to the King and ask for his needs to be met.”

The King finally felt at ease, and the whole world felt overjoyed to hear that his ears were huge so that he could listen to the problems of the people. The King appointed the Barber as a Minister. He told the newly appointed Minister, “You really didn’t tell anyone. You protected my secrets. Therefore, I have chosen you as a Minister.”

From that moment onward, the Barber led any work that the King initiated. In the whole country, there wasn’t a single Barber except for this one, and he was now a Minister. The people wanted to cut and style their hair, but there were no Barbers in the Kingdom.

The people did not know how to handle political matters in an honorable and polite way. They laughed at the King’s huge ears and the Barber’s appointment as a Minister. The King cut off their heads directly. From the Barber turned Minister, the people learned to be understanding and level headed. And so the King and the Barber lived in happiness, and the people did as well.

WHEN FISH FLY

Originally told by Sahar Mohammad Muqdad from Derra, now living in Amman*

A young, clever woman and the devil had a fight and they disagreed on who was stronger, the woman or the devil. The devil said, “I am stronger than you.” “No, I’m stronger than you,” insisted the woman,

and the devil replied, "Tomorrow we will see who is stronger." She told him, "I can make a man divorce his wife and return to her the next day. Can you do that?" He admitted, "No." She nodded triumphantly and told him, "Tomorrow you will see what I'm planning to do."

The next day, she visited a silk trader near her home. She went disguised as an elderly woman. She said, "My son, give me a piece of green silk." He accepted and as he was cutting the silk, she interrupted and said, "My son, I want this silk to be very well cut. Pay attention to your work." He turned to her and replied, "Why are you so concerned?" She explained, "My son is in love with a girl, and he wants to take this piece of silk and give it to her." After he finished his work, she took the silk and left the shop.

Instead of going home, she went to the silk trader's house, where his wife was. She knocked on the door and said, "My dear, it's the time for prayer and I need a place to pray. Can I pray in your home?" The silk trader's wife let her in and showed her to the bedroom. But the old woman did not pray. She intentionally put the silk under the pillow, went out of the room, and left their house and went back to her own.

That night, the silk trader came home. He put his hand under the below and felt something. He pulled out the silk and asked his wife, "Where is this from?" She swore to him that she did not know. She explained, "A very old woman came and brought it." "That's impossible," he exclaimed in shock. "You're in love with the son of the old woman and she brought you the silk as a present! The old woman came to my shop today and bought the silk from me and told me about her son's deep love for a girl. I didn't know it was you. I am going to divorce you. You cannot stay in our house." He threw her out of their home.

The next day the old woman came to his shop again. She asked him for a cut of silk, the same

shade of green. Confused, he asked, "But wasn't it just yesterday you bought the same thing? Why do you need another?" She told him, "I went to pray in a house because I was walking on the street when I needed a place to pray. I entered the house of a very respectable and capable woman, but I forgot the silk there." "Go back to the house and bring the silk then," suggested the silk trader. She replied, "I don't remember the house nor do I know the name of the woman. It was only by chance that I knocked its door and the woman inside let me pray there. Today I want another piece of silk in its place." He asked her, "Are you sure you don't know the owner of the house?" She confirmed that she did not.

In that moment, the trader saw clearly what had happened. "You came to my house. Did you know that the woman was my wife? I threw her out of our home and divorced her, and now I'm going to return to her." She exclaimed, "Oh no! You must remarry her." The trader brought the old woman the cut of silk from his house. His wife and her family were very upset, and the divorce was nearly irreversible, but they settled the dispute and remarried.

The young woman took off her disguise and told the devil, "See! I made a man divorce his wife and return to her the next day. Can you do that?" He shook his head and acknowledged that he could not and that her plotting impressed him. The clever woman returned to her home and the devil descended to his. He sighed and admitted, "Women teach the devil lessons." ♦

Endnotes

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