Munshi Newal Kishore Press

DIGITAL MUSEUM EXHIBIT

Hatim Tai حاتم طائی

The Seven Questions



ILLUSTRATED STORY / QUICK COMIC

2026 MUSEUM EDITION

LUCKNOW

A contemporary recreation · 2026

CONTENTS

The seven journeys

Each chapter opens with Husn Banu’s question. Read the illustrated story or follow the comic panels. The links at the foot of each page keep your place.

The woman who built Shahabad				3
Who is who				5
When and where				6

CHAPTER		OPENING	STORY	COMIC
I	A Second Glimpse	7	8–13	14–22
II	Two Loaves for the River	23	24–26	27–28
III	The Man in the Branches	29	30–31	32–33
IV	The Thief of Karam	34	35–38	39–40
V	When the Mountain Calls	41	42–43	44–45
VI	The Pearl’s Missing Twin	46	47–49	50–51
VII	The Bath of Badgard	52	53–54	55–56

The seven answers · 57

Hatim in print · 59

Picture and panel studies · 60

Source notes · 62

PROLOGUE / SHAHABAD

The woman who built Shahabad

When Husn Banu was twelve, her father, Burzakh, died and left her the fortune he had made as a merchant in Khorasan. She began giving it away. There was one matter she meant to keep in her own hands. She had no wish to marry simply because someone asked her. The woman who had nursed her as a child knew seven mysteries. Let any suitor first bring back their answers, the nurse suggested. Husn Banu liked the terms.

One evening Husn Banu gave a feast for Azrak, a holy man whom the king trusted. That night, from behind a screen, she saw her guest come back with armed men. They killed members of her household and carried away her belongings. She went to court the next morning and named the man she had fed. The king was so certain of Azrak’s goodness that he banished the girl who accused him. Her nurse went with her.

Out in the wilderness Husn Banu fell asleep under a tree. A man in a dream told her where to dig. When she and her nurse broke the ground, they found buried gold. She sent for the people who had been turned out of her house. Soon tents stood under the trees, and a builder named Muammir came to measure the ground. To win permission for a city, Husn Banu dressed as a merchant and went back to the very king who had sent her away. He received her as Mahru Shah. Within a few years a city called Shahabad stood where Husn Banu and her nurse had slept.

PROLOGUE / SHAHABAD

The portrait in the water



As Mahru Shah she invited Azrak to feast again in her father’s old house. This time the watch was ready. At midnight they caught him with a cup of rubies he had just stolen. In court the king recognised his trusted adviser. Husn Banu then told him whose accusation he had refused to hear. It was the same merchant’s daughter who now stood before him. Back in Shahabad, Husn Banu furnished a house where travellers could eat, sleep and get money for the road. Those travellers carried her name farther than any royal herald could have done.

Their stories reached Prince Munir Shami. He sent a painter to Shahabad. Husn Banu had a basin filled with water and leaned over it from above. The painter studied the face in the water and made her portrait. When Munir saw it, he set out himself. Husn Banu gave him the first mystery. Somewhere a man kept calling for a second sight of something he had seen just once. Could Munir find that man and tell her what he meant? Munir carried the portrait away. He had no name for the man, and no road to follow.

BEFORE THE JOURNEY

Who is who

Husn Banu

The founder of Shahabad keeps a guesthouse there. Suitors may come to her door, but she sets the terms on which she will hear them. The seven questions are hers to ask.

Prince Munir Shami

A visiting prince who hears what Husn Banu has done for strangers and hopes to marry her. He tries to solve the first mystery alone. When his strength gives out, it costs him something to accept a stranger’s help.

Hatim Tai

A prince of Yemen who can understand animals. He finds Munir while out hunting. A hungry wolf soon discovers that Hatim will listen even when helping one creature puts him in debt to another.

Husn Banu’s nurse

The woman who raised Husn Banu. She proposes the seven conditions, shares her exile and is beside her when she begins again. The book gives her no personal name.

THE LEGEND AND ITS READERS

When and where

Arabia in the sixth century CE

The historical Hatim al-Ta’i belonged to the Arab tribe of Tayy. His hospitality became proverbial. People told stories about what a hungry guest might receive at his fire.

The time inside the tale

Centuries later an anonymous Persian romance imagined seven journeys for him. Its oldest known manuscript dates to the sixteenth century. The adventures have no stated calendar year. A man can remember eight hundred years, but supper can still go cold while a friend is missing.

The places on the road

Yemen is Hatim’s home. Khorasan is the region where Husn Banu builds Shahabad. Its guesthouse is the place to remember. However far a journey takes him, Hatim owes someone there an answer. Mountains that speak and islands ruled by fairies belong to the geography of the tale.

Lucknow, September 1888

Munshi Newal Kishore Press printed Qissa Hatim Tai Manzoom, an Urdu verse telling by Tansukh Rai, who wrote as Raghbat. You can see its title leaf, printer’s imprint and dated colophon in the museum pages.

London 1830 · Bombay and Adyar 1911 · Lucknow 2026

Duncan Forbes translated the Persian romance into English in 1830. The museum used its 1911 third edition for the sequence of events. This 2026 English retelling adds new dialogue, comic panels and illustrations.

CHAPTER I

A Second Glimpse

“What I once saw, I long for a second time.”



ON THE ROAD

Shahabad • the lake • the desert of Hawaida

Husn Banu knows what the stranger calls out, but she has never seen his face. Munir has worn himself out looking for him. Hatim asks to take his place.

PEOPLE TO LOOK FOR

The bear king’s daughter gives Hatim a small pearl to wear in his turban. The man of Hawaida lives on the far side of an enchanted lake.

Read the story · p. 8

Read the comic · p. 14

SCENE 1 OF 5 / A SECOND GLIMPSE

The portrait in the prince’s coat

“What I once saw, I long for a second time.”



At the edge of Yemen, Hatim heard somebody weeping under a tree. He lowered his bow. A stranger sat in a fine coat, grey with dust except for one clean fold. From inside it he drew a painting. “I have walked so far,” he said, “that today I passed my own footprints.”

His name was Munir Shami. “I sent a painter to Shahabad,” he said. “People spoke so warmly of Husn Banu that I wanted to see her for myself. When I asked if she would marry me, she gave me the first of her seven questions. Somewhere a man keeps calling for a second sight of something. She asked me to find out what he saw. Neither of us knows where he lives.”

Hatim took Munir home for three days of food and sleep. Before they left for Shahabad he told his household to keep feeding travellers in his absence. At Husn Banu’s guesthouse he made his offer. “Let Munir stay here. I’ll look for the man and bring you his story.” Husn Banu agreed. Munir folded the portrait away. “I’ll have supper waiting,” he said.

SCENE 2 OF 5 / A SECOND GLIMPSE

The wolf’s share

“What I once saw, I long for a second time.”



A doe shot past Hatim. A wolf ran so close behind her that its muzzle almost touched her flank. Hatim saw the milk on her udder. Somewhere a fawn was waiting to be fed. He stepped between the animals. The doe escaped. Hatim, who understood the speech of animals, waited while the wolf got its breath back.

“You must be Hatim.” “How do you know my name?” “Who else would stop a wolf for the sake of a fawn? Only tell me, Hatim, since you sent away my supper, what am I to eat?” Its ribs showed through its coat. Hatim gave it a piece of flesh from his own thigh. As he bound the wound, he told the wolf whose voice he sought. “I’ve heard of that man,” said the wolf. “Take the right fork towards the desert of Hawaida.”

Hatim made it as far as a jackal den before the pain in his thigh brought him down. One jackal stayed with him while its mate sought a remedy. For seven nights they tended him. When he could stand, the jackals showed him the shortest way across the desert.

ON THE ROAD / A SECOND GLIMPSE

The pearl in Hatim’s turban

On the road from the jackals’ tree to the mountain hermit.



In the land beyond the fork, bears seized Hatim and took him before their king. The king wanted Hatim to marry his daughter, a princess with human form. Hatim asked to go on to Hawaida. The king had him locked in a cave and rolled a stone across its mouth.

In his sleep Hatim saw an old man who told him that the princess would help him reach Hawaida. When the king asked again, Hatim agreed to the marriage. Six months passed. He told his wife about Munir and asked her help. She went straight to her father. “He says he’ll come back. I believe him.” The king let him go. Before Hatim left, his wife tied a little pearl into a fold of his turban. It was a charm against fire and poison.

Far out on the sand he saw what looked like a hill. The hill drew breath. Hatim’s feet left the ground and a dragon swallowed him whole. Its venom never touched him. For three days Hatim kept trying to stand, his boots pressing into the dragon’s belly. The creature could bear it no longer. It spat him onto the sand. Hatim lay in the sun to dry, one hand on the knot in his turban.

Forbes, Book I, pp. 36–41

SCENE 3 OF 5 / A SECOND GLIMPSE

Three days at the feast

“What I once saw, I long for a second time.”



A hermit who knew the way to Hawaida pointed out a lake. “Under the water stands a palace. There you’ll see a fairy in a golden veil. Take her hand and the spell will send you on to the desert.” Hatim peered into the lake. He could see every pebble. Then the pebbles wavered and a woman rose through the water, her pale sleeve drifting round her wrist. She offered him her hand. He took it and held his breath. When his feet touched ground, he was in a garden. The lake spirit vanished among the trees.

Women led him through the garden to a palace. When he put one foot on the step of its throne, he heard a crack so loud that he bent down to see what he had broken. The step was sound. He sat down. The fairy in the golden veil came to stand beside him. An attendant held out a dish of figs. They were so ripe that drops of juice stood on their split skins.

Three days he feasted there. After the last fig he was as hungry as after the first. He thought of Munir in the guesthouse, setting a place for a man who might spend another three days eating. On the fourth morning he rose and took the veiled fairy by the hand. A guardian sprang from beneath the throne and struck him. He landed face down in hot sand. Across the dunes of Hawaida someone called, “What I once saw, I long for a second time.”

SCENE 4 OF 5 / A SECOND GLIMPSE

One loaf for each of them

“What I once saw, I long for a second time.”



The voice came three times, then fell silent. Hatim climbed the nearest rise and saw only sand. For days he followed the sound. On the ninth evening he came upon an old man sitting alone under a thin moon. “So it was you I heard,” said Hatim. “I’ve come a long way to ask what you saw.” The old man shifted over. “Then you’ve come a long way without a meal. Sit here.”

The moment Hatim sat down, two loaves and two pitchers of water appeared on the ground. The old man put a loaf and a pitcher into his guest’s hands. They ate without speaking. A single mouthful of that dry bread did more for Hatim’s hunger than all the figs beneath the lake.

“I found a lake once,” the old man said. “A spirit took me down to a palace. By the throne stood a woman in a golden veil. I lifted the veil and she smiled at me. I caught her hand to draw her up beside me. Then something struck me. When I opened my hand again it was full of sand.” His fingers closed at the memory. “I’d give a great deal to see her smile once more. Do you know the way?” Hatim brushed the crumbs from his knees. “Lean on me.”

SCENE 5 OF 5 / A SECOND GLIMPSE

The branch above the water

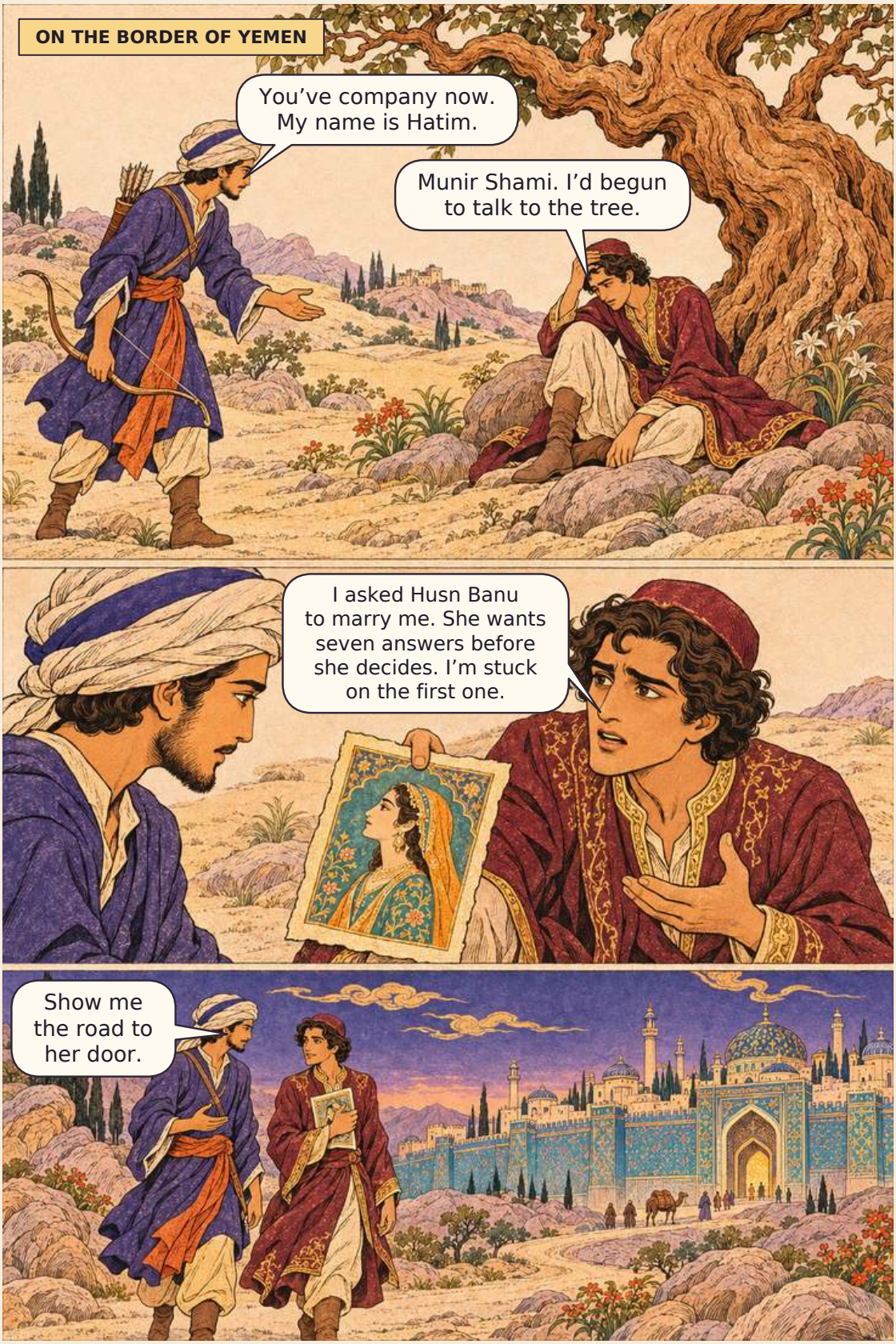
“What I once saw, I long for a second time.”



At first the old man walked so briskly that Hatim had to lengthen his stride. By midday his arm lay heavy on Hatim’s shoulder. They found shade and rested. Some days later, before Hatim could point out the lake, his companion began to laugh. “That branch! I remember how far it bent under my weight.”

At the bank Hatim said, “Let the lake spirit take you down as she did before. When you come to the throne, leave the fairy’s veil where it is. If you take her hand again, you know where you’ll wake.” The old man looked at his own fingers. “I might give her time to say something this time.” He climbed onto the branch. A pale sleeve rose through the green water. For a moment Hatim saw the two hands meet. Then rings spread among the reeds.

On his way back Hatim visited the hermit, spent a month with his wife as he had promised and stopped at the jackals’ tree. In Shahabad he told Husn Banu about the man of Hawaida and the smile he remembered. “You had your answer in the desert,” she said. “Why go back to the lake?” “Because he still had to get there,” said Hatim. Munir passed him the bread. “Tomorrow,” said Husn Banu, “find out why a man would throw good loaves into a river.”



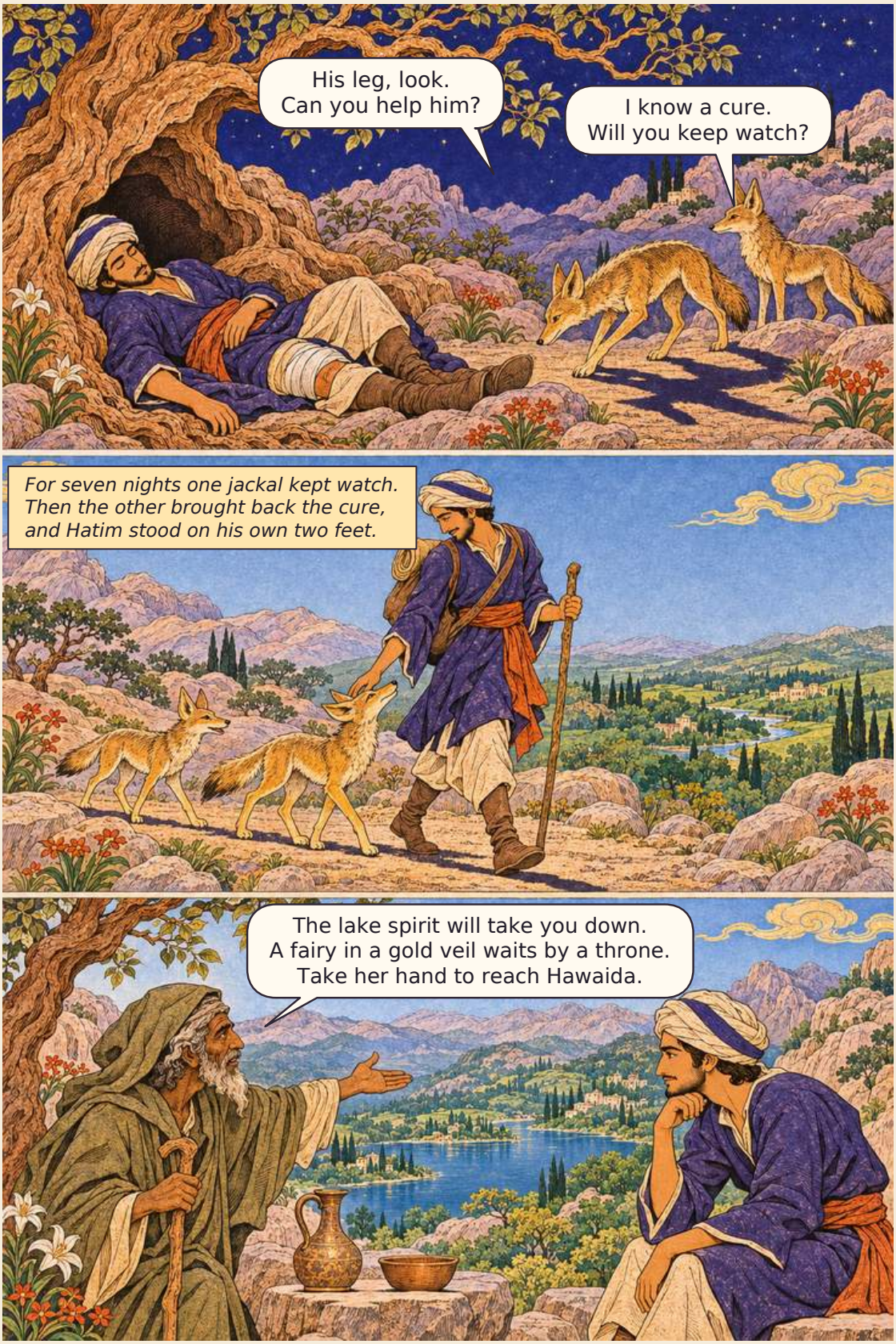
A weary prince carries a portrait and seven unanswered questions. When Hatim finds him under a tree, he offers to go with him to Shahabad.



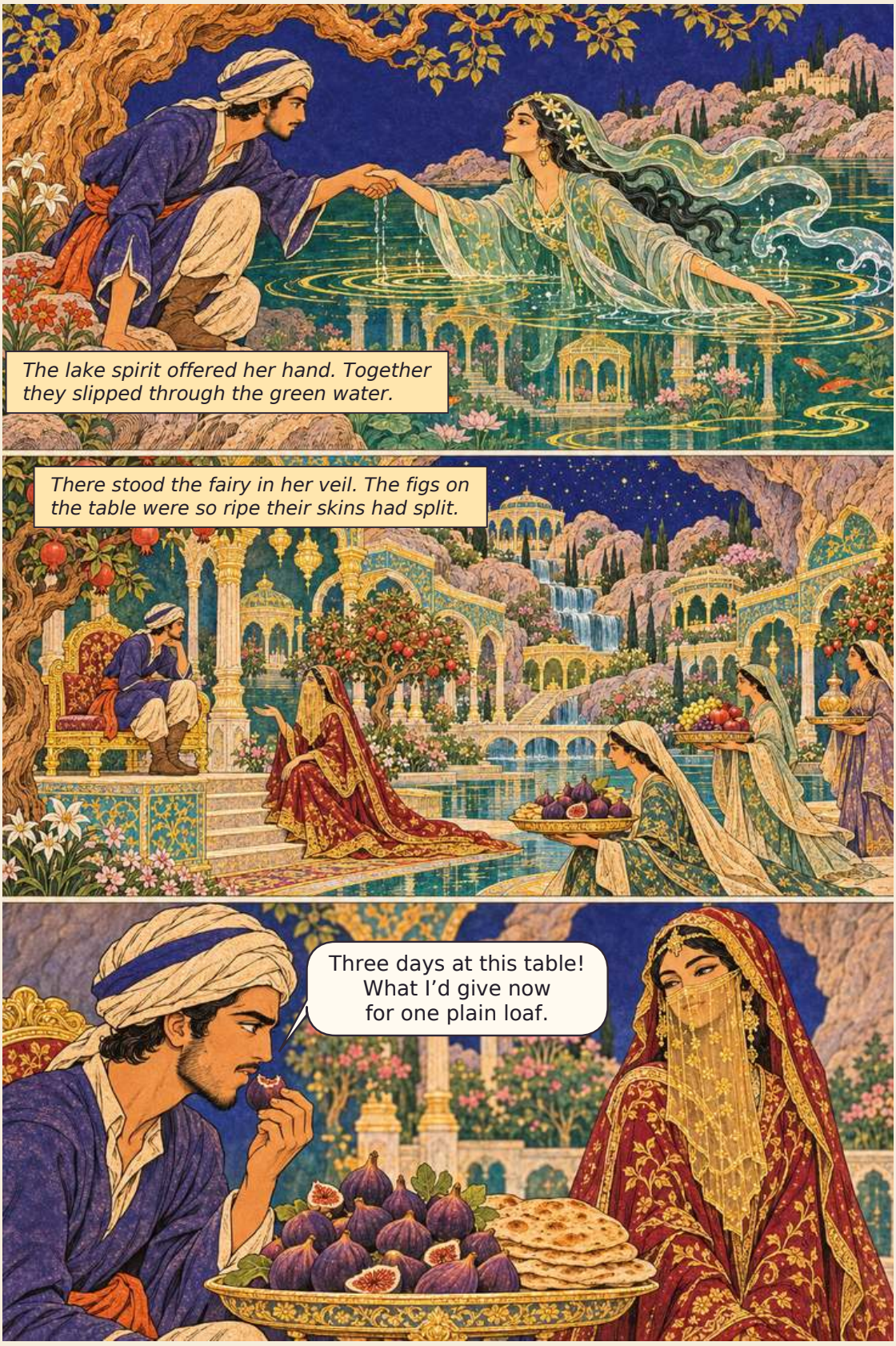
Husn Banu wants to know who keeps calling for a second glimpse and what he has seen. Hatim sets out while Munir keeps a place for him.



A nursing doe escapes when Hatim stops a hungry wolf. The wolf asks what it should eat, and Hatim pays for the doe's life with flesh of his own.



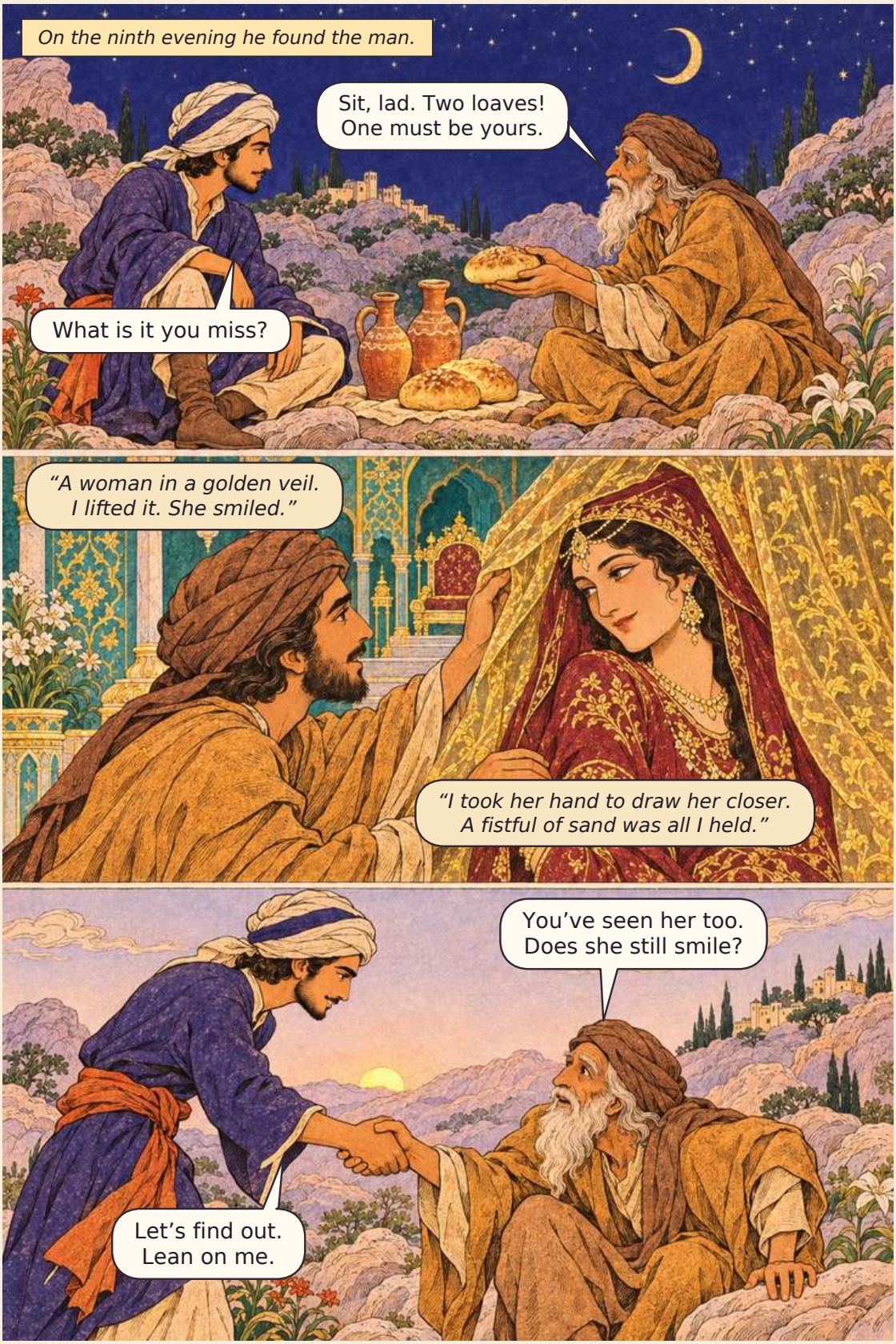
Two jackals find Hatim hurt. One keeps watch while the other brings a cure. Farther along, a hermit shows him the lake on the road to Hawaida.



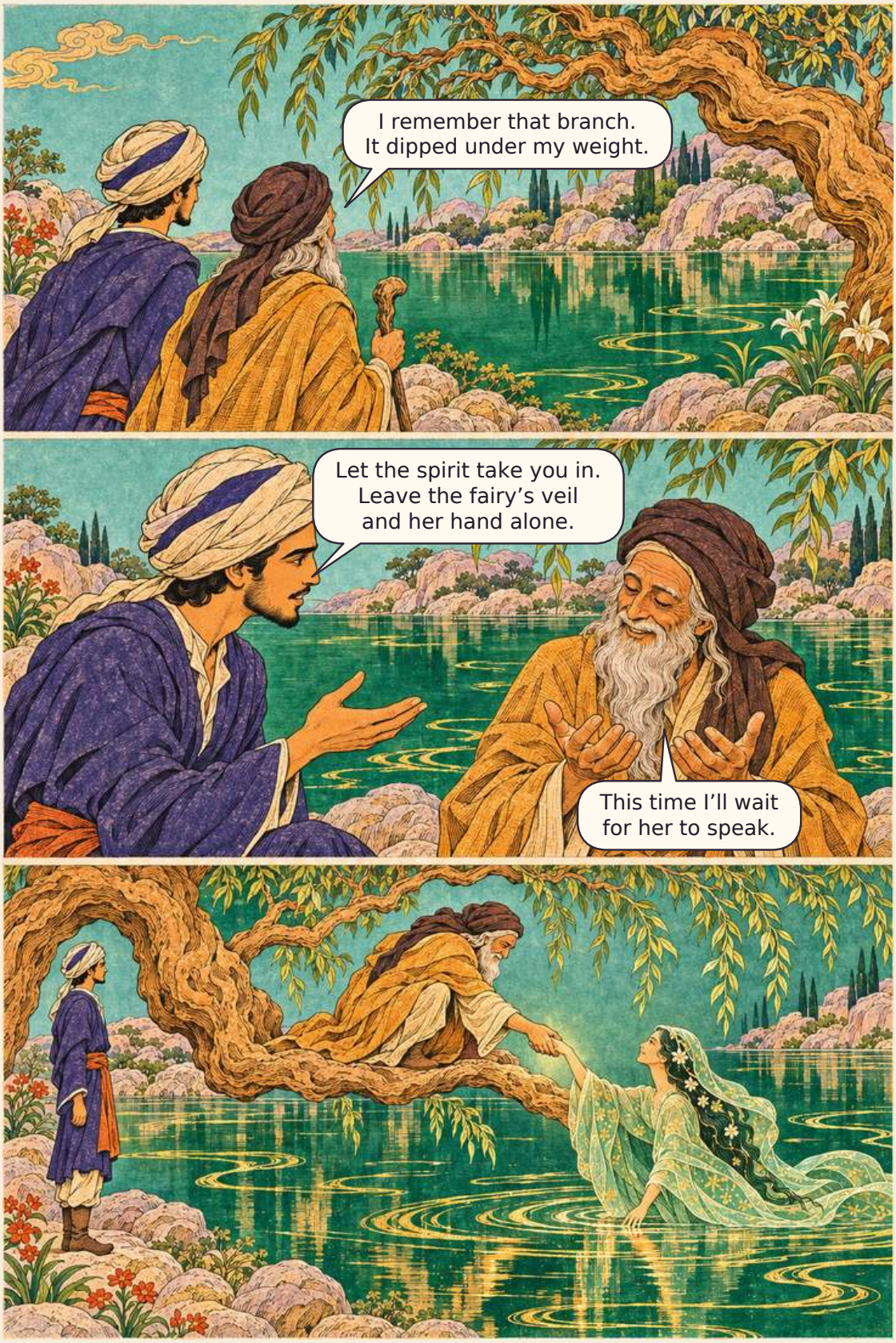
Under the lake, Hatim finds a palace, a gold-veiled fairy and a feast. For three days he eats his fill, yet he stays hungry.



Hatim takes the fairy’s hand. A guardian strikes him, the palace vanishes, and across the sand he hears the voice he came to find.



On the ninth evening Hatim finds the old man. The man shares his bread and explains whose smile he remembers.



Hatim walks his companion back to the lake. The old man recognises the branch over the water and reaches down to the waiting spirit.



In Shahabad, Munir has saved Hatim a place at supper. Hatim answers Husn Banu’s first question, and she gives him the next.

CHAPTER II

Two Loaves for the River

“Do good, and cast it upon the waters.”



ON THE ROAD

The country beneath the cave • the river house

Who put the words about doing good above a riverside door? To get there Hatim first goes underground for a merchant with a question of his own.

PEOPLE TO LOOK FOR

Farokash rules the spirits beneath the earth. The white-bearded baker lives by the river. Both men offer Hatim a meal, for very different reasons.

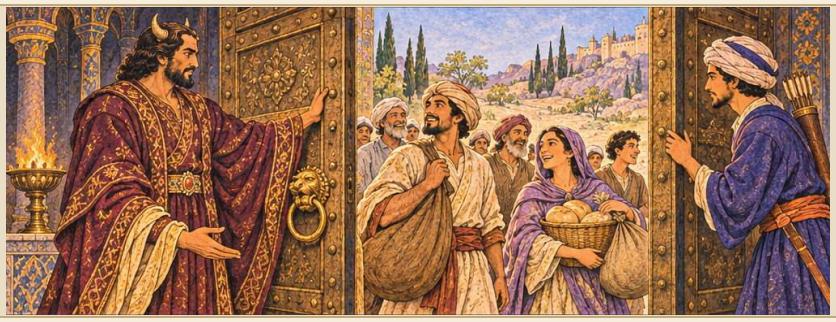
Read the story · p. 24

Read the comic · p. 27

ON THE ROAD / TWO LOAVES FOR THE RIVER

Supper in the king’s hall

Before Hatim reaches the river house, another traveller sends him underground.



On the road to the river house, Hatim met Naim, a young merchant in love. The woman he hoped to marry had set three tasks of her own. First Naim must find out where a cave led. Hatim left him at an inn and went in. The passage opened into the country of Farokash, king of the spirits. Every meal left the king doubled up in pain. He held human travellers prisoner in the hope that one of them could cure him.

A local chief’s wife had lost her sight. Hatim bathed her eyes with water in which he had dipped the bear princess’s pearl. When she could see again, her husband took him to Farokash. At dinner Hatim held up a joint of meat for everyone to see, then covered it. An hour later he lifted the cover. Worms swarmed over the dish. In this enchanted court the hungry gazes of the watching servants had spoiled the meat. “Tomorrow let the servants have their dinner before you sit down to yours,” he told the king. Farokash fed his household first, then ate in private. The charm broke. His pain left him.

Offered a place of honour, Hatim asked for something else. “Let the travellers go home.” Farokash gave his prisoners clothes and provisions for the journey. Hatim stayed to tend the king’s sick daughter with the little pearl from his turban. At the mouth of the cave he found Naim waiting for news. Hatim saw his friend through the other two tasks as well. One concerned a voice that cried in the night, the other a fairy’s jewel. When Naim and the merchant’s daughter were married, Hatim took up his own errand and followed the road to the river.

Forbes, Book II, pp. 50–62 and 109–111

SCENE 1 OF 2 / TWO LOAVES FOR THE RIVER

Two for the fish

“Do good, and cast it upon the waters.”



Hatim found the words Husn Banu had described above a doorway by the river. “Do good, and cast it upon the waters.” He was still reading when a white-bearded man opened the door. “The letters will keep,” he said. “The bread is warm now.”

The man set a bowl before him. There was flour in the creases of his knuckles. “Did you have those words put up?” Hatim asked. The fingers went still. “I did. In my younger days, a traveller who saw these hands on his bridle knew he was going to lose his purse. I made my living by robbery.”

Each day, the man said, he also kneaded sweet oil and sugar into dough and baked two round loaves. He carried them down to the river. Before the first crumb struck the water, he could see fish gathering in the shadow of his arm. “I gave it for the love of God. The fish could do nothing for me, so far as I knew.” He broke the bread on the table and gave Hatim half.

SCENE 2 OF 2 / TWO LOAVES FOR THE RIVER

A place at the table

“Do good, and cast it upon the waters.”



“Then I fell ill,” the old robber told Hatim. In a fever dream a hand dragged him towards a pit. Two young strangers caught him, one under each arm, and swept him up to the gates of heaven. An angel asked his name. “You want the other man of that name. This one has another hundred years.”

The strangers carried him home. As they set him down, he caught the edge of a sleeve. “Tell me who saved my life.” “The two loaves you broke for the fish,” came the answer. He woke gripping his quilt. For a while he lay there listening to his own breath. Then he hung up his knife.

When he could bake again, he took his loaves to the river. A hundred gold dinars lay on the bank. He asked through the village for their owner. Nobody came. For ten mornings the money appeared there. Then he dreamed that what he needed was his to keep and the rest was for people in want. He built the house where Hatim sat. Every day he still fed the fish and welcomed whoever knocked.

In Shahabad, Husn Banu asked what good the robber’s loaves had done. “First they fed the fish,” said Hatim. “Then they saved the baker. Now he feeds hungry travellers on the very road where he once robbed them.”

QUEST II / THE QUESTION

Two Loaves for the River

Do good, and cast it upon the waters.



Husn Banu had asked who wrote the saying over a doorway. Hatim found the words on a house by the river. A cook opened the door.

THE COOK “I wrote those words. I was once a robber.”



In those days he robbed travellers. Each day he also baked two loaves with sweet oil and sugar.

THE COOK “I broke them up for the fish. They took every crumb.”

QUEST II / THE ANSWER

Two Loaves for the River

Do good, and cast it upon the waters.



Fever laid him low. In a dream two strangers caught him at the edge of death and carried him home.

ONE STRANGER “We’re the loaves you threw into the river.”



He woke and put away his knife. Hatim could tell Husn Banu what those loaves had done. They had fed the fish and saved the baker.

THE COOK “Pass that bowl along, Hatim.”

CHAPTER III

The Man in the Branches

“Do no evil. If you do, such shall you meet with.”



ON THE ROAD

The hills of Himyar • the field of luminous flowers

A caller in the hills warns that harm comes back to the person who does it. Hatim wants to know why he says it. The man who can answer is sitting in a cage with the door open.

PEOPLE TO LOOK FOR

Hamir is the man in the hanging cage. Himyar, by contrast, is the hill country where he lives. The sage in Hamir’s story once worked for him.

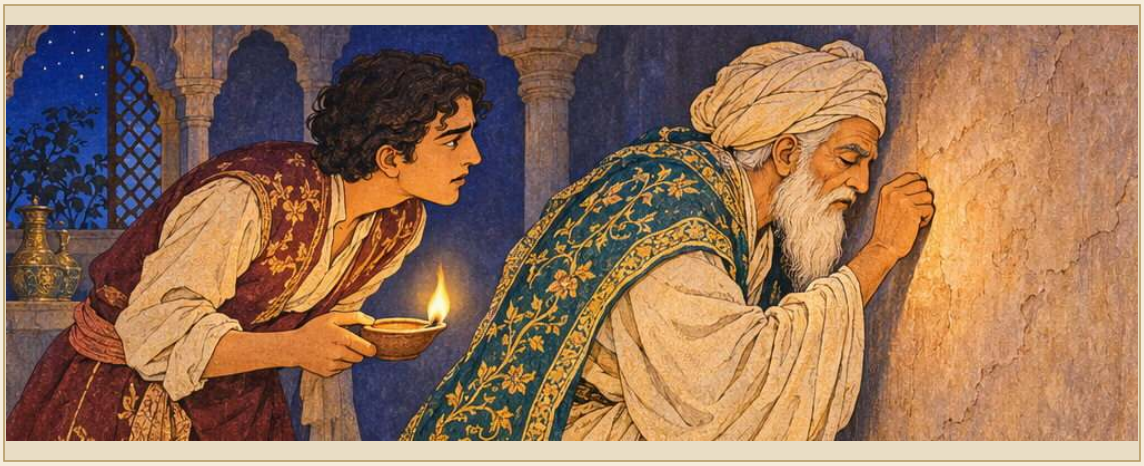
Read the story · p. 30

Read the comic · p. 32

SCENE 1 OF 2 / THE MAN IN THE BRANCHES

A door on the wind

“Do no evil. If you do, such shall you meet with.”



Husn Banu had heard of a man in the hills of Himyar who cried, “The hurt you give will come back to you.” Who was he, and what hurt had he done? On the way Hatim had helped reunite a young man with Alkanpari, the fairy queen he loved. In thanks she sent her fairies to carry Hatim to Himyar. As they set him down he heard the cry.

A cage hung from a tree. Its door stood open. Inside sat a blind man named Hamir. “Can you reach the opening?” Hatim asked. Hamir put a hand through the bars. Pain caught him so sharply that Hatim steadied the swinging cage while he drew it back. “Nearly three years I’ve sat here,” Hamir said. “I’ll tell you why, if you give me your word you’ll keep it to yourself.” Hatim gave his word.

Hamir’s father had left him in charge of the family property. By the time news came that his father had died at sea, Hamir had spent everything he could reach. A sage offered to find the treasure hidden in the house in return for a quarter of it. Hamir agreed. The sage put his ear to a wall and tapped. One stone rang hollow. “When I saw how much gold there was,” said Hamir, “I threw him a few coins. When he asked for his share, I struck him.”

SCENE 2 OF 2 / THE MAN IN THE BRANCHES

The field after dark

“Do no evil. If you do, such shall you meet with.”



The sage came back with a pot of kohl, the dark powder worn around the eyes. One touch, he told Hamir, and he would see treasure underground. Hamir tipped up his face. Everything went black. The sage shut him in the cage, naming one cure before he left. “Other travellers have heard me call for the flower of light,” Hamir said. “I can tell when they’ve gone. I hear the gravel under their shoes.”

The fairies who had brought Hatim to Himyar knew the field where the flowers of light grew. One night their scent woke him. Each stalk bore what looked like a little lamp. In their light he saw the scorpions too, and the snakes coiled between the stems. He took the bear princess’s pearl from his turban and closed his hand round it. He crossed the field unhurt and picked three flowers.

Hatim lowered the cage and squeezed the stalks over Hamir’s eyes. For a long moment Hamir sat still. “Your sleeve,” he said. “It’s blue.” He stepped out and offered Hatim gold. “Feed somebody who needs it,” Hatim said. “And may I tell Husn Banu your story?” Hamir nodded. “Tell her how much I owed him.” In Shahabad Hatim told her about the quarter share, the blow and the years in the cage. Then he sent for Munir to share his supper.

QUEST III / THE QUESTION

The Man in the Branches

Do no evil. If you do, such shall you meet with.



A voice called from a tree in Himyar. Hamir sat blind inside a cage, with the door wide open.

HAMIR “I can put my hand through the bars. Then the pain starts.”



Hamir promised a sage a quarter of any treasure he found. When the sage found gold, Hamir threw him a few coins and shoved him outside.

THE SAGE “Is that the quarter you promised me?”

QUEST III / THE ANSWER

The Man in the Branches

Do no evil. If you do, such shall you meet with.



The sage took revenge. He put an enchanted powder in Hamir's eyes and blinded him. Hatim searched among the snakes for the flower that could cure him.

A FAIRY "Three stems, Hatim! Now come back!"



The juice of the flowers restored Hamir's sight. He sent Hatim home to Husn Banu with the story he had kept to himself for three years.

HAMIR "Tell her how much I owed him. A quarter. Start with that."

CHAPTER IV

The Thief of Karam

“He who speaks the truth is always tranquil.”



ON THE ROAD

The enchanted lake • the Red Mountain • Old Karam

Husn Banu sends Hatim to a man who says telling the truth lets him sleep in peace. On the way Hatim meets Zarinposh. To help her, he must tell a painful truth himself.

PEOPLE TO LOOK FOR

Zarinposh is the daughter of the magician Sam Ahmar. Sarmak is a guard in his service. The elderly householder in Old Karam has a story of his own.

Read the story · p. 35

Read the comic · p. 39

ON THE ROAD / THE THIEF OF KARAM

The women in the tree

On the road from Shahabad to Old Karam.



Husn Banu’s fourth question was about a man in Karam who had put these words over his door. “He who speaks the truth is always tranquil.” Hatim was to ask what had once troubled him, and how he had come by his peace.

On his way to Karam, Hatim stooped for a drink and snatched his hand back. The stream was red. He followed it uphill for two days to a lake and a tree hung with women’s heads. From the highest branch came a laugh. Hatim stayed to learn how such a dreadful thing could laugh.

At sunset the heads dropped into the lake. Where the water had been stood a palace bright with lamps. Music began. The woman from the highest branch sat whole and alive upon its throne. Seeing Hatim hungry outside, she sent him supper. At dawn the lamps went out, and there was the tree again.

An old man dressed in green told him her name. Zarinposh had asked to marry a man of her own choosing. Her father, the magician Sam Ahmar, had answered by laying this spell on her and her attendants. Hatim climbed to her branch. The instant he touched it, his own head appeared beside hers. That night he ate with Zarinposh, unable even to remember that he had come to help her. The old man found him there by day and touched him with his staff. When Hatim stood on his own feet again, he asked the way to her father.

Forbes, Book IV, pp. 168–176

ON THE ROAD / THE THIEF OF KARAM

What Zarinposh asked

Before Hatim reaches the man with the writing above his door.



The old man taught Hatim a prayer made of the names of God. “Keep your word and tell the truth if you would have these words help you.” On the Red Mountain Hatim’s feet stuck fast to the rocks. He said the prayer and felt a pebble shift under his heel. He could climb again.

Sam Ahmar tried to burn Hatim, then had him chained. A guard named Sarmak helped him escape. When the magician’s soldiers tried to flee, he turned them into trees. Sarmak led Hatim into the silent forest. Hatim breathed his prayer over a cup of water. Sarmak sprinkled the trunks. Branches bent into arms. Men stood rubbing their eyes where the trees had been.

Together they climbed to the stronghold where Sam Ahmar and his master had taken refuge in a dome of cloud. At Hatim’s prayer the dome broke. The two magicians fled and fell over a precipice.

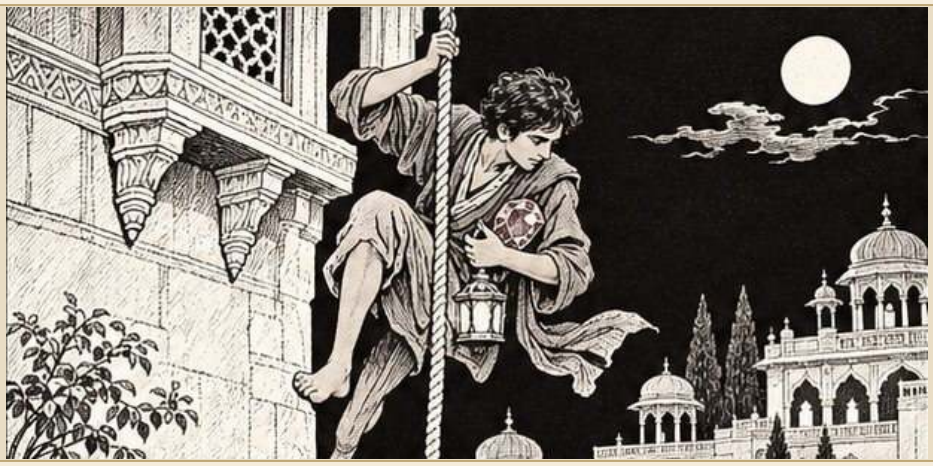
When Hatim came back to the lake, Zarinposh met him in daylight. She asked how her father had died. Hatim sat beside her and told her everything. She wept for him. In time she chose to marry Hatim, who already had a wife in the bear kingdom. He spoke of Munir waiting and the man in Karam he had still to find. Zarinposh took letters to his parents in Yemen. Hatim set out for Karam, carrying his little bundle alone once more.

Forbes, Book IV, pp. 175–177, 186–190 and 195–201

SCENE 1 OF 2 / THE THIEF OF KARAM

The writing over the door

“He who speaks the truth is always tranquil.”



At the end of the road stood Karam, but nobody there had seen the inscription Husn Banu had told Hatim about. “You want Old Karam,” a baker said. “The town moved. That man never did.” Beyond the gardens Hatim found a stone house. Above its door were the words, “He who speaks the truth is always tranquil.” Its owner gave him supper and a bed. Over breakfast he told Hatim, “I was a young man when I built this house, and I’m eight hundred now.” He passed Hatim a peeled egg with a steady hand.

Once, those same hands had shaken so badly he could scarcely throw the dice. He had lost his last coin and still wanted to play. That night he climbed a rope to a window of the king’s palace. Inside, a princess lay asleep. He emptied her jewel case into his sash, saving a great red ruby for the inside pocket. On his way out he saw one more thing worth stealing. He tucked the golden lamp under his arm and slipped down the rope. The room above him went dark.

SCENE 2 OF 2 / THE THIEF OF KARAM

Who was at the door

“He who speaks the truth is always tranquil.”



The thief was crossing the desert when he came upon a gang dividing their spoils. The moment he showed them the ruby, every hand reached for it. A shout made the earth shake. The others scattered, but the thief stood rooted. An old stranger faced him. “Whose stone is that?”

He could have called it a family jewel. Instead he told the stranger about the sleeping girl, right down to the lamp. The stranger let him go on one condition. “Give up gambling. Keep that promise, and your life will stretch to nine hundred years.” The young man gave his word. He never picked up the dice again.

The stolen wealth paid for his house, and his sudden good fortune aroused suspicion. First the magistrate questioned him, then the king. To the princess’s own father he admitted everything. “You have put yourself in my hands by telling me that,” said the king. He pardoned the thief and let him keep the treasure.

“That was the day I had those words cut over my door.” Someone knocked. Hatim watched the old man get up at once to answer. In Shahabad, Husn Banu asked whether he really slept as peacefully as he claimed. “He does,” said Hatim. “He’s told the one man whose knock he had reason to fear.”

QUEST IV / THE QUESTION

The Thief of Karam

He who speaks the truth is always tranquil.



In Old Karam, Hatim found a saying carved above a door. Those who tell the truth sleep easy. He knocked.

THE OLD MAN “Come in. I can tell you why I wrote it.”



Broke from gambling, he climbed a rope to a palace window. He slid down with a ruby.

THE OLD MAN “Even the lamp beside the princess’s bed. I took that too.”

QUEST IV / THE ANSWER

The Thief of Karam

He who speaks the truth is always tranquil.



A stranger promised him nine hundred years if he gave up gambling. Later, before the king he had robbed, he confessed again.

THE YOUNG THIEF “Your daughter was asleep, Majesty. I took her gold.”



The king pardoned him for telling the whole truth. Now eight hundred years old, he could answer a knock without hiding a thing.

THE OLD MAN “When someone knocks in the night, I just open the door.”

CHAPTER V

When the Mountain Calls

“Bring back an account of the mountain of Nida.”



ON THE ROAD

The city below Mount Nida • the road past Yemen

Husn Banu asks what happens to the people a mountain calls away. Hatim spends months waiting for a chance to follow one of them. By the time the chance comes, the man is his friend.

PEOPLE TO LOOK FOR

Jam lives below Mount Nida. During the months Hatim lodges there, an acquaintance at the supper table becomes a friend.

Read the story · p. 42

Read the comic · p. 44

SCENE 1 OF 2 / WHEN THE MOUNTAIN CALLS

The place at supper

“Bring back an account of the mountain of Nida.”



For her fifth question Husn Banu sent Hatim to Mount Nida. People went when the mountain called, she had heard. What became of them? Hatim had hardly reached the city at its foot when he heard a voice from the peak. “Come quickly!” A young man beside him got up and ran. Hatim followed him up the slope. Suddenly the whole mountain vanished, taking the young man with it. Where it had stood, a many-coloured stone glinted in the road.

That evening the young man’s family set out a meal for the poorest people in town. It was their custom when the mountain called someone away. A man named Jam made room for Hatim at the end of a bench. By the third supper Jam had taken to holding the bread just out of his reach. “Say please, traveller.” Hatim always did. He stayed six months. Each time someone went up the mountain, another family laid a table. Still nobody could tell him what happened beyond the rock.

One evening Jam’s hand was on the loaf when the voice came. He rose so fast the bench tipped over. On the hillside Hatim caught his wrist. Jam shook him off and ran harder. Hatim caught up again and this time held fast to Jam’s coat. “Wherever it is,” he gasped, “you needn’t go alone.” The cliff opened just wide enough to let them through.

SCENE 2 OF 2 / WHEN THE MOUNTAIN CALLS

Where the grass grew

“Bring back an account of the mountain of Nida.”



Beyond the opening lay a green plain with one bare patch the length of a man. Jam reached it first. His knees folded. Hatim slipped an arm beneath his head and called him by name, but his friend had died. The earth trembled and took Jam out of his arms. Where his head had rested, blades of grass began to rise.

The cliff had closed behind them. Seven days later Hatim came to a shore where an empty boat waited with two loaves and a fried fish. He sat down to wait for whoever owned the meal. A dolphin put its head above the water. “If you’re waiting for the guest,” it said, “he’s already aboard.”

The voyage took him past a mountain of jewels whose guardians gave him a ruby, an emerald and a diamond. At last he set foot in Yemen. A villager dropped what he was carrying. “Seven years since you went away! We’ve had just the letters Zarinposh brought.” Hatim could see the way to his parents’ house. “Tell them you saw me,” he said. Then he turned towards Shahabad.

There he showed Husn Banu the three stones. “Nida calls the people of that city when their lives are over. I held my friend to the end.” Munir pushed the bread within Hatim’s reach. “What was his name?” “Jam,” said Hatim. “He would have made me say please.”

QUEST V / THE QUESTION

When the Mountain Calls

Bring back an account of the mountain of Nida.



People vanished when Mount Nida called. In six months at its foot, Hatim made a friend. Jam always saved him bread.

JAM “Say please, traveller.”



Then the mountain called Jam. He dropped everything and ran. Hatim caught the hem of his coat as the rock opened.

HATIM “I’m coming with you, Jam.”

QUEST V / THE ANSWER

When the Mountain Calls

Bring back an account of the mountain of Nida.



Inside the mountain Jam fell on the one bare patch of earth. The ground closed over him. Grass came up through Hatim’s fingers.

HATIM “I’m here, Jam.”



On the journey home the mountain guardians gave Hatim three gems. He told Husn Banu that Nida calls its people when their lives are over.

HATIM “Thank you. Jam always made me say please.”

CHAPTER VI

The Pearl’s Missing Twin

“Bring back a pearl to match this one, the size of a duck’s egg.”



ON THE ROAD

The desert spring • the island of Barzakh

This time Husn Banu asks for an object. A silver model shows Hatim the size of the pearl she wants. Two birds know where its twin went, and a king wants to hear how it got there.

PEOPLE TO LOOK FOR

Shams Shah rules a people who once could fly. Mahyar rules the island of Barzakh and keeps the pearl. The prince of Zuman has come to Mahyar’s court before.

Read the story · p. 47

Read the comic · p. 50

SCENE 1 OF 2 / THE PEARL’S MISSING TWIN

What the seabirds knew

“Bring back a pearl to match this one, the size of a duck’s egg.”



For her sixth question Husn Banu laid a pearl on dark silk beside a duck’s egg. They were almost exactly the same size. “Somewhere there’s another pearl to match this one. Will you bring it here?” The charm in Hatim’s turban was small enough to hide in a fold of cloth. He had never seen anything like the pearl on the table. A silversmith made him a model to show people on the road.

At dusk two seabirds settled above Hatim as he turned the silver model in his fingers. He counted seven colours in their feathers. One cocked its head. “Have the silversmiths taken to laying eggs?” Hatim knew their speech. He had questioned jewellers for miles. It had never occurred to him to listen to a bird.

They were natikas. Long ago, once in thirty years, the females of their kind laid a pearl for an egg. Of all those pearls just two remained above water. A king had owned both. The one he gave away passed through many hands before it reached Husn Banu. When he died, his widow escaped with the other. At the shore a merchant named Simbar heard her calling and rowed out for her. She climbed aboard with the pearl in her fist. Hatim listened until he knew how it had reached its present owner on the island of Barzakh.

ON THE ROAD / THE PEARL'S MISSING TWIN

The serpent at the spring

After the two birds' account and before the flight towards Barzakh.



The birds had told Hatim where to find the other pearl. It still lay across a sea. Thirsty from the desert crossing, he came to a spring and found a great serpent coiled round it. The creature moved aside. "There's room," it said. "Drink." Hatim drank. He followed his unlikely host to a shady garden, where the serpent slipped into a pool.

Fairies came out with trays of emeralds. Hatim thanked them and asked to meet the one who had offered him water. A young man rose from the pool. "It was me you saw at the spring." Over a meal he told Hatim his name. He was Shams Shah, a fairy king under a curse. His people owed allegiance to the prophet Sulaiman, but Shams Shah had wanted the earth for his kingdom. When he raised an army to seize it, he became a serpent and his soldiers lost their wings. A voice had promised him release on the day he welcomed a thirsty stranger named Hatim.

Hatim prayed for the king and his people. Around them, soldiers felt their wings unfold again. When Hatim showed him the silver model, Shams Shah recognised the pearl of Barzakh. He warned him of demons on the road. Then he called his men. This time they spread their wings to carry a guest.

Forbes, Book VI, pp. 257–261 and 263–264

SCENE 2 OF 2 / THE PEARL'S MISSING TWIN

A story for a pearl

"Bring back a pearl to match this one, the size of a duck's egg."



King Mahyar of Barzakh promised his pearl to anyone who could tell him its history. As Shams Shah's winged bearers carried Hatim towards the island, they saw a young fairy prince on a ledge. He came from Zuman and had hoped to meet Mahyar's daughter. "I told her father the pearl came from the sea. He pointed out that any fish could have told him that." Hatim moved along the seat. "Come back with me. I've been talking to birds."

In the audience hall, Mahyar rolled the silver copy between his palms. Hatim told him about the birds that once laid pearls, and the queen who escaped with this one to Simbar's boat. "Simbar took her into his family. When she had her son, he raised the boy as his heir. That boy became king, and his descendants ruled these islands for generations. In time the pearl passed to your mother, and from her to you."

Mahyar opened his treasure room and gave Hatim the pearl. His daughter asked the prince of Zuman to stay for supper. In Shahabad, Husn Banu held one pearl in either palm. "Shut your eyes. I'll change them round." Hatim shut them gladly. For once he need never tell the two apart. He found Munir at the guesthouse. "Six," he told him. "One more journey."

QUEST VI / THE QUESTION

The Pearl’s Missing Twin

Bring back a pearl to match this one, the size of a duck’s egg.



Beside Husn Banu’s great pearl lay its twin in silver. Hatim picked up the copy for the road.

HATIM “Keep the pearl here. I only need its measure.”



Two seven-coloured birds settled above his head. Long ago their kind had laid pearls. Just two remained above the sea.

ONE BIRD “King Mahyar has the other one, over on Barzakh.”

QUEST VI / THE ANSWER

The Pearl’s Missing Twin

Bring back a pearl to match this one, the size of a duck’s egg.



Mahyar offered to give up his pearl if Hatim could tell its history. Hatim remembered what the two birds had told him.

HATIM “A seabird laid it. A queen fled with it. Simbar saved her. Her son became a king.”



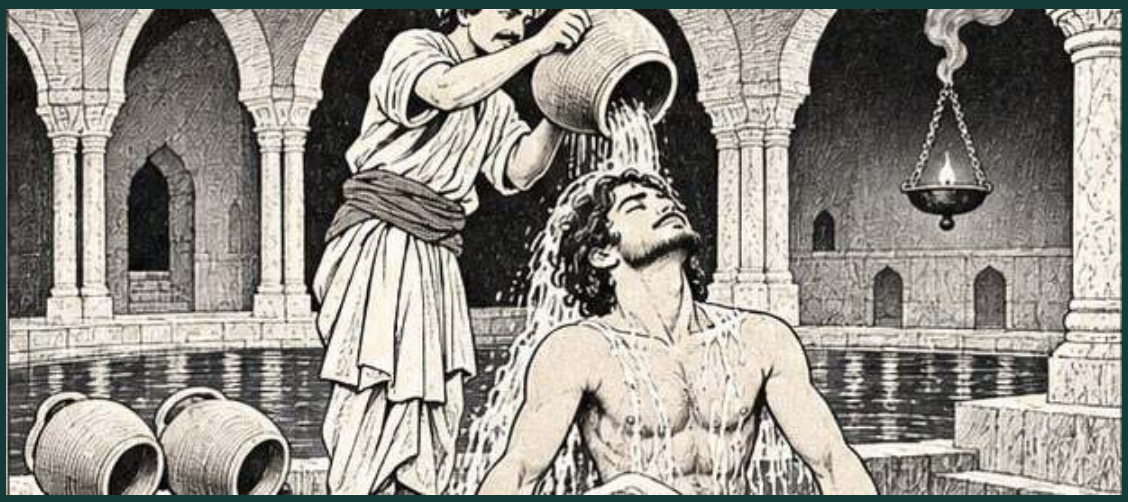
Mahyar heard him out and gave him the pearl. In Shahabad, Husn Banu held the two true pearls, one in each palm.

HUSN BANU “Close your eyes, Hatim. I’ll change them round.”

CHAPTER VII

The Bath of Badgard

“Bring back an account of the bath of Badgard.”



ON THE ROAD

Katan • the bathhouse • Shahabad • Yemen

No traveller has come back from Badgard to say what happens inside. To answer Husn Banu’s last question, Hatim must walk in through the same door.

PEOPLE TO LOOK FOR

The king of Katan controls the road to the bath. Its keeper guards the entrance. The attendant inside offers a bath to every traveller who comes through.

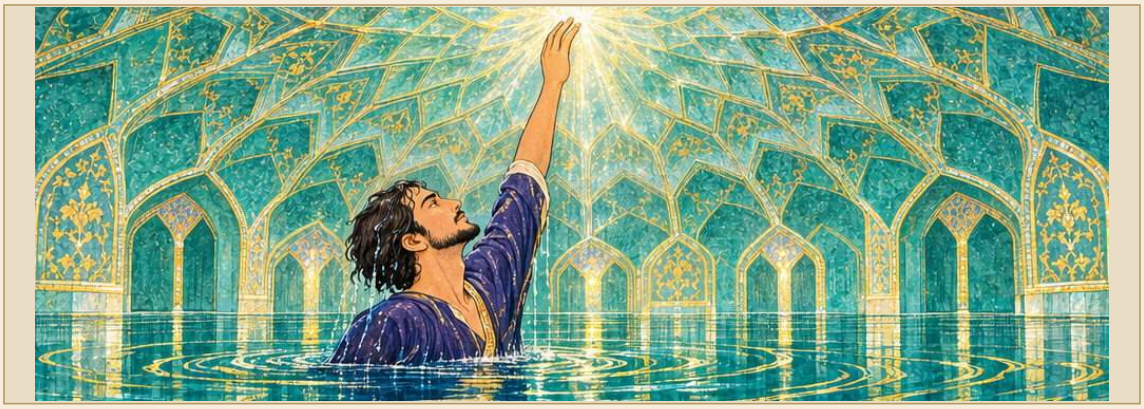
Read the story · p. 53

Read the comic · p. 55

SCENE 1 OF 2 / THE BATH OF BADGARD

The bath with no door

“Bring back an account of the bath of Badgard.”



For the last question Husn Banu asked about the bathhouse of Badgard. People went in. Nobody had ever come out to tell what happened there. The king of Katan gave Hatim a letter for its keeper, allowing him through. “Your lady already knows the place is dangerous,” said the keeper. “She doesn’t know what became of the people inside,” said Hatim.

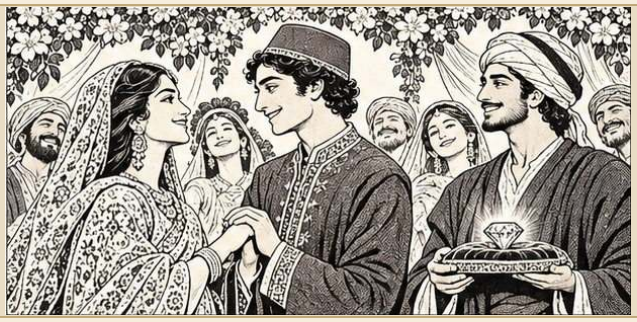
At the bathhouse an attendant poured three jars of water over his head. With the third came a crack of thunder. The attendant vanished. Water rose to Hatim’s chest as he felt along the wall for the door. Smooth stone met his fingers all the way round. Soon only the tip of the dome held any air. Hatim reached as high as he could. When his knuckles touched the peak, the thunder sounded again. He fell dripping onto hot sand.

He crossed the waste. On the third day he came to a garden lined with statues. Here were the missing travellers. An inscription told him why an ancient king had built the bath. He had a diamond he could not bear to lose. His spell hid it in the body of a parrot. An archer could break the spell by hitting the bird in the head. There were three arrows. At Hatim’s first shot the parrot jumped to its cage roof. His legs turned to marble. At the second it darted aside again. The stone reached his waist.

SCENE 2 OF 2 / THE BATH OF BADGARD

The last arrow

“Bring back an account of the bath of Badgard.”



Hatim could still move his fingers. He set the last arrow to the string. Beside him stood a traveller with a small sandal tied to his pack. Some child might have grown too big for it by now. Hatim took aim. “God, steady my hand,” he whispered. He closed his eyes and let go.

The arrow struck the parrot. Wind tore through the garden. When Hatim opened his eyes he could bend his knees again. The cage had gone. A diamond lay beside his bow. He picked it up and heard a cough. All around him travellers were stretching. The man with the sandal laughed. “There’s a pebble in my boot. I can feel it!”

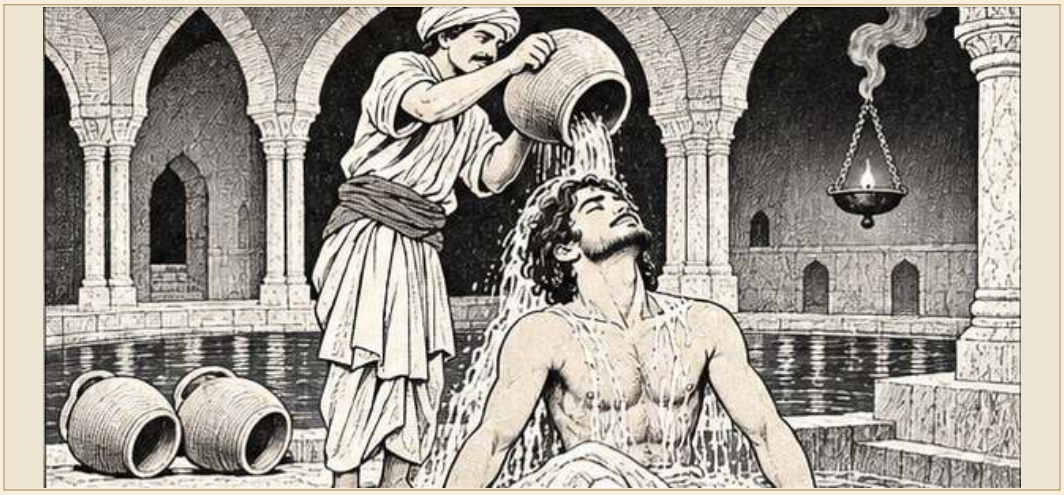
In Katan, Hatim asked the king for two things. Would he send the travellers home with food and money? And might Hatim first show the diamond in Shahabad? The king agreed. When Hatim put the jewel into Husn Banu’s hand he could give her the seventh answer. “Badgard guarded this stone. The travellers it held are on their way home.”

Husn Banu turned to Munir. “I have a question for you now. Will you marry me?” His yes could be heard from the far end of the table. After their wedding Hatim sent the diamond back to Katan. This time, in Yemen, he took the turning towards his parents’ house. They came out to meet him, and Zarinposh was there. In time his father entrusted him with the kingdom. In his house there was always a place at the table for the traveller who knocked.

QUEST VII / THE QUESTION

The Bath of Badgard

Bring back an account of the bath of Badgard.



To learn why nobody returned from Badgard, Hatim entered its bathhouse. An attendant poured three jars of water over his head. At the third, thunder sounded and the door vanished.

HATIM “There was a handle here. I felt it.”



Beyond the bath he found the missing travellers turned to stone. A diamond lay hidden inside a parrot. He had three arrows to break the spell and two had already missed.

HATIM “God, steady my hand.”

QUEST VII / THE ANSWER

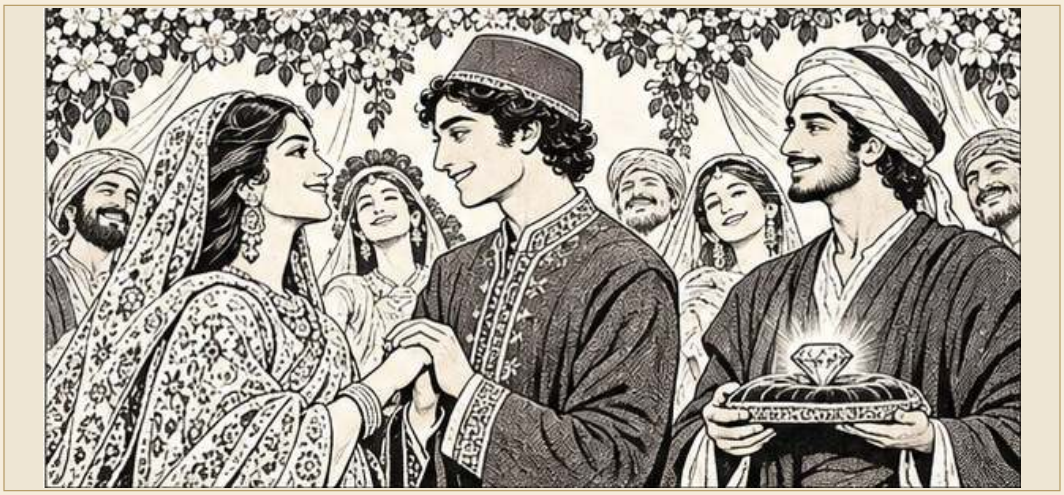
The Bath of Badgard

Bring back an account of the bath of Badgard.



Two misses had turned Hatim to marble up to the waist. His last arrow struck. He seized the fallen diamond, and the travellers breathed again.

A TRAVELLER “Help me up. I have a long way home.”



Hatim showed Husn Banu the diamond. She asked Munir to marry her. After their wedding Hatim sent the diamond back to Katan and went home to Yemen, where Zarinposh and his parents welcomed him.

MUNIR “With all my heart.”

AFTER THE SEVENTH JOURNEY

The seven answers

At Shahabad, Husn Banu asked Hatim for an account of what he had found. Here are his seven answers, in the order he brought them home.

I A Second Glimpse

The old man of Hawaida longs for one more glimpse of the fairy who smiled at him by the throne beneath the lake. Hatim learns the answer and walks him back to the water.

II Two Loaves for the River

A robber once threw two loaves to hungry fish every day. In his fever the loaves took human shape and carried him home. He put away his knife and used the gold he found to feed travellers.

III The Man in the Branches

Hamir cheated and struck the sage who found his father’s treasure. The sage blinded him and left him in the cage. Hatim finds the flowers that restore his sight. Hamir gives him leave to tell Husn Banu what he did.

IV The Thief of Karam

The thief admitted to the king that he had robbed the princess’s room. Pardoned, and faithful to his promise to give up gambling, he no longer feared a knock at the door. Hatim also frees Zarinposh and marries her.

AFTER THE SEVENTH JOURNEY

The seven answers (continued)

V When the Mountain Calls

Nida calls the people of the city at the end of their lives. Hatim follows Jam inside and stays until he dies. He returns to Shahabad able to tell Husn Banu what he saw, and Munir the name of the friend he lost.

VI The Pearl’s Missing Twin

The natika birds once laid pearls as eggs. Hatim traces the second great pearl through a queen and her descendants. When he tells its history to King Mahyar, the king gives it to him, and Husn Banu can hold the pair.

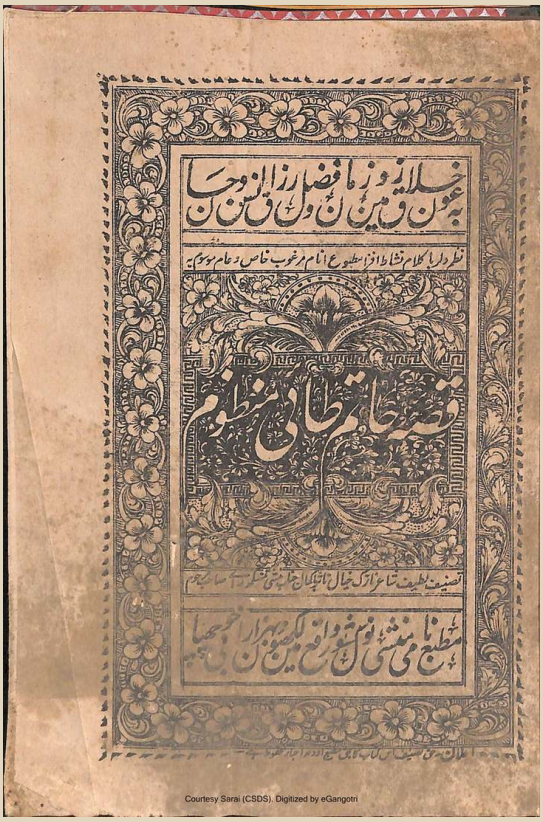
VII The Bath of Badgard

The bath concealed a diamond inside a parrot and turned travellers into stone. With his last arrow Hatim breaks the spell and frees them. He gives his account to Husn Banu, who can now answer Munir for herself.

FROM THE PRINTED COLLECTION

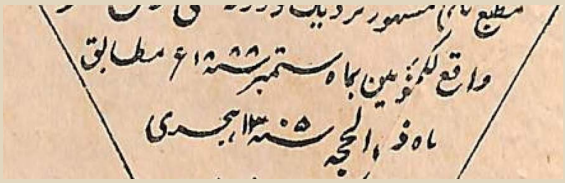
Hatim in print

Munshi Tansukh Rai wrote this Urdu telling of Hatim’s adventures under the pen name Raghbat. The title calls it manzūm, or “in verse.” Look first at the bold letters in the centre, then at the framed lines where the printer names his Lucknow press.





01 THE PRINTER’S IMPRINT



02 THE DATE ON PAGE 215

QISSA HATIM TAI MANZOOM / LUCKNOW, SEPTEMBER 1888

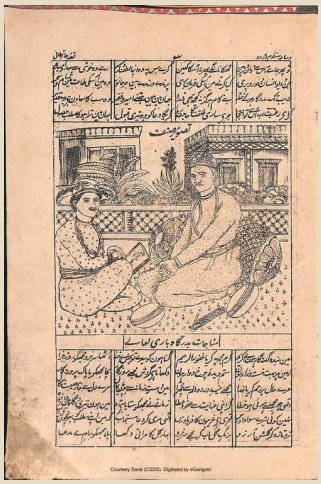
The title leaf names Munshi Nawal Kishore’s press at Lucknow. Turn to the colophon on printed page 215 for the date, given as September 1888 and Dhu al-Hijjah 1305 AH. Courtesy Sarai (CSDS). Digitized by eGangotri.

Open the 1888 title leaf **Inspect the dated colophon**

READING ROOM / A RELATED LUCKNOW EDITION

Where the picture sits

Two Lucknow printers gave pictures a place among the lines of Urdu. Compare the frames, then notice where your eye returns to the text.

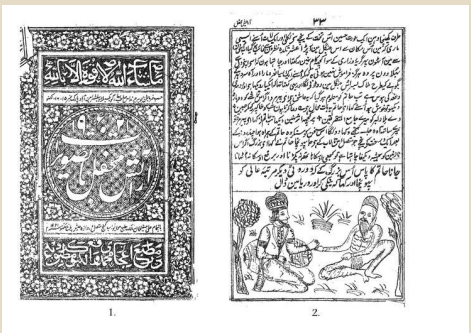




NEWAL KISHORE PRESS / PRINTED PAGE 3 AND DETAIL

Four narrow columns give way to a framed picture labelled “portrait of the author.” Two seated figures face one another across a book.

Inspect page 3 of the verse telling





COMPARISON / MAṬBAʿ-I IʿJĀZ-I MUḤAMMADĪ, LUCKNOW, 1921

Title page and page 33. Here the scene follows a single block of prose.

Inspect the 1921 pages at full size

READING ROOM / THE ART OF THE RETELLING

One loaf apiece

Before the old man tells Hatim what he saw, he gives him something to eat. Look for the division of the meal in the printed lines, then look at the hands in the drawing.

"Sit down by me," said the aged man, "and I will tell you all." Hatim set down, and in an instant two loaves and two flaggons full of pure water miraculously appeared before them. The old man handed to Hatim one of the loaves and one of the pitchers full of water, and reserved an equal quantity for himself, and both of them silently ate and drank. After their refreshment, Hatim addressed the old man, saying, "Venerable Sir, pray tell me the meaning of these words which you have so often repeated."

PRINTED PAGE 46 / FORBES TRANSLATION / THIRD EDITION, 1911



CONTEMPORARY PANEL / FIRST QUEST

Open the English edition

THE DIGITAL MUSEUM

About this edition

THE STORY IN ENGLISH

The narrative follows Duncan Forbes’s translation of the Persian romance, read in the 1911 third edition. The text identifies the Cherag Office, Bombay, and the Theosophist Office, Adyar, Madras, as its publishers. Chapter headings, scene divisions and dialogue in this abridgement were written for the museum.

THE LUCKNOW BOOK

Munshi Tansukh Rai, who used the pen name Raghbat, retold Hatim’s adventures in Urdu verse. Munshi Newal Kishore Press printed his Qissa Hatim Tai Manzoom in Lucknow in September 1888. The reproduced title leaf and interior pages come from Prof. Shahid Amin’s Urdu collection. Courtesy Sarai (CSDS). Digitized by eGangotri. The repository records a CC0 dedication.

THE TWO ENDINGS

In Forbes’s telling, Husn Banu authorises Hatim to arrange her marriage and he chooses Munir. On Barzakh, the pearl and Mahyar’s daughter are offered together, and Hatim arranges her marriage to the fairy prince. The museum gives the two women their own words and decisions. Husn Banu asks Munir to marry her. Mahyar gives Hatim the pearl, and his daughter decides whom to invite to supper. The dialogue throughout is newly written.

THE ARTWORK

The historical title leaf, colophon and printed specimens are scans of the credited books. The 1921 comparison comes from a different Lucknow printer, Iʿjāz-i Muḥammadī, via the Digital Library of India and Wikimedia Commons. The 51-panel comic and the colour story illustrations are contemporary AI-generated artwork.

EDITIONS AND IMAGE RECORDS

Read the sources

The Adventures of Hatim Tai, Duncan Forbes, third edition (1911). Book I, pp. 8–29, tells Husn Banu’s and Munir’s stories. Book V, pp. 245–247, marks the years away. Book VII, pp. 308–309, brings Hatim home.

Qissa Hatim Tai Manzoom, Tansukh Rai “Raghbat”, Munshi Newal Kishore Press (Lucknow, 1888). Digitised copy, courtesy Sarai (CSDS) and eGangotri.

Pegah Shahbaz, “Ḥātem-nāma”, Encyclopaedia Iranica. The Persian romance and its transmission.

Mahmoud Omidsalar, “Ḥātem Ṭāʾi”, Encyclopaedia Iranica. The historical figure and the traditions about his hospitality.

The Lucknow title leaf · September 1888

The dated Urdu colophon · printed page 215

Duncan Forbes · the 1911 third edition

The 1888 Lucknow volume · Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Newal Kishore Press bibliography · FID4SA

Related Urdu prose telling · Rekhta

The 1921 comparison image · Wikimedia Commons

MUNSHI NEWAL KISHORE PRESS

Digital Museum Exhibit



“Break the bread, Hatim.”

A guesthouse in Shahabad, a hungry wolf, two loaves by a river. A stranger’s supper runs like a thread through Hatim’s journeys.

CONTINUE IN THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM

Le Press, Lucknow