



Zadig, or Destiny

VOLTAIRE

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA



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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Complete machine-assisted Plain English translation made independently and directly from the French, in separate source-only translation tasks, not from the Musean edition or a published English translation. Same complete scope and author's notes; later editors' notes are omitted. Source-language review is recorded with the source witness.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

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Approbation



I, the undersigned, who have passed myself off as a scholar and even as a man of wit, have read this manuscript. Against my will, I found it interesting, entertaining, moral, philosophical, and good enough to appeal even to people who hate novels. So I spoke out against it and assured the chief military judge that it was a dreadful book.

Dedicatory Epistle



Of Zadig

To Sultana Sheraa,

By Sadi.

The 10th day of the month of Shawwal, in the year 837 of the Hijra.

Delight of the eyes, torment of hearts, light of the mind, I do not kiss the dust at your feet. You hardly ever walk, and when you do, you walk on Iranian carpets or on roses. I offer you the translation of a book by an ancient wise man. He was lucky enough to have nothing to do, and had the further good fortune to enjoy writing the story of Zadig, a book that says more than it seems to say. Please read it and judge it for yourself. You are in the springtime of your life. Every pleasure seeks you out. You are beautiful, and your talents add to your beauty. People praise you from evening until morning. All these things give you every right to have no common sense. Yet you have a very sound mind and very good taste. I have heard you reason better than old dervishes with long beards and pointed caps. You are careful about what you say without being suspicious. You are gentle without being weak. You use good judgment in helping others. You love your friends and make no enemies. Your wit never depends on cutting remarks about other people. You neither say nor do anything harmful, even though it would be extraordinarily easy for you. In short, your soul has

always seemed to me as pure as your beauty. You even have a little grounding in philosophy. That made me think you would enjoy this wise man's book more than someone else would.

It was first written in ancient Chaldean, which neither you nor I understand. It was translated into Arabic to entertain the famous Sultan Oulougebe. This was when the Arabs and Persians were beginning to write works such as the *Thousand and One Nights* and the *Thousand and One Days*. Ouloug preferred reading *Zadig*, but the sultanas preferred the *Thousand and One*. "How can you prefer stories that make no sense and mean nothing?" wise Ouloug asked them. "That's exactly why we like them," the sultanas replied.

I like to think you will not be like them, and that you will be a true Ouloug. I even hope that when you tire of ordinary conversations, I may find a minute to have the honor of talking sense with you. Those conversations are very like the *Thousand and One*, except that they are less entertaining. If you had been Thalestris in the time of Scander, Philip's son, or the Queen of Sheba in the time of Solomon, those kings would have been the ones to make the journey.

I pray to the heavenly powers that nothing will spoil your pleasures, that your beauty will last, and that your happiness will never end.

Sadi.

CHAPTER 1

The One-Eyed Man



In King Moabdar's time, a young man named Zadig lived in Babylon. He had been born with a good character, and his education had strengthened it. Although he was young and rich, he knew how to control his passions. He never put on an act, never insisted on always being right, and knew how to make allowances for human weakness. People were surprised that someone so intelligent never made fun of the vague, disconnected, noisy remarks, the reckless gossip, the ignorant judgments, the crude jokes, and the empty flood of words that people in Babylon called *conversation*. He had learned from the first book of Zoroaster that self-love is a balloon full of wind: prick it, and storms come out. Above all, Zadig never boasted of despising women and making them submit to him. He was generous. He was not afraid to help ungrateful people, following Zoroaster's great rule: *When you eat, feed the dogs, even if they bite you*. He was as wise as anyone can be, because he tried to live among wise people. He had studied the learning of the ancient Chaldeans and knew the physical principles of nature as people understood them then. He knew as much about metaphysics as anyone has ever known: very little. He firmly believed that the year was three hundred and sixty-five and a quarter days long, despite the new philosophy of his time, and that the sun was at the center of the universe. When the leading magi told him, with insulting arrogance, that his

beliefs were wrong, and that anyone who believed the sun turned on its axis and the year had twelve months was an enemy of the state, he stayed quiet, without anger or contempt.

Zadig was very wealthy and therefore had friends. He was healthy and good-looking, with a fair, levelheaded mind and an honest, generous heart. He thought he could be happy. He was going to marry Sémire, whose beauty, birth, and wealth made her the most desirable match in Babylon. His love for her was steady and honorable, and she loved him passionately. They were close to the happy moment of their marriage when, walking together near one of Babylon's gates, under the palm trees along the bank of the Euphrates, they saw men coming toward them armed with swords and arrows. These were the hired men of young Orcan, a minister's nephew. His uncle's courtiers had led him to believe he could do anything he liked. He had none of Zadig's charm or good qualities, but he thought himself much better and was furious that Sémire did not prefer him. This jealousy, which came entirely from his vanity, made him think he was madly in love with her. He meant to abduct her. His men seized her. In their violent fury they wounded her, drawing the blood of someone whose very appearance would have softened the tigers of Mount Imaus. Her cries pierced the sky. "My dear husband!" she cried. "They're tearing me away from the man I adore!" She was not thinking about her danger, only about her dear Zadig. Meanwhile, he was defending her with all the strength that courage and love can give. With help from just two slaves, he drove the kidnappers away and took Sémire home, unconscious and bleeding. When she opened her eyes, she saw the man who had rescued her. "Oh, Zadig!" she told him. "I loved you as my husband. Now I love you as the man who saved my honor and my life." No heart had ever been more deeply moved than Sémire's. No more beautiful mouth had ever expressed more touching feelings, in the passionate words inspired by gratitude for the greatest possible service and the tender excitement of the most rightful love. Her wound was slight and soon healed. Zadig was hurt more seriously. An arrow had struck near his eye, leaving a deep wound. Sémire asked the gods for nothing but her lover's recovery. Her eyes were wet with tears day and night. She waited for the moment when Zadig's eyes could

once again enjoy her loving looks. But an abscess developed in the wounded eye, giving them reason to fear the worst. They sent all the way to Memphis for the great physician Hermes, who arrived with a large following. He examined the patient and announced that he would lose his eye. He even predicted the day and hour when this terrible event would happen. "If it had been the right eye," he said, "I would have cured it. But wounds to the left eye cannot be cured." All Babylon pitied Zadig's fate and admired the depth of Hermes's knowledge. Two days later, the abscess burst on its own, and Zadig recovered completely. Hermes wrote a book proving to him that he should not have recovered. Zadig did not read it. As soon as he could go out, he prepared to visit the woman who was his hope for a happy life, the only person he wanted eyes for. Sémire had been in the country for three days. On the way, he learned that this beautiful woman had publicly announced her insurmountable disgust for one-eyed men, and had just married Orcan that very night. At the news, he fainted. His grief brought him close to death. He was ill for a long time, but eventually reason overcame his distress. The very cruelty of what had happened even helped to console him.

"Since a girl brought up at court has treated me with such cruel fickleness," he said, "I must marry a woman from the city." He chose Azora, the most sensible and best-born woman in the city. He married her, and for a month they enjoyed the sweetness of the most loving marriage. He noticed only a little flightiness in her, and a strong tendency always to think that the best-looking young men were also the most intelligent and virtuous.

CHAPTER 2

The Nose



One day Azora came back from a walk very angry, exclaiming loudly. “What’s wrong, my dear wife?” he asked. “What could have upset you so much?” “Oh,” she said, “you’d be as outraged as I am if you’d seen what I just saw. I went to comfort the young widow Cosrou. Two days ago she put up a tomb for her young husband beside the stream along that meadow. In her grief, she promised the gods she would stay beside the tomb as long as the stream kept flowing past it.” “Well,” said Zadig, “there’s an admirable woman who truly loved her husband!” “Ah,” Azora replied, “if you only knew what she was doing when I visited her!” “What was it, beautiful Azora?” “She was having the stream diverted.” Azora went on insulting the young widow for so long, and burst out in such violent accusations, that Zadig disliked this show of virtue.

He had a friend named Cador, one of the young men his wife considered more honest and worthy than the rest. He took Cador into his confidence and gave him a substantial gift to make as sure as he could of his loyalty. Azora spent two days with a woman friend in the country and returned home on the third day. Weeping servants told her that her husband had died suddenly that very night. They had not dared bring her the terrible news, and had just buried Zadig in his family tomb at the end of the garden. She wept, tore her hair, and swore she would die. That evening Cador asked permission to speak to her, and they both wept. The next day they wept less and had dinner together. Cador

told her privately that his friend had left him most of his property. He hinted that nothing would make him happier than sharing his fortune with her. The lady wept, became angry, then softened. Supper lasted longer than dinner. They spoke more openly to each other. Azora praised her dead husband, but admitted that he had faults Cador did not have.

In the middle of supper, Cador complained of a terrible pain in his spleen. Anxious and eager to help, the lady had all her perfumes brought in, to see whether any of them might be good for it. She was very sorry that the great Hermes was not yet in Babylon. She even went so far as to touch the side where Cador was in such severe pain. "Do you often suffer from this terrible illness?" she asked sympathetically. "Sometimes it brings me close to death," Cador replied, "and only one remedy can give me relief. I have to put the nose of a man who died the day before against my side." "What a strange remedy," said Azora. "No stranger," he answered, "than Mr. Arnoult's pouches^a for strokes." This argument, together with the young man's outstanding qualities, finally persuaded the lady. "After all," she said, "when my husband crosses the Tchinavar bridge from the world of yesterday into the world of tomorrow, will the angel Asrael be any less willing to let him through because his nose is a little shorter in his second life than in his first?" So she took a razor and went to her husband's tomb. She covered it with her tears and moved closer to cut off Zadig's nose. She found him stretched out in the grave. Zadig got up, holding his nose with one hand and stopping the razor with the other. "Madam," he told her, "stop making such a fuss about young Cosrou. Planning to cut off my nose is every bit as good as planning to divert a stream."

^a At that time there was a Babylonian named Arnoult who, in the newspapers, cured and prevented every stroke with a pouch hung around the neck.

CHAPTER 3

The Dog and the Horse



Zadig discovered that, as the book of Zend says, the first month of marriage is the month of honey, and the second is the month of wormwood. Some time later he had to divorce Azora, who had become too difficult to live with. He looked for happiness in studying nature. “No one is happier,” he said, “than a philosopher reading this great book that God has put before our eyes. The truths he discovers are his own. He feeds and improves his soul, lives in peace, and has nothing to fear from other people. And his loving wife doesn’t come to cut off his nose.”

With these thoughts in mind, he moved to a country house on the banks of the Euphrates. There he did not spend his time calculating how many inches of water flowed under a bridge’s arches in a second, or whether a cubic twelfth of an inch more rain fell in the month of the mouse than in the month of the sheep. He had no plans to make silk out of spiderwebs or porcelain out of broken bottles. Instead, he mainly studied the characteristics of animals and plants. He soon developed a sharp eye that showed him a thousand differences where other people saw only sameness.

One day, while walking near a small wood, he saw one of the queen’s eunuchs running toward him. Several officers followed, looking deeply worried and running here and there like frantic men searching for the most precious thing they had lost. “Young man,” the chief eunuch asked him, “have you seen

the queen's dog?" Zadig answered modestly, "It's a female, not a male." "You're right," the chief eunuch replied. "She's a very small spaniel," Zadig added. "She's recently had puppies, she limps on her left front leg, and her ears are very long." "So you've seen her?" the chief eunuch asked, quite out of breath. "No," Zadig answered. "I've never seen her, and I never knew the queen had a female dog."

At exactly the same time, in one of fortune's usual strange twists, the finest horse in the king's stable had escaped from a groom on the plains of Babylon. The chief huntsman and all the other officers were chasing it as anxiously as the chief eunuch was chasing the dog. The chief huntsman asked Zadig whether he had seen the king's horse pass by. "It's a horse with the finest gallop," Zadig answered. "It's five feet tall, with very small hooves and a tail three and a half feet long. The knobs on its bit are twenty-three-karat gold, and its shoes are silver eleven parts fine out of twelve." "Which way did it go? Where is it?" the chief huntsman asked. "I haven't seen it," Zadig replied, "and I've never heard of it."

The chief huntsman and the chief eunuch had no doubt that Zadig had stolen the king's horse and the queen's dog. They had him brought before the assembly of the Great Desterham, which sentenced him to a flogging with the knout and the rest of his life in Siberia. Hardly had the judgment been given when the horse and dog were found. The judges faced the painful necessity of changing their ruling. But they sentenced Zadig to pay four hundred ounces of gold for saying he had not seen what he had seen. He had to pay this fine first. After that, he was allowed to argue his case before the Great Desterham's council. He spoke as follows:

"Stars of justice, bottomless wells of learning, mirrors of truth, you have the weight of lead, the hardness of iron, the sparkle of diamonds, and a great affinity for gold. Since I am allowed to speak before this honored assembly, I swear to you by Orosmade that I have never seen the queen's respected dog or the sacred horse of the king of kings. Here is what happened to me. I was walking toward the small wood where I later met the respected eunuch and the very distinguished chief huntsman. I saw an animal's tracks in the sand and easily rec-

ognized them as a small dog's. There were long, shallow grooves in the little rises of sand between the paw prints. These showed me that it was a female with hanging teats, so she had given birth a few days before. Other marks ran in a different direction, always seeming to brush the surface of the sand beside the front paws. They told me that her ears were very long. And I noticed that one paw always made a shallower print in the sand than the other three. So I realized that our honored queen's dog had a slight limp, if I may say so.

"As for the horse of the king of kings, you should know that while walking along the paths in this wood I noticed hoofprints. They were all equally spaced. 'Here is a horse with a perfect gallop,' I said. On a narrow path only seven feet wide, some dust had been brushed off the trees on either side, three and a half feet from the middle of the path. 'This horse has a tail three and a half feet long,' I said. 'As it swung from side to side, it swept this dust away.' Under trees that formed an arch five feet high, I saw leaves that had just fallen from the branches. I realized the horse had touched them and was therefore five feet tall. As for its bit, it must be twenty-three-karat gold. The horse had rubbed its knobs against a stone that I recognized as a touchstone, and I tested it. Finally, from the marks its shoes had left on stones of another kind, I judged that it was shod with silver eleven parts fine out of twelve."

All the judges admired Zadig's deep and subtle powers of observation. News of them reached the king and queen. In the royal waiting rooms, bedroom, and private study, people talked of nothing but Zadig. Several magi thought he should be burned as a sorcerer, but the king ordered that the fine of four hundred ounces of gold be returned to him. The clerk, the court officers, and the attorneys came to his house with great ceremony to bring back his four hundred ounces. They kept only three hundred and ninety-eight for legal expenses, and their servants asked for tips.

Zadig saw how dangerous it could sometimes be to know too much. He firmly promised himself that, the next time he had the chance, he would not say what he had seen.

The chance soon came. A political prisoner escaped and passed under the windows of his house. Zadig was questioned and said nothing, but it was proved that he had looked out the window. For this crime he was sentenced to pay five hundred ounces of gold. Following Babylonian custom, he thanked his judges for their leniency.

“Great God!” he said to himself. “How unfortunate it is to walk in a wood where the queen’s dog and the king’s horse have passed! How dangerous it is to look out the window! And how hard it is to be happy in this life!”

CHAPTER 4

The Envious Man



Zadig wanted to find comfort in philosophy and friendship after the troubles fortune had brought him. In a suburb of Babylon, he had a tastefully furnished house where he brought together all the arts and pleasures fit for a decent man. In the morning his library was open to all scholars. In the evening his table was open to good company. But he soon discovered how dangerous scholars are. A great argument broke out over a law of Zoroaster that forbade eating griffin. “How can anyone forbid eating griffin,” some asked, “if the animal doesn’t exist?” “It must exist,” the others said, “since Zoroaster doesn’t want us to eat it.” Zadig tried to settle their argument. “If there are griffins, let’s not eat them,” he said. “If there aren’t any, we’ll eat even fewer. That way we’ll all obey Zoroaster.”

One scholar had written thirteen volumes on the characteristics of griffins and was also a great expert in invoking divine powers. He hurried to accuse Zadig before a chief magus named Yébor, the stupidest of the Chaldeans and therefore the most fanatical. This man would have had Zadig impaled for the greater glory of the sun, and would have recited Zoroaster’s prayer book all the more contentedly for it. His friend Cador—a friend is worth more than a hundred priests—went to see old Yébor and said:

“Long live the sun and the griffins! Be very careful not to punish Zadig. He’s a saint. He keeps griffins in his poultry yard and doesn’t eat them. His accuser is a heretic who dares to claim that rabbits have split hooves and are not unclean.” “Well,” said Yébor, shaking his bald head, “Zadig must be impaled for thinking wrongly about griffins, and the other man for speaking wrongly about rabbits.” Cador settled the matter through a maid of honor with whom he had fathered a child, and who had great influence in the college of magi. No one was impaled. Several learned men grumbled about this and predicted the decline of Babylon. Zadig cried out, “What fragile things our happiness depends on! Everything in this world persecutes me, even creatures that don’t exist.” He cursed scholars and decided from then on to live only among good company.

He brought together the most decent people and the most charming women in Babylon at his house. He gave fine suppers, often with concerts beforehand and lively, delightful conversations during the meal. He had managed to keep out the urge to show off one’s wit, which is the surest way to show none and to spoil the most brilliant gathering. Vanity played no part in his choice of friends or food. In everything, he preferred reality to appearances. This earned him genuine respect, which he had not been seeking.

Across from his house lived Arimaze, a man whose coarse face showed the ugliness of his soul. He was eaten up with bitterness and swollen with pride. To top it all off, he was a tedious wit. Having never been able to succeed in society, he took revenge by speaking badly of it. Rich as he was, he had trouble finding flatterers to gather at his house. The sound of chariots arriving at Zadig’s in the evening annoyed him. The sound of people praising Zadig annoyed him even more. He sometimes went to Zadig’s and sat down to eat without being invited. He spoiled everyone’s enjoyment, just as harpies are said to foul the meat they touch. One day he wanted to give a party for a lady, but instead of accepting, she went to supper at Zadig’s. Another day, while he and Zadig were talking in the palace, they approached a minister who invited Zadig to supper but not Arimaze. The most unforgiving hatreds often have no more important

cause. This man, known in Babylon as the *Envious Man*, wanted to ruin Zadig because people called him the *Happy Man*. As Zoroaster says, a chance to do harm comes a hundred times a day, and a chance to do good comes once a year.

The Envious Man went to Zadig's. Zadig was walking in his gardens with two friends and a lady to whom he often said flattering things, with no intention beyond saying them. They were talking about a war the king had just brought to a successful end against the prince of Hyrcania, his vassal. Zadig had distinguished himself by his courage in this short war. He warmly praised the king, and praised the lady still more. He took out his writing tablets, made up four lines of verse on the spot, wrote them down, and gave them to the beautiful lady to read. His friends asked him to share them, but modesty—or rather, a well-judged concern for himself—stopped him. He knew that verses made up on the spot are only ever good for the woman they honor. He broke the sheet of his writing tablets in two and threw the halves into a rosebush. They searched for them there without success. A light rain began, and everyone went back to the house. The Envious Man stayed in the garden and searched until he found one piece of the sheet. It had broken in such a way that each half-line made sense by itself, and even formed a shorter line of verse. By an even stranger chance, these short lines together made a statement containing the most horrible insults against the king. They read:

By the worst crimes
Secure on the throne,
Amid the public peace,
This is the only enemy.

The Envious Man was happy for the first time in his life. He had in his hands the means to ruin a good, likable man. Filled with this cruel joy, he got the satire, in Zadig's own handwriting, to the king. Zadig, his two friends, and the lady were put in prison. His trial was quickly over, without anyone bothering to hear him. When he came to receive his sentence, the Envious Man stood in his path and told him loudly that his verses were worthless. Zadig did not

pride himself on being a good poet. But he was in despair at being condemned for an offense against the king, and at seeing a beautiful lady and two friends kept in prison for a crime he had not committed. He was not allowed to speak because his tablets spoke for him. That was the law in Babylon. So he was taken to his execution through a crowd of curious onlookers. None dared express pity for him. They rushed forward to examine his face and see whether he would die gracefully. Only his relatives were distressed, because they would inherit nothing. Three-quarters of his property was confiscated for the king, and the other quarter for the Envious Man.

As he was preparing to die, the king's parrot flew off the king's balcony and landed on a rosebush in Zadig's garden. The wind had carried a peach there from a nearby tree. It had fallen on a piece of a writing tablet and stuck to it. The bird picked up the peach and the tablet and carried them onto the monarch's lap. Curious, the king read words on it that made no sense and seemed to be the ends of lines of verse. He liked poetry, and there is always some hope with rulers who like verse. His parrot's adventure made him think. The queen remembered what had been written on a piece of Zadig's tablet and had it brought to her.

They compared the two pieces, which fit together perfectly. Now they read the verses as Zadig had written them:

By the worst crimes I have seen the world disturbed.
Secure on the throne, the king can overcome everything.
Amid the public peace, love alone wages war:
This is the only enemy we need to fear.

The king immediately ordered that Zadig be brought before him and that his two friends and the beautiful lady be released from prison. Zadig threw himself facedown at the feet of the king and queen. He very humbly asked their forgiveness for having written bad verses. He spoke with such charm, wit, and good sense that the king and queen wanted to see him again. He came back, and they liked him even more. He was given all the property of the Envious

Man, who had accused him unjustly. But Zadig returned it all. The only feeling the Envious Man had was pleasure at not losing his property. The king's respect for Zadig grew from day to day. He included him in all his pleasures and asked his advice on all his affairs. From then on, the queen looked on him with a warmth that could become dangerous for her, for the king, her honored husband, for Zadig, and for the kingdom. Zadig was beginning to think that being happy was not so difficult.

CHAPTER 5

The Generous



The time came for a great festival held every five years. In Babylon, it was the custom at the end of five years to announce formally which citizen had done the most generous deed. The nobles and the priests were the judges. The chief satrap, who was in charge of the city, described the finest deeds done under his administration. The judges voted, and the king announced the decision. People came from the ends of the earth for this ceremony. The winner received a gold cup set with jewels from the king's own hands. The king said to him, "Accept this prize for generosity, and may the gods give me many subjects like you!"

When this memorable day arrived, the king appeared on his throne. Around him were the nobles, the priests, and representatives of every nation. They had come for contests where people won glory not through the speed of horses or physical strength, but through virtue. The chief satrap read aloud the deeds that might earn their doers this priceless award. He said nothing about the generosity with which Zadig had given the Envious Man back his entire fortune. That deed did not qualify him to compete for the prize.

First he presented a judge. Through a mistake for which he was not even responsible, the judge had caused a citizen to lose an important lawsuit. He had given the man everything he owned, which was worth as much as the other man had lost.

Next he brought forward a young man who was desperately in love with a girl he was about to marry. He had given her up to a friend who was nearly dying of love for her. In giving up the girl, he had even paid her dowry.

Then he presented a soldier who had shown an even greater example of generosity during the war in Hyrcania. Enemy soldiers were carrying off the woman he loved, and he was defending her against them. Someone came to tell him that other Hyrcanians were carrying off his mother a few steps away. In tears, he left the woman he loved and ran to free his mother. Then he returned to his beloved and found her dying. He wanted to kill himself. His mother pointed out that she had no one but him to help her, and he found the courage to endure living.

The judges favored this soldier. The king spoke up. "His deed and the others are admirable, but they don't surprise me. Yesterday Zadig did something that surprised me. A few days ago I dismissed my minister and favorite, Coreb. I was complaining bitterly about him, and all my courtiers assured me I was being too kind. They competed to see who could say the worst things about Coreb. I asked Zadig what he thought, and he dared to speak well of him. I admit that in our histories I have seen examples of people paying for a mistake with their property, giving up the woman they loved, or putting a mother before a beloved. But I have never read of a courtier speaking well of a dismissed minister when his ruler was angry with him. I give twenty thousand gold pieces to each of those whose generous deeds we have just heard. But I give the cup to Zadig."

"Your Majesty," Zadig told him, "you alone deserve the cup. You have done the most unheard-of deed. Though you are a king, you did not get angry with your slave when he opposed your anger." Everyone admired the king and Zadig. The judge who had given away his property, the lover who had married his beloved to his friend, and the soldier who had chosen to save his mother rather than his beloved all received the king's gifts. They saw their names written in the book of the generous. Zadig received the cup. The king earned a reputation

as a good ruler, though he did not keep it long. The day was honored with celebrations that lasted longer than the law prescribed. It is still remembered in Asia. Zadig said, "So at last I'm happy!" But he was wrong.

CHAPTER 6

The Minister



The king had lost his prime minister. He chose Zadig to fill the position. All the beautiful women in Babylon applauded the choice. Since the empire was founded, it had never had such a young minister. All the courtiers were upset. The Envious Man coughed up blood, and his nose swelled enormously. After thanking the king and queen, Zadig went to thank the parrot too. “Beautiful bird,” he told it, “you saved my life and made me prime minister. Their Majesties’ dog and horse did me a great deal of harm, but you have done me good. So this is what human destinies depend on! But,” he added, “such strange good luck may soon disappear.” The parrot answered, “Yes.” This word struck Zadig. But he had a good knowledge of natural science and did not believe parrots were prophets, so he soon felt reassured. He set about doing his job as well as he could.

He made everyone feel the sacred power of the laws, but he made no one feel the weight of his high position. He let people speak freely in the council. Each minister could express an opinion without displeasing him. When he ruled on a case, it was not he who judged, but the law. Yet when the law was too harsh, he softened it. When no law existed, his sense of fairness supplied laws that could have been mistaken for Zoroaster’s.

Nations owe this great principle to him: it is better to risk letting a guilty person go free than to condemn an innocent one. He believed laws were made to help citizens as much as to frighten them. His chief talent was finding the truth that everyone tries to hide. He used this great talent in the first days of his administration. A famous merchant of Babylon had died in India. After marrying off his daughter, he had left his two sons equal shares of his estate. He also left a gift of thirty thousand gold pieces to whichever son was judged to love him more. The older son built him a tomb. The younger added part of his inheritance to his sister's dowry. Everyone said, "The older son loves his father more. The younger one loves his sister more. The thirty thousand pieces belong to the older son."

Zadig had the two sons come to see him, one after the other. He told the older one, "Your father is not dead. He has recovered from his recent illness and is coming back to Babylon." "Thank God," the young man answered, "but that tomb cost me a great deal!" Zadig then told the younger son the same thing. "Thank God!" he answered. "I'll give my father back everything I have. But I would like him to let my sister keep what I gave her." "You won't give anything back," said Zadig, "and you'll have the thirty thousand pieces. You're the one who loves your father more."

A very rich girl had promised to marry two priests. After taking lessons from both for a few months, she found herself pregnant. Both wanted to marry her. "I'll take as my husband," she said, "whichever one of you has put me in a position to give the empire a citizen." "I'm the one who did that good deed," said one. "I'm the one who had that advantage," said the other. "Well," she answered, "I'll recognize as the child's father whichever one can give it the best education." She gave birth to a son. Each priest wanted to raise him. The case came before Zadig. He sent for both priests. "What will you teach the boy in your care?" he asked the first. "I'll teach him," said the scholar, "the eight parts of speech, logic, astrology, the study of demons, substance and accident, the abstract and the concrete, monads and pre-established harmony." "As for me," said the second, "I'll try to make him fair and worthy of having friends." Zadig ruled, "Whether you're his father or not, you'll marry his mother."

Every day, complaints reached the court about the governor of Media, named *Irax*. He was a great lord who was not bad at heart, but vanity and sensual pleasure had corrupted him. He rarely let anyone speak to him and never let anyone dare to disagree with him. Peacocks were no vainer, doves no more sensual, and tortoises less lazy. He lived for nothing but false glory and false pleasures. Zadig set out to reform him.

On the king's behalf, he sent *Irax* a music director with twelve singers and twenty-four violinists, a steward with six cooks, and four chamberlains. They were not to leave him. The king's order said the following ceremony must be strictly observed. Here is what happened.

On the first day, as soon as the pleasure-loving *Irax* woke up, the music director came in, followed by the singers and violinists. They sang a cantata that lasted two hours. Every three minutes, they repeated this chorus:

How great his worth is!
What grace! What greatness!
Oh, how our lord
Must be pleased with himself!

After the cantata, a chamberlain gave him a forty-five-minute speech. It specifically praised him for every good quality he lacked. When the speech ended, they led him to the table as the instruments played. Dinner lasted three hours. As soon as he opened his mouth to speak, the first chamberlain said, "He'll be right." He had barely said four words when the second chamberlain cried, "He's right!" The other two chamberlains burst out laughing at the witty things *Irax* had said or should have said. After dinner, they repeated the cantata.

He found this first day delightful. He thought the king of kings was honoring him as he deserved. The second day seemed less pleasant, the third was a strain, the fourth was unbearable, and the fifth was torture. At last, sick of always hearing them sing,

Oh, how our lord
Must be pleased with himself!

of always hearing that he was right, and of having a speech made to him at the same time every day, he wrote to the court. He begged the king to be kind enough to recall his chamberlains, musicians, and steward. He promised to be less vain and more hardworking from then on. He had himself praised less, held fewer parties, and was happier. For, as the Sadder says, constant pleasure is no pleasure.

CHAPTER 7

Disputes and Audiences



In this way, Zadig showed the sharpness of his mind and the goodness of his heart every day. People admired him, yet they loved him too. He was thought to be the luckiest man alive. His name was known throughout the empire. All the women eyed him. All the citizens praised his fairness. Scholars looked to him for answers as if he were an oracle. Even the priests admitted that he knew more than the old high priest Yébor. No one was thinking of putting him on trial over griffins now. People believed only what he found believable.

A great quarrel had been going on in Babylon for fifteen hundred years. It divided the empire into two stubborn religious groups. One insisted that people must always enter the temple of Mithra left foot first. The other hated this custom and always entered right foot first. Everyone waited for the solemn festival of the sacred fire to see which group Zadig would favor. The whole world had its eyes on his two feet. The entire city was agitated and waiting anxiously. Zadig entered the temple by jumping with both feet together. Then he gave an eloquent speech proving that the God of heaven and earth, who shows no favoritism, cares no more about the left leg than the right. The Envious Man and his wife claimed that his speech had too few figures of speech and that he had not made the mountains and hills dance enough. “He’s dry and has no imagination,” they said. “In his speeches, you don’t see the sea running away, the stars falling, or the sun melting like wax. He doesn’t have the proper

Eastern style.” Zadig was content to use a reasonable style. Everyone supported him—not because he was on the right path, not because he was reasonable, not because he was likable, but because he was prime minister.

He settled the great lawsuit between the white priests and the black priests just as successfully. The white priests insisted it was wicked to face the winter sunrise when praying to God. The black priests declared that God hated the prayers of people who faced the summer sunset. Zadig ordered that everyone could face whichever way they pleased.

In this way, he found the secret of finishing both private and public business in the morning. He spent the rest of the day making Babylon more beautiful. He had tragedies staged that made people cry and comedies that made them laugh. This had long been out of fashion, and he revived it because he had good taste. He did not claim to know more than the artists. He rewarded them with gifts and honors and felt no secret jealousy of their talents. In the evenings he greatly entertained the king, and especially the queen. The king said, “What a great minister!” The queen said, “What a charming minister!” Both added, “It would have been such a shame if he’d been hanged.”

No man in office had ever been obliged to grant so many private meetings to women. Most came to discuss business they didn’t have, in hopes of having an affair with him. The Envious Man’s wife was among the first to appear. She swore by Mithra, the Zend-Avesta, and the sacred fire that she had hated her husband’s conduct. Then she confided that her husband was a jealous brute. She hinted that the gods were punishing him by denying him the precious effects of that sacred fire through which alone a man resembles the immortals. She ended by letting her garter fall. Zadig picked it up with his usual politeness, but he did not fasten it back around her knee. This small mistake, if it was one, caused the most terrible misfortunes. Zadig gave it no thought, but the Envious Man’s wife thought about it a great deal.

Other women appeared every day. The secret histories of Babylon claim that he gave in once, but was amazed to find himself having sex without pleasure and embracing his lover absentmindedly. The woman to whom he gave signs of his favor, almost without noticing it, was a chambermaid to Queen

Astarté. This affectionate Babylonian told herself for comfort, "This man must have an enormous amount of business on his mind, since he keeps thinking about it even while making love." At a moment when some people say nothing and others say only sacred words, Zadig suddenly let out a cry: "The queen!" The Babylonian thought he had finally come to his senses at a good moment and was calling her "My queen." But Zadig, still very distracted, said Astarté's name. In these happy circumstances, the woman took everything in her own favor. She imagined he meant, "You're more beautiful than Queen Astarté." She left Zadig's harem with some very fine gifts. She went to tell her story to the Envious Woman, who was a close friend. The Envious Woman was deeply stung that he had preferred someone else. "He didn't even bother," she said, "to fasten this garter back on me. Here it is. I don't want to wear it anymore." "Oh! Oh!" the lucky woman told the Envious Woman. "You wear the same garters as the queen! Do you get them from the same maker?" The Envious Woman thought hard, said nothing, and went to consult her husband, the Envious Man.

Meanwhile, Zadig noticed that he was always distracted when he granted meetings and heard cases. He did not know what caused it. This was his only worry.

He had a dream. He seemed to be lying first on dry grass, with a few prickly blades that made him uncomfortable. Then he rested comfortably on a bed of roses. A snake came out of it and wounded his heart with its sharp, poisoned tongue. "Oh!" he said. "I've spent a long time lying on that dry, prickly grass. Now I'm on the bed of roses. But what will the snake be?"

CHAPTER 8

Jealousy



Zadig's misfortune came from his good fortune itself, and above all from his fine qualities. Every day he talked with the king and Astarté, his royal wife. His conversation was made even more charming by his wish to please, which does for the mind what fine clothes do for beauty. Little by little, his youth and charm made an impression on Astarté that she did not notice at first. Her passion grew while she remained innocent. Without guilt or fear, Astarté enjoyed seeing and hearing a man who was dear to her husband and the state. She constantly praised him to the king. She talked about him with her attendants, who praised him even more. Everything drove the arrow deeper into her heart without her feeling it. She gave Zadig gifts that were more flirtatious than she realized. She thought she spoke to him only as a queen pleased with his services. Sometimes, though, her words were those of a woman in love.

Astarté was much more beautiful than Sémire, who hated one-eyed men so much, or that other wife who had wanted to cut off her husband's nose. Astarté's familiar manner, her tender words, which were beginning to make her blush, and her eyes, which she tried to turn away but kept fixing on his, lit a fire in Zadig's heart that astonished him. He fought against it. He called on philosophy, which had always helped him. It gave him understanding but no relief. Duty, gratitude, and the royal authority he was violating rose before his eyes like avenging gods. He fought and won. But this victory, which had to be won

again at every moment, cost him groans and tears. He no longer dared speak to the queen with the gentle ease that had charmed them both so much. His eyes clouded over. His words were strained and disconnected. He lowered his eyes. When, despite himself, he looked toward Astarté, his eyes met the queen's, wet with tears and shooting arrows of flame. They seemed to say to each other, "We adore each other, and we're afraid to love each other. We both burn with a fire we condemn."

Zadig left her confused and distraught, his heart weighed down by a burden he could no longer carry. In his intense distress, he let his friend Cadore discover his secret. He was like a man who has long endured sharp pain and finally reveals his suffering through a cry torn from him by a sudden, worse attack, and through the cold sweat running down his forehead.

Cadore told him, "I've already recognized the feelings you wanted to hide from yourself. Passion has signs that can't be mistaken. My dear Zadig, since I've read your heart, consider whether the king won't discover a feeling there that offends him. His only fault is being the most jealous of men. You resist your passion more strongly than the queen fights hers, because you're a philosopher and because you're Zadig. Astarté is a woman. She lets her eyes speak all the more carelessly because she doesn't yet think herself guilty. Unfortunately, her innocence reassures her, so she neglects the appearances she needs to keep up. I'll fear for her as long as she has nothing to blame herself for. If the two of you came to an agreement, you would know how to fool everyone's eyes. A growing passion that people fight against shows itself. A love that has been satisfied knows how to hide." Zadig shuddered at the suggestion of betraying the king, his benefactor. He was never more faithful to his ruler than when he was guilty of this involuntary offense against him. But the queen said Zadig's name so often, blushed so deeply when she said it, and was sometimes so lively and sometimes so flustered when she spoke to him in the king's presence that the king grew troubled. When Zadig left, she fell into such deep daydreams. The king believed everything he saw and imagined everything he did not see. Above all, he noticed that his wife's slippers were blue and Zadig's slip-

pers were blue, that his wife's ribbons were yellow and Zadig's cap was yellow. These were terrible clues for a ruler so sensitive about his honor. In his embittered mind, suspicion became certainty.

All the slaves of kings and queens are spies on their masters' hearts. People soon discovered that Astarté was in love and Moabdar was jealous. The Envious Man persuaded the Envious Woman to send the king her garter, which looked like the queen's. To make matters worse, this garter was blue. The king could think of nothing but revenge. One night he decided to poison the queen and have Zadig strangled with a cord at dawn. The order went to a merciless eunuch who carried out his acts of revenge. There was a small dwarf in the king's room at the time. He could not speak, but he could hear. They always let him stay. Like a household pet, he witnessed the most secret things that went on. This little man was deeply attached to the queen and Zadig. He heard the order for their deaths with as much surprise as horror. But how could he stop this dreadful order, which would be carried out in a few hours? He could not write, but he had learned to paint and was especially good at getting a likeness. He spent part of the night sketching what he wanted the queen to understand. In one corner, his drawing showed the king in a rage, giving orders to his eunuch. On a table were a blue cord and a vase, with blue garters and yellow ribbons. In the middle of the picture, the queen lay dying in her attendants' arms, with Zadig strangled at her feet. A rising sun appeared on the horizon to show that this horrible execution was to take place at the first light of dawn. As soon as he finished, he ran to one of Astarté's attendants, woke her, and made her understand that she must take the picture to the queen at once.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the night, someone knocked at Zadig's door. He was woken and given a note from the queen. He wondered if it was a dream. With a trembling hand, he opened the letter. How shocked he was! Who could describe the dismay and despair that overwhelmed him when he read these words? "Run away at once, or they're going to take your life! Run away, Zadig. I order you in the name of our love and my yellow ribbons. I was not guilty, but I feel that I am going to die guilty."

Zadig barely had the strength to speak. He ordered someone to fetch Cador and handed him the note without a word. Cador forced him to obey it and take the road to Memphis immediately. "If you dare go to the queen," he told him, "you'll hasten her death. If you speak to the king, you'll destroy her just the same. I'll take charge of her fate. Follow your own. I'll spread the word that you've taken the road to India. I'll come to find you soon and tell you what has happened in Babylon."

Cador immediately had two of the fastest dromedaries brought to a secret gate of the palace. He had Zadig put on one. Zadig had to be carried and was close to death. Only one servant went with him. Soon Cador, lost in shock and grief, could no longer see his friend.

When this famous fugitive reached the edge of a hill overlooking Babylon, he turned to look at the queen's palace and fainted. He regained consciousness only to shed tears and wish for death. At last, after dwelling on the terrible fate of the most lovable woman and the foremost queen in the world, he thought about himself for a moment and cried, "What is human life, then? Virtue! What good have you done me? Two women have shamefully deceived me. The third, who is not guilty and is more beautiful than the others, is going to die! Everything good I've done has always brought curses down on me. I was raised to the very peak of greatness only to fall into the most horrible pit of misfortune. If I had been wicked like so many others, I'd be happy like them." Crushed by these bleak thoughts, his eyes covered by a veil of grief, his face deathly pale, and his soul sunk in the depths of dark despair, he continued his journey toward Egypt.

CHAPTER 9

The Beaten Woman



Zadig steered by the stars. The constellation Orion and the bright star Sirius guided him toward the port of Canopus. He admired those vast globes of light that look to our eyes like faint sparks, while the earth, really just an invisible speck in nature, seems so great and noble to our greed. He pictured human beings as they really are: insects devouring one another on a tiny atom of mud. This true image seemed to wipe out his troubles by showing him how insignificant he and Babylon were. His soul soared into infinity. Freed from his senses, it contemplated the unchanging order of the universe. But then he returned to himself and looked into his heart. When he thought that Astarté might have died because of him, the universe disappeared from his eyes. In all of nature, he saw only Astarté dying and Zadig in misery. Swept back and forth between lofty philosophy and crushing grief, he traveled toward the borders of Egypt. His faithful servant had already reached the first village and was looking for lodging for him. Meanwhile, Zadig walked toward the gardens along the village's edge. Not far from the main road, he saw a woman in tears calling on heaven and earth to help her, with a furious man chasing her. The man had caught her, and she was clinging to his knees. He rained blows and accusations on her. From the Egyptian's violence and the woman's repeated pleas for forgiveness, Zadig judged that the man was jealous and the woman unfaithful. But when he looked at her touching beauty, which even reminded him a little of the

unfortunate Astarté, he felt deep pity for her and horror at the Egyptian. “Help me!” she cried to Zadig between sobs. “Get me out of the hands of this most brutal man! Save my life!” At these cries, Zadig ran to put himself between her and the brute. He knew some Egyptian. He said to the man in that language, “If you have any humanity, I beg you to respect beauty and weakness. How can you treat this masterpiece of nature so badly, when she is at your feet with nothing but tears to defend her?” “Aha!” the furious man told him. “So you love her too! Then you’re the one I must take revenge on.” As he spoke, he let go of the woman, whom he had been holding by the hair with one hand. He grabbed his spear and tried to run the stranger through. Zadig remained calm and easily dodged the enraged man’s thrust. He caught the spear near its iron tip. One man tried to pull it back, the other to wrench it away. It broke in their hands. The Egyptian drew his sword, and Zadig drew his own. They attacked each other. The Egyptian delivered a hundred hurried blows, and Zadig skillfully blocked them. Sitting on the grass, the woman fixed her hair and watched. The Egyptian was stronger than his opponent, but Zadig was more skillful. Zadig fought like a man whose head directed his arm. The Egyptian fought in a rage, his blind anger sending his movements at random. Zadig closed in and disarmed him. The Egyptian, even more furious, tried to throw himself at him. Zadig seized him, pressed him back, and brought him down, holding his sword against his chest. He offered to spare his life. Beside himself, the Egyptian pulled out a dagger and wounded Zadig at the very moment his conqueror was forgiving him. Outraged, Zadig drove his sword into his chest. The Egyptian gave a horrible cry and died struggling. Zadig then approached the woman and said humbly, “He forced me to kill him. I’ve avenged you. You’re free of the most violent man I’ve ever seen. What would you like me to do for you now, madam?” “Die, you villain!” she answered. “Die! You’ve killed my lover. I wish I could tear your heart out.” “Really, madam,” Zadig answered, “that was a strange lover you had. He was beating you with all his strength, and he wanted to kill me because you begged me to help you.” “I wish he were still beating me!” the woman cried out. “I deserved it. I had made him jealous. I wish to heaven he were beating me and you were in his place!” More astonished and

angry than he had ever been in his life, Zadig said, "Madam, beautiful as you are, you're so unreasonable that you deserve for me to beat you in turn. But I won't trouble myself." With that, he got back on his camel and headed for the village. He had gone only a few steps when he turned at the sound of four couriers from Babylon. They were riding at full speed. Seeing the woman, one of them cried, "That's her! She matches the description we were given." They paid no attention to the dead man and seized the woman at once. She kept crying to Zadig, "Help me once more, generous stranger! Forgive me for complaining about you. Help me, and I'm yours until death!" Zadig no longer felt any desire to fight for her. "Try someone else," he answered. "You won't catch me again." Besides, he was wounded and bleeding and needed help. The sight of the four Babylonians, probably sent by King Moabdar, filled him with alarm. He hurried toward the village, unable to imagine why four couriers from Babylon had come to seize this Egyptian woman, but even more astonished by her character.

CHAPTER 10

Slavery



As he entered the Egyptian village, the people surrounded him. Everyone shouted, “There’s the man who carried off beautiful Missouf and has just murdered Clétofis!” “Gentlemen,” he said, “God keep me from ever carrying off your beautiful Missouf! She’s too unpredictable. As for Clétofis, I didn’t murder him. I only defended myself against him. He wanted to kill me because I had very humbly asked him to spare beautiful Missouf, whom he was beating mercilessly. I’m a foreigner seeking shelter in Egypt. Surely it isn’t likely that, in coming to ask for your protection, I would begin by carrying off a woman and murdering a man.”

The Egyptians were fair and humane in those days. The people took Zadig to the town hall. First they had his wound dressed. Then they questioned him and his servant separately to find out the truth. They determined that Zadig was not a murderer. Still, he was guilty of shedding a man’s blood, and the law sentenced him to slavery. His two camels were sold for the village’s benefit. All the gold he had brought was shared among the inhabitants. He and his traveling companion were put up for sale in the public square. An Arab merchant named Sétoc bid for them. But the servant, who was better suited to hard work, sold for much more than his master. No one considered the two men comparable. So Zadig became a slave under the authority of his own servant. They were chained together by the feet and followed the Arab merchant to his house in

this condition. On the way, Zadig comforted his servant and urged him to be patient. But, as usual, he reflected on human life. “I see,” he told him, “that my bad luck is spilling over into your life. Everything that has happened to me so far has taken a very strange turn. I was fined for seeing a female dog pass by. I was nearly impaled over a griffin. I was sent for execution because I had written verses praising the king. I was about to be strangled because the queen had yellow ribbons. Now I’m a slave along with you because a brute beat his lover. Come on, let’s not lose courage. Perhaps all this will end. Arab merchants have to have slaves, after all. Why shouldn’t I be one like anyone else, since I’m a human being like anyone else? This merchant won’t be merciless. He has to treat his slaves well if he wants them to work for him.” So he spoke, while deep in his heart he was thinking about the fate of the queen of Babylon.

Two days later, the merchant Sétoc left for the Arabian desert with his slaves and camels. His tribe lived near the desert of Horeb. The journey was long and hard. Along the way, Sétoc thought much more of the servant than of the master, because the servant was much better at loading the camels. All the little favors went to him. A camel died two days’ journey from Horeb. Its load was divided among the servants, each carrying some on his back. Zadig had his share. Sétoc began to laugh when he saw all his slaves walking bent over. Zadig took the liberty of explaining why they did this and taught him the laws of balance. Amazed, the merchant began to see him differently. Seeing that he had aroused Sétoc’s curiosity, Zadig increased it by teaching him many things relevant to his trade: how much equal volumes of different metals and goods weighed, the characteristics of several useful animals, and ways to make other animals useful too. In the end, Sétoc thought him a wise man. He came to prefer Zadig to his companion, whom he had valued so highly. He treated him well and had no reason to regret it.

When he reached his tribe, Sétoc began by asking a Hebrew to repay five hundred ounces of silver that he had lent him in front of two witnesses. But both witnesses had died. Since his debt could not be proved, the Hebrew kept the merchant’s silver, thanking God for giving him a way to cheat an Arab. Sétoc told his trouble to Zadig, who had become his adviser. “Where,” Zadig

asked, “did you lend this untrustworthy man your five hundred ounces?” “On a broad stone near Mount Horeb,” the merchant answered. “What sort of person is your debtor?” Zadig asked. “A scoundrel,” Sétoc replied. “But I’m asking whether he’s quick or slow, careful or reckless.” “Of all the people who don’t pay their debts,” said Sétoc, “he’s the quickest I know.” “Well then,” Zadig went on, “let me argue your case before the judge.” He did indeed summon the Hebrew to court and spoke to the judge as follows: “Cushion of the throne of fairness, I come on my master’s behalf to demand five hundred ounces of silver that this man refuses to return.” “Do you have witnesses?” the judge asked. “No, they’re dead. But there is still a broad stone on which the money was counted out. If Your Greatness would be pleased to order someone to fetch it, I hope it will give evidence. The Hebrew and I will stay here while we wait for the stone to come. I’ll send for it at my master Sétoc’s expense.” “Very gladly,” answered the judge, and he began dealing with other cases.

At the end of the session, he said to Zadig, “Well, hasn’t your stone arrived yet?” Laughing, the Hebrew answered, “Your Greatness could stay here until tomorrow and the stone still wouldn’t have arrived. It’s more than six miles away, and it would take fifteen men to move it.” “Well!” Zadig cried. “I told you the stone would give evidence. Since this man knows where it is, he admits that the money was counted out on it.” Caught off guard, the Hebrew was soon forced to admit everything. The judge ordered him tied to the stone, without food or drink, until he returned the five hundred ounces. They were soon repaid.

The slave Zadig and the stone became highly respected throughout Arabia.

CHAPTER 11

The Pyre



Sétoc was delighted and made his slave his close friend. He could no more do without him than the king of Babylon had, and Zadig was glad Sétoc had no wife. He found his master naturally inclined to do good, with plenty of honesty and common sense. He was sorry to see that Sétoc worshiped the host of heaven—the sun, the moon, and the stars—as the Arabs had done since ancient times. He sometimes discussed this with him very tactfully. At last he told him these were bodies like any others. They deserved his worship no more than a tree or a rock did. “But,” Sétoc said, “they are eternal beings that give us everything we need. They bring nature to life and govern the seasons. Besides, they are so far from us that we can’t help honoring them.” “You get more benefit,” Zadig answered, “from the waters of the Red Sea, which carries your goods to India. Why shouldn’t it be as old as the stars? And if you worship what is far away, you should worship the land of the Gangarides, at the ends of the earth.” “No,” Sétoc said. “The stars shine too brightly for me not to worship them.” That evening Zadig lit a great many candles in the tent where he was to have supper with Sétoc. As soon as his master appeared, he dropped to his knees before the burning candles and said, “Eternal, shining lights, always look kindly on me!” After saying this, he sat down to eat without looking at Sétoc. “What are you doing?” Sétoc asked in surprise. “The same as you,” Zadig answered. “I worship these candles and ignore their master and mine.” Sétoc understood the

deeper meaning of this little fable. His slave's wisdom entered his soul. He stopped lavishing incense on created things and worshiped the eternal Being who had made them.

At that time there was a terrible custom in Arabia. It had originally come from Scythia and had taken hold in India through the influence of the Brahmins. Now it threatened to spread throughout the East. When a married man died, if his beloved wife wanted to become a saint, she burned herself in public on her husband's body. It was a solemn festival called the *widow's pyre*. The tribe in which the most women had been burned was the most respected. An Arab of Sétoc's tribe died. His widow, named *Almona*, was very devout and announced the day and hour when she would throw herself into the fire to the sound of drums and trumpets. Zadig pointed out to Sétoc how much this horrible custom harmed humanity. Every day young widows were allowed to burn themselves when they could have given the state children, or at least raised their own. He made Sétoc agree that they should abolish such a barbaric practice if they could. Sétoc answered, "Women have enjoyed the right to burn themselves for more than a thousand years. Which of us will dare change a law that time has made sacred? Is anything more worthy of respect than an ancient abuse?" "Reason is older still," Zadig replied. "Speak to the tribal chiefs. I'll go and see the young widow."

He had himself introduced to her. He won her over by praising her beauty and telling her what a shame it was to put so many charms into the fire. Then he praised her firmness and courage as well. "You must have loved your husband enormously?" he asked. "Me? Not at all," the Arab lady answered. "He was a brute, a jealous man, impossible to live with. But I'm firmly determined to throw myself onto his pyre." "Apparently," Zadig said, "there must be some exquisite pleasure in being burned alive." "Oh! The thought makes human nature shudder," the lady said. "But it has to be done. I'm devout. My reputation would be ruined, and everyone would laugh at me if I didn't burn myself." Zadig got her to admit that she was burning herself for other people and out of vanity. He talked to her for a long time in a way that made her a little fonder of life. He even managed to inspire some fondness for the man speaking to her.

“What would you do, then,” he asked, “if the vanity of burning yourself didn’t have such a hold on you?” “Oh!” the lady said. “I think I’d ask you to marry me.”

Zadig was too absorbed in thoughts of Astarté not to sidestep this declaration. But he went straight to the tribal chiefs, told them what had happened, and advised them to pass a law. A widow would be allowed to burn herself only after she had talked alone with a young man for a full hour. From then on, no lady burned herself in Arabia. It was Zadig alone they had to thank for ending, in a single day, a cruel custom that had lasted so many centuries. He had become Arabia’s benefactor.

CHAPTER 12

The Supper



Sétoc could not bear to be apart from this man who embodied wisdom. He took him to the great fair at Basra, where the leading merchants of the inhabited world were to meet. It was a real comfort to Zadig to see so many men from different countries gathered in one place. He felt that the universe was one big family coming together at Basra. On the second day he dined with an Egyptian, an Indian from the land of the Gangarides, a man from Cathay, a Greek, a Celt, and several other foreigners. On their frequent journeys to the Arabian Gulf, they had learned enough Arabic to make themselves understood. The Egyptian seemed very angry. “What a dreadful place Basra is!” he said. “They won’t lend me a thousand ounces of gold against the best security in the world.” “Really?” Sétoc said. “What security did they refuse to lend you that sum against?” “My aunt’s body,” the Egyptian answered. “She was the finest woman in Egypt. She always traveled with me. She died on the way, and I made her into one of the most beautiful mummies we have. In my own country I could get anything I wanted by putting her up as collateral. It’s very strange that here they won’t even give me a thousand ounces of gold against such solid security.” Still raging, he was about to eat some excellent boiled chicken when the Indian seized his hand and cried out in distress, “Oh! What are you about to do?” “Eat some of this chicken,” said the man with the mummy. “Don’t do it!” said the Gangaride. “The dead woman’s soul may have passed into this

chicken's body. Surely you wouldn't want to risk eating your aunt. Cooking chickens is an outright insult to nature." "What are you talking about with your nature and your chickens?" the angry Egyptian replied. "We worship an ox, and we certainly eat beef." "You worship an ox! Is that possible?" said the man from the Ganges. "Perfectly possible," the other answered. "We've done so for a hundred and thirty-five thousand years, and no one among us finds anything wrong with it." "Oh! A hundred and thirty-five thousand years!" the Indian said. "That's a little exaggerated. India has only been inhabited for eighty thousand years, and we're certainly older than you. Brahma forbade us to eat oxen before you ever thought of putting them on altars and roasting spits." "Your Brahma is a funny sort of animal to compare with Apis!" the Egyptian said. "What has your Brahma done that's so wonderful?" The Brahmin answered, "He taught people to read and write, and the whole world owes the game of chess to him." "You're wrong," said a Chaldean sitting beside him. "We owe such great gifts to the fish Oannès, and it's only right to worship him alone. Everyone will tell you he was a divine being. He had a golden tail and a handsome human head. He came out of the water to preach on land for three hours a day. He had several children, all of whom became kings, as everyone knows. I have a picture of him at home, which I honor as I should. You can eat all the beef you want, but cooking fish is certainly a very great sin. Besides, both of you come from peoples too lowborn and too recent to dispute anything with me. The Egyptian nation counts only a hundred and thirty-five thousand years, and the Indians boast of only eighty thousand, while we have almanacs going back four thousand centuries. Take my advice. Give up your foolish ideas, and I'll give each of you a beautiful picture of Oannès."

The man from Cambalu spoke up. "I have great respect for the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Greeks, the Celts, Brahma, the ox Apis, and the beautiful fish Oannès. But perhaps Li or Tien^a, whichever you choose to call it, is as good as oxen and fish. I won't say anything about my country. It's as large as Egypt, Chaldea, and India put together. I don't argue about antiquity, because it's

enough to be happy, and being ancient counts for very little. But if we had to discuss almanacs, I'd say all Asia uses ours. We had very good ones before people in Chaldea knew arithmetic."

^a Chinese words whose precise meanings are: *li*, natural light, reason; and *tien*, heaven; they also mean God.

"You're all completely ignorant!" the Greek shouted. "Don't you know that chaos is the father of everything, and that form and matter have made the world what it is?" This Greek spoke for a long time. At last the Celt interrupted him. He had drunk a great deal during the argument and now thought he knew more than all the others. Swearing, he said that only Teutath and mistletoe growing on oak trees were worth talking about. He always had mistletoe in his pocket. The Scythians, his ancestors, were the only decent people who had ever lived. True, they had sometimes eaten human beings, but that was no reason not to have great respect for his nation. Finally, if anyone spoke badly of Teutath, he would teach him some manners. The quarrel grew heated, and Sétoc thought blood was about to flow across the table. Zadig had stayed silent throughout the argument. At last he stood up. He spoke first to the Celt, who was the most furious, told him he was right, and asked him for some mistletoe. He praised the Greek's eloquence and soothed everyone's temper. He said very little to the man from Cathay, because he had been the most reasonable of them all. Then he said, "My friends, you were about to quarrel over nothing. You all agree." At this, they all protested. "Isn't it true," he said to the Celt, "that you don't worship this mistletoe, but the one who made the mistletoe and the oak?" "Certainly," the Celt answered. "And you, my Egyptian friend, surely what you honor in a particular ox is the one who gave you oxen?" "Yes," the Egyptian said. "The fish Oannès," he continued, "must give way to the one who made the sea and the fish." "Agreed," said the Chaldean. "The Indian," he added, "and the man from Cathay acknowledge a first cause, just as you do. I didn't quite understand the wonderful things the Greek said, but I'm sure he too accepts a higher Being, on whom form and matter depend." The Greek, whose ideas were being admired, said Zadig had understood his thought very well. "So you all agree," Zadig replied, "and there's nothing here to quarrel

about.” Everyone embraced him. After selling his goods at a very high price, Sétoc took his friend Zadig back to his tribe. When Zadig arrived, he learned that he had been tried in his absence and was going to be burned over a slow fire.

CHAPTER 13

The Appointments



The Appointment.

While Zadig was away in Basra, the priests of the stars had decided to punish him. By right, the jewels and ornaments of the young widows they sent to the pyre belonged to them. Having Zadig burned was the least they could do after the nasty trick he had played on them. So they accused him of holding false beliefs about the host of heaven. They testified against him, swearing they had heard him say that the stars did not set in the sea. This terrible blasphemy made the judges shudder. They were ready to tear their clothes when they heard these ungodly words. They would certainly have done so if Zadig had had the money to pay for them. But in their overwhelming grief, they settled for sentencing him to be burned over a slow fire. Sétoc was desperate. He used his influence to try to save his friend, but it was no use. Soon he was forced to keep quiet. The young widow Almona had become very fond of life, and she owed it to Zadig. She decided to save him from the pyre, whose injustice he had shown her. She turned her plan over in her mind without telling anyone. Zadig was to be executed the next day. She had only the night to save him. Here is how she went about it, as a charitable and sensible woman.

She put on perfume, enhanced her beauty with the richest and most attractive clothes, and went to ask the chief priest of the stars for a private audience. When she stood before this venerable old man, she spoke to him as follows: “El-

dest son of the Great Bear, brother of the Bull, cousin of the Great Dog” (these were the high priest’s titles), “I’ve come to confide my misgivings to you. I’m very much afraid I committed a terrible sin by not burning myself on my dear husband’s pyre. After all, what did I have to preserve? Perishable flesh that’s already all withered.” As she spoke, she drew her bare arms out of her long silk sleeves. They were beautifully shaped and dazzlingly white. “You see,” she said, “how little they’re worth.” In his heart, the high priest found them worth a great deal. His eyes said so, and his mouth confirmed it. He swore he had never seen such beautiful arms in his life. “Oh!” the widow said. “My arms may be a little less ugly than the rest. But you’ll admit that my breasts weren’t worth bothering about.” Then she revealed the loveliest breast that nature had ever formed. Beside it, a rosebud on an ivory apple would have looked like madder red on boxwood, and lambs fresh from washing would have seemed a brownish yellow. That breast; her large black eyes, languid and softly shining with tender fire; her cheeks, flushed with the loveliest crimson mixed with the purest milky white; her nose, which was not like the tower of Mount Lebanon; her lips, like two borders of coral enclosing the finest pearls in the Arabian Sea—all of this together made the old man think he was twenty. Stammering, he declared his love. Seeing him on fire, Almona asked him to pardon Zadig. “Oh! My beautiful lady,” he said, “even if I granted you his pardon, my leniency would do no good. Three more of my colleagues have to sign it.” “Sign it anyway,” Almona said. “Gladly,” said the priest, “provided your favors are the price of my willingness.” “You do me too much honor,” Almona said. “Just be so kind as to come to my room after sunset. As soon as the bright star *Sheat* is above the horizon, you’ll find me on a rose-colored sofa, and you can do whatever you can manage with your servant.” Then she left, taking his signature with her and leaving the old man full of love and doubts about his strength. He spent the rest of the day bathing. He drank a liquor made with cinnamon from Ceylon and precious spices from Tidore and Ternate. He waited impatiently for the star *Sheat* to appear.

Meanwhile, beautiful Almona went to see the second high priest. He assured her that the sun, the moon, and all the fires in the heavens were only flickering marsh lights compared with her charms. She asked him for the same pardon, and he proposed that she pay the price for it. She let herself be persuaded and made an appointment with the second high priest for the rising of the star *Algénib*. From there she went to the third and fourth priests. Each time she got a signature and gave an appointment, from one star to the next. Then she sent word to the judges to come to her house on important business. They came. She showed them the four names and told them the price at which the priests had sold Zadig's pardon. Each priest arrived at the appointed hour. Each was very surprised to find his colleagues there, and even more surprised to find the judges, in front of whom their disgrace was exposed. Zadig was saved. Sétoc was so delighted with Almona's cleverness that he married her.

CHAPTER 14

The Dance



Sétoc had to go to the island of Serendib on business. But he was in the first month of his marriage, which, as everyone knows, is the honeymoon. He could neither leave his wife nor believe he would ever be able to leave her. He asked his friend Zadig to make the trip for him. “Oh!” Zadig said. “Must I put an even greater distance between beautiful Astarté and myself? But I must serve my benefactors.” He said this, wept, and left.

He had not been on the island of Serendib long before people regarded him as an extraordinary man. He settled every dispute among the merchants, became the friend of the wise, and advised the few people who take advice. The king wanted to see him and hear him speak. He soon recognized Zadig’s full worth, trusted his wisdom, and made him his friend. The king’s warmth and respect made Zadig tremble. Day and night, he was haunted by the misfortune Moabdar’s kindness had brought on him. “The king likes me,” he said. “Won’t that be my ruin?” Yet he could not escape His Majesty’s affection. It must be admitted that Nabussan, king of Serendib, son of Nussanab, son of Nabassun, son of Sanbusna, was one of the best rulers in Asia. It was hard to talk to him without liking him.

This good ruler was constantly praised, deceived, and robbed. Everyone competed to plunder his treasures. The chief tax collector of the island of Serendib always set the example, which the others faithfully followed. The king

knew this. He had changed treasurers several times, but he had been unable to change the established practice of dividing his revenues into two unequal halves. The smaller half always went to His Majesty, and the larger to his officials.

King Nabussan confided his trouble to the wise Zadig. "You know so many wonderful things," he said. "Don't you know a way to find me a treasurer who won't rob me?" "Certainly," Zadig answered. "I know a foolproof way to give you a man with clean hands." Delighted, the king embraced him and asked how to go about it. "You only have to make everyone who applies for the office of treasurer dance," Zadig said. "The lightest dancer will certainly be the most honest man." "You're joking," said the king. "What a funny way to choose someone to collect my revenues! What! You claim that the man who best crosses his feet in midair will be the most upright and capable financier!" "I don't promise he'll be the most capable," Zadig replied. "But I assure you he'll unquestionably be the most honest." Zadig spoke with such confidence that the king thought he had some supernatural secret for judging financiers. "I don't like the supernatural," Zadig said. "People and books full of marvels have always displeased me. If Your Majesty will let me carry out the test I propose, you'll be thoroughly convinced that my secret is the simplest, easiest thing in the world." Nabussan, king of Serendib, was far more amazed to hear that the secret was simple than if he had been told it was a miracle. "Very well," he said. "Do as you see fit." "Leave it to me," Zadig said. "You'll gain more from this test than you think." That very day he had an announcement made in the king's name. Everyone seeking the position of chief collector of funds for His Gracious Majesty Nabussan, son of Nussanab, was to appear in the king's antechamber on the first day of the moon of the Crocodile, wearing light silk clothes. Sixty-four of them came. Violinists had been brought into a nearby hall. Everything was ready for the ball, but the hall's door was shut. To get in, they had to pass through a small, rather dark gallery. An usher came to fetch each candidate and lead him in, one after another, through this passage, where he was left alone for a few minutes. The king, who was in on the secret, had laid out all his treasures in the gallery. When all the applicants had reached the hall,

His Majesty ordered them to dance. No one ever danced more heavily or with less grace. They all had their heads lowered, their backs bent, and their hands pressed against their sides. "What crooks!" Zadig said under his breath. Just one of them danced nimbly, his head high, his gaze confident, his arms stretched out, his body straight, and his legs firm. "Ah! What an honest man! What a fine man!" Zadig said. The king embraced this good dancer and named him treasurer. All the others were punished and made to pay, with perfect justice. Each had filled his pockets while he was in the gallery and could barely walk. The king was sorry for human nature that sixty-three of these sixty-four dancers were thieves. The dark gallery was named *the Corridor of Temptation*. In Persia, these sixty-three gentlemen would have been impaled. In other countries, a special court would have been set up that would have spent three times the stolen money on expenses and returned nothing to the ruler's coffers. In another kingdom, they would have cleared themselves completely and had the light-footed dancer disgraced. In Serendib, they were only sentenced to add to the public treasury, because Nabussan was very forgiving.

He was also very grateful. He gave Zadig a sum of money greater than any treasurer had ever stolen from the king he served. Zadig used it to send express messengers to Babylon to report to him what had become of Astarté. His voice shook as he gave this order. His blood rushed back to his heart, darkness covered his eyes, and his soul almost left him. The courier set out, and Zadig watched him board the ship. He went back to the king without seeing anyone, thinking he was in his own room and saying the word "love." "Ah! Love," the king said. "That's exactly the problem. You've guessed what's troubling me. What a great man you are! I hope you'll teach me how to recognize a woman who can withstand every test, just as you found me a treasurer with no interest in personal gain." Zadig came to his senses and promised to help him in love as he had in finance, although this seemed even harder.

CHAPTER 15

Blue Eyes



“The body and the heart,” the king said to Zadig... At these words the Babylonian could not help interrupting His Majesty. “I’m so grateful,” he said, “that you didn’t say ‘the mind and the heart’! That’s all you hear in conversation in Babylon. You see nothing but books about the heart and the mind, written by people who have neither. But please, sir, go on.” Nabussan continued: “My body and my heart are made for love. The first of these two powers has every reason to be satisfied. I have a hundred women here at my service. All are beautiful, obliging, attentive, even passionate—or pretending to be so with me. My heart is nowhere near as happy. I’ve learned all too well that people lavish affection on the king of Serendib and care very little about Nabussan. It’s not that I think my women are unfaithful. But I’d like to find a soul that belonged to me. For such a treasure, I’d give up the hundred beauties whose charms I possess. See if, among these hundred women, you can find one whose love I can be sure of.”

Zadig answered as he had in the matter of the financiers: “Sir, leave it to me. But first let me use what you laid out in the Gallery of Temptation. I’ll give you a proper account of it, and you won’t lose anything.” The king gave him complete control. In Serendib, Zadig chose thirty-three of the ugliest little hunchbacks he could find, thirty-three of the handsomest pages, and thirty-three of the most eloquent and vigorous monks. He gave them all free access to the

women's rooms. Each little hunchback had four thousand gold pieces to give away, and every hunchback succeeded on the very first day. The pages, who had nothing to offer but themselves, took two or three days to triumph. The monks had a little more trouble, but in the end thirty-three devout women gave in to them. Through latticed screens looking into all the rooms, the king watched every test and was amazed. Of his hundred women, ninety-nine gave in before his eyes. One remained, very young and entirely new, whom His Majesty had never approached. They sent one, two, three hunchbacks to her, offering her as much as twenty thousand gold pieces. She could not be bought. She couldn't help laughing at their idea that money would improve their figures. They brought her the two handsomest pages. She said she found the king even handsomer. They sent in the most eloquent monk, then the boldest. She thought the first a chatterbox and did not even bother to wonder about the second one's talents. "The heart is everything," she said. "I'll never yield to a hunchback's gold, a young man's charms, or a monk's seductions. I'll love only Nabussan, son of Nussanab, and wait until he is willing to love me." The king was beside himself with joy, amazement, and tenderness. He took back all the money that had made the hunchbacks successful and gave it to beautiful Falide, for that was the young woman's name. He gave her his heart. She fully deserved it. Youth had never flowered so brightly; beauty's charms had never been so enchanting. Historical truth will not let us hide the fact that she curtsied badly. But she danced like the fairies, sang like the sirens, and spoke like the Graces. She was full of talents and virtues.

Loved in return, Nabussan adored her. But she had blue eyes, and this caused the greatest misfortunes. An ancient law forbade kings to love one of those women whom the Greeks later called "ox-eyed." The chief monk had established this law more than five thousand years before. He wanted to take the mistress of Serendib's first king for himself. That was why this first monk had made the curse on blue eyes a fundamental law of the state. All the orders of the empire came to protest to Nabussan. People said openly that the kingdom's last days had come, that wickedness had reached its height, that all

nature was threatened by some terrible event. In short, Nabussan, son of Nussanab, was in love with two big blue eyes. The hunchbacks, the financiers, the monks, and the brunettes filled the kingdom with their complaints.

The savage peoples living in northern Serendib took advantage of this general discontent. They invaded good Nabussan's lands. He asked his subjects for funds. The monks, who possessed half the state's revenues, settled for raising their hands to heaven. They refused to put them into their coffers to help the king. They offered beautiful prayers set to music and left the state at the mercy of the barbarians.

"Oh, my dear Zadig, will you get me out of this terrible mess too?" Nabussan cried in distress. "Very gladly," Zadig answered. "You'll get as much money from the monks as you want. Leave the lands where their castles stand undefended, and defend only your own." Nabussan did just that. The monks came and threw themselves at the king's feet, begging for help. The king answered them with beautiful music whose words were prayers to heaven to preserve their lands. At last the monks gave money, and the king brought the war to a successful end. So Zadig's wise, effective advice and great services had earned him the unrelenting hatred of the most powerful men in the state. The monks and the brunettes swore to destroy him. The financiers and the hunchbacks did not spare him. They made good Nabussan suspicious of him. Services rendered often stay in the antechamber, while suspicions enter the private office, as Zoroaster's saying goes. Every day brought new accusations. The first is pushed back, the second grazes, the third wounds, the fourth kills.

Zadig was frightened. He had handled his friend Sétoc's business well and sent him his money. Now he thought only of leaving the island. He decided to go himself to find news of Astarté. "If I stay in Serendib," he said, "the monks will have me impaled. But where can I go? In Egypt I'll be a slave, in Arabia I'll most likely be burned, in Babylon I'll be strangled. Still, I must find out what has become of Astarté. Let's leave and see what my sad fate has in store for me."

CHAPTER 16

The Robber



When Zadig reached the border between Arabia Petraea and Syria, he passed near a well-fortified castle. Armed Arabs came out of it, and he found himself surrounded. They shouted, “Everything you have belongs to us, and you belong to our master.” Zadig answered by drawing his sword. His servant, who was brave, did the same. They struck dead the first Arabs who laid hands on them. Twice as many came at them. They did not lose heart and resolved to die fighting. Two men were defending themselves against a crowd. Such a fight could not last long. The castle’s master, named Arbogad, saw Zadig’s amazing feats of courage from a window and came to respect him. He hurried down and himself drove his men back and freed the two travelers. “Everything that passes through my land is mine,” he said, “and so is anything I find on other people’s land. But you seem such a brave man that I’ll exempt you from the general rule.” He brought Zadig into his castle and ordered his men to treat him well. That evening Arbogad wanted to have supper with him.

The lord of the castle was one of those Arabs called *robbers*. But among his many bad deeds he sometimes did good ones. He robbed with furious greed and gave generously. He was fearless in action, fairly gentle in his dealings, wild at the table, cheerful in his excesses, and above all frank. He liked Zadig very much. Zadig’s lively conversation kept the meal going. At last Arbogad said, “I advise you to join my band. You couldn’t do better. This isn’t a bad trade. One

day you could become what I am.” “May I ask,” Zadig said, “how long you’ve practiced this noble profession?” “Since my earliest youth,” the lord replied. “I was the servant of a fairly clever Arab. I couldn’t stand my position. All the earth belongs equally to everyone, and I was desperate to see that fate had not set aside my share. I confided my troubles to an old Arab, who said, ‘My son, don’t despair. Once there was a grain of sand that lamented being an unnoticed speck in the desert. After a few years it became a diamond. Now it’s the finest jewel in the crown of the king of India.’ His words struck me. I was the grain of sand. I resolved to become a diamond. I began by stealing two horses. I gathered some companions and put myself in a position to rob small caravans. In this way I gradually did away with the inequality that had existed between other men and me. I got my share of this world’s goods and was even compensated with interest. People thought very highly of me. I became a robber lord and took this castle by force. The governor of Syria wanted to drive me out, but I was already too rich to have anything to fear. I gave him money. In return I kept the castle and enlarged my lands. He even made me treasurer of the tribute Arabia Petraea paid to the king of kings. I performed my duties as collector, but none at all as payer.

“The Great Desterham of Babylon sent a minor governor here in King Moabdar’s name to have me strangled. This man arrived with his order. I knew all about it. He had brought four people with him to tighten the cord. I had them strangled in front of him. Then I asked him how much he stood to make from the job of strangling me. He answered that his fee could come to three hundred gold pieces. I made it clear that there was more to be earned with me. I made him a deputy robber. Today he’s one of my best officers and one of the richest. Take my advice, and you’ll succeed as he did. There’s never been a better season for robbery, now that Moabdar has been killed and everything in Babylon is in confusion.”

“Moabdar has been killed!” Zadig said. “And what’s become of Queen Astarté?” “I don’t know,” Arbogad replied. “All I know is that Moabdar went mad and was killed, that Babylon is one big den of cutthroats, that the whole empire is devastated, that there are still some fine hauls to be made, and that

I've made some wonderful ones myself." "But the queen," Zadig said. "Please, don't you know anything about the queen's fate?" "I've heard of a prince of Hyrcania," he replied. "She's probably among his concubines, unless she was killed in the uproar. But I'm more interested in loot than news. I've captured several women on my raids. I don't keep any of them. When they're beautiful, I sell them for a high price without asking who they are. People don't buy rank. An ugly queen wouldn't find a buyer. Perhaps I've sold Queen Astarté. Perhaps she's dead. But I don't care, and I don't think you should worry about it any more than I do." As he spoke, he drank so boldly and muddled all his ideas so thoroughly that Zadig could get no clear information out of him.

Zadig sat speechless, crushed, motionless. Arbogad kept drinking, telling stories, and endlessly repeating that he was the happiest man alive. He urged Zadig to make himself just as happy. At last, gently lulled by the fumes of the wine, he went off to sleep peacefully. Zadig spent the night in the most violent turmoil. "What!" he said. "The king went mad! He's been killed! I can't help pitying him. The empire is torn apart, and this robber is happy. Oh, fortune! Oh, fate! A thief is happy, and the loveliest person nature ever made may have died horribly, or may be living in a state worse than death. Oh, Astarté! What has become of you?"

At daybreak he questioned everyone he met in the castle. But everyone was busy, and no one answered. They had made fresh conquests during the night and were dividing the spoils. In all this noisy confusion, the only thing he could obtain was permission to leave. He took advantage of it at once, more deeply sunk than ever in his painful thoughts.

Zadig walked on, anxious and restless. His mind was filled with the unhappy Astarté, the king of Babylon, his faithful Cador, the happy robber Arbogad, and that fickle woman whom some Babylonians had carried off on the borders of Egypt. In short, he thought of all the setbacks and misfortunes he had suffered.

CHAPTER 17

The Fisherman



A few leagues from Arbogad's castle, Zadig came to the bank of a small river. He was still mourning his fate and thinking of himself as the very model of an unhappy man. He saw a fisherman lying on the bank. His limp hand barely held his net, which he seemed ready to give up, and his eyes were turned toward the sky.

"I must be the unhappiest man alive," the fisherman said. "Everyone agreed that I was the most famous seller of cream cheese in Babylon, and I was ruined. I had the prettiest wife a man could have, and she betrayed me. I had one poor little house left, and I saw it looted and destroyed. I took shelter in a hut. Fishing is my only way to survive, and I can't catch a single fish. Oh, my net! I won't throw you into the water again. It's time to throw myself in." As he spoke, he got up and moved forward like a man about to jump in and end his life.

"What!" Zadig said to himself. "Are there other men as unhappy as I am?" The urge to save the fisherman's life came as quickly as the thought. He ran to him, stopped him, and questioned him with gentle concern, trying to comfort him. People say we feel less unhappy when we aren't alone in our unhappiness. But according to Zoroaster, this comes from need, not spite. We feel drawn to

another unfortunate person as to someone like ourselves. A happy man's joy would be an insult. But two unhappy people are like two weak saplings that lean against each other and grow stronger against the storm.

"Why are you giving in to your troubles?" Zadig asked the fisherman. "Because I see no way out of them," he answered. "I was the most respected man in the village of Derlback near Babylon. With my wife's help, I made the best cream cheeses in the empire. Queen Astarté and the famous minister Zadig were especially fond of them. I had supplied their households with six hundred cheeses. One day I went to the city to collect my money. When I reached Babylon, I learned that the queen and Zadig had disappeared. I hurried to Lord Zadig's house, though I had never seen him. There I found the Great Desterham's guards, armed with a royal order, loyally looting his house in an orderly way. I rushed to the queen's kitchens. Some of the officers in charge of her food told me she was dead. Others said she was in prison, and others claimed she had run away. But they all assured me I wouldn't be paid for my cheeses. My wife and I went to Lord Orcan, who was one of my customers. We asked for his protection in our misfortune. He granted it to my wife and refused it to me. She was whiter than those cream cheeses that started my troubles. The splendor of Tyrian purple was no brighter than the rosy color that brought that whiteness to life. That was why Orcan kept her and threw me out of his house. I wrote my dear wife a desperate man's letter. She told the messenger, 'Ha, ha! Yes! I know the man who's writing to me. I've heard of him. They say he makes excellent cream cheeses. Have some brought to me, and make sure he's paid for them.'

"In my misery, I decided to turn to the courts. I had six ounces of gold left. I had to give two ounces to the lawyer I consulted, two to the attorney who took my case, and two to the chief judge's secretary. When all that was done, my trial hadn't even begun, and I had already spent more money than my cheeses and my wife were worth. I went back to my village, planning to sell my house so I could get my wife back.

“My house was easily worth sixty ounces of gold. But people could see I was poor and needed to sell quickly. The first man I approached offered me thirty ounces, the second twenty, and the third ten. I was so blinded that I was finally ready to accept, when a prince of Hyrcania came to Babylon and laid waste to everything in his path. My house was first ransacked, then burned.

“Having lost my money, my wife, and my house, I came to this country where you see me now. I tried to make a living as a fisherman. The fish mock me just as people do. I catch nothing. I’m starving. Without you, my noble comforter, I would have died in the river.”

The fisherman didn’t tell this story all at once. Zadig, deeply moved and beside himself, kept interrupting: “What! You know nothing about what happened to the queen?” “No, sir,” the fisherman answered. “But I know the queen and Zadig haven’t paid me for my cream cheeses, that my wife has been taken from me, and that I’m desperate.” “I hope you won’t lose all your money,” Zadig said. “I’ve heard of this Zadig. He’s an honest man. If he returns to Babylon, as he hopes to do, he’ll give you more than he owes you. But as for your wife, who isn’t so honest, I advise you not to try to get her back. Take my word for it. Go to Babylon. I’ll get there before you, since I’m on horseback and you’re on foot. Go to the distinguished Cador. Tell him you met his friend, and wait for me at his house. Go. Perhaps you won’t always be unhappy.”

“Oh, mighty Orosmade!” he went on. “You use me to comfort this man. Who will you use to comfort me?” As he spoke, he gave the fisherman half of all the money he had brought from Arabia. Overwhelmed with wonder and delight, the fisherman kissed the feet of Cador’s friend and said, “You’re an angel who has saved me.”

Still Zadig kept asking for news and shedding tears. “What, sir!” the fisherman cried. “Can you be unhappy too, when you do so much good?” “A hundred times unhappier than you,” Zadig answered. “But how can it be,” the good man said, “that the person who gives is more to be pitied than the person who receives?” “Because your greatest trouble was need,” Zadig replied, “and mine is a broken heart.” “Has Orcan taken your wife too?” asked the fisherman. These words brought all Zadig’s adventures back to his mind. He went

over the list of his troubles, starting with the queen's female dog and ending with his arrival at the robber Arbogad's home. "Ah!" he told the fisherman. "Orcan deserves to be punished. But it's usually people like him who are fortune's favorites. Whatever happens, go to Lord Cador's house and wait for me." They parted. The fisherman walked on, thanking his fate, while Zadig rode off, still blaming his own.

CHAPTER 18

The Basilisk



When he reached a beautiful meadow, he saw several women searching very carefully for something. He took the liberty of approaching one and asking whether he might have the honor of helping them search. “Don’t even think of it,” the Syrian woman answered. “Only women can touch what we’re looking for.” “That’s very strange,” Zadig said. “May I ask what this thing is that only women are allowed to touch?” “A basilisk,” she said. “A basilisk, ma’am! And why, if I may ask, are you looking for a basilisk?” “For our lord and master Ogul. You can see his castle beside that river, at the far end of the meadow. We’re his very humble slaves. Lord Ogul is sick. His doctor has ordered him to eat a basilisk cooked in rosewater. It’s a very rare animal, and it only lets women catch it. So Lord Ogul has promised to make whichever of us brings him one his beloved wife. Please let me keep looking. You can see what I stand to lose if one of my companions finds it first.”

Zadig left the Syrian woman and the others to look for their basilisk and walked on through the meadow. At the edge of a small stream, he found another woman lying on the grass, looking for nothing. Her figure seemed majestic, but a veil covered her face. She was leaning toward the stream, sighing deeply. In her hand she held a little stick. With it, she was tracing letters in the fine sand between the grass and the stream. Zadig was curious to see what she was writing. He came closer and saw a Z, then an A. He was startled. Then a D

appeared, and he trembled. Nothing could equal his surprise when he saw the last two letters of his name. He stood motionless for a while. At last he broke the silence, speaking in a halting voice: "Oh, kind lady! Forgive a stranger, an unhappy man, for daring to ask what amazing chance has brought me here to find the name ZADIG written by your divine hand." At the sound of that voice and those words, the woman lifted her veil with a trembling hand. She looked at Zadig and cried out with tenderness, surprise, and joy. Overcome by all the different feelings flooding her heart at once, she fainted in his arms. It was Astarté herself, the queen of Babylon. It was the woman Zadig adored and blamed himself for adoring, the woman whose fate had made him weep so much and fear so much. For a moment, he lost all awareness. Then he fixed his eyes on Astarté's. They were opening again, weakly, with a mixture of embarrassment and tenderness. "Oh, immortal powers who guide the fates of weak human beings!" he cried. "Are you giving Astarté back to me? At what a time, in what a place, in what a condition I find her again!" He fell to his knees before Astarté and pressed his forehead into the dust at her feet. The queen of Babylon raised him and made him sit beside her at the stream's edge. Again and again, she wiped her eyes, but the tears kept flowing. Twenty times she tried to resume what she was saying, only to be interrupted by her sobs. She asked what chance had brought them together, then cut off his answers with more questions. She began telling him her troubles, then wanted to hear his. At last, when the turmoil in their hearts had calmed a little, Zadig briefly told her how he had come to this meadow. "But, my unfortunate and honored queen, how do I find you in this remote place, dressed as a slave, with other slave women looking for a basilisk to cook in rosewater on a doctor's orders?"

"While they look for their basilisk," the beautiful Astarté said, "I'll tell you everything I've suffered, and everything I forgive heaven for now that I see you again. You know that the king, my husband, resented your being the most charming of men. That was why, one night, he decided to have you strangled and me poisoned. You know how heaven allowed my little mute servant to warn me of his sublime majesty's order. The faithful Cadore had barely forced you to obey me and leave when he dared to enter my rooms in the middle of

the night through a secret passage. He carried me away to the temple of Orosmade. There his brother, the priest, hid me inside an enormous statue whose base reaches the temple's foundations and whose head touches its vaulted roof. I was buried there, in a way, but the priest looked after me, and I had everything I needed. Meanwhile, at dawn, his majesty's apothecary entered my room with a potion containing henbane, opium, hemlock, black hellebore, and aconite. Another officer went to your house with a blue silk cord. They found no one. To deceive the king more thoroughly, Cador pretended to come and accuse us both. He said you had taken the road to India and I the road to Memphis. Men were sent after both of us.

"The messengers looking for me didn't know me. I had almost never shown my face to anyone but you, and then only in my husband's presence and on his orders. They pursued me with only the description they had been given of my appearance. At the Egyptian border, they came across a woman of my height who may have been even more attractive. She was wandering around in tears. They had no doubt that she was the queen of Babylon and took her to Moabdar. Their mistake first sent the king into a violent rage. But soon, after taking a closer look at the woman, he found her very beautiful and was consoled. Her name was Missouf. I've since been told that in Egyptian this name means *the beautiful, unpredictable woman*. She was certainly that. But she was as cunning as she was unpredictable. Moabdar liked her. She gained such control over him that she had herself declared his wife. Then her character came out in full. She gave free rein, without fear, to every crazy idea that entered her head. She tried to make the chief priest, who was old and had gout, dance for her. When he refused, she persecuted him fiercely. She ordered her master of the horse to bake her a jam tart. He tried in vain to explain that he wasn't a pastry cook. He had to make the tart, and then he was dismissed because it was too badly burned. She made her dwarf master of the horse and gave a page the chancellor's job. That was how she governed Babylon. Everyone missed me. The king had been a fairly decent man until the moment he decided to poison me and have you strangled. Now he seemed to have drowned all his virtues in his overwhelming love for this beautiful, unpredictable woman. On the great

festival of the sacred fire, he came to the temple. I saw him praying to the gods for Missouf at the feet of the statue where I was hidden. I raised my voice and called out, 'The gods reject the prayers of a king who has become a tyrant, who tried to kill a sensible wife so he could marry a madwoman.' These words so bewildered Moabdar that his mind became disturbed. The oracle I had delivered and Missouf's tyranny were enough to make him lose his reason. Within a few days, he went mad.

"His madness seemed a punishment from heaven and became the signal for revolt. People rose up and rushed to arms. Babylon, which had spent so long sunk in idle luxury, became the scene of a terrible civil war. I was taken out of my hollow statue and put at the head of one faction. Cadore hurried to Memphis to bring you back to Babylon. When the prince of Hyrcania heard this terrible news, he returned with his army to form a third faction in Chaldea. He attacked the king, who rushed out to meet him with his crazy Egyptian woman. Moabdar died, pierced with wounds. Missouf fell into the victor's hands. As bad luck would have it, a Hyrcanian detachment captured me too. They brought me before the prince at the very moment Missouf was brought to him. You'll no doubt be flattered to hear that the prince found me more beautiful than the Egyptian. But you'll be upset to learn that he intended me for his harem. He told me quite firmly that as soon as he finished the military expedition he was about to undertake, he would come to me. Imagine my grief. My ties to Moabdar were broken. I could belong to Zadig, and instead I was falling into this barbarian's chains! I answered him with all the pride my rank and my feelings gave me. I had always heard that heaven gave people of my standing a certain majesty. A single word or glance from them could force anyone bold enough to forget himself back into the humblest respect. I spoke as a queen, but I was treated as a lady's maid. Without even bothering to address me, the Hyrcanian told his black eunuch that I was impertinent, but that he found me pretty. He ordered him to look after me and put me on the diet given to his favorites. This would freshen my complexion and make me more worthy of his favors on the day he found it convenient to honor me with them. I told him I would kill myself. He laughed and replied that people didn't kill them-

selves, that he was used to such behavior. Then he left me like a man who has just put a parrot in his menagerie. What a position for the foremost queen in the world—and, more than that, for a heart that belonged to Zadig!”

At these words he fell to his knees before her and bathed her knees in tears. Astarté tenderly helped him up and continued: “I found myself in a barbarian’s power, shut up with a madwoman who was my rival. She told me about her adventure in Egypt. From her description of your appearance, the timing, the dromedary you rode, and all the circumstances, I realized it was Zadig who had fought for her. I had no doubt you were in Memphis and decided to escape there. ‘Beautiful Missouf,’ I told her, ‘you’re much more amusing than I am. You’ll entertain the prince of Hyrcania far better than I could. Help me find a way to escape. You’ll reign alone, and by getting rid of a rival, you’ll make me happy.’ Missouf helped me plan my escape. So I left secretly with an Egyptian slave woman.

“I was already near Arabia when a famous robber named Arbogad kidnapped me and sold me to merchants. They brought me to this castle, where Lord Ogul lives. He bought me without knowing who I was. He’s a man devoted to pleasure who thinks only of fine dining. He believes God put him in the world to keep a dinner table. He’s so excessively fat that he’s always on the verge of suffocating. His doctor has little influence over him when his digestion is good, but rules him like a despot when he has eaten too much. He has convinced him he can cure him with a basilisk cooked in rosewater. Lord Ogul has promised to marry whichever of his slave women brings him a basilisk. As you see, I leave them to hurry about earning this honor. And I’ve never wanted to find that basilisk less than I do now, since heaven has allowed me to see you again.”

Then Astarté and Zadig said everything that feelings held back for so long, everything that their troubles and their love, could inspire in the noblest and most passionate hearts. The spirits who watch over love carried their words as far as the sphere of Venus.

The women returned to Ogul's house without finding anything. Zadig had himself shown in and spoke to him as follows: "May immortal health come down from heaven and care for you every day of your life! I'm a doctor. When I heard of your illness, I hurried here and brought you a basilisk cooked in rose-water. That doesn't mean I intend to marry you. All I ask is freedom for a young slave woman from Babylon you've had for a few days. I agree to remain a slave in her place if I don't have the good fortune to cure the magnificent Lord Ogul."

The offer was accepted. Astarté left for Babylon with Zadig's servant, promising to send a messenger immediately to tell him everything that had happened. Their farewell was as tender as their reunion had been. The moment when we meet again and the moment when we part are life's two greatest milestones, as the great book of the Zend says. Zadig loved the queen as much as he swore he did, and the queen loved Zadig more than she told him.

Meanwhile, Zadig spoke to Ogul: "Sir, you don't eat my basilisk. All its power must enter your body through your pores. I've put it in a small, well-inflated bag covered with a thin skin. You must hit this bag with all your strength, and I'll hit it back to you again and again. After a few days on this treatment, you'll see what my skill can do." On the first day, Ogul was completely out of breath and thought he would die of exhaustion. On the second, he was less tired and slept better. In eight days, he regained all the strength, health, lightness, and good spirits of his best years. "You've played ball and lived moderately," Zadig told him. "Understand that no basilisk exists in nature. Moderation and exercise keep you healthy. The art of combining overindulgence with good health is as imaginary as the philosopher's stone, predictive astrology, and the priests' theology."

Ogul's chief doctor realized how dangerous this man was to medicine. He joined forces with Ogul's personal apothecary to send Zadig to look for basilisks in the next world. So, after always being punished for doing good, he was about to die for curing a gluttonous lord. He was invited to an excellent dinner. He was to be poisoned at the second course, but at the first he received

a messenger from the beautiful Astarté. He left the table and set off. When a beautiful woman loves you, says the great Zoroaster, you always find a way out of trouble in this world.

CHAPTER 19

The Combats



The queen had been welcomed in Babylon with the enthusiasm people always show for a beautiful princess who has suffered. Babylon now seemed calmer. The prince of Hyrcania had been killed in battle. The victorious Babylonians declared that Astarté would marry the man chosen as their ruler. They refused to let the world's highest position—husband to Astarté and king of Babylon—depend on plots and factions. They swore to recognize the bravest and wisest man as king. A large tournament ground was laid out a few leagues from the city, surrounded by magnificently decorated stands. The contestants were to arrive in full armor. Behind the stands, each had a separate room where no one was to see him or learn who he was. Each had to fight four jousts. Those lucky enough to defeat four knights would then fight one another. The last man left in control of the field would be declared the winner of the games. Four days later, he had to return in the same armor and solve the riddles set by the priests. If he couldn't solve them, he wouldn't be king. The jousting would have to start again until a man won both contests. They were absolutely determined to have the bravest and wisest man as king. Throughout this time, the queen was to be closely guarded. She was allowed only to attend the games, wearing a veil. She wasn't allowed to speak to any of the candidates, so there could be no favoritism or unfairness.

This was the news Astarté sent her lover, hoping he would show more courage and intelligence for her sake than anyone else. He set off, asking Venus to strengthen his courage and sharpen his mind. He reached the bank of the Euphrates on the eve of the great day. He had his identifying motto entered among those of the contestants, keeping his face and name hidden as the rules required. Then he went to rest in the room assigned to him by lot. His friend Cadore had returned to Babylon after searching for him in Egypt in vain. He had a full suit of armor sent to Zadig's room, a gift from the queen. On her behalf, he also had the finest horse in Persia brought to him. Zadig recognized Astarté's hand in these gifts. They gave fresh strength and hope to his courage and his love.

The next day, the queen took her place under a canopy covered in jewels. The stands filled with all the ladies and all the ranks of Babylon, and the contestants appeared in the arena. Each came forward to lay his motto at the high priest's feet. The mottos were drawn by lot. Zadig's came last. The first man to advance was a very rich lord named Itobad. He was extremely vain, not very brave, very clumsy, and unintelligent. His servants had persuaded him that a man like him ought to be king. He had answered, "A man like me must rule." So they had armed him from head to foot. He wore gold armor enameled in green, with a green plume and a lance decorated with green ribbons. From the way Itobad handled his horse, it was immediately clear that heaven hadn't reserved the scepter of Babylon for a man like him. The first knight who charged him knocked him out of the saddle. The second tipped him back onto his horse's rump, with both legs in the air and his arms spread out. Itobad got himself upright again, but so awkwardly that the whole crowd burst out laughing. A third knight didn't bother to use his lance. As he rode past, he grabbed Itobad's right leg, spun him halfway around, and dropped him onto the sand. The tournament squires ran up laughing and put him back in the saddle. The fourth contestant grabbed his left leg and made him fall off the other side. He was led back amid jeers to his room, where the rules required him to spend the night. Barely able to walk, he said, "What a thing to happen to a man like me!"

The other knights did better. Some defeated two opponents in a row, and a few managed three. Only Prince Otame defeated four. At last it was Zadig's turn. He unhorsed four riders in a row with perfect grace. Now they had to see which would win, Otame or Zadig. Otame wore blue and gold armor with a matching plume. Zadig's armor was white. Everyone's hopes were divided between the blue knight and the white knight. With her heart pounding, the queen prayed to heaven for white. The two champions wheeled and charged so nimbly, struck such fine blows with their lances, and held their saddles so firmly that everyone except the queen wished Babylon could have two kings. At last their horses were tired and their lances broken. Zadig used this trick: he rode behind the blue prince, jumped onto his horse's rump, grabbed him around the waist, and threw him to the ground. He took Otame's place in the saddle and pranced around him as he lay in the arena. The whole crowd shouted, "Victory to the white knight!" Furious, Otame got up and drew his sword. Zadig jumped from the horse with his saber in his hand. Now they were both on the ground, fighting a new battle in which strength and agility gained the upper hand in turn. The plumes on their helmets, the studs on their arm guards, and the links of their armor flew off under a thousand rapid blows. They thrust and slashed, right and left, at head and chest. They moved back and forward, sized each other up, closed in, grappled, twisted like snakes, and attacked like lions. Their blows kept striking sparks. At last Zadig took a moment to collect himself. He stopped, feinted, rushed Otame, knocked him down, and disarmed him. Otame cried, "White knight! You're the one who should rule Babylon." The queen was overjoyed. The blue knight and the white knight were led back to their separate rooms, like all the others, as the rules required. Mute servants came to wait on them and bring them food. You can imagine whether it was the queen's little mute servant who waited on Zadig. Then they were left to sleep alone until the next morning. That was when the winner had to bring his motto to the high priest to have it matched and his identity established.

Although he was in love, Zadig was so tired that he slept. Itobad, who lay in the next room, didn't sleep. During the night he got up, entered Zadig's room, took his white armor and his motto, and left his own green armor in their place.

At dawn, he proudly went to the high priest to declare that a man like him had won. No one expected it, but he was proclaimed the winner while Zadig was still asleep. Shocked and heartbroken, Astarté went back to Babylon. The stands were already almost empty when Zadig woke up. He looked for his armor and found only the green suit. He had to put it on, since he had nothing else with him to wear. Astonished and outraged, he angrily dressed in it and went out.

Everyone still in the stands and the arena greeted him with jeers. They surrounded him and insulted him to his face. No man had ever suffered such humiliating treatment. He lost his patience and used blows of his saber to drive away the mob that dared abuse him. But he didn't know what to do. He couldn't see the queen. He couldn't claim the white armor she had sent him, because that would compromise her. So while she was sunk in grief, he was filled with anger and anxiety. He walked along the banks of the Euphrates, convinced his star had doomed him to hopeless misery. He went back over all his troubles, from the affair of the woman who hated one-eyed men to the affair of his armor. "This is what comes of waking up too late," he said. "If I'd slept less, I'd be king of Babylon, and Astarté would be mine. So learning, good character, and courage have only ever brought me misfortune." At last he let himself complain against Providence. He was tempted to believe that everything was ruled by a cruel fate that oppressed good people and made green knights prosper. One of his troubles was having to wear the green armor that had brought him so many jeers. A merchant passed by. Zadig sold him the armor for next to nothing and took a robe and a tall cap from him. Dressed this way, he followed the Euphrates in despair, secretly blaming the Providence that never stopped persecuting him.

CHAPTER 20

The Hermit



As he walked, he met a hermit whose venerable white beard reached his waist. He held a book in his hand and was reading it closely. Zadig stopped and bowed deeply. The hermit greeted him with such dignity and kindness that Zadig wanted to talk to him. He asked what book he was reading. "It's the book of destinies," the hermit said. "Would you like to read some of it?" He put the book in Zadig's hands. Though Zadig knew several languages, he couldn't make out a single character in the book. This made him even more curious. "You seem very sad," the good father told him. "Sadly, I have every reason to be," Zadig said. "If you'll let me travel with you," the old man replied, "perhaps I can help you. I've sometimes brought comfort to unhappy hearts." Zadig felt respect for the hermit's manner, his beard, and his book. In conversation, he found him extraordinarily wise. The hermit spoke about fate, justice, morality, the highest good, human weakness, virtues, and vices with such lively and moving eloquence that Zadig felt irresistibly drawn to him. He begged him not to leave him until they were back in Babylon. "That's the very favor I ask of you," the old man said. "Swear to me by Orosmade that for the next few days you won't leave me, whatever I do." Zadig swore, and they set off together.

That evening, the two travelers reached a splendid castle. The hermit asked for lodging for himself and the young man with him. The doorkeeper, who could have passed for a great lord, let them in with a sort of condescending

kindness. They were presented to a senior servant, who showed them his master's magnificent rooms. They were admitted to the lower end of his table. The lord of the castle didn't honor them with a glance, but they were served the same fine food in the same abundance as everyone else. Afterward, they were given water to wash in a gold basin set with emeralds and rubies. They were taken to sleep in a beautiful room. The next morning, a servant brought each of them a gold coin, and then they were sent on their way.

"The master of that house seems generous to me, though a little proud," Zadig said as they walked. "He offers hospitality in a noble way." As he spoke, he noticed that a sort of very large pocket the hermit wore seemed stretched and swollen. Inside it he saw the gold basin set with jewels, which the hermit had stolen. At first, he didn't dare show that he had noticed, but he was extremely surprised.

Around noon, the hermit went to the door of a very small house where a rich miser lived. He asked for a few hours' hospitality. An old servant in shabby clothes greeted him rudely and showed him and Zadig into the stable. There they were given some rotten olives, bad bread, and spoiled beer. The hermit ate and drank as contentedly as he had the day before. The old servant watched them both to make sure they stole nothing and urged them to leave. The hermit turned to him, gave him the two gold coins he had received that morning, and thanked him for all his care. "Please," he added, "let me speak to your master." Astonished, the servant showed the two travelers in. "Magnificent sir," the hermit said, "I can only thank you most humbly for the noble way you've welcomed us. Please accept this gold basin as a small token of my gratitude." The miser nearly fell over backward. The hermit gave him no time to recover from his amazement. He left as quickly as possible with his young companion. "Father," Zadig said, "what does all this mean? You don't seem like other people at all. You steal a gold basin set with jewels from a lord who receives you magnificently, and give it to a miser who treats you shamefully." "My son," the old man answered, "that magnificent man, who only welcomes strangers out of vanity and to make them admire his wealth, will grow wiser. The miser will learn to offer hospitality. Don't be surprised at anything. Follow me." Zadig still didn't

know whether he was dealing with the maddest or the wisest man alive. But the hermit spoke with such authority that Zadig couldn't help following him, bound as he also was by his oath.

That evening, they reached a pleasantly built but simple house, with no sign of either extravagance or stinginess. Its owner was a philosopher who had withdrawn from the world. He peacefully cultivated wisdom and virtue, yet wasn't bored. He had enjoyed building this retreat, where he welcomed strangers with dignity and without any showiness. He came out himself to meet the two travelers and first let them rest in a comfortable room. A little later, he came himself to invite them to a well-planned, neatly served meal. During it, he spoke discreetly about the recent upheavals in Babylon. He seemed sincerely devoted to the queen and wished Zadig had appeared on the tournament ground to compete for the crown. "But people," he added, "don't deserve a king like Zadig." Zadig blushed and felt his grief grow sharper. In conversation, they agreed that things in this world didn't always go as the wisest people would like. The hermit kept insisting that no one understood the ways of Providence, and that people were wrong to judge a whole when they could see only the tiniest part of it.

They discussed the passions. "Oh, how destructive they are!" Zadig said. "They're the winds that fill a ship's sails," the hermit replied. "Sometimes they sink it, but without them it couldn't sail. Bile makes people angry and sick, but without bile no one could live. Everything down here is dangerous, and everything is necessary."

They discussed pleasure, and the hermit proved it was a gift from God. "For," he said, "a person can't give himself either sensations or ideas. He receives everything. Pain and pleasure come to him from elsewhere, just as his existence does."

Zadig marveled that a man who had done such outrageous things could reason so well. At last, after a conversation as instructive as it was pleasant, their host took the two travelers back to their room. He blessed heaven for sending him two such wise and virtuous men. He offered them money with an easy dignity that couldn't offend them. The hermit refused it and said goodbye,

explaining that he planned to leave for Babylon before daylight. They parted warmly. Zadig in particular felt full of respect and affection for such a charming man.

Once the hermit and Zadig were in their room, they spent a long time praising their host. At dawn, the old man woke his companion. "We must leave," he said. "But while everyone is still asleep, I want to leave this man a token of my respect and affection." As he spoke, he took a torch and set the house on fire. Horrified, Zadig cried out and tried to stop him from doing such a terrible thing. The hermit dragged him away with superior strength. The house was in flames. Already far off with his companion, the hermit calmly watched it burn. "Thank God!" he said. "Now my dear host's house has been destroyed from top to bottom. What a lucky man!" At these words, Zadig wanted all at once to burst out laughing, insult the reverend father, beat him, and run away. But he did none of these things. Still overpowered by the hermit's authority, he followed him against his will to their last night's lodging.

They stayed with a charitable, virtuous widow. She had a nephew of fourteen, a charming boy who was her only hope. She did her best to make them welcome in her house. The next day, she told her nephew to accompany the travelers as far as a bridge. It had recently been damaged and had become dangerous to cross. The eager boy walked ahead of them. When they reached the bridge, the hermit told the boy, "Come here. I must show my gratitude to your aunt." Then he seized him by the hair and threw him into the river. The child fell, appeared again for a moment on the surface, and was swallowed by the current. "You monster! You most wicked of men!" Zadig cried. "You promised me more patience," the hermit interrupted. "Understand that beneath the ruins of the house Providence set on fire, its owner found an immense treasure. Understand that this boy, whose neck Providence has broken, would have murdered his aunt in a year and you in two." "Who told you that, you barbarian?" Zadig cried. "Even if you had read this event in your book of destinies, does that give you the right to drown a child who has done you no harm?"

As the Babylonian spoke, he saw that the old man no longer had a beard and that his face was taking on the features of youth. His hermit's clothes disappeared. Four beautiful wings covered a majestic body shining with light. "Oh, messenger from heaven! Divine angel!" Zadig cried, throwing himself to the ground. "Have you come down from the highest heaven to teach a weak mortal to submit to eternal commands?" "People judge everything without knowing anything," the angel Jesrad said. "Of all people, you were the one who most deserved to be enlightened." Zadig asked permission to speak. "I don't trust my own judgment," he said. "But may I ask you to clear up a doubt? Wouldn't it have been better to reform that child and make him virtuous than to drown him?" Jesrad replied, "If he had been virtuous and had lived, his destiny was to be murdered himself, along with the woman he was to marry and the son who was to be born to them." "But wait!" Zadig said. "Must there be crimes and misfortunes, then? And misfortunes fall on good people!" "The wicked are always unhappy," Jesrad answered. "They serve to test the small number of good people scattered across the earth. There is no evil that doesn't produce some good." "But," Zadig said, "what if there were only good and no evil?" "Then," Jesrad replied, "this earth would be a different earth. The chain of events would follow a different wise order. And that order, which would be perfect, can exist only in the eternal home of the Supreme Being, whom evil cannot approach. He has created millions of worlds, none of which can resemble another. This immense variety is an attribute of his immense power. No two leaves on earth, and no two globes in the infinite reaches of the sky, are alike. Everything you see on the tiny atom where you were born had to exist in its own place and at its fixed time, according to the unchanging commands of the one who holds everything within his reach. People think the child who has just died fell into the water by chance, and that the same kind of chance burned that house down. But there is no chance. Everything is a test, a punishment, a reward, or a precaution. Remember that fisherman who thought himself the unhappiest man alive. Orosmade sent you to change his fate. Weak mortal! Stop arguing against what you must worship." "But," Zadig said... As he was

saying *but*, the angel was already flying toward the tenth sphere. On his knees, Zadig worshiped Providence and submitted. From high in the air, the angel called to him, "Take the road to Babylon."

CHAPTER 21

The Riddles



Beside himself, like a man next to whom lightning has struck, Zadig wandered at random. He entered Babylon on the day when those who had fought in the tournament were already gathered in the palace's great entrance hall to solve the riddles and answer the high priest's questions. All the knights had arrived except the one in green armor. As soon as Zadig appeared in the city, the people gathered around him. Their eyes couldn't get enough of seeing him, their mouths of blessing him, or their hearts of wishing him the empire. The Envious Man saw him pass, shuddered, and turned away. The people carried Zadig to the meeting place. When the queen heard he had arrived, she was torn between fear and hope. Anxiety consumed her. She couldn't understand why Zadig had no armor or how Itobad had come to wear the white suit. A confused murmur rose at the sight of Zadig. Everyone was surprised and delighted to see him again. But only knights who had fought were allowed into the gathering.

"I fought like the others," he said. "But someone else here is wearing my armor. Until I have the honor of proving it, I ask permission to come forward and solve the riddles." They put it to a vote. His reputation for honesty was still so firmly fixed in everyone's mind that they admitted him without hesitation.

The high priest began with this question: "Of all things in the world, what is the longest and the shortest, the fastest and the slowest, the most easily divided and the most far-reaching, the most neglected and the most regretted, without which nothing can be done, which devours everything small and gives life to everything great?"

It was Itobad's turn to speak. He answered that a man like him understood nothing about riddles, and that it was enough to have won with mighty blows of his lance. Some said the answer was fortune, others the earth, and others light. Zadig said it was time. "Nothing is longer," he added, "since it measures eternity. Nothing is shorter, since we never have enough for our plans. Nothing moves more slowly for someone waiting, or more quickly for someone enjoying himself. It stretches infinitely far and can be divided into infinitely small parts. Everyone neglects it, and everyone regrets losing it. Nothing is done without it. It makes everything unworthy of future generations' attention fade from memory, and makes great things immortal." The gathering agreed that Zadig was right.

Next they asked, "What do we receive without giving thanks, enjoy without knowing how, give to others when we don't know what we're doing, and lose without noticing?"

Everyone offered an answer. Only Zadig guessed that it was life. He solved all the other riddles just as easily. Itobad kept saying that nothing could be easier, and that he would have solved them just as easily if he had wanted to take the trouble. They asked questions about justice, the highest good, and the art of ruling. Zadig's answers were judged the soundest. "What a shame," people said, "that such a fine mind belongs to such a poor horseman."

"Distinguished lords," Zadig said, "I had the honor of winning in the tournament. The white armor belongs to me. Lord Itobad took it while I was asleep. Apparently he thought it would suit him better than the green. I'm ready to prove here and now, before you, with my robe and my sword against all that fine white armor he took from me, that I was the one who had the honor of defeating the brave Otame."

Itobad accepted the challenge with complete confidence. Wearing a helmet, breastplate, and arm guards, he had no doubt he would easily defeat a champion in a nightcap and dressing gown. Zadig drew his sword and saluted the queen, who watched him, filled with joy and fear. Itobad drew his own sword without saluting anyone. He advanced on Zadig like a man with nothing to fear. He was about to split his head open. Zadig blocked the blow, setting what is called the strong part of his blade against the weak part of his opponent's, so that Itobad's sword broke. Then Zadig grabbed his enemy around the body and threw him to the ground. Placing his sword point at a gap in the breastplate, he said, "Let me disarm you, or I'll kill you." Still amazed at the misfortunes that kept happening to a man like him, Itobad let Zadig do as he pleased. Zadig calmly removed his magnificent helmet, his splendid breastplate, his fine arm guards, and his shining thigh guards. He put them on himself and ran, dressed this way, to fall at Astarté's knees. Cador easily proved that the armor belonged to Zadig. Everyone agreed to recognize him as king, especially Astarté. After so much adversity, she enjoyed the sweetness of seeing her lover worthy in the eyes of the whole world to become her husband. Itobad went home to have himself called "my lord." Zadig became king and was happy. He kept what the angel Jesrad had told him in mind. He even remembered the grain of sand that had become a diamond. He and the queen worshiped Providence. Zadig let the beautiful, unpredictable Missouf roam the world. He sent for the robber Arbogad and gave him an honorable rank in his army. He promised to promote him to the highest positions if he behaved like a true soldier, and to hang him if he went back to robbery.

Sétoc was summoned from deep in Arabia, with the beautiful Almona, to take charge of Babylon's trade. Cador received a position and affection worthy of his services. He was the king's friend, and the king was then the only monarch on earth who had a friend. The little mute servant wasn't forgotten. The fisherman was given a beautiful house. Orcan was ordered to pay him a large sum and give him back his wife. But the fisherman had grown wiser and took only the money.

The beautiful Sémire couldn't get over having believed Zadig would be one-eyed. Azora never stopped weeping over having wanted to cut off his nose. He eased their sorrows with gifts. The Envious Man died of rage and shame. The empire enjoyed peace, glory, and plenty. It was the finest age the earth had ever known. The earth was ruled by justice and love. The people blessed Zadig, and Zadig blessed heaven^a.

^a Here ends the manuscript of Zadig's story that has been found. We know he had many other adventures that were faithfully recorded. We ask the gentlemen who interpret Eastern languages to share them if they come into their hands.