

HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES

An Opera by Charles Wuorinen

Based on the novel by Salman Rushdie

Libretto by James Fenton

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Haroun Khalifa

Rashid, his father

Soraya, his mother

Mr Sengupta, a neighbour

Mrs Sengupta

Announcer

Two men with mustachios

Butt

Snooty Buttoo

Iff

Princess in Rescue Story

Mali, a Floating Gardener

Bagha and Goopy, Plentimaw Fish

The King of Gup

Prince Bolo

General Kitab

Khattam-shud, the Prince of Darkness

Princess Batcheat

Chorus of citizens of Alifbay, Guppees, Chupwalas, oarsmen, birds, heralds,
cheerleaders, etc.

SCENE ONE

Soraya:

Zembla, Zenda, Xanadu:
All our dream-worlds may come true.
May come true.
They may come true.
All our dream-worlds may come true.

Haroun:

That was my mother singing
In the sad city of Alifbay
And the smoke of the sadness poured away
Poured away
From all the sadness factories
Sadder than song
Sadder than song
Sadder than the seas where the glumfish swam
And something went wrong
One day
Something went wrong
And cut the thread of my mother's song.

Soraya:

Zembla Zenda, Xanadu
Zembla, Zenda...

Haroun: (speaking)

As if someone had thrown a switch!

My father noticed none of this.
He was too busy
Telling stories every day
Hour after hour.

Myth and magic, wicked uncles,
Cowards, heroes, catchy tunes,
Brand-new sagas, ancient legends,
Gangsters in yellow check pantaloons.

Rashid:

Oh I am the Ocean of Notions.
I am the Shah of Blah.
The Source of the Sea of Stories
Is roughly speaking where we are.
I'm the guru of the Gulf of Gumption
With a hundred-mile attention span –
A heck of a feller
A treat of a teller
A million-volume version of a man.

Boccacc-i-o's Decameron
Is nothing to the likes of me.
A Thousand and One Arabian Nights
Are but a triviality
And Proust is a slim slim volume
And Tolstoy a trite little joke.
I'm the Genie in the Bottle.
I'm the guy you'd like to throttle
I'm a never-ending sequel of a bloke!

I'm the Library of Alexandria!
I'm a desertful of Dead Sea Scrolls!
I'm a whole heap of hieroglyphics!
I'm the Greatest Story Ever Told!
I'm the soap of the soapiest opera!
I'm the Tale of a Tub at the turn of a tap!
I'm the art of diction!
I'm the Supreme Fiction!
I'm a multi-story carpark of a chap!

Mr Sengupta (to Soraya):
Supreme fiction indeed.
I'll give him a supreme fiction one of these days,

Excuse me if I mention
Excuse me if I dare
Excuse me but your husband
Has his head stuck in the air.
And what are all these stories?
And what are they to you?
(My dear)
What's the use of stories
That aren't even true?

Haroun (overhearing):
What's the use of stories that aren't even true?
What a terrible question!

Father, Where do stories come from?
Everything comes from somewhere
So a story couldn't come out of thin air.
The river comes from the mountain...

Rashid:
Correct!

Haroun:
The rain comes from the sky...

Rashid:
Spot on!
And the stories come from the Great Story Sea
And I shall never drink it dry.
I drink the warm story waters
Then I feel full of steam

Haroun:
Ridiculous!

Mr Sengupta (aside to Soraya):
My car is waiting.
Come with me my dear,
My dearest.

Rashid:
And the stories come bubbling out of me...

Haroun:
Any more of this nonsense and I'll scream!

Rashid (speaking)

The story water comes out of an invisible tap installed by one of the Water Genies.
Of course you have to be a subscriber.

Haroun:

And how do you do that?

Rashid:

By a P2C2E – a process too complicated to explain.

How does a stroke of genius
Strike on the stroke of three?
By a P2C2
P2C2
P2C2E!

It's a complicated business
Which one day you will learn.
It's a wonder!
It's an enigma!
But you will have your turn
(My boy)
If I stand you a subscription
Will you do the same for me
For a P2C2

Haroun:

Me too see through

Both:

The P2C2E!

Rashid:

Now why should your mother have written me a letter?
Why couldn't she have spoken herself?
Let's see:
"My dear Rashid, my husband as was,
You are only interested in pleasure
But a proper man would know
That life is a serious business.
You have your head in the clouds –"

Haroun:

That's what Mr Sengupta always says.
That sounds like Mr Sengupta!

Rashid:

"And your feet off the ground.
Your brain is full of make-believe
So there is no room for facts.
Mr Sengupta has no imagination at all.
This is okay by me."
Oh No.

Drops letter, which Haroun picks up.

Haroun:

"Tell Haroun I love him
But I can't help him any more.
I have to strike out now for a new life.
I have to slam the door."

Rashid:

Eleven o'clock precisely.
She must have planned it all
To the last detail.

(Takes up clock and smashes it. Goes on rampage smashing clocks.)

Mrs Sengupta:

They've gone. They've gone together.
I knew there was something up.
It was you neglecting your wife gave him the chance
And he took it like the rat that he is! Oh! Oh!

Haroun:

That was my clock. Why did you smash my clock?

Rashid

What to do, son
What to say, where to go.
This always telling stories
This is the only work I know.

Haroun:

But what's the point of it?
What's the use of stories that aren't even true?

(Rashid hides his face and weeps.)

Haroun:

If I could catch those words I spoke
And take them back again
I'd pay whatever price it took
Not to have seen your pain.

To turn the clock back a minute or less
To catch the word on the wing
I'd pay whatever price it took
Not to have done this thing.

I hurt you then. I know it now.
I knew it at the time.
But a word can strike like a criminal
And flee from the scene of the crime.

Return to the scene, o criminal word –
Isn't that what criminals do?
Return, return to the scene of the crime.
I have my dagger here for you

SCENE TWO

Announcer:

Ladies and Gentlemen,
The moment you have all been waiting for –
The great Ocean of Notions himself,
The Shah of Blah,
The Supreme Fiction –
Mr Rashid Khalifa !

(Applause)

Chorus:
Tell us a story
Making it sentimental
And gentle
Or gory!

Tell us a story
Of caliphs and eunuchs and ogres
Or
Of Romans in tunics and togas
Shouting MEMENTO MORI!

Tell us a story
Of paynim knights and damozels
Or
Of fishnet tights and mam'selles
Inflammatory.
Tell us a story
Of the dragon, the hippogriff and the centaur
And other such mythological impedimenta
As are obligatory –
Tell us a Story
Now!

(pause)

If you please!

Rashid:
Now let me see, in the Valley of Hum
In the days of who the devil was it...

Chorus:
This opening is inauspicious. Please improve.

Rashid:
In the Valley of Hum in the days of Ha...

Chorus:
This exposition is exiguous.
We have nothing to go on.
Give us some facts.

Rashid:
In the Ha of Hum...

Chorus:
This is minimalism

Rashid:
Ho?! Hum?
Ark. Ark.

Chorus:
Verging on subliminalism.
You have exhausted our patience
With these equivocations.
Have some rotten eggs in return.

(Crowd pelts Rashid.)

SCENE THREE

Rashid (solus):

Well, what's the use?
I had it all once
And now it seems I'm through
But who cares? Who's there to care
If I've run out of juice?
I might as well put my head in a noose.
What's the use of stories that aren't even true?

Oh it was all my imagination.
I had one once
And now it's flown into the blue.
But who cares? I've lost the caring part of me,
My instinct and my art.
I'm just a flake.
I might as well jump in the lake.
What's the use of stories that aren't even true?

I'm done.
My wife thinks herself well shot of me,
I'm an embarrassment to my son.
I've lost the thread.
I've lost the plot of me.
I might as well be dead
And through.
What's the use of stories that aren't even true?

Mrs Sengupta:

I tell you something, Mr Khalifa.
Independence is a beautiful thing.
No more Mrs Sengupta for me!
From today, call me Miss Oneeta only.

(Sings her torch song, with diminishing confidence.)

I'm empowered
Bright as a frying pan that I myself
Have recently scoured.

I'm empowered!
The woman I once was
Oh that bloody woman was perfectly obviously
A bloody coward.

Now I'm empowered
I'm not afraid to live alone.
I don't sit waiting by the phone
Nor do I cry myself to sleep
(Or not as much as I used to)
And – you know – my existence has not soured.
I'M EMPOWERED!
(Bursts into tears.)
O! O! What is to become.

Rashid:

What is to become indeed.
What is to become of all of us.
I've lost the gift of the gab
And the strangest thing has happened to Haroun.

He seems to have lost his powers of concentration.
Eleven minutes is as long as he can last.
After eleven, niente, nada, nix.

Mrs Sengupta:

It's his pussy-collar-jee.

Rashid:

I see.

Mrs Sengupta:

You follow my drift.

Rashid:

Well, no. Not your drift, as such.

[I follow you, of course.

But not your drift.]

Explain please.

Mrs Sengupta:

His mother left at eleven o'clock precisely.

That was when you broke all the clocks.

It's pussy-collar-jee!

Haroun (overhearing):

That isn't true.

Or maybe it is true.

It's true that I seem to stumble

After eleven minutes

And even when I count to eleven

My mind begins to wander.

What lies beyond eleven

Is wrapped in mystery.

I'm stuck in time like a broken clock.

I have no future.

(Enter Two Men)

Rashid:

Who are you?

And why are you looking at me askance?

Two Men:

We are two men in mustachios

And yellow check pants.

Rashid:

I see I'm in for the high-jump.

Tell me what this mission means.

Cut the crap and spill the beans.

Two Men:

Supposing a teller of stories

Got work from a powerful man

To tell the public stories

As only a storyteller can

And this powerful man had a rival

Who paid the old guy on the side

To pretend to forget all his stories –

Rashid:
It's not true!

Two Men:
And the silly old story-teller went and lied
And the powerful man grew angry
Cos the story-teller had taken a bung
So he sent out his trusted henchmen
To cut out the story-teller's tongue –

What a pity
What a horrible pity
What a horrible pity that would be!

Rashid:
I deny it all.
It is true that I have been indisposed of late
But at our next appointment
In the Valley of K
I shall be terrifico
Magnifico.
Splendifico.

Two Men:
Better you are
Better you are
Or out comes that tongue from your lying throat.
What a pity
What a horrible pity
What a horrible pity that would be.

(Spoken) And in case you think us incapable of such an outrage, here's one we prepared earlier.

(Handing Rashid a human tongue)

Haroun:
My fault again.
I started all this off.
What's the use of stories that aren't even true?
I asked the question
And it broke my father's heart.
And now it's up to me to put things right.
Something has to be done.
Something has to be done.
And the trouble is – I haven't a clue in my head.

SCENE FOUR

Chorus:
Get on the bus.
Get on the bus.
Get on the bus and come with us.
Vegetables goats and chickens
Sacks of rice and what the dickens
Leaking parcels, bags of rye
Fling them in and pile them high -
Get on the bus.

Get on the bus.
Get on the bus.
Get on the bus and come with us.
Gentlemen of many parts,
Travelling salesmen, unravelling tarts,

Hucksters, fixers, confidence tricksters,
Muckers, suckers, city slickers –
Get on the bus.

Unsavoury monks
Get out of your bunks –
Get on the bus.

Get on the bus
With us.

Don't make a fuss.
Don't bust a truss.

Butt:

You seem a tip-top type, young man.
My goodname is Butt
Driver of the Number One
Super Express mail-coach
To the Valley of K.
At your service, sir!

Haroun:

To the Valley of K?
Hey, if you mean what you say
And you really are at my service
Then in fact there is something you can do.

Butt:

It was a figure of speech
But but but
I shall stand by my figure of speech.
Butt's a straight man
Not a twister.
What's your wish
My young mister?

Haroun:

Now let me see...
From the town of G
There runs a way
To the Valley of K...

Butt:

Correct!

Haroun:

And from the Pass of H
To the tunnel of I
[(Which is also sometimes known as J)]
There's a hairpin bend...

Butt:

There are twenty bends
And that's where many a journey ends.

Haroun:

But when you come through the tunnel
To the Valley of K –
Or so my father tells me –
There's a view to take your breath away
And no man can be sad

-Or so says my dad –
Who sees that view
When the fields are gold
The mountains silver
And the sky is blue.
Just give us two front seats
And cheer my dad up with that view.

Butt:
But but but
The hour is late.
We'll never be there before dark.
But but but
So what – let's try.
Let the sad dad have his day
All aboard for the Valley of K!

SCENE FIVE

Chorus:
Driver, driver, not so fast.
Every moment could be our last.

Butt:
The snow line! Icy patches ahead! Hurrah!

Chorus:
If you try to rush or zoom
You are sure to meet your doom.

Butt:
Crumbling road surface! Hurrah!

Chorus:
All the dangerous overtakers
End up safe at undertakers.

Butt:
Hairpin bends! Hurrah!

Chorus:
Look out. Slow down. Don't be funny.
Life is precious. Cars cost money.

Butt:
Danger of avalanches! Hurrah!

Chorus:
If from speed you get your thrill
Take precaution - Make your will.

Butt:
Full speed ahead into the Valley of K! Hurrah!

Chorus:
Aaagh!

(They enter the tunnel.)

SCENE SIX

BLACK

Butt (spoken, amplified, with reverberation):

Like I said, Tunnel.

At the far end, Valley of K.

Hours to sunset, one.

Time in tunnel, some moments only.

One view coming up.

Like I said, no problem.

(They emerge from the tunnel.)

Celestial view music

Chorus:

Aaah!

SCENE SEVEN

Haroun:

So it was all true.

The fields are gold with saffron.

The mountains are silver with snow

And the skies are blue.

Rashid:

Thanks for fixing this up, son.

But I admit

I thought we were all fixed up good and proper.

Done for. Finito. Khattam-shud.

Haroun:

Khattam-shud?

What was the story you used to tell?

Rashid:

Khattam-shud is the Arch-Enemy of all stories,

Even of language itself.

He is the Prince of Silence

And the Foe of Speech.

Everything ends.

Everything must come to an end.

Dreams end.

Stories end.

Life ends.

And so at the end of everything we use his name.

We say: **it is finished**

It is over.

Khattam-shud: The End.

Haroun:

Khattam-shud.

This place is doing you good.

Your crazy stories are coming back.

Chorus:

Get on the bus.

Get on the bus.

Get on the bus and come with us.

**Don't make a fuss.
Don't bust a truss.
Get on the bus with us.**

SCENE EIGHT

Snooty Buttoo:

Mr Rashid
Esteemed Mr Rashid –
A legend comes to town:
The Shah of Blah deigns to make his way
To the Valley of K.
A pleasure to meet you.
The name is Buttoo.

Haroun:

Almost the same
As the bus-drivers name.

Buttoo:

My dear young man not at all the same.
Bus-driver?
Suffering Moses
Do I look the bus-driver type?
Do you know to whom you speak?
I am Snooty Buttoo!

Haroun:

Well excuse me–

Buttoo:

Respected Mr Rashid,
Bearers will carry your bags.
[And yours too, I suppose, young man.]

Haroun and Rashid:

Soldiers everywhere
And armored cars
And helmeted policemen
Lounging outside the bars
Burly men and surly men
Wandering around –
There's a sad feeling,
A bad feeling
In this town.

You can smell it on the highway
At night, when the trucks are gone
And the moon is shining
Bright as a silver piece
You can smell it in the alleyways
When the blinds are drawn
And the flame of the nightlight
Gutters in a pool of grease.

Sleeping out on the rooftops
Underneath the stars.
Gunshots from the mountains.
Gunshots from the bars.
Fearful men and tearful men
Stretched out on the ground –
There's a sad feeling,

A bad feeling
In this town.

Haroun:

How popular can Mr Buttoo be
If he needs all these soldiers to protect him?
And why should my father
Tell stories for his campaign?

Buttoo:

Here is the swan-boat.
Tonight you stay as my guest
In the finest houseboat on the lake.
I trust it will not prove too humble
For a grandee like you.

SCENE NINE

Rashid:

You see, Haroun, you see –
The Floating Gardens.
They weave a floating mat of lotus root.
You can grow vegetables on the lake.
That is, if you want to.

Haroun:

You sound sad, father.
Don't be sad.

Buttoo:

Sad? Did someone say sad?
Surely the eminent story-teller
Is satisfied with all we have done for him?

Rashid:

Sir I am more than satisfied.
This sadness is an affair of the heart.

Buttoo:

Wife left you, did she?
Never mind.
There are plenty more fish in the sea.

Haroun:

Fish? Did he say fish?
Is my mother a pomfret?
Is she a shark?
Why doesn't father bop this Buttoo on the nose?

Rashid:

But you must go a long long way
To find Angel Fish.
Those Angel Fish are few and far between.

Haroun:

Never mind Angel Fish.
I can't even see to the tip of my –

Rashid:

Phoo! Who made that smell?
Come on. Admit.

Haroun:

It is the mist.
We seem to have rowed
Into the Mist of Misery.
It is the Misery makes the Mist.

Buttoo:

That boy is crazy for make-believe
Like the folk of this foolish valley.
My enemies tell bad stories about me
And the ignorant people lap it up like milk.
So I have turned to you, Mr Rashid.
You shall tell happy stories
You shall tell praising stories
And the people will believe you
And they will vote for me!
All of the people will vote for me!!

All the people will vote for me
Whether they like or no –
The muddy peasant with his ruddy wife,
The butcher with his bloody knife,
The nice boy on the way to school,
The ice-boy with his ice-chopping tool,
The master of the silver band,
The lowly crematorium hand,
All the people will vote for me
Several times in a day.
None of them will get away
Until they vote for me!!

All the people will vote for me
Whether they like or no –
The laundress with her steamy vat,
The brothel madame and her cat,
The oily spiv with fancy wheels,
The transvestite in six-inch heels,
The chap in the chupatti flour,
The departed Parsee in the Vulture Tower –
All the people will vote for me
Several times in a day.
None of them will get away
Until they vote for me!!

Haroun:

Funny how that harsh hot wind
Began to blow
As soon as Snooty Buttoo began to speak.
This lake is positively temp'ramental...
But it's not at all dull.
It's positively temperamental.
Perhaps we have come to the Moody Land.

The Moody Land, the Moody Land
I heard my father say
When people were happy in the Moody Land
The sun would turn the night to day.
But when the sun got on their nerves
My father said to me
An irritable night would fall
Full of mutterings and misery.

And if they were neither happy nor sad
But muddled and unsure
The colours would run in the Moody Land
And every outline became obscure.

Oh father, father, take my hand
And try the trick with me.
Let us spread some joy in the Moody Land
And clear the Mist of Misery.

Rashid:

My son, my son,
The Moody Land was only a story.

Haroun:

Now I know how **sad** he is.
“Only a story” indeed!
The Shah of Blah would never have spoken like that
In the good old days.
And now the mist is getting worse.

(Lightning. Thunder)

Oarsmen (chorus):

Oh Oh Oh, down we go!

Haroun:

Okay. Everybody listen.
Stop talking. This is very important.
Not a word. Zip the lips
On a count of one two three.
One!

(I must try to calm them down
Or we'll definitely drown.)

Two!

(I must calm myself as well
And not let Buttoo break the spell.)

Three!

Now the waves and wind are gone
But the mist is lingering on.
Father, father, help your son.
Think of the happiest times you can.
Think of happiness gone by.

[Think again.

Think again.

Think on, think on.]

Think your happiness across the sky!

(The mist disappears and the moon comes out.)

Rashid:

Now the sea is calm, and here's the moon.
You're a blinking good man
In a blinking tight spot.
Hats off to you, Haroun.

(They arrive at the houseboat)

SCENE TEN

Buttoo:

Welcome to my houseboat,
The largest and best on the lake.
I have called it Arabian Nights Plus One
Because even in the Arabian Nights
You will never have a night like this.
For you, erudite Mr Rashid
Here is the peacock room,
And here on the shelves you will find
The entire collection of tales known as
The Ocean of the Streams of Story.
If ever you run out of material
You will find plenty here.

Rashid:

Run out? What are you saying?

Buttoo:

Touchy touchy Mr Rashid!
It was a joke only,
A passing lightness,
A cloud blown away on the breeze.
Of course we have the highest expectations
Of your performance tomorrow
And all the praising stories
That will redound to our credit.
Of course we have...
Don't we?
Now as for you, young man,
We have given you the turtle room.

Haroun:

Thank you, it is very pleasant.

Buttoo:

Very pleasant, indeed!
Inappropriate young person,
This is Arabian Nights Plus One.
"Very Pleasant" doesn't cover it at all.
Supermarvelloso, perhaps.
Incredibable, and wholly fantastick!

All the best belongs to me!
Belongs to me!
Belongs to me!
The biggest vest!
The biggest treasure chest!
The biggest bathroom in the East or West!
Everything best belongs to me
By right!

Good night!

SCENE ELEVEN

(Night music to indicate the passing of time. Haroun and Rashid are in their bedrooms, unable to sleep.)

Rashid:

It's no use.
I won't be able to tell my stories.
I'm finished, finished for good.
"Only praising tales" indeed.
I am the Ocean of Notions.
I am the Shah of –
Well, I'm not some office boy for Snooty Buttoo to boss about.
But what am I saying?
What if I get up on stage and have nothing to say?
They'll slice me in pieces.
They'll come and cut out my tongue.
It'll be up with me for good.
Finito. Khattam-shud!

Since you left me
Since you cleft my heart in two
Since you bereft me
There's nothing deft that I can do

I've no heft left
Since you tore the weft in two
Cleft my heart
Left me apart
From you.

Even my arias run out of rhymes.

Haroun:

Still singing about my mother.

Rashid:

Who's there?

Haroun:

It's me. I couldn't sleep.
I couldn't sleep on the turtle bed.
It's too weird.

Rashid:

That's funny. I've been having problems with this peacock.
I'd rather a turtle any night.
How do you feel about the bird?

Haroun:

Definitely better.
A bird sounds okay.

Rashid:

Well then let's swap.
Now get some sleep young man.

SCENE TWELVE

Iff:

Do this. Do that.
Put it in. Take it out.
Rush job. Hush-hush job.
Never mind my workload.

Hot tap. Cold tap.

Story tap. Disconnect.
Cash job. On account.
On the never-never.

Never so much as a by-your-leave.
Never a thought for me sir.
Disconnect my story tap
At the hour of three sir.

Do this. Do that.
Put it in. Take it –

(Interrupting himself)

And on top of it all, where's my disconnecting tool?
Who's pinched it? Where are you?
No kidding. Well, enough's enough.
Party's over. Fair's fair.
GIVE IT BACK.

Haroun:
No.

Iff:
The Disconnecter. Hand it over.
Return to sender.
Yield. Surrender.

Haroun:
You're not getting it back
Until you tell me what you are doing here.
Are you a burglar?
Shall I call the cops?

Iff:
Mission impossible to divulge.
Top secret, classified. Eyes only info.
Zip the lips
Or you've had your chips.

Haroun:
Very well. Then I'll wake my father.

Iff:
No. No adults.
Rules and regulations.
No parents or other close relations.

Haroun:
I'm waiting for some explanations.

Iff:
I am the Water Genie Iff
From the Ocean of the Streams of Story.
You may think as a boy you're adorable.
I call you deplorable.

Haroun:
Are you really one of those genies
My father told me about?

Iff:
Supplier of Story Water from the Great Story Sea.
Precisely the same. No other. It is me.
Or rather it is I.
I is it.
Hence this visit.
I regret to report
The gentleman your father
No longer requires the service.
He has discontinued narrative activities
Thrown in the towel
Told his last story
To its last vowel.
And hence my presence
For the purpose of disconnection of his story tap –
To which end, kindly return my tool.

Haroun:
Not so fast.
I don't believe you.
How did he send the message?
I've been with him almost all the time.

Iff:
He sent it by the usual means –
A P2C2E.

Haroun:
And what is that?

Iff:
Obvious.
It's a Process Too Complicated to Explain.

How does the Story Water
Come from the Story Sea
By a P2C2
P2C2
P2C2E!

It's a most mysterious business
And hard to deconstruct.
It's a riddle.
It's a conundrum.
But it's utterly **ineluct-
able**
If you think of my department
You can think straight through to me
By a P2C2

Haroun:
No! Not he too!

Both:
A P2C2E!

Iff:
Something to do with thought-beams.
We listened to your father's thoughts –

Haroun:
And you got the wrong end of the stick

My father has definitely not given up.

Iff:

Well, those are my orders.

If you have any queries

Please address them to:

P2C2E House

Gup City

Kahani.

Haroun:

Mr Iff, take me at once to Gup City!

Iff:

Oh, what a pity.

Gup City is banned, off limits, strictly restricted.

Haroun:

In that case you'll have to go back without *this*

And see how they like *that*.

Iff:

Okay I give in.

You've got me bang to rights.

But if we're going, let's go now.

Haroun:

You mean – now?

Iff:

Now means now

If you have something to do

Do it now.

Thinking of tying a shoe?

Tie it now.

Don't wait to slip

And trip on the street

–That is complete-
ly insane.

Think what advantage you gain

Doing it now

If you have somewhere to go

Go there now.

Though it is far as the crow

Flies, fly now.

Don't wait to pack

A rucksack or two.

That is the u-

sual way.

Trust your first impulse and say:

I'll go there now.

So, pick a bird.

Haroun:

The only bird around here

Is a sort of wooden peacock.

Iff:
Foolish thieflet,
A person may choose what he cannot see.
A person may mention a bird's name
Even if that creature is not present and correct.
A woodpecker, for instance, or a whinchat,
A wheatear, a waxwing or a wattlebird,
A whimbrel, a whistler or a wagtail,
A wigeon, a wedgebill or a weebill,
A whipbird, a warbler or a whiteye,
A whippoorwill, or a white-winged wydah—
All these exist, but there is more to come.
For a person may select
A flying creature of his own invention —
For example, a winged horse or a flying turtle,
An airborne whale or an aeromouse.
To give a thing a name, a lable, a handle,
To pluck it out of the Place of. Namelessness,
In short to identify it —
Well, that's a way of bringing
The said thing into being —
Or, in this case,
The said bird or Imaginary Flying Organism.

[Haroun:
That may be true where you came from
But in these parts, stricter rules apply.

Iff:
In these parts!
O foolish Disconnecter Thief
How much have you see of “these parts”?
And can you not trust in what you have not seen?
Have you seen Africa?

Haroun:
Not yet.

Iff:
Then is it “yet” truly there?
Have you seen
A submarine?

Haroun:
Not really.

Iff:
Then does it “really” exist?
Have you seen
A bathing machine,
A Kangaroo,
Kalamazoo,
Mount Fujiyama,
A snake charmer,
A pistol shrimp —

Haroun:
A pistol shrimp?

Iff:
Yes, you imp,
A pistol shrimp.

**Have you seen the distant past?
Then, did it happen?
Have you seen the future?
Will it occur?
Have–**

**Haroun:
I think you have won this argument.]**

Iff:
So pick a bird.
Think of all the birds you can,
Of all the winged creatures
Known and unknown to man.

Haroun:
I see a lion with a human head
And curly beard and hairy wings,
I see a monkey fly from tree to tree,
Angels and flying saucers, stranger things
Than ever I've heard said.
I see a school of levitating fish
Gulping the air and heading for the sky
And all these birds which seem to turn to me
And offer me the wings to fly –
Fly where my heart could wish

And offer me the wings to fly
Go heading for the open sky
Fly where my heart could wish.
Swim like a bird.
Fly like a fish.
Go heading for the open sky.

So, I'll choose that one –
The one with the funny crest.

Iff:
So, it's the Hoopoe for us.
A significant choice!
(Throws miniature Hoopoe out of window.)

Haroun:
What was that for?

Iff:
Wait and see.

(A huge Hoopoe arrives.)

And off we go!

Haroun:
That's odd, that floating feeling.
Just like on the mail coach ride.
And this Hoopoe with its feathers
Reminds me quite a bit of old Butt.
Butt with his quiff of hair.
Butt's hair seemed feathery
And these feathers seem hairy.
No bird could fly so fast.
Is this a machine?

Butt the Hoopoe:

But if I was?

Do you have some objection to machines?

But but but

You entrusted your life to me –

Am I not worthy of a little respect?

A machine

Is entitled to some self esteem

Or so it seems

To me.

Haroun:

You seem to be reading my mind.

Butt:

But but but certainly.

And I am speaking to you by telepathy.

Haroun:

And how do you do that?

Butt and Iff:

By a P2C2E.

How does a hurtling hoopoe

Speak by telepath-ee?

All:

By a P2C2

P2C2

P2C2E!

Butt:

See there.

That is the second moon of Earth –

Kahani.

Haroun:

But but but

How can the earth have a second moon?

It would have been discovered!

Butt:

Speed, speed –

It is the Speed of the moon

Kahani.

Speed of the moon

Speed of the moon

Necessary

Needful speed

Shine like a spoon

Fly like a steed

Luminary

Lunar speed

Speed that conceals

Speed that reveals

Speed of hand and foot and thigh

Voom! Varoom!

Away we zoom!
Speed of a glance or a glint in the eye

Speed of the moon
Speed of the moon
Necessary
Needful speed
Be heedful Haroun
Of the speed of the moon
Heedful of the needful speed
Heedful of the needful speed.

(Rushing towards them is a sparkling and seemingly infinite expanse of water.)

Iff:
The Ocean of the Streams of Story –
Wasn't it worth travelling
So far and fast to see?

Butt:
Three two one zero!

(They land on the Moon Kahani.)

SCENE THIRTEEN

Haroun:
It's a trick.
There's no Gup City here -
No point in being here at all.

Iff:
Hold your horses.
Cool down.
Keep your hair on.
Everything will be explained.

Haroun:
But this is the Middle of Nowhere!

Iff:
This is the Deep North of Kahani
And here we may find Wishwater.

Butt:
Look for the brightest patches of water.
That is wishwater.
Use it properly
And you can make a wish come true.

Iff:
Wish for your father, Haroun,
And maybe you can make his problem disappear
And we can all go home.

Haroun:
Oh very well.
Though I should have liked to see Gup City too.

Iff:

Tip top type!

Prince among men!

And hey presto - wishwater ahoy.

(Iff fills a bottle with wishwater and hands it to Haroun.)

Drink the water.

The harder you wish

The better it will work.

Your heart's desire

Will be as good as yours.

So - down the hatch!

Haroun:

I wish – what will I wish?

My wishes fly before me

Like a school of flying fish.

I wish my father well...

I wish him all the happiness of heart

And art

To tell...

To tell my mother to come home again!

No, that's not right.

Not quite.

I wish – what will I wish?

My wishes fly before me

Like a school of flying fish.

I see my father pleading

Saying: do this one thing for me...

What thing?

What can that be?

Maybe my father telling stories every day

Made my mother run away.

I wish she would come back.

No... that's a different track...

I wish – what would I wish?

My wishes fly before me

Like a school of flying fish –

Flashing

Dashing

Disappearing

Like a school of flying fish.

Iff:

Eleven minutes –

Just eleven minutes and his concentration goes

Ka-bam, ka-blooy, ka-put.

Haroun:

I know.

I have failed.

I could have helped my father and I failed.

Butt:

Wishes are not such easy things.

Don't bully the boy.

You, Mister Iff, are upset

Because of your own mistake,
Because we must now go to Gup City after all
And there will be harsh words,
Harsh words and hot water for you.
Stop taking it out on the boy.
[Stop it or I'll be annoyed.]

Iff:
But but but...
Okay, **Okay**
Gup City it is.
Unless of course
You'd like to hand over the Disconnecting Tool
And call the whole thing off.

(Haroun shakes his head miserably.)

Butt:
But but but
You're still bullying the boy.
Cheer him up man
Cheer him up.
Give him a happy story to drink.

Haroun:
Not another drink.
What are you going to make me fail at now?

Iff:
Cheer up, Haroun
And look at all the colours of the sea.
It is a liquid tapestry
Of breath-taking complexity.
This is the Ocean of the Streams of Story.
Every tale that has been told is here
And every tale that has yet to be invented
And if **you're** very careful
[Very careful or very highly skilled]
You can dip a cup into the ocean
And fill it with a single story –
A single pure stream of story
Like so.
Go on now. Knock it back.
Guaranteed to make you feel
A-number-one.

Haroun takes a cup, dips into the sea, and drinks a story.

SCENE FOURTEEN

[PRINCESS = also ONEETA and BATCHEAT]

Princess:
An outlandish knight from the north country came
And he came for to rescue me
And the four-headed lion did shake its mane
Most grisly for to see.

Oh have you seen the noble knight
And have you heard his tune?
It is the fairest knight in the land
And his name it is Sir Haroun.

Oh yes I've seen the noble knight
A-pricking o'er the plane
And the sun did on his helmet shine
As on a mountain after the rain.

Let down, let down your flaxen hair
And I shall climb to thee
And I shall slay your jailer bold
And I shall your rescuer be.

And so I let down my flaxen hair
And he began to climb
But then... I felt a hairy leg

And EEK it was a spider all the time!

Eek my dearest – you have into a spider turned!

(Attacks Haroun with knife)

SCENE FIFTEEN

Iff:
Wake up, snap out of it.
Let's have you.
What happened?
Did you save the Princess?

Haroun:
I was saving her.
But then I turned into a spider.

Iff:
Turned into a spider
In a Princess Rescue Story?
I can't believe it.
Never in all my born days.

Haroun:
I'm glad to hear it
Because I was thinking
That it wasn't the most brilliant way
To cheer me up.

Iff:
It's [the] pollution.
Something or someone has been putting filth
Into the Ocean of the Streams of Story.
If the stories get polluted they go wrong.
And if the pollution has come as far as the Deep North
Then Gup City could be close to crisis.
Top speed ahead!
This could mean war!

Haroun:
War with whom?

Butt:
With the Land of Chup
On the dark side of Kahani.

This looks like the doing of the leader of the Chupwalas –
The Cultmaster of Bezaban himself.

Haroun:

And who is that?

Iff:

His name is Khattam-Shud.

Haroun:

Too many fancy notions
Are turning out to be true.
Tell me more about Khattam-Shud.

Iff:

Khattam-Shud is the arch-enemy of all stories,
Even of Language itself.
He is the Prince of Silence
And the Foe of Speech.

Haroun:

Exactly what my father told me.

Iff and Butt:

On the far side of the moon
Darker than the deepest wood
In a permanence of gloom
Lives the Master Khattam-Shud.

And the dark Chupwalas go
Fearful of his least command
And their sombre legion[s] know
Deeds done by his dreadful hand.

Everything must have an end,
Die, decay and decompose.
Friendship falter, falter friend.
Shorn the shape the shadow shows.

In the shadow of the moon
Darker than the deepest wood
You shall know, if you go, Haroun,
Khattam-Shud, Khattam-Shud –

You shall know
If you shall go
Khattam-Shud
Khattam-Shud.

Haroun:

Look at all the birds.
The sky is filling up with **birds**.

Iff:

Something serious has happened.
All units have been called back to base.

Haroun:

Listen.
Listen to the beating of their wings.
Listen to the song of the birds.

Chorus of Birds:

Halcyon blue

Halcyon blue

We're flying through the halcyon blue

On a thermal

On a high

Like mackerel in a mackerel sky.

Heaviside Layer

Heaviside Layer

We're flying through the Heaviside Layer

On a cyclone

Cycling near

Cycling[home] through the exosphere.

Bats have wings

And sprats have wings

And pterodactyls have similar things

To bring them through

The tropopause

And pare their nails and clip their claws.

Halcyon blue

Halcyon blue

We're flying [home] through the halcyon blue

On a thermal

On a high

Like mackerel in a mackerel sky.

Haroun:

What's that?

Butt:

A floating gardener of course.

[Haroun:

You mean a floating garden.

Butt:

That's all you know.

(Mali appears.)

Haroun:

So it is a floating gardener after all.

Why doesn't he sink?

Butt:

How could he sink?

Would he not be a sinking gardener in that case?]

Look – he floats, he runs, he hops.

No problem.

Mali:

Who are you, stranger?

Haroun:

I am Haroun Khalifa

From the sad city of Alifbay.

Mali:

I am Mali,

Floating Gardener First Class.

Haroun:

Please

What does a floating gardener do?

Mali:

Untwisting twisted story streams.

Also unlooping same.

Weeding. In short: gardening.

Butt:

Think of the Ocean as a head of hair.

The Story Streams are floating everywhere

As a thick mane is full of flowing strands

And you can run the stories through your hands.

Think of that hair growing longer every day

Thicker and knottier, tangled every way.

It needs a brush, conditioner, shampoo.

That's what a floating gardener has to do.

Birds:

Halcyon blue

Halcyon blue

We're flying through the halcyon blue

On a thermal

On a high

Like mackerel in a mackerel sky.

Bagha:

Hurry hurry, don't be late.

Goopy:

Ocean's ailing. Cure can't wait.

Hurry, hurry.

Hurry.

Hurry, hurry.

Hurry.

Bagha & Goopy:

These are Plentimaw fishes.

See how many mouths they have.

Haroun:

So there really are Plentimaw Fish in the Sea

Just as Snooty Buttoo said.

Excuse me,

Are you quite well?

Bagha:

All this bad taste! Too much dirt!

Goopy:

Swimming in the Ocean starts to hurt.

Bagha:

Call me Bagha. This is Goopy.

Goopy:

Excuse our rudeness. We feel droopy.

Bagha:

Eyes feel rheumy. Throat feels sore.

Goopy:

When we're better we'll talk more.

Bagha:

Things are worse than we've ever known.

Goopy:

And the worst place is down in our Old Zone.

Iff:

What? What?

If the Old Zone is polluted

Then the Source of all Stories is poisoned

And if the source is poisoned

What will happen to the Ocean, to us all?

We have ignored it far too long

And now we pay the price

Butt (spoken, amplified):

Hold on to hats.

Hitting the brake now.

Gup City ahead.

Record time!

Va-va-va-voom!

No-o-o problem!

(They land in Gup City.)

SCENE SIXTEEN

Chorus:

Now the lagoon is blue.

Now the lagoon is green

And now the lagoon is strawberry jelly

And something in between.

Now the lagoon is damask grey

And now an amber silk

And now the lagoon is a purple velvet

Dipped in a bath of asses' milk.

Stare in the depths of the water.

Stare in the depth Haroun.

This is the biggest kaleidoscope

On the bright side of the moon.

These are the colours of thought.

These are the colours of dreams.

These are the colours of storylines.

These are the story streams.

Now the lagoon is red.

Now the lagoon is blue.

Now the lagoon is everything

Everything a lagoon should be –

Topaz, quartz, chalcedony –

Doing everything a lagoon should do,

Everything, Haroun for you.

(The crowd bustling about)
(General Kitab appears and the crowd falls silent)

General Kitab:

[My loyal subjects...]

Words fail **the king**.

He cannot speak to you.

Chorus:

Words fail his Majesty?

This is most unusual.

General Kitab:

You tell them, Prince Bolo. (Weeps.)

Prince Bolo:

They have seized her!

They have seized the Princess Batcheat

My bride to be.

The servants of the Cultmaster

Khattam-Shud...

Chorus (softly):

Khattam-Shud.

Bolo:

Have made off with my future wife.

Churls, varlets, dastards, hounds!

By gum, they will pay for this!

Will they not pay for this, General Kitab ?

Will they not pay through the nose for this?

General Kitab:

My liege, it is the most blasted business.

The Princess is [**probably**] now a prisoner

In the citadel of Chup,

The ice-castle of Khattam-Shud.

Chorus (softly):

Khattam-Shud.

General Kitab:

We have sent messages

To the Cultmaster Khattam-Shud –

Chorus (softly):

Khattam-Shud.

General Kitab:

Oh will you stop interrupting?

We have sent messages

Concerning the vile poison being injected

Into the Ocean of the Streams of Story

And the abduction of the Princess.

We demanded that he stop the pollution

And return the King's daughter within seven hours.

Neither demand was met

And I have to inform you

That a state of war now exists

Between the lands of Gup and Chup.

(Silence.)

I said a state of war now exists
Between the lands of Gup and Chup.

(Silence.)

I must say
You don't seem very interested.

Chorus:
You **told** us not to interrupt you
And we obeyed to the letter.

General Kitab
My dear friends
I **seem** to have offended you.
You must forgive a military man
His crusty old ways.

Chorus:
It is never necessary or polite
To raise one's voice among friends.

General Kitab:
Oh I have offended you.
Accept my most abject apologies.
Forgiveness, forgiveness
Forgiveness is all I ask.
Forgive me my friends
My failure to transcend
The limitations of my social class.

Chorus:
Forgiveness, forgiveness
Forgiveness is all he asks.
For failure to transcend
The limitations of his social class.

General Kitab:
Forgive me my friends
My failure to transcend
The limitations of my social class.

Chorus: (Still seemingly offended)
Very well. Go back to what you were saying.

General Kitab:
I said I have to inform you
That a state of war now exists
Between the lands of Gup and Chup.

Chorus(after a split second, with amazing volume):
War! War! War! War!
War between the lands of Chup and Gup!
War between the lands of Gup and Chup!
A battle to the death!
A battle to the dying breath!
A struggle for the triumph of the forces of the Good!
A struggle for the overthrow of

(pianissimo)
Khattam-shud!

General Khitab (spoken):

That's exactly what I had in –

Chorus:

War! War! War! War!

War between the lands of Chup and Gup!

War between the lands of Gup and Chup!

The armies of the night

Are absolutely frightful.

They are poisoning the Ocean like a poison of the blood

And the frightfullest of all of them is

(pianissimo)

Khattam-Shud!

(fortissimo)

Khattam-Shud!

END OF ACT I

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

(Outside the Palace, exactly as before. Chorus and singers frozen in the same positions.)

Chorus:

-shud!

General Kitab:

And now, herald, let my word go forth.
Bring the spy before the people!

First Herald:

Bring the spy before the treacle!

Second Herald:

Bring the pie before the treacle!

Third Herald:

Fling the pie before the treacle!

Haroun:

Fling the pie before the treacle?
This could get messy?

General Kitab:

You are right.
Officer, bring the spy before the people.

(Footsteps approaching. Rashid is brought on with a sack over his head.)

Haroun:

That looks like my dad.
It is my dad.

Rashid:

Sir, there seems to be some mistake.
I am just a story-teller
And a long-time subscriber
To your story-water service.

Chorus:

One of our own subscribers
And he has betrayed us!
He was caught spying in the Twilight Strip.

Haroun:

He's not a spy.
He's my father.

Rashid:

Haroun!

Haroun:

And the only thing wrong with him
Is that he's lost the gift of the gab.

Rashid:

That's right, my son,

Tell everyone.
Broadcast it to the whole world.
Don't mind my feelings.
I'm just a humble story-teller
Who bit off more than he could chew.
I became over-extended I
And now my story's ended.

(Weeps.)

It's so discouraging.

Chorus:

Aaah!

Prince Bolo:

Tell us your story.
I love a good story -
Especially if I come into it.
Tell us a Prince Bolo story.

Rashid:

Oh very well then.

I flew to the Twilight Strip.
It was dark and the trees were dripping.

Prince Bolo:

How utterly gripping!

Rashid

And there was the Chupwala Army
Encamped in their black tents
In fanatical silence.

Prince Bolo:

Those black tents
Are making me tense -
Go on.

Rashid:

I made my way
Among those dull pavilions
Among those millions of scullions
Scouring their skillets
Outside their billets
When suddenly
I heard the sound
Of a young woman singing.

Prince Bolo:

How wonderful!

Rashid:

It was without doubt
One of the most appalling experiences of my life –
A voice like a parrakeet
On heat -
Like so:

(He imitates the voice.)

Chorus:

The Princess Batcheat!
He has heard the Princess Batcheat!

Prince Bolo:

Princess Batcheat,
My love, my bride to be!
So this is a Prince Bolo Story after all.
Proceed, pronounce, for pity's sake.

Rashid:

No sooner had the princess and her handmaidens
Come into view
Than a posse of Chupwalas
Leapt from the bushes
And bagged the lot of them
Kicking and screaming

Prince Bolo:

And you did nothing?
You did nothing to save them?

Rashid:

Me? I did nothing?
You mistake your man...
Ahem... I, ah, I...

Prince Bolo:

Well then...

Rashid:

Sire, swift as a sunbeam
I surveyed my situation.
It was insupportable.
An unspeakable peril.
Not only was I unarmed and in my nightshirt.
I was outnumbered twenty-five to one.

Prince Bolo:

Those odds are trifling.

Rashid:

Exactly what I thought
Until I heard something
That made my blood run cold -
So cold, I decided
There was not a moment to lose.
I must seek help at once.
Prince Bolo, sire,
Are you sitting down?

Prince Bolo:

Of course not, I -

Rashid:

Be prepared for the worst.
As the Chupwala soldiers
Hauled the Princess away
Kicking and screaming
I heard one say:
"The great Feast of the Idol Bezaban
Is coming soon.

Let us offer this Guppee Princess
As a sacrifice.
Let us stitch up her lips
And sacrifice her to Bezaban.”

Prince Bolo:

Now there is not a second to lose!
Assemble the armed forces -
All the pages,
Every Chapter,
Every Volume.
To war! To war!
For Batcheat, only Batcheat!

General Kitab:

For Batcheat and the Ocean!

Rashid:

Sire, I shall lead you to the Chupwala tents.

Haroun:

I'm coming too.

Rashid:

No, son.
This could be dangerous.

Haroun:

All the more reason for sticking together.
It's a Princess Rescue Story.
It's a deed of derring-do.
It's a case of death or glory.
A priori
It's my cue.

Rashid:

Though the upshot may be gory
We shall have to see it through.
Though the story may be hoary
A priori
It's our cue.

Chorus:

It's a well-known category
It's a tale that's tried and true.
It's a Princess Rescue Story
A priori
It's our cue.

SCENE TWO

To the Twilight Strip

Bagha:

Saving Batcheat! What a notion.

Goopy:

What matters now is to save the Ocean.

Bagha:

That's the plan to set in motion.

Goopy:

Find the source of the poison potion.

Bagha:

The Ocean's the important thing.

Goopy:

Worth more than the daughter of any king.

Haroun:

Sounds like mutinous talk to me.

Bagha and Goopy:

What's a Mutinus? Who he?

Haroun:

What a chattering, clattering, quarreling crew
Sailing through the halcyon blue -
Floating gardeners, Pages, Barge-birds,
Plentimaw Fish
Plentimaw Fish
Plentimaw Fish in the Story Sea.

Chorus:

Chatter chatter chatter
What's the matter if we chatter
If we chatter chatter chatter on our way?
Chatter chatter chatter all day?
What's the matter with our patter
With the clatter of our scattergun
Rattling
Battling
Fray?

Haroun:

You'll give the game away!

Chorus:

Better to give
Better to live
Giving the game away.

Haroun:

What an absurd armada!
How can we ever succeed?
There isn't even any light
To see the enemy by.
We're on a suicide mission.
Batcheat will perish
And the Ocean will be ruined for ever.

Butt:

But but but
Don't be depressed.
You're suffering from Heart Shadow.
Everyone gets it
As they approach the Twilight Strip

Heart Shadow –

The night is brushing you
Brushing like a raven's wing
A fearful thing

To feel.

Heart Shadow –
The wind is rushing through
Rushing like a swollen stream
And yet it seems
Unreal.

It feels like a memory
Buried somewhere beneath the snow.
It feels like a memory
Of something somehow lost long ago.

Heart Shadow –
That loss is crushing you
Crushing you before you start
Making you lose heart -
Heart Shadow.
You're feeling Heart Shadow.

They land on the Twilight Strip.

Chorus:
Hush for a moment.
This is the Twilight Strip.

On these twilit shores
No birds sing.
No wind blows.
No voice speaks.
Feet falling on the shingle
Fall silently.

The air smells stale
And stenchy.
The bushes cluster around
And leafless trees
Like fallow ghosts.
All is still and all is cold.

The darkness is biding its time.

Rashid:
The further they lure us
Into the darkness
The better for them.
And they know we will come
Because they are holding Batcheat.

Haroun:
I thought that Love
Was supposed to conquer all
But it seems that Love
Makes monkeys of us –
Makes mincemeat of the lot of us.

Prince Bolo:
Storyteller
Now is the hour
When you must lead us to the tents of the Chupwalas.
Great matters are afoot.
We must save the Princess.

Haroun:

Yes, father, you must help save the Princess
And I
I shall go down to the Old Zone
And I shall try to save the Sea of Stories.

Rashid:

To save the Sea of Stories singlehanded!
There's more to you, Haroun Khalifa,
Than meets the blinking eye.

Haroun:

There's not a moment to lose.
The sea is dying even as we speak.
The sea is dying
And all the stories will be coming to an end.

Rashid:

Good luck, son.
Good luck, Haroun,
My pride and joy!

Oh, I feel as if I'd lost the plot entirely.

SCENE THREE

On the Way to the South Pole

Butt:

Speed of the moon
Speed of the moon
Necessary
Needful speed

Shine like a spoon
Fly like a steed
Luminary
Lunar speed, etc

Haroun:

It's getting even colder
And the waters are losing their colour.

Bagha and Goopy:

We're going the right way! We can tell!
Before it was filthy! Now it's Hell!

Haroun (to Mali)

Does the poison hurt your feet?

Mali:

Poison?
A little poison? Bah!
A little acid? Pah!
I'm a tough old bird.
It won't stop me.

You can stop a cheque.
You can stop a leak or three.
You can stop traffic, but
You can't stop me.

Haroun:

Nobody wants to.
We're out to stop the Cultmaster
Khattam-shud.

Iff:

If the source of the Sea of Stories
Is at the South Pole
That's where Khattam shud will be.

Haroun:

To the South Pole.
To the South Pole.

Butt:

Full speed ahead to the South Pole.

Bagha and Goopy:

Never thought it would be so bad.
We have failed you. We feel sad.
I feel terrible. She feels worse.
We can hardly speak in verse.

Haroun:

Stay here and keep watch.
Goodbye.
The water is growing thicker.
It's like looking into molasses
Through dark glasses.

Mali:

These are the waters of neglect.
These are the seas of disgrace.
Give me a year and I expect
I could clean this place.

Haroun:

But we haven't got a year.
We haven't a moment to waste.

Mali:

I'll go ahead and I will clear
A channel through.

You can stop a cheque.
You can stop a leak or three.
You can stop traffic but
You can't stop me.

You can't stop me
(I said)
You can't stop – aaagh!

Haroun:

Mali. Mali! Where are you?
Mali?

(Hissing sound.)

Butt:

It is the Web of ythe Night.
We are caught in the Web of the Night.
And the Web will grip you harder
The harder you fight.

Iff:

It's no use.
It's no use.
Khattam-shud
Has cooked our goose.

Haroun:

So we're prisoners already?
Some hero *I* turned out to be!

Scene Four

“They were being pulled slowly forwards”

Iff:

Up the creek
Pretty pickle
Had our chips is what I say.

Butt:

Woe is us!
Alack-a-day!

Iff and Butt:

Hai-hai-hai
Hai-hai-hai
It's zap, bam, phut, finito for us all.

Haroun:

You're a fine pair of companions.
Pull yourselves together.

Butt:

How can we pull ourselves anywhere
When we are being pulled in the Web of Night?

Iff:

Look down
Look down at the Ocean.

Haroun:

It is as cold as death.

Iff:

Look at it now.
Look at it now.
The oldest stories ever made –
Look at them now.
We let them rot.
We abandoned them
And now they are utterly spoilt.

(The Web of Night is removed. They are surrounded by Chupwalas.)

Haroun:

We have stopped.
We must be on the edge
Of Perpetual Darkness.
They are taking us to the flagship
Of Khattam-shud.)

(They are led onto the ship.)

Butt:

But but but
You must not take that –
That's my brain!

(The Chupwalas remove Butt's brain.)

Haroun:

Oh Hoopoe
I'm sorry I ever criticised you.
You're the bravest and best machine that ever was.
I'll get back your brain for you.

Oh brave machine
Now it's too late to tell you what you mean
To me
To say what might have been
What moments on this flight have been
With your machinery –

Oh brave machine
Now it's too late to tell you what you mean
To me
And now this night has been
The chance to put things right has been
Lost, all at sea
For you, for me,
With your machinery.

Iff:

Here, a little emergency something.
Maybe you'll get a chance to use it.

Haroun:

What is it?

Iff:

Bite the end off
And it will give you two full minutes of light.
It's called a Bite-a-Lite.
Hide it under your tongue. Shh!

(Haroun pockets the Bite-a Lite.)

Haroun:

Look, it's a factory ship
And those must be the poison tanks
And yet it all seems
Shadowy
As if the whole thing were made of shadows.

(Enter Khattam-shud.)

And who is this skinny, scrawny,
Measly, weaselly, snivelling clerical type?
Can this be the terrible Cultmaster himself
Or could it be his shadow?
He reminds me of someone.

Khattam-shud:

Spies. What a melodrama.
A Water Genie from Gup City
And a young fellow from down there
If I am not mistaken.

Haroun:

I know him.
I've met him somewhere before.

Khattam-shud:

What brought you here, young man?
Stories, I suppose.
Well, look where stories have landed you now.
What started up as stories
Has ended up as spying
And you know what happens to spies, don't you?

Excuse me if I mention
Excuse me if I dare
Excuse me but this young man
Has his head right in the air.
What started out with stories
Has got him in a stew –
Young man!
What's the use of stories
That aren't even true?

Haroun:

I know. You're him.
You're Mr Sengupta and you stole my mother.

Iff:

Haroun, lad, it's not the same guy.
This is the Cult-Mastrer of Bezaban, Khattam-shud.

Khattam-shud:

Come, young Haroun,
And let me show you my poison-blenders.
We need all the poisons we can make
For every story to be ruined in a different way.
And I have discovered
That for every story there is an anti-story.
Put the two together
And they cancel each other out.
Every day we release new poisons.
Soon, now, soon
The Ocean will be dead –
Cold and dead –
And my victory will be complete.

Haroun:

But why do you hate stories so much?
Stories are fun.

Khattam-shud:

Foolish child,
The world is not for fun.
The world is for controlling.
Inside every single story
There lies a world, a story world,
That I cannot rule at all.
It is beyond my control!
Can you imagine it?
Can you imagine what that means to me?
It spoils everything!

(Mali is heard whistling.)

Khattam-shud:

What was that?
I gave the strictest instructions
Nobody should ever whistle.

Voice of Mali:

You can chop a flower-bush
You can chop a tree
You can chop liver but
You can't chop me.

Khattam-shud:

Intruder. Intruder alert!

Haroun:

Hooray, Mali!

Voice of Mali:

You can chop and change
You can chop in ka-ra-tee
You can chop suey but
You can't chop me
(I said)
You can't chop me.

Khattam-shud:

Switch on the darkness!

Haroun:

Come on now Haroun –
It's your turn now or never.

Khattam:shud:

This is control.
This is control.
Kill all the intruders.
Kill all the intruders.

Haroun:

Let's see what a Bite-a-Lite can do.

(Brilliant light. Groaning and shrieking of Chupwalas.)

Now if I just grab that brain-box.

But how does it connect up?
Like so?

Butt: (making strange noises)
You must sing a-down a-down
And you call him a-down-a –

Haroun:
I've driven it mad.
Let's see...

Butt:
Look, look! A mouse. Peace, peace!
This piece of toasted cheese will do it.

Haroun:
Third time lucky, I hope.

Butt:
So what took you so long.
Let's go. Va-va-voom!

Haroun:
They'll kill us if we try to escape.
We've only got one minute left of the Bite-a-Lite.

Iff:
Look in your right pocket.

Haroun:
What? Wow! I'd forgotten.
There's still some wishwater left.

Iff:
Go ahead. Wish us out of this mess
If you think you can concentrate.

Haroun:
Maybe this time I can do better than that.

Iff:
Remember
The harder you wish
The better it will work.
Your heart's desire
Will be as good as yours.

Haroun:
I wish – what will I wish?
My wishes fly before me
Like a school of flying fish.

I wish this moon to turn
I wish this moon to turn in such a way
Today
Right now
So that the sun will shine
Shine on the Dark Ship
Shine on the dark Chupwalas one by one
Shine on, oh sun
Shine on the bad
Shine on the good

Shine on the world, the work of Khattam-shud
Shine on the poisoned sea
Shine on my friends and shine on me.

I wish – this is what I wish.
My wishes fly before me
Like a school of flying fish.

I wish the sun to rise
Shine on the dread Chupwalas with their negative eyes
Shine on the Dark Ship on the poisoned sea
Shine on my mother wheresoever she be
Shine on my dad, my friends, and shine on me.

(The sun rises and the Dark Ship is destroyed.)

Scene Five

Meanwhile, at the Citadel of Chup

Chorus:

War! War! War! War!
War between the lands of Chup and Gup!
War between the lands of Gup and Chup!
A battle to the death!
A battle to the dying breath!
A struggle for the triumph of the forces of the good!
A struggle for the overthrow of
Khattam-shud!

(Battle music.)

Prince Bolo:

Where are you, Khattam-shud?
Come on out.
Your army has been defeated
On the plains of Bat-Mat-Karo
And Batcheat
My golden girl
My princess, my love –
Where are you? Are you still alive?

Defeated Chupwala:

Listen a moment.
You'll soon hear where your girlfriend Batcheat waits.

Batcheat:

Oooh I'm talking 'bout my Bolo
And I aint got time for nothin' else.

Rashid:

I'm sure I know that song
But the words seem different.

Batcheat:

Lemme tell you 'bout a boy I know,
He's my Bolo and I love him so.

Bolo:

She sings? My Batcheat sings?
Then hush my friends and hearken to her song.

Batcheat: (appearing at a window in a tower)

He won't play polo,
He won't fly solo,
Oo-wee but I love him true.
Our love will gro-lo,
I'll never let him go-lo –
Got those waiting for those Bolo blues.

Bolo:

Beautiful. That's so beautiful.

Batcheat:

His name aint Rollo,
His voice aint low-lo,
Uh-HUH!
 But I love him fine,
So stop the show-lo,
Pay me what you owe-lo.
I'm gonna make that Bolo
Mine
YESSIR!
I'm gonna make that Bolo – aaggh, mmfff –

(Khattam-shud appears at the window, his hand over Batcheat's mouth.)

Khattam-shud:

Prince Bolo, General Kitab,
I have heard your idle boasts
And it is true that my army has suffered a trifling reverse
But before I let anyone lay hands on me
I shall sew up the lips of Princess Batcheat
And put a stop to this racket for good
By sacrificing her to the colossus of Bezaban.
I have the needle here!
I have the thread.

Prince Bolo:

Help me someone. Help save the Princess Batcheat!

Chorus (looking at their fingernails):

Well...

Batcheat: (breaking free for a moment)

I'm gonna MAKE THAT BMFFF!!!

Bolo:

Is that a voice or what is it?

Rashid:

It must be a what-is-it
For it isn't a voice.

(Rumbling noise in distance.)

Khattam-shud:

Maybe this staple-gun will do the trick!

Chorus:

That sounds like an earthquake!

(Sun rises on Citadel of Chup. Enter Haroun with Iff, flying on Butt.)

Haroun:

It's a Princess Rescue Story.
It's a deed of derring do.
It's a case of death or glory –
 A priori
It's my cue.

(They rescue Princess before Citadel collapses taking Cultmaster and Idol with it.)

SCENE SIX

At the Door of P2C2E House

Haroun:

They told me to report here
And they sounded cross
Maybe I'm in trouble.
Knock knock.

Voice:

Who's there?

Haroun:

Haroun.

Voice:

Haroun who?

Haroun:

Haroun who was told to report here.

Voice:

Come in, little Haroun.
Come in and get a big surprise.

Haroun:

Is it a nice surprise
Or a nasty one?

Voice:

It's a surprise surprise.
It's a

(The door opens. Light floods the stage.)

Chorus:

Party! It's a party!

Hats off to you, Haroun.
Hats off to you, Haroun.
You're a heck of a chap
In a heck of a spot.
Hats off to you, Haroun, Haroun
Haroun!
Haroun!
Hats off to you, Haroun.

Rashid:

When you've lost your inspiration
And you've storyteller's block

And you' re somewhere between a hard place
And the proverbial rock
When you need a chap to befriend you
Or you'll burst like a stuck balloon
I can heartily recommend you
My talented son, Haroun, Haroun –
You're a tonic!
You're bionic!
My talented son, Haroun.

Chorus:

Hats off to you Haroun, etc.

Princess Batcheat:

When they drag you off and gag you
And bind your every joint
In a Princess Rescue Story
Which seems to have lost its point,
When you suffer a dread enforcement
And you feel you're about to swoon
I can offer a warm endorsement
Of my punctual friend Haroun, Haroun –
You're romantic!
I was frantic!
My punctual friend Haroun.

Chorus:

Hats off to you Haroun, etc.

Iff, Butt, Mali, etc:

For that deucedly difficult mission
For that quasi-impossible quest
For his verve and vim and vision
For his zip and zeal and zest
From the top-knot to the toenail
From pig-tail to pantaloons
We can offer a testimonial
For our capable friend Haroun, Haroun –
Your example
Has been ample,
Our capable friend Haroun.

Chorus:

Hats off to you Haroun, etc.

The King:

Haroun Khalifa,
To honour you for the service
You have done to the peoples of Kahani
And to the Ocean of the Streams of Story
We grant you the right to ask of us
Whatever favour you desire
And we promise to grant it if we can.

Rashid:

Well, Haroun, Any ideas?

Haroun:

It's no use asking for anything
For what I really want
Nobody here can give me.

The King:

I think we can give you what you want.

Haroun:

And what would that be?

The King:

After a great adventure
Everyone wants a happy ending.

Haroun:

A happy ending, yes.
But not only for me.

I come from a sad city
From the sad city of Alifbay.
I should like a happy ending
Not just for my adventure
But for the whole sad city too.

The King:

Haroun, Haroun
Happy endings come
But not till the end of the story.
I think - ahem -
That you and your father here
Have forgotten something.

Haroun:

What could that be?

Rashid:

Oh my goodness!
Snooty Buttoo!
It had quite gone out of my mind.
Come, Haroun, there is no time to lose.

SCENE SEVEN

Mr Buttoo's Rally

Cheerleaders:

Vote Buttoo
Vote Buttoo
Who's the one for you?

Not just one, Buttoo!

Mr Buttoo:

All the people will vote for me
Whether they like or no -
The muddy peasant with his ruddy wife,
The butcher with his bloody knife,
The nice boy on the way to school,
The ice-boy with his ice-chopping tool,
The master of the silver band,
The lowly crematorium hand -
All the people will vote for me
Several times in a day.
None of them will get away
Until they vote for me!

Cheerleaders:

Vote vote vote
For you know who.
Vote Buttoo.
Vote Buttoo.
Vote Buttoo, or else!

Buttoo (aside to Rashid):

And you, Mr Rashid,
You're on now,
And you'd better be good, or else...

Two Men in Mustachios:

Or else out comes that tongue from your lying throat.

Buttoo and Two Men:

What a pity
What a horrible pity
What a horrible pity that would be.

Rashid:

Ladies and gentlemen
The great Shah of Blah
The Ocean of Notions himself -
That is, myself -
Is about to tell you a story
And the name of the story I am going to tell is
Haroun and the Sea of Stories.

Chorus:

Tell us that story!
Tell us that story!

Haroun (aside):

So you didn't forget...
You're back on line.

Rashid:

There was once a young boy
In the sad city of Alifbay
Where the smoke of the sadness poured away
Poured away
From all the sadness factories...

(Continues telling story in dumbshow.)

Buttoo:

I don't like the sound of this.
I don't like the sense of this.
I don't like the mood of this.
I don't like the tense of this.

Chorus (listening to Rashid):

No-o-o-o.

Buttoo:

I don't like the drift of this -
Something slipping away from me.
I don't like the shift of this -
Someone calling it a day for me.

Chorus:

Ah-a-a-ah! No-o-o!

Buttoo:

I want the glory and
I want it whole,
I want a storyline
I can control.

Control

Control

I can control!

I want a storyline

I can control!

Member of Chorus:

Mister Buttoo

Khattam-shud!

Chorus:

Mister Buttoo

Khattam-shud.

Buttoo:

Alright everyone –

That's enough story-telling.

Now everyone go down to the polling-station

And vote for me!

Vote for me!

Chorus:

No no no.

We will not vote for you.

We will not speak by rote for you.

We will not trail a coat for you

Or push out the boat for you

Any more.

Buttoo:

How can this be?

Chorus:

Because we are free –

Or if not yet we shall be soon

Thanks to the efforts of Haroun.

We shall be free of you for good.

Snooty Buttoo is Khattam-shud.

(They chase him away.)

SCENE EIGHT

Back Home

Rashid:

Here we are, son,

Back home again in Alifbay.

I wonder what we'll find.

Hallo? Anyone there?

Haroun:
Miss Oneeta, Miss Oneeta.

Mrs Sengupta:
You're back. You are back.
What celebrations we will have,
What sweets there will be to eat!

Haroun
Why, what is there to celebrate?

Mrs Sengupta:
Well now, for me
I have really said goodbye to Mr Sengupta.
I'm finally and truly empowered
And I am free as a bee.
And as for you...
You know...
Someone else has said goodbye to Mr Sengupta too.

Rashid:
Soraya! My dear wife!

Soraya:
I know, I made a mistake.
I went - I don't deny.
I acted like a fool
Or worse
And with that snivelling drivelling
Mingy stingy
Measly weaselly clerk.
But now he's done for
Done for good.

Haroun:
Khattam-shud.

Soraya:
That is right, Haroun, my son.
Mr Sengupta is khattam-shud.

Rashid:
Welcome home Soraya
Welcome
Welcome home.

SCENE NINE

Haroun Wakes in his bedroom at dawn.

Soraya's Voice:
Zembla, Zenda, Xanadu
All our dreamworlds may come true -
May come true
It may come true
All our dreamworlds may come true.

Haroun:
Where am I? Who was that?
Oh
That was my mother singing.
I must be home after all.

I was afraid it was all a dream.
(Picks up toy Hoopoe.)
And my friend, my friend the Hoopoe,
So small now he can fit in my hand.
Please understand
My friend
It's good to know
You will be here if I should need you.
You'll be ready to go.
But I've had enough adventures for a while.

Hoopoe's Voice:
But but but...
No problem.

Soraya's voice:
Fairy lands are fearsome too
Fearsome too
Fearsome too
Fairy lands are fearsome too.

(All the clocks in the house begin to strike six.)

Haroun:
What's all this?
I have a new clock
New clothes and presents.
Of course, it must be my birthday.
Time is on the move again.

Soraya's voice:
As I wander far from view
Read and bring me home to you
Home
Home
Bring me, bring me home to you.

Haroun:
Everything rhymes.
Everything chimes.
Yes, time is on the move again!

FINIS