Elijah's Violin

& Other Jewish Fairy Tales

Selected and Retold by

Howard Schwartz

Illustrated by Linda Heller

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Illustrations by Linda Heller
Calligraphy by Tsila Schwartz

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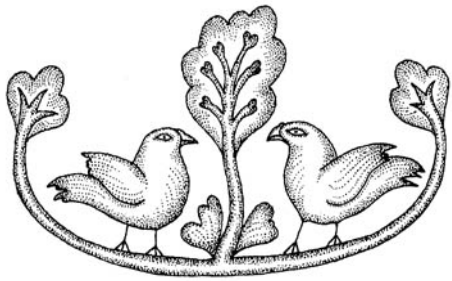

For Shira and Nathan

How should we be able to forget those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples, the myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses? Perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave.

Rainer Maria Rilke

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Introduction: On Jewish Fairy Tales

Tales of magic and wonder can be found in every phase of Jewish literature, both sacred and secular. Among the post-biblical *aggadot* (legends) and the *maaysiot* (tales) of Jewish folklore are to be found a number of stories which can readily be identified as traditional fairy tales. Some of these are the universal type of fairy tale set in an enchanted land and populated with a variety of human and supernatural beings, both good and evil, and are Jewish solely by virtue of their source. But many others, perhaps half of the existing body of Jewish fairy tales, have fused some specific aspects of Jewish life and tradition with the archetypal fairy-tale framework. For the fairy-tale version of the world as a stage on which good and evil struggle is fully compatible with the Jewish view of the essential condition of this world, where faith in God can defeat the evil impulse, known as the *Yetzer Hara.*

The fairy tale is a very ancient genre, filled with marvels and enchantments, and typically concerned with kings and queens ready to give up half their kingdoms if they could only have a child of their own; with princes who set out on quests to waken sleeping princesses; and with witches who are prepared, at the slightest offense, to throw a fly in the ointment. Above all, the hero must overcome obstacles in order to prove himself and win

his reward. And when all is said and done, good always triumphs over evil, and the prince and princess live happily ever after.

Yet despite the apparent simplicity and even childlike qualities of the fairy tale, much of its power derives from the timeless fantasies and human concerns it embodies, which we recognize primarily on an unconscious level when we read it, and which explain its primal and compelling power. This suggests why the fairy tale is found in virtually every culture, providing a medium of expression for the archetypes of the unconscious, embodied in such beings as witches, sorcerers, and enchanted princesses. For if fairy tales served merely as an outlet for the need to imagine ourselves as royalty, their spell would soon be broken, but instead these tales retain a remarkable power all our lives, not only when we are children. For just as the outer garments of Jewish ritual signify something much greater to observant Jews than mere custom, so too does the seemingly safe and familiar format of the fairy tale encompass some of the most elemental drives and emotions.

The pioneering work of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson in this field, especially in *The Types of the Folk-Tale,* has demonstrated convincingly the parallel themes and patterns of fairy tales and other kinds of folktales found throughout the world. The fairy tales collected in the following pages from a wide range of Jewish sources and periods substantiate the thesis of Aarne and Thompson. There are even Jewish variants of such well-known fairy tales as "Cinderella," "Rapunzel," and "The Golden Bird," but at the same time they contain many unique qualities as a result of their origin. Especially those fairy tales which concern Jewish legendary figures have brought with them the customs and settings of the milieu from which they have emerged, and are valuable bearers of the Jewish tradition.

That fairy-tale elements can be found at the earliest stages of Jewish literature is demonstrated by the biblical Book of Esther, in which a queen, Esther, struggles with Haman, an evil minister of King Ahasuerus, who is trying to destroy her people, the Jews. The minister's plot is foiled by a wise old man, Mordecai, who is Esther's kinsman. Whatever the historical basis for this account, it

has been cast in the mold of a fairy tale, for all of the characteristics are present except for the intervention of the supernatural, and there is even a happy ending. In fact, it is possible to recognize in the Book of Esther the direction taken by later Jewish fairy tales, especially those of the medieval period, which combine the universal fairy-tale format with a distinctly Jewish context.

Fairy-tale qualities can be found as well in the account of David and Goliath—the young shepherd boy David slaying the giant Goliath against all the odds. That this episode was indeed regarded as a fairy tale is made apparent by the tale of David and the giant Ishbi-benob, brother of Goliath, which is found in the Talmud, the most sacred Jewish text after the Bible. In this tale, "King David and the Giant," Ishbi-benob behaves exactly as do bellicose giants in fairy tales, attempting to crush King David beneath his olive press while his evil mother, Orpah, throws her spindle at Abishai, King David's general. Here the latent fairy-tale elements in the story of David and Goliath are made overt; whereas in the biblical tale it is David's skill and cunning that save him, here it is the supernatural power of the Name of God (known as the Tetragrammaton) which performs the magic of suspending David in the air so that he does not land on the giant's spear, making this much more of a fairy tale than its biblical forerunner. The use of divine intervention is characteristic of the Jewish fairy tale in general, where it replaces the usual devices of enchantment. Thus what other fairy tales attribute to magical causes, the Jewish vision interprets as a demonstration of the power and beneficence of God. King Solomon's primary source of power, for example, is his ring, on which is engraved the Name of God. Magical rings of enchanted origin are often found in fairy tales, but the power of Solomon's ring derives explicitly from the presence of God's Name: thus Benaiah, Solomon's general, need only hold up Solomon's ring and cry out "The Name of your Master is upon you!" and Asmodeus, king of the demons, is rendered powerless.

Fairy-tale elements can also be found in the accounts of the Garden of Eden, Noah's ark, and Joseph's rise to power under

Pharaoh, as well as in the many uses to which Moses puts his magic staff. Still, such elements do not play a prominent role in the Holy Scriptures, and it is only in the Talmud that the first clear-cut Jewish fairy tales are to be found. This is largely due to the more prominent role of fantasy in the talmudic legends, which make liberal use of poetic license. Yet as with virtually all of the *aggadot,* the fairy tales that are found in the Talmud and the Midrash have as their starting point an attempt to resolve a question raised in the biblical text. The workings of this process are especially apparent in "King Solomon and Asmodeus." The premise of this well-known talmudic tale is an explanation of how King Solomon managed to construct the stone altar of the Temple *with neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was being built* (I Kings 6:7). Since there was no known way to accomplish this, a magical creature, the Shamir, was created, which could cut through anything, and King Solomon sends his trusted general Benaiah on a quest to capture Asmodeus, king of the demons, who knows where the Shamir can be found, and then to obtain it from the bird that has possession of it.

All in all there are no more than a dozen fairy tales to be found in the Talmud, four of which are included here: "The Witches of Ashkelon," "King David and the Giant," "King Solomon and Asmodeus," and "The Beggar King." The first of these concerns historical figures, as do the tales about King David and King Solomon. There is little doubt that "The Witches of Ashkelon" is, in fact, based on a historical event: the hanging of eighty witches in the city of Ashkelon. Fabulous as the tale itself seems, in which the witches are deceived when their captors disguise themselves as would-be suitors wishing to dance with them, the Talmud also reports the fury of the relatives of the witches following their execution. And thus this tale offers an instance in which it is possible to follow the evolution of a historical event into a tale of the fantastic, whereas most legends have long since succeeded in discarding the historical kernel that brought them into being.

In a tale such as "King Solomon and Asmodeus" the distinc-

tion between legend and fairy tale has become substantially blurred. Legends are typically based upon historical persons, places, or events and usually possess some degree of realism, but while it is quite certain that King Solomon as well as his general, Benaiah, were historical figures, the quest described here is clearly drawn from the realm of fantasy. Such an approach is typical of most aggadic legends, which are free of most of the constraints of verisimilitude, including the portrayal of time. Yet because of the legendary intention that inspired them, the tales of the Talmud and the Midrash remain a unique form, functioning as both legendary tales and tales of the fantastic at the same time. And on occasion the rule of fantasy fully dominates the tale, bringing it into the realm of the tale of enchantment. That such fairy-tale elements are present in "King Solomon and Asmodeus" is readily apparent, enabling it to function both as a *drash* (biblical exegesis) explaining how the injunction that *thou shalt lift up no iron tool upon the altar of the Lord* (Deut. 27:5) was fulfilled, as well as a tale of enchantment concerned with a quest, the defeat and capture of the king of demons, the use of a magical ring to subdue him, and the discovery of a creature which can cut through the hardest stone. It is in this very tale, then, that the fusion of the uniquely Jewish aggadic tale and the universal fairy tale can be seen to take place. And it is worth noting that such hybrid creation is unusual—while most myths, legends, and folktales are colored, to a considerable extent, with the customs and setting of the culture from which they emerge, this usually is not the case with fairy tales, which exist in a timeless and spatially elastic world.

In the Talmud "King Solomon and Asmodeus" is followed by a companion tale in which Asmodeus revenges himself by outsmarting King Solomon, the wisest of all men. In this tale, "The Beggar King," Solomon's fall from glory is so complete he is reduced to being a wandering beggar, regarded as a madman when he insists he is a king. This tale exists as a brief coda at the end of "King Solomon and Asmodeus," but a considerable number of variants stemming from the Middle Ages are to be found, which expand on the wanderings of Solomon. This process of

embellishment of an earlier narrative is characteristic of Jewish folklore in general, and demonstrates the manner in which the earlier tale was received as a story worthy of further development rather than as a fixed work that had to be retold in exactly the same way. Naturally, much of this narrative freedom derives from the nature of folklore, which belongs primarily to the people, and generally remains an oral rather than a written tradition. Although this is true of the folklore of most of the people of the world, the exceptional continuity of the Jewish tradition makes it possible to trace the evolution of many tales from their earliest written versions, preserved in sacred texts, through various retellings in later periods. And naturally the abundance of such variants often makes retelling the tale enviable in the possibilities of combination and variation.

Whereas the historical King Solomon was known as a great ruler and a man of surpassing wisdom, the legendary Solomon has been transformed into a sorcerer without peer, versed in all aspects of magic, including the knowledge of the languages of the birds and other animals, and able to call upon the demons and even the winds to serve his will. It is interesting to note, however, the ambivalence toward Solomon that emerges in many of these tales. On the one hand there is still admiration for his prowess and grandeur, but this is qualified by a recognition of his excessive pride. Such a portrayal of Solomon also reflects a hesitant attitude toward the realms of magic and the supernatural, for Jewish legend is filled with tales of those less wise and fortunate than Solomon who were destroyed by engaging in the occult.

This theme of chastisement is also found in the midrashic tale "The Mysterious Palace" when Solomon is riding his flying carpet. Filled with a sense of his own greatness, he is suddenly reminded of how fragile is the covenant that permits him to glide through the air, which God can withdraw as though it were the wind. The succeeding episode, concerning the palace of the eagles, teaches Solomon something of the lessons of eternity, not unlike those taught Ozymandias in Shelley's poem of the same title. The whole tale has a strong echo of a talmudic legend

in which Solomon tries to enter the gates of the Sanctuary of the Temple, only to be rebuffed when the gates refuse to open, for he is not permitted to enter on his own merits, but only on those of his father, King David.

"The Princess in the Tower," a midrashic variant of "Rapunzel," demonstrates that even King Solomon, the wisest of mortals, could not outfox fate. Solomon attempts to circumvent the prophecy that his daughter will marry a poor man by isolating her in a tower on a remote island. But a giant eagle ends up carrying her destined bridegroom to the roof of the tower. This tale confirms the talmudic dictum that "Forty days before the formation of a child a voice goes forth out of Heaven to announce that this one will marry that one." And not even King Solomon can deprive a person of his or her destined match. A similar moral is found in a legend about two men Solomon attempts to assist in escaping the Angel of Death. In one version Solomon pronounces the Divine Name and suspends the men in the air, where, it turns out, the Angel of Death has been ordered to seize them; in another version he sends them to the city of Luz, which the Angel of Death is forbidden to enter, but the Angel still seizes them, at the gate of the city. (B. Sukkah 53a). As these parallel legends demonstrate, the same motifs are found throughout the Jewish legendary tradition, in which sacred legends and secular folklore, including fairy tales, are in many ways cut from the same cloth, and well-defined distinctions between them are often not possible.

This legendary city of Luz reappears in a medieval tale of the same title, which offers an opportunity to observe the evolution of a legend from its origin in the Bible through its development in the Talmud and Midrash until its crowning expression as a medieval folktale. There are four brief references to the city of Luz in the Bible. The first of these, that of Jacob's dream, identifies the city as one of the Gates of Heaven:

> And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said: "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." And he was afraid, and said: "How full of awe is this place! This is none other than the House

> of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven." . . . And he called the name of that place Beth-el, but the name of the city was Luz at first.
>
> *Genesis 28:16–17; 28:19*

The Talmud identifies Luz for the first time as a city of immortals:

> It has been taught: "That is the Luz against which Sennacherib marched without disturbing it, and even the Angel of Death has no permission to pass through it. But when the old there become tired of life they go outside the wall and then die."
>
> *Babylonian Talmud, Sota 46b*

By the Middle Ages the city in which none of its inhabitants died had grown into a legendary place and the storytellers' art lay primarily in telling of the quest to reach it.

The quest for the blue dye (*tekhelet*) in the tale "The City of Luz," included here, derives from another biblical injunction:

> And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them throughout their generations fringes in the corners of their garments, and that they put with the fringe of each corner a thread of blue."
>
> *Numbers 15:37–38*

By the time of the talmudic sages, however, it was no longer known which creature supplied the *tekhelet* dye. Some said it was derived from a shellfish, others a snail. Therefore the rabbis decided to leave the thread white rather than to dye it incorrectly. However, the Talmud states that the *tekhelet* dye can be found in the city of Luz. Thus the quest in this fairy tale is not only to locate the city of immortals, but to retrieve the dye with which to fulfill the *mitzvah,* or obligation, of the blue thread.

The most prolific period of Jewish folklore comes in the Middle Ages. It is in this period that the fairy tale first emerges as a prominent form of Jewish folklore. This abundance of folklore was brought about by the independent evolution of talmudic and midrashic motifs among the people, who were especially attracted to tales which demonstrated the greatness of the Jewish kings

and prophets of the past. At a time when rabbinic formulations had become more allegorical and esoteric, especially as manifested in the kabbalistic literature, the common folk were drawn to tales with pronounced elements of fantasy and clear-cut morals. The fairy tales which are found in this medieval folklore demonstrate a considerable evolution in the genre, creating a form which in many ways is a hybrid, weaving the features of the typical folktale into the fabric of the fairy tale. For example, the hero in these tales is often a common Jew, but the characteristic link to royalty is usually retained by the presence of a king or queen (or prince or princess) of the opposite sex. In "The Princess with Golden Hair," the Jew Yohanan is sent out on a mission to locate the princess whose strand of golden hair has been dropped by a bird at the feet of the king, and the tale ends with the fairy-tale marriage of Yohanan and the princess and his ascension to the throne. Another example is found in "The Flight of the Eagle," in which the Jewish youth Shlomo becomes the beloved and then the husband of the daughter of the king of Spain. And in "The Demon Princess," a Jew even ends up wedded to the daughter of Asmodeus.

These medieval fairy tales also typically retain the moral basis of Judaism. A vow made to one's father is sacred, and Yohanan, in "The Princess with Golden Hair," honors it until he is left impoverished. When he has demonstrated his faithfulness, he is rewarded by the giant scorpion he has raised, and eventually he not only completes the quest to find his princess but even becomes king, a proper reward, the tale implies, for honoring a vow. It is interesting to note that in a version of this tale found in the *Maaseh Book,* which, according to Moses Gaster, dates from six hundred years later, the scorpion has become a frog and the principal figure a rabbi. But for the most part the story remains the same, another striking example of the continuity of Jewish tradition.

As Yohanan's fidelity makes him deserving of his great reward, so does the violation of such a vow unleash the punishments that overwhelm the man in "The Demon Princess." This tale, which is also known as "The Tale of a Jerusalemite," has

been ascribed to Abraham, the son of Moses Maimonides, who lived at the beginning of the thirteenth century in Egypt. The Jew who breaks his vow to his father is portrayed as deceitful and manipulative, and makes other vows he has no intention of keeping to the daughter of Asmodeus. The man provokes the wrath of the king of demons and his daughter, which is not tempered with mercy.

This rare occasion of a fairy tale which does not have a happy ending indicates the extent to which the form has evolved. The notion of the kiss of death, with which the demon princess takes the life of the man who has betrayed her, is echoed in a talmudic legend which describes the death of Moses as having come from the Kiss of the *Shekhinah,* the Divine Presence and Bride of God. In this context it signifies a mystical union at the moment of death, whereas the man kissed by the demon princess simply has his breath snatched away. For those familiar with the talmudic legend, of course, its echo in the fairy tale is readily apparent, and enriches the resonance of the tale.

Of particular interest in "The Demon Princess" is the description of the religious life in the kingdom of the demons, which seems parallel, in every respect, to that of a devout Jew of the Middle Ages. This is not intended as mockery, for the *Yenne Velt,* the world in which demons and other spirits live, was believed to be a mirror image, somewhat distorted, of the world in which we live.

It is worth noting that the characterization of Asmodeus found in this tale is consistent with that in "King Solomon and Asmodeus" and "The Beggar King." Asmodeus is a characteristically Jewish demon who, like his nemesis, King Solomon, is one of the most popular figures in Jewish folklore. Spending part of his time in Paradise, where he studies in the Heavenly Academy, Asmodeus does not fit the mold of the typical demon of fairy tales—he performs good deeds, such as setting a blind man on the proper path, as well as mischievous ones. Further aspects of his character are found in the tales "Partnership with Asmodeus" and "The Magic Flute of Asmodeus." In the former, Asmodeus saves a man from suicide—again performing a *mitzvah,* or good

deed—and proposes a partnership which brings the man great benefit until he proves to be an ingrate. Then Asmodeus turns on him, as does the demon princess on her dishonest husband, and puts him in grave danger. Or again, Asmodeus appears as a grateful father who rewards the shepherd in "The Magic Flute of Asmodeus" for saving his son and gives him every magical gift he requests. And it should be noted that even when Asmodeus is responsible for Solomon's fall from glory in "The Beggar King," it is for the purpose of teaching the king an important lesson. On the one hand Asmodeus is a worthy adversary, with some of the subtlety of Goethe's Mephistopheles. On the other hand Asmodeus plays a positive role in God's design, for His agency is seen ultimately in every event, whether good or bad.

Another strain of meaning in medieval Jewish fairy tales is found in those about Rabbi Adam, a Jewish sorcerer, who, like Solomon, was master of many mysteries. Rabbi Adam is perhaps best known for his role as the transmitter of the fabled Book of Mysteries to the Baal Shem Tov in Hasidic legend, but there also exist several independent medieval tales about him, including "The King's Dream," "The Magic Mirror of Rabbi Adam," and "The Enchanted Journey," which are represented here. In each case Rabbi Adam comes to the assistance of his fellow Jews either by interceding with an evil king or by directly aiding a Jew in danger. It is not difficult to recognize in these tales the deep frustrations, impotence, and isolation experienced by Jews in the medieval period, and to see how the fantasy mechanisms of the fairy tale operate. For it is out of the people's longing to be independent and secure that such tales emerged, and this is true of the tales from the Middle East and those from Eastern Europe, the lives of both the Sephardic (Middle Eastern) and Ashkenazic (East European) Jews being equally difficult. The tales about Rabbi Adam also served as models for some of the legends of Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, the creator of the Golem. In both sets of tales the role of the Jewish hero is taken over by the *tzaddik,* the righteous man who owes his powers to his knowledge of the Torah and his trust in God.

The next important source for Jewish fairy tales, after the

Middle Ages, is in the Hasidic era of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Eastern Europe. While the Hasidic masters, including the Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism, had been the subject of a rich body of miracle tales, there are relatively few fairy tales, perhaps because the Hasidim identified their rabbis with the patriarchs and ancient sages rather than with the more fanciful heroes of fairy tales. However, there is a treasury of such fairy tales attributed to Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, who lived in the nineteenth century. In the last four years of his life Rabbi Nachman, who was the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, undertook to tell tales to his Hasidim as a method of transmitting his teachings. Four of Rabbi Nachman's tales are included here: "The Lost Princess," "The Prince Who Was Made of Precious Gems," "The Water Palace," and "The Pirate Princess." Although most of these tales seem, on the surface, to be traditional fairy tales, they are in fact complex allegories frequently linked to myths concerning the *Shekhinah* and the Messiah. In the tales of Rabbi Nachman the *maaseh,* the traditional Jewish tale, and the universal fairy tale fully merge and become inseparable.

A story such as "The Lost Princess," for example, appears to be a typical tale of the quest for an imprisoned princess, but, according to Rabbi Nachman's scribe, Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov, it is actually an allegory about the Exile of the *Shekhinah,* the Divine Presence, which becomes identified as a mythically independent feminine being during the kabbalistic period. According to kabbalistic myth, the *Shekhinah* went into Exile at the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The loyal minister who searches for her in this tale may be seen to represent the Messiah, who has been sent to bring her out of Exile, since tradition holds that the *Shekhinah* will be freed only when the Messiah has come. Or the minister may be seen as a *Tzaddik,* a righteous one, as the most elect among the Hasidic rabbis were called, who obeys the command of the King, the Divinity, to search for the lost *Shekhinah* so as to make it possible for the messianic era to begin. For those familiar with these kabbalistic myths, as Nachman's Hasidim were, this symbolism conveyed profound secrets, including, it is hinted, the means to hasten the messianic era.

This does not mean, however, that Rabbi Nachman's tales must be read allegorically to be appreciated. The tales have great power in themselves, for Nachman's figures, events, and images are, at once, so primary and so subtle that they evoke the numinous quality of the inner world. Furthermore, his allegorical intentions brilliantly exploit the fairy-tale form as a pure and spontaneous expression of unconscious states. So too does the kabbalistic concept of the *Shekhinah* naturally link up with the Jungian concept of the anima, the feminine aspect of the psyche of every man. The identification of the *Shekhinah* with the imprisoned princess does not differ very much from the way in which the figure of the evil stepmother in fairy tales serves as a mask for our own mothers, permitting the child an expression of fear or anger that might otherwise be repressed. Rabbi Nachman was thus especially remarkable because he recognized the vital symbolism in fairy tales, saw its link to the mystical imagery in the Kabbalah, and discovered a way to fuse the two.

From the perspective of the tradition of Jewish literature, then, it is possible to see how Rabbi Nachman's innovations represent a continuation of the development beginning with the *aggadot* of the Talmud and Midrash, the basic sources of post-biblical legends, where there is a remarkably complete identification with the primary biblical figures, such as Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, which made the legends modes of personal expression as well as of biblical exegesis. The rabbis not only freely provided missing episodes from the biblical narrative, such as that of Abraham's childhood, but also attributed to the patriarchs dreams of their own, such as an apocryphal dream Abraham is said to have had about a cedar and a palm tree, which warned him of the coming danger in Egypt. Such projections have always been the basis of fairy tales, in which the primary characters are often left unnamed, identified only as a king or queen, a prince or princess, thus inviting identification with the listener or reader of the tale. Beginning with the kabbalistic period of Jewish literature, the kinds of projections that were common for biblical figures came to include more abstract concepts, such as the *Shekhinah* and the Messiah. So for Rabbi Nachman the lost princess, or soul, in each of us must be sought after, for each of us

must seek to accomplish the personal restoration and redemption that the Messiah represents on a cosmic scale. By linking these abstractions with the more concrete characters of the traditional fairy tale, Rabbi Nachman was making this process of spiritual projection a much simpler matter to envision.

Virtually all of the sources discussed so far have come down to us in written form. Nonetheless, all of them first existed as oral tales, which, except for the tales of Rabbi Nachman, were handed down for centuries before they were finally recorded. However, because of the low status of Jewish folklore among the rabbis, who were the primary keepers of the tradition, these secular tales were not scrupulously preserved, as were the sacred texts of the Talmud, Midrash, and Kabbalah. As a result a great many tales have been lost, which will almost certainly never be recovered. At the same time, many tales continued to be retold, and thus were preserved orally, especially in isolated areas such as Yemen, into the present century.

Among the early Jewish scholars who sought to preserve this oral tradition were S. Ansky, the Yiddish dramatist and author of *The Dybbuk,* and Y. L. Cahan, who collected Jewish folksongs as well as folktales. Ansky and Cahan went out into the countryside and wrote down the tales as they were told to them. Some of these tales had already been preserved in an earlier written form, but the majority had not. Often these tales were the purest kinds of fairy tales, which had been left unrecorded simply because they did not seem to bear a religious moral. But there were also examples of the fused Jewish folktale and universal fairy tale that emerged in its most complete form in the Middle Ages. Among the tales collected by Y. L. Cahan and recorded in Yiddish included here are "The Imprisoned Princess" and "The Exiled Princess." "The Imprisoned Princess" can readily be seen as another variant of the theme found in Rabbi Nachman's "The Lost Princess," while "The Exiled Princess" is a Jewish variant of "Cinderella." (The bulk of the material collected by Ansky has remained unavailable in a Russian archive, and promises to provide many treasures once it is released.)

One unusual format for the preservation of folk material, including fairy tales, was the ballad. Ballads were especially popular in Sephardic communities, such as those found in Greece, Turkey, and Morocco, and there are also Yiddish folksongs which have preserved similar material. In many cases the Judeo-Spanish ballads contain the only existing versions of the tales on which they were based. The fairy tale in a ballad format usually has been condensed to include only the primary episodes of the tale. But since fairy tales are in many ways predictable, it is not difficult to imagine the details suggested by the ballad's narrative. An example of a fairy tale reconstructed from such a source is "The Nightingale and the Dove," which comes from Salonika. Note that one of the subjects of the ballad/fairy tale is the beautiful singing voice of the young man, which enables him to court the princess against all odds.

While most of the fairy tales that have been preserved in the sacred literature of the Talmud and Midrash and the later medieval folklore are either specifically Jewish in content, or else parables and teaching-stories which have been transmitted for their allegorical intent, the universal fairy tale without overt Jewish elements also flourished during all of these periods. Some of the tales are very old indeed, but since they existed solely in the oral tradition, it is almost impossible to estimate their dates of origin. And while the outer garment of the tale cannot be identified as Jewish, there can be no doubt that the themes of many of these tales are parallel to the concerns of the more overtly Jewish ones. As with the identifiably Jewish fairy tales, the primary themes concern quests and imprisoned princesses.

What is it about these two themes that make them so compelling? The parallels of the theme of the imprisoned princess to the kabbalistic myth of the Exile of the *Shekhinah* have already been observed. The theme of the quest is often taken up in the midrashic literature, depicting, for example, the search for the legendary Book of Raziel, given to Adam by the angel Raziel, as well as the search for the Temple vessels, preserved from destruction by Jeremiah when the Romans overran the Temple in Jerusalem. And in his myth of the Shattering of the Vessels and

the Gathering of the Sparks, the sixteenth-century kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the Ari, develops a method of restoration, or *tikkun,* which works very much like a quest. According to this kabbalistic myth, God sent out vessels filled with a primordial light (which itself is the subject of many midrashim), but these vessels unexpectedly shattered, scattering the sparks of light throughout the world. The role of the Jew, according to the Ari, was to raise these scattered sparks from where they had fallen, and so eventually restore the world to its pristine state. So it is that the Jew has been brought into this world, in the Lurianic view, to complete such a personal quest, and therefore has a stake in the ultimate destiny of this world and the next. This Lurianic myth is retold in "The Eternal Light," which itself is cast in the form of a quest.

That the standard fairy-tale quest and the myth of the Ari have distinct parallels is amply demonstrated in "The Princess and the Slave," where too the quest takes on religious significance. Here the slave Samuel seeks Moses in an endless wilderness, suggesting the wandering of the Israelites. As a result of the successful completion of his quest, Samuel discovers the secret of eternal youth, which in symbolic terms can be said to be eternal life, just as the reward for raising the fallen sparks that one is destined to gather is also eternal life in the World to Come. Likewise, the quest for Elijah's violin in the title story is of a religious nature. For the successful completion of the king's quest enables the violin's imprisoned melodies, emblematic of the Jewish spirit, to be set free.

Among the characteristics which these fairy tales and the midrashic literature have in common is their timelessness. That Samuel succeeds in his quest to find Moses in "The Princess and the Slave" indicates that this fairy tale is set in a timeless world indeed. In the midrashic tradition Moses is often viewed as an immortal figure, largely because his death is not recorded in the biblical narrative. So too does the appearance of Elijah in a multitude of post-biblical tales attest to the tradition that Elijah appears in each generation to assist those Jews with the greatest need. This tradition derives from Elijah's miraculous ascension

into heaven in a chariot of fire. Yet while most of these stories concern the miraculous, very few are fairy tales in the traditional sense. "Elijah's Violin," however, is an exception, and the violin itself can be seen as a symbol for the positive attributes of the legendary Elijah, as well as a magical device exactly like those found so often in fairy tales—a Jewish equivalent of Aladdin's lamp.

The characteristic Jewish fairy tale, then, can best be seen as a fusion of the Jewish sacred legend or the Jewish secular folktale with the universal fairy tale, conditioned by the biblical and post-biblical tradition in which Divine Providence takes the place of magical devices and resolutions and the moral element is pre-eminent. The result is a powerful medium for the reaffirmation of Jewish faith and longing, sustained over one hundred generations. The archetypal and eternal nature of the fairy tale thus becomes particularly appropriate as an expression of continuity with the past, in which all the Jewish generations merge and mysteriously enter a single, timeless present.

Elijah's Violin

nce upon a time there was a king who had three daughters. Now he loved them dearly, but one day he had to leave them to go off to war. Before he left he spoke to his daughters and said: "If I am victorious in this war, I will bring each of you a gift. Tell me, what would you like?" The eldest spoke up and said: "I would like a diamond in the shape of a star." And the second daughter said: "I would like a gown woven from pure gold." But the youngest said: "I only want you to come home safely from the war." The king was pleased to hear this, and he said: "Thank you, daughter, for your good wish. But you must ask me to bring you something, as your sisters did. Think it over for three days, then tell me before I depart what it is that you want."

Now the youngest daughter was sitting alone on a rock next to the lake outside the palace, when there appeared before her an old woman, who asked her: "What is wrong, child?" And she replied: "I do not know what gift to ask of my father, the king." The old woman said: "You must ask your father for Elijah's violin." So the princess agreed that this would be her request.

At the end of three days the king said to his daughter: "What

gift have you decided upon?" And the princess replied: "I would like you to bring me Elijah's violin." The king agreed and set out to war.

Now the king led his troops to victory in every battle, and after his triumph he sought and found the gifts for his two eldest daughters, the star-shaped diamond and the golden gown, but he was unable to find Elijah's violin anywhere. The king asked his generals if they knew where it could be found, but none of them had heard of it in any of the countries in which they had fought. And he asked his wise men, but none of them had read of it in any book. And he asked his soothsayers, but none of them could find it in the stars. So the ship of the king departed, and sailed until it came to land. The king ordered his crew to cast anchor there, to see if Elijah's violin was to be found in that place. And in this way he embarked on a long quest, which took him to the four corners of the world. After many trials and tribulations, he was led to an old man who lived in a cave, and the old man said: "Elijah's violin is in the possession of the king of this country." He also said that the king had a daughter imprisoned in stone and whoever freed his daughter from the stone would be richly rewarded. Then the old man gave the king three long hairs and he said: "These three strands are from the bow of Elijah's violin. Burn these when you are in the presence of the princess."

The king thanked the old man, and took the three hairs from the bow of Elijah's violin, and put them safely away. Then he asked the old man what he might give him in return. And the old man said: "There will come a day when you will repay me in full, for your daughter will set free the imprisoned melodies." And the king wondered at this, and he said: "Tell me, old man, what is your name?" The old man replied: "My name is Elijah." And then the old man returned to the shadows of the cave, and the king set off to rescue the princess who was imprisoned in stone.

When the king approached the palace in which the stone princess lived, he advised his generals and wise men and soothsayers that he preferred to proceed on his own, and that they should camp there and wait for him. And when he came to the