

The Fisherman's Vessel: A Seal Broken at the Shore

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A fisherman opens a sealed metal vessel and releases a spirit who threatens his life. The Arabian Nights makes Solomon's old authority tangible through a stopper that can still hold terror.

STATUS	Medieval literary folktale; sealed spirit is a narrative tradition
CLASSIFICATION	STR
MATERIAL	Arabic storytelling tradition
DISPOSITION	PUBLIC / SOURCED STORY
CATEGORY	Strange Files
RECORD TYPE	Ancient stories
STORY HISTORY	Medieval Nights tradition; Galland manuscript dated to the 15th century

THE ACCOUNT

The fisherman expects something he can sell when his net brings up a heavy vessel. Instead, removing its leaden seal releases smoke that gathers into an immense spirit. The creature still invokes Solomon, although the king has long been dead. Freedom has not made it grateful: its long imprisonment has turned promised rewards into a vow to kill its liberator. The fisherman survives the immediate danger by doubting that such a body could ever have fitted inside.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

The Fisherman and the Genie is an established tale in the Arabian Nights tradition. The Bibliothèque nationale de France dates the three-volume manuscript used by Antoine Galland to the fifteenth century; his French translation appeared from 1704. The story predates the modern English retelling linked here, but its exact first composition is uncertain. Solomon's sealing of the spirit is part of the tale's inherited setting, not evidence that an authenticated vessel from his reign has been found.

WHY IT STAYS WITH US

The danger comes from mistaking a prison for a treasure chest. The story gives enormous power to something small enough to hold in a hand, then lets quick thinking reverse the scale again. It also imagines captivity lasting so long that the prisoner's anger survives the entire world in which the sentence was imposed.

WHERE THIS TELLING COMES FROM

The Arabian Nights: The Story of the Fisherman and the Genie

Project Gutenberg; traditional tale in an older English edition

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20916/20916-h/20916-h.htm>

La transmission des Mille et Une Nuits

Bibliothèque nationale de France

<https://essentiels.bnf.fr/fr/article/7cbf6b6d-8f7c-428c-ae42-9a58a7374522-transmission-mille-et-une-nuits>

RETURN TO THE STORY

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