

الحكواتي

Al Hakawati
[The Storyteller]
fragments from an opera

for soprano and orchestra

Karim Al-Zand
(2024)

version for
piano & voice

Al Hakawati
[The Storyteller]
fragments from an opera

Text

1. I shiver, I tremble

I shiver, I tremble,
Trapped in a story of woe.
Frightening and violent.
Beyond these walls, this sky,
Another storyteller wanders free.
I would dance with her, my sister,
As the world shares her stories.
A different time, and place,
Another hakawati gathers friends.
I would sing with him, my brother,
As the world shares his stories.
Worlds interwoven with words and wishes.
Another Scheherazade, from afar.
I shiver, I tremble,
Trapped in a story of woe.
Frightened, but not silent.

2. He sleeps, this one

He sleeps, this one...
Sleeps the sleep of cruelest kings,
and of wickedness;
a callous and cold sleep, deep.

I seethe, inside...
Seethe with rage that terror brings,
and its bitterness;
with each breath left to breathe, seethe.

I can no longer weep.
The wound is too deep.
Sleep! In a burning keep!
Sleep! Sleep! The righteous flames will leap!

3. Dance of the seven swords

[orchestra]

4. You and I

You and I, we are cast in different molds,
My happiness is tempered with yours:
it shines when our elements meld;
together, an alloy of burnished brass.

But your nature needs no alchemy;
forged in a secluded mine, remote,
alone, its metal hard and heavy.
You and I, we are cast in different molds,

And all my deeds, bear your leaden heedlessness;
its weight crushes me so that
my soul buckles under your burden.

5. For all I know

For all I know,
a story has wings, that it might soar—
fledged in a mind,
flying from our lips,
flocking to eager ears,
to open our dreaming eyes—
homing to our hearts.
Swirling stories—in droves they take a murmuring shape,
in forms that scrape the drawn dawn—
tracing a truth in the sky.

*Hakawati, teller of tales:
the people's prophet,
the curse of kings.
Hakawati, Hakawati!
Show us the wisdom of things!

For all I know,
a tale is a pilgrim, that it might journey—
migrating from world to world,
message in its satchel,
moving through ages,
arriving here—
to camp in our hearts.
Traveling tales—a caravan with load of amber,
flutes and tambour the dawn down—
leaving lessons in the sand.

Hakawati, teller of tales:
the people's prophet,
the curse of kings.
Hakawati, Hakawati!
Show us the wisdom of things!

*optional Arabic text for mm. 67–90:

Ḥakawātī rāwī al-qīṣaṣ	حكواتي راوي القصص
Nabīu al-shaʿb	نبي الشعب
Laʿnat al-mulūk	لعنة الملوك
Ḥakawātī Ḥakawātī	حكواتي حكواتي
Aishrah lanā ḥikmat al-ashyāʾ	اشرح لنا حكمة الاشياء

Program Note

Al Hakawati (The Storyteller) presents fragments from an opera-in-progress entitled *The Book of Tales*. The opera is inspired by a recent discovery about a beloved story collection: the so-called “Arabian Nights.” The exact provenance of these medieval Arabic tales—properly known as *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* (One Thousand and One Nights)—has always been something of a mystery. That all changed in 1993 when a forgotten 18th century Arabic manuscript was found in the Vatican library. It was a travel memoir written by a 75-year-old Syrian storyteller named Hanna Diyab. It recounts how, as a young man in 1707, the young Diyab had embarked on an extraordinary, years-long journey to Europe. His incredible adventures culminated in a meeting with the Sun King, King Louis XIV, in the halls of Versailles. Diyab told entrancing stories to everyone he met in his travels, including to Antoine Galland, a translator and archaeologist in Paris. It was Galland who, in 1710, first introduced Western readers to the stories of Ali Baba and Aladdin in *Les Mille et une Nuits*—though Galland makes no mention of Diyab. The storyteller returned to Aleppo in 1709 and eventually became a successful cloth merchant. He seems to have had no idea how far his captivating stories had travelled.

The opera connects stories and storytellers across time and place: from the present day, to the *Ancien Régime* of France, to the imaginary world of Scheherazade. The fragments in *Al Hakawati* comprise four “scenes” that feature the opera’s principal female characters.

1. I shiver, I tremble

The famed storyteller Scheherazade contemplates her precarious circumstances: each night she tells stories to the murderous Shahryar to postpone her execution.

2. He sleeps, this one

Shahryar is finally asleep. Consumed with fury, Scheherazade prepares to set his bed alight.

3. Dance of the seven swords (orchestra)

Murjana dances for her husband, Ali Baba, and a visiting merchant. She alone has discerned their guest’s true identity: he is Nadir, the leader of a band of thieves. He plans to kill her witless husband, who has foolishly stolen their treasure. At the climax of the dance she dispatches the villain.

4. You and I

Mujana has once again saved her hapless husband, Ali Baba. She is exhausted and laments their frustrating and troubled relationship.

5. For all I know

Tarina Safar, a modern-day scholar of medieval Arabic, has discovered Hanna Diyab’s manuscript in the Vatican library. She marvels at the power of stories and of storytellers.*

*Safar’s character is fictional, but she is inspired by the American scholar of Islam, Nabia Abbott (1897–1981), the first female professor at the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute. Abbott did some of the earliest research into the origins of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

commissioned by the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, Orchestre National de France,
WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln & conductor Cristian Măcelaru

Al Hakawati

[The Storyteller]

fragments from an opera
for soprano and orchestra

1. I shiver, I tremble

Ad Libitum; atmospheric

Musical score for the first system, measures 1-3. It features a soprano line and a piano accompaniment in 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats. The piano part includes a low register accompaniment with sustained notes and a melodic line in the right hand.

④ Slowly; somber, anxious (later hopeful, dreamily) ♩ = 50

Musical score for the second system, measures 4-7. The soprano line contains the lyrics: [The famed storyteller Scheherazade laments her precarious circumstances. Later, she dreams of fellow hakawatis from faraway times and places.]. The piano accompaniment continues with a steady rhythmic pattern.

Musical score for the third system, measures 8-11. The soprano line contains the lyrics: I shiv - er, I shiv - er, I shiv - er, I shiv - er. The piano accompaniment features triplet patterns in the right hand.

Musical score for the fourth system, measures 12-15. The soprano line contains the lyrics: I trem - ble, I shiv - er, I shiv - er, I shiv - er. The piano accompaniment continues with triplet patterns and a "poco cresc." marking.

16 *mf*
 I trem-ble trapped in a sto-ry of

20 *cresc.*
 woe. I shiv-er, I trem-ble

24 *poco f* *f*
 fright- - - en - ing and

28 **A** *poco rit.* - - - *a tempo* *mf* *dreamily* (*poco riten.*)
 vio - - - - lent. Be - yond these

32
 walls, this sky, an - oth - er

36

sto - ry - tel - ler — wand - ers free.

B Faster; buoyant, lively $\text{♩} = 84$
in a reverie [she dances]

40

I would dance with her, I would dance with

44

her, my sis - ter, — as the world shares —

48

her sto - ries. — A dif - f'rent time, and

molto riten. *poco f* **C** tempo primo *mf*

52

place, an - oth - er Ha - ka - wa - ti — gath - ers

56 **D** As before *mf*

friends. I would sing with

60

him, I would sing with him, my broth - er, —

64 *molto riten.*

as the world shares — his sto - ries. —

68 **E** *tempo primo* *f* *riten.* *a tempo*

Worlds in - ter - wov-en — with words and — wish - es. —

73 *mp* *mp*

An - oth - er Sche-her-a-zade, — from a - far. —

F

77

poco rit. - - a tempo

p I shiv-er, I trem-ble *cresc.*

81

mp trapped in a sto-ry of woe.

85

cresc. I shiv-er, I trem-ble, *poco f* fright-ened,

89

p cresc. fright-ened, fright-ened, but not si-^{8a}lent, *sub.p*

93

rit. - - - - - but not si-^{8a}lent.

2. He sleeps, this one

Quickly; vibrating ominously ♩ = 84

[Shahryar is finally asleep. Consumed with fury, Scheherazade prepares to set his bed alight.]

④ *mp contemptuous* *mf*
He sleeps, _____ this one... this
mp (sim.)

⑦
one, he sleeps, he sleeps the sleep of cruel-est kings, —
cresc.

⑩ *poco f*
and of wick-ed-ness, sleeps, sleeps, _____
poco f

13

f

a cal - lous and cold sleep, — deep, deep, —

16

p

— deep, sleep, sleep, — sleep, sleep, —

19

G

I see the, — in -

22

mf

- side... in - side, I see the, I see the with rage that

cresc.

25

ter-ror brings, — and its bit-ter-ness; seethe, seethe,

28

with each breath left to breathe, seethe. —

poco f

31

seethe, seethe, — seethe, breathe, breathe,

f *p*

34

breathe, breathe — seethe, — sleep,

rit. — — — — —

decresc.

37 - - - - - ad libitum *pp* **H** Slowly; fragile ♩ = 48
rit. - - -

breathe, — deep. — He sleeps... —

42 a tempo *p*

I can no long - er weep. — The wound

46 *molto rit.* - - - - - **I** subito Tempo Primo

is too deep.

50 *p* *cresc.*

too — deep, — too —

53

deep, — too deep, too deep,

56

deep, — deep, — deep, — sleep, — sleep, —

f

59

[she picks up the lantern]

poco f

in a burn - - - - - ing

decresc.

62

keep! Sleep!

[she approaches the bed]

mf

cresc.

65

[she raises the lamp to light the bed]

Sleep! The right - eous

69

ff *ad lib.*

J

molto allargando

f with venom!

Very Slowly $\text{♩} = 56$ *molto accel.* - -

flames, right - eous flames will leap!

74

$\text{♩} = 160$

80

4. You and I

Slowly; melancholy, intimate ♩=46

[Murjana thinks of Ali Bab, and laments their troubled relationship.]

warm, but fragile *espres.*

mp

ten. → mostly ringing through, but cleared after bass notes

7

cresc. *mf* *mp*

13

mf (take time)

You _____ and I, we _____ are cast in diff - 'rent

19

mp *cresc.* *poco f*
ten.

molds, in diff - 'rent molds, we are cast in diff - 'rent molds, you and I. _____

cresc.

poco meno mosso

25 *mf*

My hap-pi-ness is temp-ered with yours: it

29

shines when our el-e-ments meld to-gether, an al-loy of

33 *mp*

bur-nished brass, of bur-nished brass.

poco meno mosso

37 *poco f*

But your na-ture needs no al-che-my;— forged in a se-clud-ed mine,

poco f brittle, harsh

decresc. rit.-----

----- ad libitum tempo primo

40 *mp* *p* *pp* *f*

re-mote, a-lone, its met-al hard and heav-y. You

43

and I, _____ you and I, _____ we are cast _____

(sim.)

48 *mf* *sub.p* *mp* *mf*

molto allargando *a tempo*

in diff-erent molds, we are cast in diff-erent molds, you and I. _____

53 *mf* *poco meno mosso*

and all my deeds, and all my deeds _____ bear your lead-en heed-less-ness;

cresc.

58 poco accel. - - - - - a tempo molto riten. a tempo rit. - - - - -

cresc. *f* *mp*

its weight crush-es me so that my soul buck-les un-der your

f *mp* *p*

63 ad lib.; very slowly più rit. - - - - -

long *p* *slowly* *3*

bur-den, un-der your bur-den... you and I... you and I...

p *decresc.*

4. For all I know

Moderately; in a contemplative reverie ♩ = 76

poco riten.

2+3

p *wistful*

[Researcher Tarina Safar, who has recently discovered Hanna Diyab's manuscript in the Vatican library, contemplates the nature of stories.]

floating down

For all I know,

7

a tempo

a stor - y has wings, — that it might

13

mp

soar — fledged

18

gradually building excitement

poco cresc.

in a mind, fly - ing from our lips, flock - ing to ea - ger ears,

poco cresc.

23

to op - en our dream - ing eyes, dream - ing eyes—

28

poco f **R** A little faster; gradually gaining momentum ♩=88 *mf* conjuring an image

hom - ing to our hearts. Swirl - ing

33

poco f *transported*

stor - ies, swirl - ing stor - ies, stor - - - ies

39

p again, painting a picture *cresc.*

in droves they take

44 *mf* becoming more impassioned

a mur - mur-ing shape, _____ in forms

48 *f* Quickly; swirling ♩ = 69

that scrape the drawn _____ dawn _____

8^a gliss. 5 5 5

52 **S** *mp* vividly

(overlap roll from previous measure) trac - ing a truth in the sky.

59 Ad libitum, freely *mp* in awe, imagining the possibilities

For all I know, for all _____ I _____ know _____

take time ----- her thoughts carry her to a distant place

T Rhythmic; light, animated but not too fast ♩ = 88 (♩. = ca. 60)

3+2

60

66

pp as if in another world

Ha - ka - wa - - - - - ti,

71

p (ad lib.)

Ha - ka - - - - - ti, tel - ler of tales: —

Rā - wī al - qiş - aş — *mp*

76

Na - bi - u al - sha - 'b La - ' - nat al - mu - lük

the peo - ple's pro - phet, the curse of kings.

82

cresc.

Ha - ka - wa - - - ti, Ha - ka - wa - - - ti!

poco rit.

tempo primo

87

Aish - rah lan - ā hik - mat al - ash - yā' she snaps out of it

show us the wis - dom of things!

mf *decresc.* *pp* *p*

U

93

2+3 *p* *poco riten.*

For all I know,

99

a tempo

a tale is a pil - grim, that it might

105

mp

jour - ney— mi - gra - ting from

110

poco cresc.

world to world, mes - sage in its satch - el, mov - ing through ag - es,

115

ar - riv - ing here, — ar - riv - ing here — to

120

poco f **V** A little faster; as before ♩ = 80 *mf*

camp in our hearts. Trav - ling —

125 *poco f*

tales, ———— trav - 'ling tales, ———— tales ————

cresc. *f*

131 *mp excitedly* *cresc.*

— a car - a - van with a

136

load of am - ber, flutes and tam - bour, flutes and

140 *f* Quickly; as before ♩ = 69

tam - bour the dawn ———— down ————

8^a *gliss.*

144

W

sempre f jubilant

leav-ing les-sons in the sand.

151

allargando

molto allargando X a tempo (♩ = 69)

f joyous

Ha - ka - - - wa - - - - - ti!

156

(ad lib.)

Ha - ka - wa - - - - - ti,

161

tel - ler of tales: the peo-ple's pro-phet,

166

the curse of kings. Ha - ka - wa - - - - ti, Ha - ka -

171 *poco f*

- wa - - - ti! show us the wis - dom of things! _____

poco f

177

mf

183 *mf* *mp*

Ha - ka wa - - - - ti, _____ Ha - ka wa - - - - ti,

decresc.

188 *p*

Ha - ka - wa - - - - ti. _____

194 hold as softly and as long as possible

fade to nothing (no rit.) - - - - -