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**VATHEK  
AN ARABIAN TALE**

**WILLIAM BECKFORD**

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**BY**  
**WILLIAM BECKFORD**

1849

Vathek; An Arabian Tale by William Beckford.

This free ebook edition was created and published by Global Grey

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Memoir. By William North

Preface

Vathek











































































































































and other phantastic spirits, of each sex, danced lasciviously in troops, at the sound of music which issued from beneath.

In the midst of this immense hall, a vast multitude was incessantly passing, who severally kept their right hands on their hearts, without once regarding any thing around them. They had all the livid paleness of death. Their eyes, deep sunk in their sockets, resembled those phosphoric meteors, that glimmer by night in places of interment. Some stalked slowly on, absorbed in profound reverie; some shrieking with agony, ran furiously about, like tigers wounded with poisoned arrows; whilst others, grinding their teeth in rage, foamed along, more frantic than the wildest maniac. They all avoided each other, and though surrounded by a multitude that no one could number, each wandered at random unheedful of the rest, as if alone on a desert which no foot had trodden.

Vathek and Nouronihar, frozen with terror at a sight so baleful, demanded of the Giaour what these appearances might mean, and why these ambulating spectres never withdrew their hands from their hearts.

“Perplex not yourselves,” replied he bluntly, “with so much at once, you will soon be acquainted with all; let us haste and present you to Eblis.”

They continued their way through the multitude, but notwithstanding their confidence at first, they were not sufficiently composed to examine with attention the various perspectives of halls, and of galleries, that opened on the right hand and left, which were all illuminated by torches and braziers, whose flames rose in pyramids, to the centre of the vault. At length they came to a place where long curtains, brocaded with crimson and gold, fell from all parts, in striking confusion. Here the choirs and dances were heard no longer. The light which glimmered came from afar.

After some time Vathek and Nouronihar perceived a gleam brightening through the drapery, and entered a vast tabernacle, carpeted with the skins of leopards. An infinity of elders, with streaming beards, and afrits, in complete armour, had prostrated themselves before the ascent of a lofty eminence, on the top of which, upon a globe of fire, sat the formidable Eblis. His person was that of a young man, whose noble and regular features seemed to have been tarnished by malignant vapours. In his large eyes appeared both pride and despair; his flowing hair retained some resemblance to that of an angel of light. In his hand, which thunder had blasted, he swayed the iron sceptre, that causes the monster Ouranabad,<sup>26</sup> the afrits, and all the powers of the abyss to tremble. At his presence the heart of the Caliph sank within him, and, for the first time, he fell prostrate on his face. Nouronihar, however, though greatly dismayed, could not help admiring the person of Eblis, for she expected to have seen some stupendous giant. Eblis, with a voice more mild than might be imagined, but such as transfused through the soul the deepest melancholy, said:

“Creatures of clay, I receive you into mine empire. Ye are numbered amongst my adorers. Enjoy whatever this palace affords—the treasures of the preadimite sultans, their bickering sabres, and those talismans that compel the Dives to open the

<sup>26</sup> *Ouranabad*. This monster is represented as a fierce flying hydra, and belongs to the same class with the *Rakshe*, whose ordinary food was serpents and dragons; the *Soham*, which had the head of a horse, with four eyes, and the body of a flame-coloured dragon; the *Syl*, a basilisk with a face resembling the human, but so tremendous that no mortal could bear to behold it; the *Ejder*, and others. See these respective titles in Richardson’s Dictionary, Persian, Arabic and English.









