



# The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye

By A. S. Byatt

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## The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye By A. S. Byatt

The magnificent title story of this collection of fairy tales for adults describes the strange and uncanny relationship between its extravagantly intelligent heroine--a world renowned scholar of the art of story-telling--and the marvelous being that lives in a mysterious bottle, found in a dusty shop in an Istanbul bazaar. As A.S. Byatt renders this relationship with a powerful combination of erudition and passion, she makes the interaction of the natural and the supernatural seem not only convincing, but inevitable.

The companion stories in this collection each display different facets of Byatt's remarkable gift for enchantment. They range from fables of sexual obsession to allegories of political tragedy; they draw us into narratives that are as mesmerizing as dreams and as bracing as philosophical meditations; and they all us to inhabit an imaginative universe astonishing in the precision of its detail, its intellectual consistency, and its splendor.

"A dreamy treat.... It is not merely strange, it is wondrous."

--*Boston Globe*

"Alternately erudite and earthy, direct and playful.... If Scheherazade ever needs a break, Byatt can step in, indefinitely."

--*Chicago Tribune*

"Byatt's writing is crystalline and splendidly imaginative.... These [are] perfectly formed tales."

--*Washington Post Book World*



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## **The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye By A. S. Byatt Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

"Once upon a time," A.S. Byatt's title fairy story begins, "when men and women hurtled through the air on metal wings, when they wore webbed feet and walked on the bottom of the sea, learning the speech of whales and the songs of the dolphins ... there was a woman who was largely irrelevant, and therefore happy. Her business was storytelling..." But this is no backward looking, quaint fairy time. The time is the present, and the protagonist is a sensible scholar who is given the not-at-all sensible gift of a genie. How will Gillian, an expert in fairy stories and well versed in all that can go wrong with wishes, use hers?

Distinguished British author and Booker Prize-winner A.S. Byatt creates fairy tales for adults, each a blend of the magical and the modern, and readers of *Angels & Insects* and *Possession* will recognize the role of Victorian fairy tales in her fiction. This handsome little book includes reproductions of woodcuts that evoke our childhood wonder for dragons and princesses, glass coffins and netherworldly things.

#### From Library Journal

The enjoyment of fairy tales comes from new ways of telling old themes. The underlying stories are predictable?innocence is tested, a mission accomplished, a lesson learned, and an adult finally born?but the characters, adventures, and outcome vary with each telling. However, every once in a while this pattern gets bent or broken, as in Byatt's collection of five previously published stories. Each story is refreshingly different, eloquently detailing the story's setting, and each contains developed characters and dialog that make them truly enjoyable. The last and title story is the length of a small novella and is itself a collection of stories within a story. Readers who can keep up will have a fascinating adventure wandering from story to story as a modern middle-aged woman is granted three wishes by a highly personal and experienced genie. More than a play on words, this piece is a play on storytelling. Byatt has redesigned the fairy tale, breathing new life into old themes, and has done it with talent to spare. For all collections.

-?Laurel Duda, *Marine Biological Lab., Woods Hole, Mass.*

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#### From Kirkus Reviews

Four short fairy tales with a contemporary edge, and one novella-length tale that brilliantly transforms a story of middle- age angst into a celebration of serendipity and sex. Byatt (Babel Tower, 1996, etc.) uses that parallel world of fairy tales--which closely resembles our own in motive, character, and outcome--to explore the sources of hope and imagination. "The Glass Coffin" reworks a traditional quest tale as a tailor seeking employment helps a stranger and, as a reward, is given a glass key and certain mystifying instructions to follow that lead him to a beautiful sleeping princess. In "Gode's Story," a young woman is true, while her feckless sailor lover betrays her, only to find his happiness with a new bride short-lived when he sees her among the Dead riding the ocean waves. "The Story of the Eldest Princess" is a witty reworking of the quest tale as well as a low-key analysis of the role of fate, choice, and character as a princess steps out of her preordained role in life to rescue her people. And "Dragon's Breath" is a wry morality tale about the unsuspected "true relations between peace and beauty and terror" revealed when dragons destroy a village. But Byatt is at her best in the novella, about what happens when Dr. Gillian Perholt, in Turkey to attend a conference on stories, is granted the chance to make three wishes, which all come true. Troubled by visions of her mortality and her husband's desertion, fiftyish Gillian buys a dirty but striking old glass bottle and takes it back to her hotel. When she washes it, a handsome Djinn appears, who gives her the younger body she wishes for, makes love to her as she wishes, and after talk, tales, and travels, grants her her third wish. An intelligent detour with an exemplary guide through Keats's "magic casements" to fairy land. (Author

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#### **Ruth Hill:**

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