

THE FOURTH WISE MAN

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AS THE STORY BEGINS, THE OLD SERVANT KNOWN AS VASDA COMES IN FRONT OF THE CURTAIN. HE IS DRESSED IN SERVANTS CLOTHES OF PERSIA AND STARTS HIS STORY.

Vasda:

You know the story of the Three Wise Men of the East, and how they traveled from far away to offer their gifts at the manger-cradle in Bethlehem. But have you ever heard the story of the Fourth Wise Man, who also saw the star in its rising, and set out to follow it, yet did not arrive with his brethren in the presence of the young child Jesus? Of the great desire of this fourth pilgrim, and how it was denied, yet accomplished in the denial; of his many wanderings and the probations of his soul; of the long way of his seeking, and the strange way of his finding, the One whom he sought - I can tell this tale for you see, I was there. My name is Vasda, servant to Magi known as Artaban who you will be hearing and seeing a lot about tonight. I will be your narrator through the many adventures, and long span of time that my Master and I went through for his quest of the Holy Child.

CURTAIN OPENS AND THE OPENING SONG BEGINS. YOU SEE A STARRY NIGHT AND A BEAUTIFUL PALACE BALCONY. ARTABAN COMES OUT AND STARTS STARING AT THE STARS. DURING THE PIECE, IT WOULD BE BENEFICIAL IF THE ACTION THAT IS SPOKEN OF IN THE SONG, IS ACTED OUT.

Vasda: OUR STORY BEGINS WHEN THE EARTH WAS NEW,
WITH A MAGI NAMED ARTABAN.
THIS IS A TALE AMONG MANY TALES
FOR HE'LL BE KNOWN AS THE FOURTH WISE MAN.

ARTABAN, EVER SINCE HE LOST HIS SON AND WIFE,
HE BECAME OBSESSED WITH ANYTHING
THAT WOULD FILL HIS EMPTY LIFE.

ARTABAN STUDIED ALL THE SCROLLS,
SEARCHED THE STARS, READ THE PROPHECIES,
'TILL ONE DAY SOMETHING WONDERFUL OCCURRED.
ONE CLEAR NIGHT, HE LOOKED UP
AND HE SAW A BLAZING STAR.
ONE WHOSE LIGHT WAS LIKE A FIRE
THAT SHONE ACROSS THE SKY.

ARTABAN KNEW FROM ALL HIS STUDIES
THAT THE STAR SURELY WAS A SIGN AND IT TOLD
OF A GREAT KING TO BE BORN.

Artaban: THIS IS WHAT I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR.
NOW MY LIFE WILL BE FULL AT LAST.
THIS I VOW: I SHALL FIND THE NEWBORN KING.

Vasda: HE THEN SOLD ALL HE OWNED,
THEN HE BOUGHT THREE PRECIOUS GEMS.

Artaban: THESE HERE THREE, THEY WILL BE
MY PRESENTS TO THE KING.

Vasda: ARTABAN, DO YOU REALIZE THE PATH YOU CHOSE?
IT IS FILLED WITH ENDLESS MYSTERY.
GOD KNOWS HOW THAT IT WILL END.

ARTABAN, ARE YOU CHASING ONLY FANTASIES?
IS THIS KING OF YOURS REALLY REAL?
IS HE ONLY JUST A DREAM?

ARTABAN, COULD THIS REALLY BE YOUR DESTINY?
CAN THIS KING OF YOURS REALLY BE OUR WAY TO PARADISE.

All: HELP LEAD US TO PARADISE.

AT THE END OF THE PIECE, WE SEE THAT VASDA HAS TAKEN OFF HIS OLD GARMENTS AND BECOMES 30 YEARS YOUNGER. HE IS NOW IN A GREAT HALL OF LEARNING AND YOU SEE A HUGE BOWL OF FIRE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE HALL. THE FLOOR HAS MANY ANCIENT WRITINGS AND THE WALLS ARE NOTED WITH ASTRONOMICAL CHARTS AND SUCH LIKE.

Vasda:

In the days when Augustus Caesar was master of many kings and Herod reigned in Jerusalem, there lived in the city of Ectabana, among the mountains of Persia, my master named Artaban, the Median. And tonight he has called a special meeting of his fellow Magi.

MEN SLOWLY START TO WALK THROUGH THE BACKSTAGE CENTER DOOR DRESSED IN BRILLIANT ROBES. THERE ARE NINE IN ALL. THEY ENTER CHANTING.

Artaban:

Welcome! Welcome, Abdus; Peace be with you, Rhodaspes and Tigranes, and with you; My father Abgarus. You are all welcome, and this house grows bright with your presence. Vasda, if you please.

VASDA TAKES OUT A SMALL STRINGED HARP AND BEGINS TO PLAY.

Vasda: O COME AND LET US PRAISE THE LORD! LET'S SING FOR JOY TO GOD.
OH, LET US COME BEFORE HIM SINGING JOYFUL SONGS OF PRAISE.

Artaban: FOR THE LORD'S A MIGHTY GOD, HE'S KING OVER ALL GODS.
HE RULES OVER ALL THE EARTH; PRAISE HIS GLORY AND HIS MIGHT.

Magi: SING THE LORD A NEW SONG. ALL THE WORLD, SING PRAISE TO HIM.
SING TO EVERY NATION OF THE GREATNESS OF HIS NAME.
HE RULES THE WORLD WITH JUSTICE, FROM HIS MIGHTY THRONE.
SO PRAISE THE LORD, GOD ALMIGHTY AND HIS EVERLASTING LOVE.

Abgarus: I LOVE THE LORD BECAUSE HE ALWAYS LISTENS TO MY PRAYERS.

Rhodaspes: WHEN I'M DISTRESSED, I CALL ON HIM; HE ALWAYS SETS ME FREE.

Tigranes: I'M NEVER WORRIED OR AFRAID FOR I KNOW HE IS NEAR.

Abdus: HE SAVES ME FROM MY ENEMIES WHEN THEY'RE TOO STRONG FOR ME.

Magi: SING THE LORD A NEW SONG. ALL THE WORLD, SING PRAISE TO HIM.
SING TO EVERY NATION OF THE GREATNESS OF HIS NAME.
HE RULES THE WORLD WITH JUSTICE, FROM HIS MIGHTY THRONE.
SO PRAISE THE LORD, GOD ALMIGHTY AND HIS EVERLASTING LOVE.

Rhodaspes: GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR HE IS GOOD; HIS LOVE'S ETERNAL.

Abdus: LET'S JOIN OUR HANDS AND VOICES FOR A SONG AND DANCE OF PRAISES!

Vasda: YAI! DI YAI DI YAI!...ETC. (ALL MAGI DANCE)

Magi: SING THE LORD A NEW SONG. ALL THE WORLD, SING PRAISE TO HIM.
SING TO EVERY NATION OF THE GREATNESS OF HIS NAME.
HE RULES THE WORLD WITH JUSTICE, FROM HIS MIGHTY THRONE.
SO PRAISE THE LORD, GOD ALMIGHTY AND HIS EVERLASTING LOVE.

AFTER THE SONG, VASDA STAYS WHERE HE IS AND ARTABAN TAKES HIS PLACE AT THE HEAD OF THE CIRCLE.

Artaban:

You have come tonight at my call as faithful scholars, to renew your worship and rekindle your faith in the God of purity, even as this fire has been rekindled on the altar. We worship not the fire, but Him of whom it is the chosen symbol, because it is the purest of all created things. It speaks to us of one who is Light and Truth. Is it not so, my father?

Abgarus:

It is well said, my son. The enlightened are never idolaters. They lift the veil of the form and go into the shrine of the reality, and new light and truth are coming to them continually through the old symbols.

Artaban:

Hear me, then, my father and my friends while I tell you of the new light and truth that have come to me through the most ancient of all signs. We have searched the secrets of nature together, and studied the healing virtues of water and fire and the plants. We have read also the books of prophecy in which the future is dimly foretold in words that are hard to understand. But the highest learning is the knowledge of the stars. To trace their courses is to untangle the threads of the mystery of life from the beginning to the end.

Tigranes:

The stars are thoughts of the Eternal. They are numberless. But the thoughts of man can be counted, like the years of his life. The wisdom of the Magi is the greatest of all wisdoms on earth, because it knows its own ignorance. And that is the secret of power. We keep men always looking and waiting for a new sunrise. But we ourselves know that the darkness is equal to the light, and that conflict between them will never be ended.

Artaban:

That does not satisfy me, for if the waiting must be endless, if there could be no fulfillment of it, then it would not be wisdom to look and wait. But the new sunrise will certainly dawn in the appointed time. Do not our own books tell us that it will come to pass, and that great men will see the brightness of a great light?

Abgarus:

That is true. Every faithful disciple knows the prophecy that is written: 'In that day of Sosiosh the Victorious shall arise out of the number of the prophets in the east country. Around him shall shine a mighty brightness, and he shall make life everlasting, incorruptible, and immortal, and the dead will rise again.'

Tigranes:

This is a dark saying and it may be that we shall never understand it.

THE OTHERS START TO AGREE WITH TIGRANES AND A SILENCE FALLS OVER THE ROOM.

Artaban:

My father, I have kept this prophecy in the secret place of my soul. Religion without a great hope would be like an altar without a living fire and I tell you that the prophecy is about to be fulfilled.

HE PULLS A SCROLL FROM HIS BREASTPLATE AND READS:

Artaban:

There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel.

Tigranes:

Judah was a captive by the waters of Babylon, and the sons of Jacob were in bondage to our kings. The tribes of Israel are scattered like lost sheep and from the remnant that dwells in Judea under the yoke of Rome neither star nor sceptre shall arise.

Artaban:

And yet, the Hebrew Daniel, who was beloved of our great King Cyrus says this prophecy. (**He takes out another scroll**) 'Know, therefore and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore Jerusalem, unto the Anointed One, the Prince, the time shall be seven and three-score and two weeks.'

Abgarus:

But, my son, these are mystical numbers. Who can interpret them or unlock their meaning?

Artaban:

It has been shown to me by my three companions - Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. We have searched the ancient tablets of Chaldea and computed the time. It falls in this year. We have studied the sky, and in the spring of the year we saw two of the greatest stars draw near together in the sign of the Fish, which is the house of the Hebrews. We also saw a new star there, which shone for one night and then vanished. Now again the two great planets are meeting. This night is their conjunction. My three brothers are watching at the Temple of the Seven Spheres, at Borsippa, in Babylonia, and I'm watching here. If the star shines again, they will wait ten days for me at the temple, and then we will set out together for Jerusalem, to see and worship the Promised One who shall be born King of Israel. I have already sold my house and possessions, and bought these three jewels - a sapphire, a ruby, and a pearl - to carry them as tribute to the King. And I am asking you to go with me on the pilgrimage.

AS YOU ALL CAN SEE, I'M SET ON JUST WHAT I SHOULD DO.
NOW I AM ASKING YOU, MY BROTHERS, WHO WILL COME WITH ME?

I KNOW THAT I AM RIGHT CAUSE ALL THE SIGNS ARE THERE.
THIS IS OUR ONLY CHANCE TO PROVE THAT ALL
THE PROPHECIES WE KNOW ARE TRUE.

Magi:

CLUE. WE NEED A CLUE. YOUR FACTS ARE VAGUE
AND NOT CONCISE. MORE FACTS.
WE NEED MORE FACTS. WE WILL NOT ACT ON WHAT YOU HAVE.

FOR WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A SYMBOL OF THE TRUTH.
AND BEING THAT YOU'RE SO YOUNG
WHAT CAN YOU KNOW OF WHAT IS REALLY TRUE. NO CLUE.

Tigranes: ALL THIS IS JUST A DREAM. THERE WILL NOT BE A KING.

Abdus: ESPECIALLY ONE TO RISE FROM ISRAEL.

Rhodaspes: ALL THIS IS FOOLISHNESS. I'M SO SURPRISED AT YOU.

Tigranes: AND YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE OUR FUTURE LEADER?!

Artaban: JUST BECAUSE I'M YOUNG, IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT I'M NAIVE.
I'VE LEARNED ALL THAT YOU'VE LEARNED.
YOU'RE ALL JUST SCARED I MAY BE RIGHT.

I KNOW THAT I AM RIGHT CAUSE ALL THE SIGNS ARE THERE.
THIS IS OUR ONLY CHANCE TO PROVE THAT ALL
THE PROPHECIES WE KNOW ARE TRUE.
THEY'RE TRUE. THEY'RE TRUE.
THEY'RE TRUE. THEY'RE TRUE.

Magi: FOR WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A SYMBOL OF THE TRUTH.
AND BEING THAT YOU'RE SO YOUNG
WHAT CAN YOU KNOW OF WHAT IS REALLY TRUE.
NO CLUE. NO CLUE. NO CLUE. NO CLUE. NO CLUE.

THEY ALL LEAVE EXCEPT HIS FATHER WHO IS THE LAST.

Abgarus: MY SON, IT MAY BE THAT THE LIGHT OF TRUTH
IS IN THIS SIGN THAT'S APPEARED IN THE SKIES,
AND THEN IT WILL LEAD TO THE BRIGHTNESS,
OR IT COULD BE A SHADOW OF THE LIGHT.

BUT IT IS BETTER TO FOLLOW THE SHADOW OF THE BEST
THAN TO BE CONTENT WITH THE WORST.
AND THOUGH I CAN'T GO WITH YOU,
MY HEART WILL BE BY YOUR SIDE 'TILL THE END OF YOUR QUEST.

YOU MUST FOLLOW YOUR HEART WHERE IT MAY LEAD YOU.
TRAVEL THE PATH THAT NO ONE'S TROD.
FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS AND HELP THEM COME TRUE,
FOR YOU DO NOT WANT REGRETS.

YOU MUST DO WHAT YOU FEEL YOU THINK IS RIGHT.
LET NO ONE SWAY YOUR DECISION.
IF IN YOUR SOUL THE CHOICE HAS BEEN MADE,
THEN WHO AM I TO STAND IN YOUR WAY.

IT MAY BE THAT THE LORD HAS CHOSEN YOU, SON, FOR A SPECIAL TASK.

YOU MUST FOLLOW YOUR HEART WHERE IT MAY LEAD YOU.
IT IS FROM THERE THE LORD WILL GUIDE.
HE'LL KEEP YOU SAFE 'TILL YOUR JOURNEY'S END,
THEN BRING YOU HOME TO ME.
THEN BRING YOU HOME TO ME.

Abgarus:
Artaban, I want you to take Vasda with you.

Vasda:
Me, sir?!

Abgarus:
Yes. I do not wish for my son to travel alone and I expect word of my son's journey.

Vasda:
Yes, sir.

Abgarus: (to Artaban)

Go, and prepare for the journey.

OH, GODSPEED, MY SON. COME HOME SAFE TO ME.

Artaban: OH, FATHER, I LOVE YOU SO. (They embrace)

Both: WHERE I (YOU) GO, MY HEART WILL BE WITH YOU.

ABGARUS LEAVES, ALMOST IN TEARS AND VASDA HEADS OFF IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION TO PREPARE FOR THE JOURNEY. ARTABAN STARES AT THE FIRE UPON THE ALTAR THEN LOOKS UP INTO THE HEAVENS.

Artaban: OH, WHY GOD IS THIS JOURNEY LEFT TO ME ALONE?
NOW THAT THEY HAVE ALL ABANDONED ME,
DO I HAVE THE COURAGE TO HOLD MY OWN?

OH, WHY GOD? IS IT TRUE THAT YOU HAVE CHOSEN ME?
AM I WORTHY ENOUGH TO SEE
THE WONDER THAT LIES AHEAD OF ME?

BUT SOMEWHERE OUT THERE LIES ALL THE ANSWERS
TO ALL THE QUESTIONS THAT I'VE EVER HAD.
SO I MUST SEE FOR MYSELF. I HAVE TO KNOW.

I'LL FOLLOW. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS LEAD THE WAY
TO THE PATH WHERE I MAY FIND THE KING.
I'LL SEARCH FOR HIM 'TILL MY DYING DAY.
JUST SHOW ME A SIGN. SHOW ME A SIGN. SHOW ME A SIGN.

SUDDENLY, AN AZURE SPARK IS BORN OUT OF THE DARKNESS, ROUNDING ITSELF WITH PURPLE SPLENDORS TO A CRIMSON SPHERE, AND SPRINGS UPWARD THROUGH THE RAYS OF SAFFRON AND ORANGE INTO A POINT OF WHITE RADIANCE. HE BOWS HIS HEAD AND SAYS:

Artaban:

It is the sign. The King is coming, and I will go to meet Him.

Artaban: I'LL FOLLOW. WITH THIS STAR TO GUIDE AND LEAD THE WAY;
POINTING ME TO MANKIND'S ONE, TRUE LIGHT.
THE KING WHO'LL LEAD US TO HEAVEN.
TODAY IS THE DAY! NOW IS THE TIME! THIS IS OUR TIME!

SCENE 2

AS ARTABAN LEAVES HIS HOUSE, THE CURTAIN CLOSES AND VASDA COMES OUT IN FRONT.

Vasda:

Needless to say, I was not thrilled at this so-called journey but, I had to do what I was told, crazy at seemed. But all day long we rode, and we rode, and we rode. (**Rubs his behind**). It came to a point where I thought he'd never stop. Until finally when night fell, (**Curtain opens**) we dismounted. We were still another day's journey, but enough was enough and I was getting hungry. (**To Artaban**) Master, can we eat now? My stomach's growling so bad, it thinks all my teeth have fallen out.

Artaban:

Yes, Vasda. We will rest here for about an hour and then we will continue our journey.

Vasda:

Fine. Maybe by then I'll be able to feel my legs.

IT IS A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT. THE STARS SHINE BRIGHTLY IN THE HEAVENS AND ARTABAN'S STAR LOOMS OVERHEAD. BUT THE DIM LIGHT REVEALS THE FORM OF A MAN LYING ACROSS THE ROAD. HIS HUMBLE DRESS AND FACE SHOWS THAT HE IS PROBABLY ONE OF THE POOR HEBREW EXILES WHO STILL DWELT IN GREAT NUMBERS IN THE VICINITY. ARTABAN RUSHES OVER TO HIM.

Artaban:

Vasda, get some supplies out of my sack.

Vasda:

But master, he is almost dead now. What point would it be to save him?

Artaban:

Vasda, do what I tell you and bring me the water sack while you're at it.

Vasda:

But master, we only have enough for ourselves...

Artaban:

Just do it!

VASDA GOES OFF AND GETS THE SUPPLIES

Man:

Who are you? And why have you sought me here to bring me back to life?

Artaban:

I am Artaban the Magian, of the city of Ectabana, and also healer. I will attend to your needs.

AT THIS POINT, VASDA COMES IN WITH THE SUPPLIES AND ARTABAN APPLIES HIS REMEDIES.

Artaban: (to Vasda)

It's worse than I thought. We will have to wait here until the remedy takes effect.

Vasda:

But master, the caravan is waiting.

Artaban:

Thank you, Vasda. I will call you when I need you.

ARTABAN STAYS NEAR THE OLD MAN WHILE VASDA SITS ON A NEARBY ROCK FORMATION AND STARTS BROODING.

Vasda:

I DON'T GET THIS.
WHY'S HE BOTHERING TO HELP THAT SICK, OLD MAN?
WE'RE LATE ALREADY.
WHY'S HE DOING THIS WHEN TIME'S NOT ON OUR SIDE.

ALL THAT I'VE HEARD FROM HIM IS HOW WE MUST BE ON OUR WAY.
AND WITH THIS DELAY, WE WILL PRO'BLY DO DOUBLE TIME;
ALL JUST TO HELP THIS MAN. SOMEONE HE DOESN'T KNOW.

A PRIEST AND A LEVITE START WALKING PAST. THEY SEE ARTABAN HELPING THE STRANGER.

Vasda:

Kind sirs, could you please help my master?

THE TWO SNUB THEIR NOSES IN THE AIR, BASICALLY PUSH VASDA TO ONE SIDE AND CONTINUE TO WALK TO THE OPPOSITE END OF THE STAGE. VASDA LOOKS WITH DISGUST. ARTABAN LOOKS LIKE HE ALREADY KNEW WHAT THEIR RESPONSE WOULD BE.

Vasda:

WHAT I TELL YOU.
IT'S NOT WORTH THE TROUBLE HELPING THIS OLD MAN.
WHAT DOES IT GET YOU?
IF HE GETS WELL, DO YOU THINK HE'LL CHERISH WHAT YOU'VE DONE?

I ADMIRE WHAT YOU'RE DOING, BUT WE HAVE TO BE ON OUR WAY.
THIS IS NOT OUR PROBLEM. WHY SHOULD WE GET INVOLVED?
MASTER, WE HAVE TO GO! MASTER, DO YOU HEAR ME?!

ARTABAN DOES NOT SIGNIFY THAT WITH A RESPONSE AND JUST STAYS GLUED TO THE HELPLESS STRANGER. VASDA JUST SIGHS, GIVES UP AND PLOPS HIMSELF DOWN ON ONE OF THE ROCKS, SULKING. DAYBREAK COMES AND THE OLD MAN STARTS TO SHOW SIGNS OF LIFE.

Artaban:

Vasda! Fetch me more bandages.

Man:

Sir. Thank you so much.

Artaban:

Shhh. Save your strength.

Man:

Where are you headed?

Artaban:

I am going to Jerusalem in search of one who is to be born King of the Jews, a great Prince and Deliverer of all men.

Man:

You will not find him in Jerusalem.

Artaban:

What makes you say this?

Man:

It is written by our prophets that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem.

Artaban:

Thank you, old man. You have helped me more than you know. I will leave you some bread and wine, and here is a potion of healing herbs. When your strength is fully recovered you can find the dwellings of the Hebrews among the houses of Babylon.

THE OLD MAN RAISES HIS TREMBLING HAND SOLEMNLY TO HEAVEN.

Man:

NOW MAY THE GOD OF ISRAEL BLESS YOU.
MAY HE PROSPER YOUR JOURNEY AND BRING YOU PEACE.
MAY THE LORD BRING YOU SAFE
TO YOUR DESIRED HAVEN, FOR YOU'VE SHOWN PITY
UPON ME.

Artaban:

Come Vasda, prepare the horses. Maybe the caravan hasn't left yet.

Vasda:

I sincerely doubt that, sir.

SCENE 3

THEY EXIT AND THE CURTAIN CLOSES. VASDA COMES IN FRONT OF THE CURTAIN AGAIN.

Vasda:

Well, we rode and rode as fast as our horses could travel until we finally arrived at the designated spot. There was no caravan to be found. (**Artaban enters reading a parchment**) All we could find was a parchment that read...

Three Kings Voices: WE HAVE WAITED PAST THE HOUR,
AND CAN DELAY NO LONGER.
WE GO TO FIND THE KING.
FOLLOW US ACROSS THE DESERT.

Artaban:

How can I cross the desert with no food and a spent horse.

Vasda:

Got me. I guess this means we will be heading for home. I'll get the horse ready and...

Artaban:

We must return to Babylon, sell my sapphire, and buy a train of camels, and provisions for the journey.

Vasda:

But master...

Artaban:

How else are we going to see the King?! We may never overtake my friends. Only God the Merciful knows whether I shall not lose sight of the King because I tarried to show mercy.

HE LEAVES STAGE LEFT, IN FRONT OF VASDA, LEAVING HIM ALONE ON STAGE. VASDA WRITES HIS FIRST LETTER.

Vasda:

Dear Abgarus:

WHEN YOU TOLD ME TO RIDE WITH YOUR SON,
I REALLY WASN'T THRILLED.
BUT THEN I FIGURED IT WOULD BE A SHORT TRIP,
AND I COULD COME HOME SAFE AND IN ONE PIECE.

BUT AS IT LOOKS, THIS WILL TAKE A WHILE.
HE STILL WANTS TO GO ON.
FOR BABYLON IS NEXT ON OUR JOURNEY.
ALL I ASK IS, SIR, TALK SOME SENSE TO HIM.

HE'S JUST HELPED A BEGGAR FROM DIRE STRAITS
WHICH MADE US BOTH INCREDIBLY LATE
TO MEET THE CARAVAN AND NOW ARTABAN
HAS SOLD HIS SAPPHIRE FOR A LOUSY CAMEL RIDE.

PLEASE SIR, I WANT TO COME BACK HOME.
PLEASE SIR, HELP ME TO COME HOME.