

## SHIPS OF TARSHISH ©

(Inspired by the poems of Clark Ashton Smith)

Ofttimes I walked through vaulted halls,  
On marbled paths past golden walls  
Where columns soared, met painted skies,  
A dome of topaz-spangled eyes,  
Beneath whose gaze the favoured few  
In diaphanous silks of Tyrian hue,  
Brushed through incense-laden shrines,  
Plucked the burgeoning frescoed vines  
In perfumed bowers where peacocks waft  
Iridescent Turquoise fans aloft,  
Gold-flecked, or trail their Pearl-white trains  
Reflecting jewels which hang in chains.  
Then made my way towards the sea,  
Neath cedar-scented canopy  
Of towering trees which lined my way  
Where silk trees bow and date palms sway,  
On satin cushions, litter-borne,  
In cool Aurora's rosy dawn;  
Where cyan waters wash the sand  
And pour forth wealth from every land;  
From Ships of Tarshish coral wood,  
Ebony, jasper, sweet rosewood,  
Lapis, sard, rich pantheons  
O'erflowed the towering galleons.  
When summoned by the calling horns,  
I rode where tamarisk tree adorns,  
And under spreading ostrich fans  
I went to meet the caravans  
And trains of desert ships in line  
From Ophir's fabled land divine,  
Which sway beneath their precious loads  
On endless sun-dried desert roads;  
Drank deep of scented, spicy fare,  
Inhaled the aromatic air  
Of priceless treasures from afar,  
Sent for me by Balthazar,  
With bitter threads of saffron fleur,  
Gold and frankincense and myrrh.  
But oft throughout those gilded days,  
The burning memory stayed ablaze  
Of scentless words, within my heart,  
Sent to me by horse and cart,  
Silent words which plucked and stole  
The very essence of my soul.  
I gazed upon the midnight court  
Where stars their King and Queen escort

In deep blue caerulean space,  
And Luna glows in Sol's embrace.  
And musing now on Phoenix' fate,  
I saw a horn and ivory gate  
And passed into the land of dream,  
Sailing down the Morphean Stream,  
But stood upon the selfsame spot,  
Now in a land which time forgot.  
I roamed amongst the ruined halls  
Wrapped in gloomy Stygian palls,  
Which choked the life on every side,  
So even insects fought to hide  
Themselves from dusty desert storms,  
Which in their savage rage transform  
The opulence of a newborn Troy,  
Where carcassed shipwrecks now enjoy  
Silence in their graveyard station,  
Beside a land of desolation.  
Inside the bleak and silent fane,  
Where broken gods now sought in vain  
From whitened bones with empty eyes,  
The blind devotion fate denies,  
I wandered in the peristyle,  
Saw muddy parchments from the Nile.  
Then stood Winged Kairos on the sand,  
Single-Locked and scales in hand;  
In one pan weighted to the ground,  
My Golden City jewel-crowned;  
The other, weightless, held a scroll  
With scentless words upon the roll.  
"The choice is thine", the young god said,  
"Sed Tempus Fugit", then he sped  
And as he fled I snatched away  
The faded page without delay,  
Broke the seal and straight away,  
Just like dawn at break of day,  
From dark horizon, twinkling rays  
Pierced the silent, muffled ways,  
Then ever upwards rising high,  
The Evening Star from pitchy sky  
Illumed the words upon the scroll,  
A lantern for my weary soul.  
The winds sprang up in disarray,  
The boisterous Anemoi at play,  
And starry lights now sailing free  
Didst plough the dark blue Midnight Sea;  
The Argo Navis, Pyxis nigh,  
Came sailing onwards full and by,  
Trailing fragrant Jacob's ladders

In her wake of sky-blue flowers.  
Wherever Glaucus steered the anchor,  
Saluting ever-watchful Hathor,  
Starry voyagers disembarked  
Who glittering in the void sparked  
Renewal of their stellar dance,  
Which heralded the old romance;  
So constellations bent the knee,  
As gliding through the Velvet Sea,  
The Queen of Night in silvered thread  
Serenely hovered overhead,  
And dressed the ruined temple scene  
In translucent alabaster sheen  
Which every day with Sol aflush,  
Glowes with graceful rosy blush.  
Then casting loose in floating streams,  
Unfurled her radiant limpid beams,  
And spilling down each moonlit slide  
A swarm of baby stars did glide,  
Who tumbling round in playful mirth,  
Showered stardust o'er the earth.  
Afar the sound of distant thunder,  
The eastern sky was torn asunder,  
Drawn by horses darting fire,  
The solar chariot galloped higher,  
Igniting heaven's sapphire blue,  
Scattering sunstones as it flew,  
Which falling on the barren ground,  
Sowed new seeds of life around,  
Revived the bleak funereal realm  
The poppy goddess took the helm.  
Jasmine, rose and morning glory  
Weaving round the frangipani,  
Bacchus cloaks the fields with vine  
Ready for the sweet white wine;  
The air vibrates with songbird calls,  
And honeysuckle wreathes the walls  
Aglow with birds of paradise,  
Hibiscus hummingbirds entice.  
I walked into the temple square  
Where golden scrolls lay by a chair,  
And choosing one I read its prose,  
Sat beneath the Damask rose,  
Who gently bowing head down low  
Shed scented tears on words below,  
An Attar-perfumed petalled fan,  
A princely Rose from Ispahan.  
Intoxicated by its scent,  
I closed my eyes and once more dreamt;

I was the Moon, whom glowing bright,  
The heavenly court salutes each night,  
Whom Helios, checking fiery steeds,  
In celestial rosy dance did lead  
And then, the Evening Star dismissed,  
Caressed at dawn and gently kissed.

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