

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

[14]

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“The Man Who Stole the Dish of Gold Wherein the Dog Ate”

Some time erst there was a man who had accumulated debts, and his case was straitened upon him so that he left his people and family and went forth in distraction, and he ceased not wandering on at random till he came after a time to a city tall of walls and firm of foundations. He entered it in a state of despondency and despair, harried by hunger and worn with the weariness of his way. As he passed through one of the main streets, he saw a company of the great going along, so he followed them till they reached a house like to a royal palace. He entered with them, and they stayed not faring forward till they came in presence of a person seated at the upper end of a saloon, a man of the most dignified and majestic aspect, surrounded by pages and eunuchs, as he were of the sons of the Viziers. When he saw the visitors, he rose to greet them and received them with honor, but the poor man aforesaid was confounded at his own boldness when beholding the goodness of the place and the crowd of servants and attendants, so drawing back in perplexity and fear for his life, sat down apart in a place afar off, where none should see him. Now it chanced that whilst he was sitting, behold, in came a man with four sporting dogs, whereon were various kinds of raw silk and brocade and wearing round

their necks collars of gold with chains of silver, and tied up each dog in a place set privy for him. After which he went out and presently returned with four dishes of gold, full of rich meats, which he set severally before the dogs, one for each. Then he went away and left them, whilst the poor man began to eye the food for stress of hunger, and longed to go up to one of the dogs and eat with him. But fear of them withheld him. Presently, one of the dogs looked at him and the Lord Almighty inspired the dog with a knowledge of his case, so he drew back from the platter and signed to the man, who came and ate till he was filled. Then he would have withdrawn, but the dog again signed to him to take for himself the dish and what food was left in it, and pushed it toward him with his forepaw. So the man took the dish and leaving the house, went his way, and none followed him. Then he journeyed to another city, where he sold the dish and buying with the price a stock in trade, returned to his own town. There he sold his goods and paid his debts, and he throve and became affluent and rose to perfect prosperity. He abode in his own land, but after some years had passed he said to himself, "Needs must I repair to the city of the owner of the dish, and carry him a fit and handsome present and pay him the money value of that which his dog bestowed upon me." So he took the price of the dish and a suitable gift, and setting out, journeyed day and night till he came to that city. He entered it and sought the place where the man lived, but he found there naught save ruins moldering in row and croak of crow, and house and home desolate and all conditions in changed state. At this, his heart and soul were troubled, and he repeated the saying of him who saith: "Void are the private rooms of treasury. As void were hearts of fear and piety. Changed is the wady, nor are its gazelles Those fawns, nor sand hills those I wont to see." Now when the man saw these moldering ruins and witnessed what the hand of time had manifestly done with the place, leaving

but traces of the substantial things that erewhiles had been, a little reflection made it needless for him to inquire of the case, so he turned away. Presently, seeing a wretched man, in a plight which made him shudder and feel goose skin, and which would have moved the very rock to ruth, he said to him: "Ho, thou! What have time and fortune done with the lord of this place? Where are his lovely faces, his shining full moons and splendid stars? And what is the cause of the ruin that is come upon his abode, so that nothing save the walls thereof remain?" Quoth the other: "He is the miserable thou seest mourning that which hath left him naked. But knowest thou not the words of the Apostle (whom the Lord bless and keep!), wherein is a lesson to him who will learn by it and a warning to whoso will be warned thereby and guided in the right way, 'Verily it is the way of the Lord Almighty to raise up nothing of this world, except He cast it down again'?" If thou question of the cause of this accident, indeed it is no wonder, considering the chances and changes of Fortune. I was the lord of this place and I builded it and founded it and owned it, and I was the proud possessor of its full moons lucent and its circumstance resplendent and its damsels radiant and its garniture magnificent, but Time turned and did away from me wealth and servants and took from me what it had lent (not given), and brought upon me calamities which it held in store hidden. But there must needs be some reason for this thy question, so tell it me and leave wondering." Thereupon the man who had waxed wealthy, being sore concerned, told him the whole story, and added: "I have brought thee a present, such as souls desire, and the price of thy dish of gold which I took; for it was the cause of my affluence after poverty, and of the replenishment of my dwelling place after desolation, and of the dispersion of my trouble and straitness." But the man shook his head and weeping and groaning and complaining of his lot, answered: "Ho, thou! Methinks thou art mad, for

this is not the way of a man of sense. How should a dog of mine make generous gift to thee of a dish of gold and I meanly take back the price of what a dog gave? This were indeed a strange thing! Were I in extremest unease and misery, by the Lord, I would not accept of thee aught— no, not the worth of a nail paring! So return whence thou camest in health and safety.” Whereupon the merchant kissed his feet and taking leave of him, returned whence he came, praising him and reciting this couplet: “Men and dogs together are all gone by, So peace be with all of them, dogs and men!” And the Lord is All-knowing! Again men tell the tale of

