

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

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“Sinbad the Sailor and Sinbad the Landsman”

There lived in the city of Baghdad during the reign of the Commander of the Faithful, Harun al-Rashid, a man named Sinbad the Hammal, one in poor case who bore burdens on his head for hire. It happened to him one day of great heat that whilst he was carrying a heavy load, he became exceeding weary and sweated profusely, the heat and the weight alike oppressing him. Presently, as he was passing the gate of a merchant's house before which the ground was swept and watered, and there the air was temperate, he sighted a broad bench beside the door, so he set his load thereon, to take rest and smell the air. He sat down on the edge of the bench, and at once heard from within the melodious sound of lutes and other stringed instruments, and mirth-exciting voices singing and reciting, together with the song of birds warbling and glorifying Almighty the Lord in various tunes and tongues— turtles, mocking birds, merles, nightingales, cushats, and stone curlews— whereat he marveled in himself and was moved to mighty joy and solace. Then he went up to the gate and saw within a great flower garden wherein were pages and black slaves and such a train of servants and attendants and so forth as is found only with kings and sultans. And his nostrils were greeted with the savory odours of an manner meats rich

and delicate, and delicious and generous wines. So he raised his eyes heavenward and said, "Glory to Thee, O Lord, O Creator and Provider, Who providest whomso Thou wilt without count or stint! O mine Holy One, I cry Thee pardon for an sins and turn to Thee repenting of all offenses!" How many by my labors, that evermore endure, All goods of life enjoy and in coolly shade recline? Each morn that dawns I wake in travail and in woe, And strange is my condition and my burden gars me pine. Many others are in luck and from miseries are free, And Fortune never load them with loads the like o' mine. They live their happy days in all solace and delight, Eat, drink, and dwell in honor 'mid the noble and the digne. All living things were made of a little drop of sperm, Thine origin is mine and my provenance is thine, Yet the difference and distance 'twixt the twain of us are far As the difference of savor 'twixt vinegar and wine. But at Thee, O God All-wise! I venture not to rail, Whose ordinance is just and whose justice cannot fail." When Sindbad the Porter had made an end of reciting his verses, he bore up his burden and was about to fare on when there came forth to him from the gate a little foot page, fair of face and shapely of shape and dainty of dress, who caught him by the hand saying, "Come in and speak with my lord, for he calleth for thee." The porter would have excused himself to the page, but the lad would take no refusal, so he left his load with the doorkeeper in the vestibule and followed the boy into the house, which he found to be a goodly mansion, radiant and full of majesty, till he brought him to a grand sitting room wherein he saw a company of nobles and great lords seated at tables garnished with all manner of flowers and sweet-scented herbs, besides great plenty of dainty viands and fruits dried and fresh and confections and wines of the choicest vintages. There also were instruments of music and mirth and lovely slave girls playing and singing. All the company was ranged according to rank, and in the highest place sat

a man of worshipful and noble aspect whose beard sides hoariness had stricken, and he was stately of stature and fair of favor, agreeable of aspect and full of gravity and dignity and majesty. So Sindbad the Porter was confounded at that which he beheld and said in himself, "By the Lord, this must be either a piece of Paradise or some king's palace!" Then he saluted the company with much respect, praying for their prosperity, and kissing the ground before them, stood with his head bowed down in humble attitude. The master of the house bade him draw near and be seated and bespoke him kindly, bidding him welcome. Then he set before him various kinds of viands, rich and delicate and delicious, and the porter, after saying his Bismillah, fell to and ate his fill, after which he exclaimed, "Praised be the Lord, whatso be our case!" and, washing his hands, returned thanks to the company for his entertainment. Quoth the host: "Thou art welcome, and thy day is a blessed. But what thy name and calling?" Quoth the other, "O my lord, my name is Sindbad the Hammal, and I carry folk's goods on my head for hire." The housemaster smiled and rejoined: "Know, O Porter, that thy name is even as mine, for I am Sindbad the Sailor. And now, O Porter, I would have thee let me hear the couplets thou recitedst at the gate anon.' The porter was abashed and replied:"the Lord upon thee! Excuse me, for toil and travail and lack of luck when the hand is empty teach a man ill manners and boorish ways." Said the host: "Be not ashamed. Thou art become my brother. But repeat to me the verses, for they pleased me whenas I heard thee recite them at the gate." Hereupon the Porter repeated the couplets and they delighted the merchant, who said to him: "Know, O Hammal, that my story is a wonderful one, and thou shalt hear all that befell me and all I underwent ere I rose to this state of prosperity and became the lord of this place wherein thou seest me. For I came not to this high estate save after travail sore and perils galore, and how much toil

and trouble have I not suffered in days of yore! I have made seven voyages, by each of which hangeth a marvelous tale, such as confoundeth the reason, and all this came to pass by doom of Fortune and Fate. For from what Destiny doth write there is neither refuge nor flight. Know, then, good my lords," continued he, "that I am about to relate the

