

## THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

[19]

[continues]

“The First Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor”

My father was a merchant, one of the notables of my native place, a moneyed man and ample of means, who died whilst I was yet a child, leaving me much wealth in money and lands and farmhouses. When I grew up, I laid hands on the whole and ate of the best and drank freely and wore rich clothes and lived lavishly, companioning and consorting with youths of my own age, and considering that this course of life would continue forever and ken no change. Thus did I for a long time, but at last I awoke from my heedlessness and, returning to my senses, I found my wealth had become unwealth and my condition ill-conditioned, and all I once hent had left my hand. And recovering my reason, I was stricken with dismay and confusion and bethought me of a saying of our lord Solomon, son of David (on whom be peace!), which I had heard aforetime from my father: things are better than other three. The day of death is better than the day of birth, a live dog is better than a dead lion, and the grave is better than want.” Then I got together my remains of estates and property and sold all, even my clothes, for three thousand dirhams, with which I resolved to travel to foreign parts, remembering the saying of the poet: By means of toil man shall scale the height, Who to fame aspires mustn’t sleep o’

night. Who seeketh pearl in the deep must dive, Winning weal and wealth by his main and might. And who seeketh Fame without toil and strife Th' impossible seeketh and wasteth life. So, taking heart, I bought me goods, merchandise and all needed for a voyage, and impatient to be at sea, I embarked, with a company of merchants, on board a ship bound for Bassorah. There we again embarked and sailed many days and nights, and we passed from isle to isle and sea to sea and shore to shore, buying and selling and bartering everywhere the ship touched, and continued our course till we came to an island as it were a garth of the gardens of Paradise. Here the captain cast anchor and, making fast to the shore, put out the landing planks. So all on board landed and made furnaces, and lighting fires therein, busied themselves in various ways, some cooking and some washing, whilst other some walked about the island for solace, and the crew fell to eating and drinking and playing and sporting. I was one of the walkers, but as we were thus engaged, behold the master, who was standing on the gunwale, cried out to us at the top of his voice, saying: "Ho there! Passengers, run for your lives and hasten back to the ship and leave your gear and save yourselves from destruction, the Lord preserve you!. For this island whereon ye stand is no true island, but a great fish stationary a-middlemost of the sea, whereon the sand hath settled and trees have sprung up of old time, so that it is become like unto an island. But when ye lighted fires on it, it felt the heat and moved, and in a moment it will sink with you into the sea and ye will all be drowned. So leave your gear and seek your safety ere ye die!" All who heard him left gear and goods, clothes washed and unwashed, fire pots and brass cooking pots, and fled back to the ship for their lives, and some reached it while others (amongst whom was I) did not, for suddenly the island shook and sank into the abysses of the deep, with all that were thereon, and the dashing sea surged over it with clashing

waves. I sank with the others down, down into the deep, but Almighty the Lord preserved me from drowning and threw in my way a great wooden tub of those that had served the ship's company for tubbing. I gripped it for the sweetness of life and, bestriding it like one riding, paddled with my feet like oars, whilst the waves tossed me as in sport right and left. Meanwhile the captain made sail and departed with those who had reached the ship, regardless of the drowning and the drowned. And I ceased not following the vessel with my eyes till she was hid from sight and I made sure of death. Darkness closed in upon me while in this plight, and the winds and waves bore me on all that night and the next day, till the tub brought to with me under the lee of a lofty island with trees overhanging the tide. I caught hold of a branch and by its aid clambered up onto the land, after coming nigh upon death. But when I reached the shore, I found my legs cramped and numbed and my feet bore traces of the nibbling of fish upon their soles, withal I had felt nothing for excess of anguish and fatigue. I threw myself down on the island ground like a dead man, and drowned in desolation, swooned away, nor did I return to my senses till next morning, when the sun rose and revived me. But I found my feet swollen, so made shift to move by shuffling on my breech and crawling on my knees, for in that island were found store of fruits and springs of sweet water. I ate of the fruits, which strengthened me. And thus I abode days and nights till my life seemed to return and my spirits began to revive and I was better able to move about. So, after due consideration, I fell to exploring the island and diverting myself with gazing upon all things that the Lord Almighty had created there, and rested under the trees, from one of which I cut me a staff to lean upon. One day as I walked along the marge I caught sight of some object in the distance and thought it a wild beast or one of the monster creatures of the sea, but as I drew near it, looking hard the while, saw

that it was a noble mare, tethered on the beach. Presently I went up to her, but she cried out against me with a great cry, so that I trembled for fear and turned to go away, when there came forth man from under the earth and followed me, crying out and saying, "Who and whence art thou, and what caused thee to come hither?" "O my lord," answered I, "I am in very sooth a waif, a stranger, and was left to drown with sundry others by the ship we voyaged in. But the Lord graciously sent me a wodden tub, so I saved myself thereon and it floated with me, till the waves cast me up on this island." When he heard this, he took my hand and saying, "Come with me," carried me into a great sardab, or underground chamber, which was spacious as a saloon. He made me sit down at its upper end, then he brought me somewhat of food and, being a-hungered, I ate till I was satisfied and refreshed. And when he had put me at mine ease, he questioned me of myself, and I told him all that had befallen me from first to last. And as he wondered at my adventure, I said: "By the Lord, O my lord, excuse me, I have told thee the truth of my case and the accident which betided me, and now I desire that thou tell me who thou art and why thou abidest here under the earth and why thou hast tethered yonder mare on the brink of the sea." Answered he: "Know that I am one of the several who are, stationed in different parts of this island, and we are of the grooms of King Mihrjan, and under our hand are all his horses. Every month about new-moon tide we bring hither our best mares which have never been covered, and picket them on the seashore and hide ourselves in this place under the ground, so that none may espy us. Presently the stallions of the sea scent the mares and come up out of the water and, seeing no one, leap the mares and do their will of them. When they have covered them, they try to drag them away with them, but cannot, by reason of the leg ropes. So they cry out at them and butt at them and kick them, which we hearing, know that the stallions have

dismounted, so we run out and shout at them, whereupon they are startled and return in fear to the sea. Then the mares conceive by them and bear colts and fillies worth a mint of money, nor is their like to be found on earth's face. This is the time of the coming forth of the sea stallions, and The Lord-willing! I will bear thee to King Mihrjan and show thee our country. And know that hadst thou not happened on us, thou hadst perished miserably and none had known of thee. But I will be the means of the saving of thy life and of thy return to thine own land." I called down blessings on him and thanked him for his kindness and courtesy. And while we were yet talking, behold, the stallion came up out of the sea, and giving a great cry, sprang upon the mare and covered her. When he had done his will of her, he dismounted and would have carried her away with him, but could not by reason of the tether. She kicked and cried out at him, whereupon the groom took a sword and target and ran out of the underground saloon, smiting the buckler with the blade and calling to his company, who came up shouting and brandishing spears. And the stallion took fright at them and plunging into the sea like a buffalo, disappeared under the waves. After this we sat awhile till the rest of the grooms came up, each leading a mare, and seeing me with their fellow syce, questioned me of my case, and I repeated my story to them. Thereupon they drew near me and spreading the table, ate and invited me to eat. So I ate with them, after which they took horse and mounting me on one of the mares, set out with me and fared on without ceasing till we came to the capital city of King Mihrjan, and going in to him, acquainted him with my story. Then he sent for me, and when they set me before him and salaams had been exchanged, he gave me a cordial welcome and wishing me long life, bade me tell him my tale. So I related to him all that I had seen and all that had befallen me from first to last, whereat he marveled and said to me: "By the Lord, O my son, thou hast indeed been

miraculously preserved! Were not the term of thy life a long one, thou hadst not escaped from these straits. But praised be the Lord for safety!" Then he spoke cheerily to me and entreated me with kindness and consideration. Moreover, he made me his agent for the port and registrar of all ships that entered the harbor. I attended him regularly, to receive his commandments, and he favored me and did me all manner of kindness and invested me with costly and splendid robes. Indeed, I was high in credit with him as an intercessor for the folk and an intermediary between them and him when they wanted aught of him. I abode thus a great while, and as often as I passed through the city to the port, I questioned the merchants and travelers and sailors of the city of Baghdad, so haply I might hear of an occasion to return to my native land, but could find none who knew it or knew any who resorted thither. At this I was chagrined, for I was weary of long strangerhood, and my disappointment endured for a time till one day, going in to King Mihrijan, I found with him a company of Indians. I saluted them and they returned my salaam, and politely welcomed me and asked me of my country. When they asked me of my country, I questioned them of theirs and they told me that they were of various castes, some being called shakiriyah, who are the noblest of their casts and neither oppress nor offer violence to any, and others Brahmans, a folk who abstain from wine but live in delight and solace and merriment and own camels and horses and cattle. Moreover, they told me that the people of India are divided into two and seventy castes, and I marveled at this with exceeding marvel. Amongst other things that I saw in King Mihrijan's dominions was an island called Kasil, wherein all night is heard the beating of drums and tabrets, but we were told by the neighboring islanders and by travelers that the inhabitants are people of diligence and judgment. In this sea I saw also a fish two hundred cubits long and the fishermen fear it, so they

strike together pieces of wood and put it to flight. I also saw another fish with a head like that of an owl, besides many other wonders and rarities, which it would be tedious to recount. I occupied myself thus in visiting the islands till one day as I stood in the port with a staff in my hand, according to my custom, behold, a great ship, wherein were many merchants, came sailing for the harbor. When it reached the small inner port where ships anchor under the city, the master furled his sails and making fast to the shore, put out the landing planks, whereupon the crew fell to breaking bulk and landing cargo whilst I stood by, taking written note of them. They were long in bringing the goods ashore, so I asked the master, "Is there aught left in thy ship?" and he answered: "O my lord, there are divers bales of merchandise in the hold, whose owner was drowned from amongst us at one of the islands on our course; so his goods remained in our charge by way of trust, and we purpose to sell them and note their price, that we may convey it to his people in the city of Baghdad, the Home of Peace." "What was the merchant's name?" quoth I, and quoth he, "Sindbad the Sailor," whereupon I straitly considered him and knowing him, cried out to him with a great cry, saying: "O Captain, I am that Sindbad the Sailor who traveled with other merchants, and when the fish heaved and thou calledst to us, some saved themselves and others sank, I being one of them. But the Lord Almighty threw in my way a great tub of wood, of those the crew had used to wash withal, and the winds and waves carried me to this island, where by the Lord's grace I fell in with King Mihrjan's grooms and they brought me hither to the King their master. When I told him my story, he entreated me with favor and made me his harbor-master, and I have prospered in his service and found acceptance with him. These bales therefore are mine, the goods which God hath given me." The other exclaimed: "There is no Majesty and there is no Mihgt save in the Lord, the Glorious, the Great!

Verily, there is neither conscience nor good faith left among men!" Said I, "O Rais, what mean these words, seeing that I have told thee my case?" And he answered, "Because thou heardest me say that I had with me goods whose owner was drowned, thou thinkest to take them without right. But this is forbidden by law to thee, for we saw him drown before our eyes, together with many other passengers, nor was one of them saved. So how canst thou pretend that thou art the owner of the goods?" "O Captain," said I, "listen to my story and give heed to my words, and my truth will be manifest to thee, for lying and leasing are the letter marks of the hypocrites." Then I recounted to him all that had befallen me since I sailed from Baghdad with him to the time when we came to the fish island where we were nearly drowned, and I reminded him of certain matters which had passed between us. Whereupon both he and the merchants were certified of the truth of my story and recognized me and gave me joy of my deliverance, saying: "By the Lord, we thought not that thou hadst escaped drowning! But the Lord hath granted thee new life." Then they delivered my bales to me, and I found my name written thereon, nor was aught thereof lacking. So I opened them and making up a present for King Mihrjan of the finest and costliest of the contents, caused the sailors carry it up to the palace, where I went in to the King and laid my present at his feet, acquainting him with what had happened, especially concerning the ship and my goods, whereat he wondered with exceeding wonder, and the truth of an that I had told him was made manifest to him. His affection for me redoubled after that and he showed me exceeding honor and bestowed on me a great present in return for mine. Then I sold my bales and what other matters I owned, making a great profit on them, and bought me other goods and gear of the growth and fashion of the island city. When the merchants were about to start on their homeward voyage, I embarked on board the ship



all that I possessed, and going in to the King, thanked him for all his favors and friendship and craved his leave to return to my own land and friends. He farewelled me and bestowed on me great store of the country stuffs and produce, and I took leave of him and embarked. Then we set sail and fared on nights and days, by the permission of the Lord Almighty, and Fortune served us and Fate favored us, so that we arrived in safety at Bassorah city, where I landed rejoiced at my safe return to my natal soil. After a short stay, I set out for Baghdad, the House of Peace, with store of goods and commodities of great price. Reaching the city in due time, I went straight to my own quarter and entered my house, where all my friends and kinsfolk came to greet me. Then I bought me eunuchs and concubines, servants and Black African slaves, till I had a large establishment, and I bought me houses, and lands and gardens, till I was richer and in better case than before, and returned to enjoy the society of my friends and familiars more assiduously than ever, forgetting all I had suffered of fatigue and hardship and strangerhood and every peril of travel. And I applied myself to all manner joys and solaces and delights, eating the daintiest viands and drinking the deliciousest wines, and my wealth allowed this state of things to endure. This, then, is the story of my first voyage, and tomorrow, The Lord-willing! I will tell you the tale of the second of my seven voyages. (Saith he who telleth the tale): Then Sindbad the Sailor made Sindbad the Landsman sup with him and bade give him a hundred gold pieces, saying, "Thou hast cheered us with thy company this day." The porter thanked him and, taking the gift, went his way, pondering that which he had heard and marveling mightily at what things betide mankind. He passed the night in his own place and with early morning repaired to the abode of Sindbad the Sailor, who received him with honor and seated him by his side. As soon as the rest of the company was assembled, he set meat and drink before

them, and when they had well eaten and drunken and were merry and in cheerful case, he took up his discourse and recounted to them in these words the narrative of

