

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

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“The Second Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor”

Know, O my brother, that I was living a most comfortable and enjoyable life, in all solace and delight, as I told you yesterday, until one day my mind became possessed with the thought of traveling about the world of men and seeing their cities and islands, and a longing seized me to traffic and to make money by trade. Upon this resolve I took a great store of cash and buying goods and gear fit for travel, bound them up in bales. Then I went down to the riverbank, where I found a noble ship and brand-new about to sail equipped with sails of fine cloth and well manned and provided. So I took passage in her, with a number of other merchants, and after embarking our goods, we weighed anchor the same day. Right fair was our voyage, and we sailed from place to place and from isle to isle, and whenever we anchored we met a crowd of merchants and notables and customers, and we took to buying and selling and bartering. At last Destiny brought us to an island, fair and verdant, in trees abundant, with yellow-ripe fruits luxuriant, and flowers fragrant and birds warbling soft descant, and streams crystalline and radiant. But no sign of man showed to the descrier— no, not a blower of the fire. The captain made fast with us to this island, and the merchants and sailors landed and walked about, enjoying

the shade of the trees and the song of the birds, that chanted the praises of the One, the Victorious, and marveling at the works of the Omnipotent King. I landed with the rest, and, sitting down by a spring of sweet water that welled up among the trees, took out some viviers I had with me and ate of that which the Lord Almighty had allotted unto me. And so sweet was the zephyr and so fragrant were the flowers that presently I waxed drowsy and, lying down in that place, was soon drowned in sleep. When I awoke, I found myself alone, for the ship had sailed and left me behind, nor had one of the merchants or sailors bethought himself of me. I searched the island right and left, but found neither man nor Jinn, whereat I was beyond measure troubled, and my gall was like to burst for stress of chagrin and anguish and concern, because I was left quite alone, without aught of worldly gear or meat or drink, weary and heartbroken. So I gave myself up for lost and said: "Not always doth the crock escape the shock. I was saved the first time by finding one who brought me from the desert island to an inhabited place, but now there is no hope for me." Then I fell to weeping and wailing and gave myself up to an access of rage, blaming myself for having again ventured upon the perils and hardships of voyage, whenas I was at my ease in mine own house in mine own land, taking my pleasure with good meat and good drink and good clothes and lacking nothing, neither money nor goods. And I repented me of having left Baghdad, and this the more after all the travails and dangers I had undergone in my first voyage, wherein I had so narrowly escaped destruction, and exclaimed, "Verily we are, the Lord's, and unto Him we are returning!" I was indeed even as one mad and Jinn-struck, and presently I rose and walked about the island, right and left and every whither, unable for trouble to sit or tarry in ay one place. Then I climbed a tall tree and looked in all directions, but saw nothing save sky and sea and trees and birds and isles and sands. However, after a

while my eager glances fell upon some great white thing, afar off in the interior of the island. So I came down from the tree and made for that which I had seen, and behold, it was a huge white dome rising high in air and of vast compass. I walked all around it, but found no door thereto, nor could I muster strength or nimbleness by reason of its exceeding smoothness and slipperiness. So I marked the spot where I stood and went round about the dome to measure its circumference, which I found fifty good paces. And as I stood casting about how to gain an entrance, the day being near its fall and the sun being near the horizon, behold, the sun was suddenly hidden from me and the air became dull and dark! Methought a cloud had come over the sun, but it was the season of summer, so I marvelled at this and, lifting my head, looked steadfastly at the sky, when I saw that the cloud was none other than an enormous bird, of gigantic girth and inordinately wide of wing, which as it flew through the air veiled the sun and hid it from the island. At this sight my wonder redoubled and I remembered a story I had heard aforetime of pilgrims and travelers, how in a certain island dwelleth a huge bird, called the "roc," which feedeth its young on elephants, and I was certified that the dome which caught my sight was none other than a roc's egg. As I looked and wondered at the marvelous works of the Almighty, the bird alighted on the dome and brooded over it with its wings covering it and its legs stretched out behind it on the ground, and in this posture it fell asleep, glory be to Him who sleepeth not! When I saw this, I arose and, unwinding my turban from my head, doubled it and twisted it into a rope, with which I girt my middle and bound my waist fast to the legs of the roc, saying in myself, "Peradventure this bird may carry me to a land of cities and inhabitants, and that will be better than abiding in this desert island." I passed the night watching and fearing to sleep, lest the bird should fly away with me unawares, and as soon as the dawn broke and morn shone,

the roc rose off its egg and spreading its wings with a great cry, flew up into the air dragging me with it, nor ceased it to soar and to tower till I thought it had reached the limit of the firmament. After which it descended earthward, little by little, till it lighted on the top of a high hill. As soon as I found myself on the hard ground, I made haste to unbind myself, quaking for fear of the bird, though it took no heed of me nor even felt me, and loosing my turban from its feet, I made off with my best speed. Presently I saw it catch up in its huge claws something from the earth and rise with it high in air, and observing it narrowly, I saw it to be a serpent big of bulk and gigantic of girth, wherewith it flew away clean out of sight. I marveled at this, and faring forward, found myself on a peak overlooking a valley, exceeding great and wide and deep and bounded by vast mountains that spired high in air. None could descry their summits for the excess of their height, nor was any able to climb up thereto. When I saw this, I blamed myself for that which I had done and said: "Would Heaven I had tarried in the island! It was better than this wild desert, for there I had at least fruits to eat and water to drink, and here are neither trees nor fruits nor streams. But there is no Majesty and there is no Might save in the Lord, the Glorious, the Great! Verily, as often as I am quit of one peril I fall into a worse danger and a more grievous." However, I took courage and walking along the wady, found that its soil was of diamond, the stone wherewith they pierce minerals and precious stones and porcelain and onyx, for that it is a dense stone and a dure, whereon neither iron nor hardhed hath effect, neither can we cut off aught therefrom nor break it, save by means of loadstone. Moreover, the valley swarmed with snakes and vipers, each big as a palm tree, that would have made but one gulp of an elephant. And they came out by night, hiding during the day lest the rocs and eagles pounce on them and tear them to pieces, as was their wont, why I wot not. And I repented of what I had

done and the Lord, I have made haste to bring destruction upon myself!" The day began to wane as I went along, and I looked about for a place where I might pass the night, being in fear of the serpents, and for my and I took no thought of meat and drink in my concern for my life. Presently, I caught sight of a cave near-hand, with a narrow doorway, so I entered, and seeing a great stone close to the mouth, I rolled it up and stopped the entrance, saying to myself, "I am safe here for the night, and as soon as it is day, I will go forth and see what Destiny will do." Then I looked within the cave and saw at the upper end a great serpent brooding on her eggs, at which my flesh quaked and my hair stood on end, but I raised my eyes to Heaven and, committing my case to fate and lot, abode all that night without sleep till daybreak, when I rolled back the stone from the mouth of the cave and went forth, staggering like a drunken man and giddy with watching and fear and hunger. As in this sore case I walked along the valley, behold, there fell down before me a slaughtered beast. But I saw no one, whereat I marveled with great marvel and presently remembered a story I had heard aforetime of traders and pilgrims and travelers— how the mountains where are the diamonds are full of perils and terrors, nor can any fare through them, but the merchants who traffic in diamonds have a device by which they obtain them; that is to say, they take a sheep and slaughter and skin it and cut it in pieces and cast them down from the mountaintops into the valley sole, where, the meat being fresh and sticky with blood, some of the gems cleave to it. Then they leave it till midday, when the eagles and vultures swoop down upon it and carry it in their claws to the mountain summits, whereupon the merchants come and shout at them and scare them away from the meat. Then they come, and taking the diamonds which they find sticking to it, go their ways with them and leave the meat to the birds and beasts, nor can any come at the diamonds

but by this device. So when I saw the slaughtered beast fall (he pursued) and bethought me of the story, I went up to it and filled my pockets and shawl girdle and turban and the folds of my clothes with the choicest diamonds, and as I was thus engaged, down fell before me another great piece of meat. Then with my unrolled turban and lying on my back, I set the bit on my breast so that I was hidden by the meat, which was thus raised above the ground. Hardly had I gripped it when an eagle swooped down upon the flesh and, seizing it with his talons, flew up with it high in air and me clinging thereto, and ceased not its flight till it alighted on the head of one of the mountains, where, dropping the carcass he fell to rending it. But, behold, there arose behind him a great noise of shouting and clattering of wood, whereat the bird took fright and flew away. Then I loosed off myself the meat, with clothes daubed with blood therefrom, and stood up by its side. Whereupon up came the merchant who had cried out at the eagle, and seeing me standing there, bespoke me not, but was affrighted at me and shook with fear. However, he went up to the carcass and, turning it over, found no diamonds sticking to it, whereat he gave a great cry and exclaimed: "Harrow, my disappointment! There is no Majesty and there is no Might save in the Lord with Whom we seek refuge from Satan the stoned!" And he bemoaned himself and beat hand upon hand, saying: "Alas, the pity of it! How cometh this?" Then I went up-to him and he said to me, "Who art thou, and what causeth thee to come hither?" And I: "Fear not, I am a man and a good man and a merchant. My story is a wondrous and my adventures marvelous and the manner of my coming hither is prodigious. So be of good cheer. Thou shalt receive of me what shall rejoice thee, for I have with me great plenty of diamonds and I will give thee thereof what shall suffice thee, for each is better than aught thou couldst get otherwise. So fear nothing." The man rejoiced thereat and thanked and blessed me. Then we talked

together till the other merchants, hearing me in discourse with their fellow, came up and saluted me, for each of them had thrown down his piece of meat. And as I went off with them and told them my whole story, how I had suffered hardships at sea and the fashion of my reaching the valley. But I gave the owner of the meat a number of the stones I had by me, so they all wished me joy of my escape, saying: "By the Lord, a new life hath been decreed to thee, for none ever reached yonder valley and came off thence alive before thee, but praised be the Lord for thy safety!" We passed the night together in a safe and pleasant place, beyond measure rejoiced at my deliverance from the valley of Serpents and my arrival in an inhabited land. And on the morrow we set out and journeyed over the mighty range of mountains, seeing many serpents in the valley, till we came to a fair great island wherein was a garden of huge champhor trees under each of which a hundred men might take shelter. When the folk have a mind to get camphor, they bore into the upper part of the bole with a long iron, whereupon the liquid camphor, which is the sap of the tree, floweth out and they catch it in vessels, where it concreteth like gum; but after this the tree dieth and becometh firewood. Moreover, there is in this island a kind of wild beast, called rhinoceros, that pastureth as do steers and buffaloes with us; but it is a huge brute, bigger of body than the camel, and like it feedeth upon the leaves and twigs of trees. It is a remarkable animal with a great and thick horn, ten cubits long, a-middleward its head, wherein, when cleft in twain, is the likeness of a man. Voyagers and pilgrims and travelers declare that this beast called karkadan will carry off a great elephant on its horn and graze about the island and the seacoast therewith and take no heed of it till the elephant dieth and its fat, melting in the sun, runneth down into the rhinoceros's eyes and blindeth him, so that he lieth down on the shore. Then comes the bird roc and carrieth off both the rhinoceros and

that which is on its horn, to feed its young withal. Moreover, I saw in this island many kinds of oxen and buffaloes, whose like are not found in our country. Here I sold some of the diamonds which I had by me for gold dinars and silver dirhams and bartered others for the produce of the country, and loading them upon beasts of burden, fared on with the merchants from valley to valley and town to town, buying and selling and viewing foreign countries and the works and creatures of the Lord till we came to Bassorah city, where we abode a few days, after which I continued my journey to Baghdad. I arrived at home with great store of diamonds and money and goods, and forgathered with my friends and relations and gave alms and largess and bestowed curious gifts and made presents to all my friends and companions. Then I betook myself to eating well and drinking well and wearing fine clothes and making merry with my fellows, and forgot all my sufferings in the pleasures of return to the solace and delight of life, with light heart and broadened breast. And everyone who heard of my return came and questioned me of my adventures and of foreign countries, and I related to them all that had befallen me, and the much I had suffered, whereat they wondered and gave me joy of my safe return. This, then, is the end of the story of my second voyage, and tomorrow, The Lord-willing! I will tell you what befell me in my third voyage. The company marveled at his story and supped with him, after which he ordered a hundred dinars of gold to be given to the porter, who took the sum with many thanks and blessings (which he stinted not even when he reached home) and went his way, wondering at what he had heard. Next morning as soon as day came in its sheen and shone, he rose and, praying the dawn prayer, repaired to the house of Sindbad the Sailor, even as he had bidden him, and went in and gave him good morrow. The merchant welcomed him and made him sit with him till the rest of the company arrived, and when they had well eaten

and drunken and were merry with joy and jollity, their host began by saying: Hearken, O my brothers, to what I am about to tell you, for it is even more wondrous than what you have already heard. But the Lord alone knoweth what things His Omniscience concealed from man! And listen to

