

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

[24]

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“The Sixth Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor”

Know, O my brothers and friends and companions all, that I abode some time, after my return from my fifth voyage, in great solace and satisfaction and mirth and merriment, joyance and enjoyment, and I forgot what I had suffered, seeing the great gain and profit I had made, till one day as I sat making merry and enjoying myself with my friends, there came in to me a company of merchants whose case told tales of travel, and talked with me of voyage and adventure and greatness of pelf and lucre. Hereupon I remembered the days of my return abroad, and my joy at once more seeing my native land and forgathering with my family and friends, and my soul yearned for travel and traffic. So, compelled by Fate and Fortune, I resolved to undertake another voyage, and, buying me fine and costly merchandise meet for foreign trade, made it up into bales, with which I journeyed from Baghdad to Bassorah. Here I found a great ship ready for sea and full of merchants and notables, who had with them goods of price, so I embarked my bales therein. And we left Bassorah in safety and good spirits under the safeguard of the King, the Preserver, and continued our voyage from place to place and from city to city, buying and selling and profiting and diverting ourselves with the sight of countries where strange folk

dwell. And Fortune and the voyage smiled upon us till one day, as we went along, behold, the captain suddenly cried with a great cry and cast his turban on the deck. Then he buffeted his face like a woman and plucked out his beard and fell down in the waist of the ship well-nigh fainting for stress of grief and rage, and crying, "Oh, and alas for the ruin of my house and the orphanship of my poor children!" So all the merchants and sailors came round about him and asked him, "O master, what is the matter?" For the light had become night before, their sight. And he answered, saying: "Know, O folk, that we have wandered from our course and left the sea whose ways we wot, and come into a sea whose ways I know not, and unless the Lord vouchsafe us a means of escape, we are all dead men. Wherefore pray ye to the Most High that He deliver us from this strait. Haply amongst you is one righteous whose prayers the Lord will accept." Then he arose and clomb the mast to see an there were any escape from that strait. And he would have loosed the sails, but the wind redoubled upon the ship and whirled her round thrice and drave her backward, whereupon her rudder brake and she fell off toward a high mountain. With this the captain came down from the mast, saying: "There is no Majesty and there is no Might save in the Lord, the Glorious, the Great, nor can man prevent that which is foreordained of Fate! By the Lord, we are fallen on a place of sure destruction, and there is no way of escape for us, nor can any of us be saved!" Then we all fill a-weeping over ourselves and bidding one another farewell for that our days were come to an end, and we had lost an hopes of life. Presently the ship struck the mountain and broke up, and all and everything on board of her were plunged into the sea. Some of the merchants were drowned and others made shift to reach the shore and save themselves upon the mountain, I amongst the number. And when we got ashore, we found a great island, or rather peninsula, whose base

was strewn with wreckage and crafts and goods and gear cast up by the sea from broken ships whose passengers had been drowned, and the quantity confounded count and calculation. So I climbed the cliffs into the inward of the isle and walked on inland till I came to a stream of sweet water that welled up at the nearest foot of the mountains and disappeared in the earth under the range of hills on the opposite side. But all the other passengers went over the mountains to the inner tracts, and, dispersing hither and thither, were confounded at what they saw and became like madmen at the sight of the wealth and treasures wherewith the shores were strewn. As for me, I looked into the bed of the stream aforesaid and saw therein great plenty of rubies, and great royal pearls and all kinds of jewels and precious stones, which were as gravel in the bed of the rivulets that ran through the fields, and the sands sparkled and glittered with gems and precious ores. Moreover, we found in the island abundance of the finest lign aloes, both Chinese and Comorin. And there also is a spring of crude ambergris, which floweth like wax or gum over the stream banks, for the great heat of the sun, and runneth down to the seashore, where the monsters of the deep come up and, swallowing it, return into the sea. But it burneth in their bellies, so they cast it up again and it congealeth on the surface of the water, whereby its color and quantities are changed, and at last the waves cast it ashore, and the travelers and merchants who know it collect it and sell it. But as to the raw ambergris which is not swallowed, it floweth over the channel and congealeth on the banks, and when the sun shineth on it, it melteth and scenteth the whole valley with a musk-like fragrance. Then when the sun ceaseth from it, it congealeth again. But none can get to this place where is the crude ambergris, because of the mountains which enclose the island on all sides and which foot of man cannot ascend. We continued thus to explore the island, marveling at the wonderful works of the Lord

and the riches we found there, but sore troubled for our own case, and dismayed at our prospects. Now we had picked up on the beach some small matter of victual from the wreck and husbanded it carefully eating but once every day or two, in our fear lest it should fail us and we die miserably of famine and affright. Moreover, we were weak for colic brought on by seasickness and low diet, and my companions deceased, one after other, till there was but a small company of us left. Each that died we washed and shrouded in some of the clothes and linen cast ashore by the tides, and after a little, the rest of my fellows perished one by one, till I had buried the last of the party and abode alone on the island, with but a little provision left, I who was wont to have so much. And I wept over myself, saying: "Would Heaven I had died before my companions and they had washed me and buried me! It had been better than I should perish and none wash me and shroud me and bury me. But there is no Majesty and there is no Might save in the Lord, the glorious, the Great!" Now after I had buried the last of my party and abode alone on the island, I arose and dug me a deep grave on the seashore, saying to myself: "Whenas I grow weak and know that death cometh to me, I will cast myself into the grave and die there, so the wind may drift the sand over me and cover me and I be buried therein." Then I fell to reproaching myself for my little wit in leaving my native land and betaking me again to travel after all I had suffered during my first five voyages, and when I had not made a single one without suffering more horrible perils and more terrible hardships than in its forerunners, and having no hope of escape from my present stress. And I repented me of my folly and bemoaned myself, especially as I had no need of money, seeing that I had enough and could not spend what I had— no, nor a half of it in all my life. However, after a while the Lord sent me a thought, and I said to myself: "By God, needs must this stream have an end as well as a beginning, ergo an issue

somewhere, and belike its course may lead to some inhabited place. So my best plan is to make me a little boat big enough to sit in, and carry it and, launching it on the river, embark therein and drop down the stream. If I escape, I escape, by God's leave, and if I perish, better die in the river than here." Then, sighing for myself, I set to work collecting a number of pieces of Chinese and Comorin aloes wood and I bound them together with ropes from the wreckage. Then I chose out from the broken-up ships straight planks of even size and fixed them firmly upon the aloes wood, making me a boat raft a little narrower than the channel of the stream, and I tied it tightly and firmly as though it were nailed. Then I loaded it with the goods, precious ores and jewels, and the union pearls which were like gravel, and the best of the ambergris crude and pure, together with what I had collected on the island and what was left me of victual and wild herbs. Lastly I lashed a piece of wood on either side, to serve me as oars, and launched it, and embarking, did according to the saying of the poet: Fly, fly with life whenas evils threat, Leave the house to tell of its builder's fate! Land after land shalt thou seek and find, But no other life on thy wish shall wait. Fret not thy soul in thy thoughts o' night, All woes shall end or sooner or late. Whoso is born in one land to die, There and only there shall gang his pit. Nor trust great things to another wight, Soul hath only soul for confederate. My boat raft drifted with the stream, I pondering the issue of my affair, and the drifting ceased not till I came to the place where it disappeared beneath the mountain. I rowed my conveyance into the place, which was intensely dark, and the current carried the raft with it down the underground channel. The thin stream bore me on through a narrow tunnel where the raft touched either side and my head rubbed against the roof, return therefrom being impossible. Then I blamed myself for having thus risked my life, and said, "If this passage grow any straiter, the raft will hardly

pass, and I cannot turn back, so I shall inevitably perish miserably in this place." And I threw myself down upon my face on the raft, by reason of the narrowness of the channel, whilst the stream ceased not to carry me along, knowing not night from day for the excess of the gloom which encompassed me about and my terror and concern for myself lest I should perish. And in such condition my course continued down the channel, which now grew wider and then straiter. Sore a-weary by reason of the darkness which could be felt, I feel asleep as I lay prone on the craft, and I slept knowing not an the time were long or short. When I awoke at last, I found myself in the light of Heaven and opening my eyes, I saw myself in a broad of the stream and the raft moored to an island in the midst of a number of Indians and Abyssinians. As soon as these blackamoors saw that I was awake, they came up to me and bespoke me in their speech. But I understood not what they said and thought that this was a dream and a vision which had betided me for stress of concern and chagrin. But I was delighted at my escape from the river. When they saw I understood them not and made them no answer, one of them came forward and said to me in Arabic: "Peace be with thee, O my brother! Who art thou, and whence faredst thou hither? How camest thou into this river, and what manner of land lies behind yonder mountains, for never knew we anyone make his way thence to us?" Quoth I: "And upon thee be peace and the ruth of the Lord and His blessing! Who are ye, and what country is this?" "O my brother," answered he, "we are husbandmen and tillers of the soil, who came out to water our fields and plantations, and finding thee asleep on this raft, laid hold of it and made it fast by us, against thou shouldst awake at thy leisure. So tell us how thou camest hither." I answered, "For the Lord's sake, O my lord, ere I speak give me somewhat to eat, for I am starving, and after ask me what thou wilt." So he hastened to fetch me food and I ate my fill, till I was

refreshed and my fear was calmed by a good bellyful and my life returned to me. Then I rendered thanks to the Most High for mercies great and small, glad to be out of the river and rejoicing to be amongst them, and I told them all my adventures from first to last, especially my troubles in the narrow channel. They consulted among themselves and said to one another, "There is no help for it but we carry him with us and present him to our King, that he may acquaint him with his adventures." So they took me, together with raft boat and its lading of moneys and merchandise, jewels, minerals, and golden gear, and brought me to their King, who was King of Sarandib, telling him what had happened. Whereupon he saluted me and bade me welcome. Then he questioned me of my condition and adventures through the man who had spoken Arabic, and I repeated to him my story from beginning to end, whereat he marveled exceedingly and gave me joy of my deliverance. After which I arose and fetched from the raft great store of precious ores and jewels and ambergris and lip aloes and presented them to the King, who accepted them and entreated me with the utmost honor, appointing me a lodging in his own palace. So I consorted with the chief of the islanders, and they paid me the utmost respect. And I quitted not the royal palace. Now the Island Sarandib lieth under the equinoctial line, its night and day both numbering twelve hours. It measureth eighty leagues long by a breadth of thirty and its width is bounded by a lofty mountain and a deep valley. The mountain is conspicuous from a distance of three days, and it containeth many kinds of, rubies and other minerals, and spice trees of all sorts. The surface is covered with emery, wherewith gems are cut and fashioned; diamonds are in its rivers and pearls are in its valleys. I ascended that mountain and solaced myself with a view of its marvels, which are indescribable, and afterward I returned to the King. Thereupon all the travelers and merchants who came to the place questioned

me of the affairs of my native land and of the King Harun al-Rashid and his rule, and I told them of him and of that wherefor he was renowned, and they praised him because of this, whilst I in turn questioned them of the manners and customs of their own countries and got the knowledge I desired. One day the King himself asked me of the fashions and form of government of my country, and I acquainted him with the circumstance of the King's sway in the city of Baghdad and the justice of his rule. The King marveled at my account of his appointments and said: "By the Lord, the King's ordinances are indeed wise and his fashions of praiseworthy guise, and thou hast made me love him by what thou tellest me. Wherefore I have a mind to make him a present and send it by thee." Quoth I: "Hearkening and obedience, O my lord. I will bear thy gift to him and inform him that thou art his sincere lover and true friend." Then I abode with the King in great honor and regard and consideration for a long while till one day, as I sat in his palace, I heard news of a company of merchants that were fitting out ship for Bassorah, and said to myself, "I cannot do better than voyage with these men." So I rose without stay or delay and kissed the King's hand and acquainted him with my longing to set out with the merchants, for that I pined after my people and mine own land. Quoth he, "Thou art thine own master, yet if it be thy will to abide with us, on our head and eyes be it, for thou gladdenest us with thy company." "By the Lord, O my lord," answered I, "thou hast indeed overwhelmed me with thy favors and well-doings, but I weary for a sight of my friends and family and native country." When he heard this, he summoned the merchants in question and commended me to their care, paying my freight and passage money. Then he bestowed on me great riches from his treasuries and charged me with a magnificent present for the King Harun al-Rashid. Moreover, he gave me a sealed letter, saying, "Carry this with thine own hand to the Commander of the Faithful, and

give him many salutations from us!" "Hearing and obedience," I replied. The missive was written on the skin of the khawi (which is finer than lamb parchment and of yellow color), with ink of ultramarine, and the contents were as follows: "Peace be with thee from the King of Al-Hind, before whom are a thousand elephants and upon whose palace crenelles are a thousand jewels. But after (laud to the Lord and praises to His Prophet!) we send thee a trifling gift, which be thou pleased to accept. Thou art to us a brother and a sincere friend, and great is the love we bear for thee in heart. Favor us therefore with a reply. The gift besitteth not thy dignity, but we beg of thee, O our brother, graciously to accept it, and peace be with thee." And the present was a cup of ruby a span high, the inside of which was adorned with precious pearls; and a bed covered with the skin of the serpent which swalloweth the elephant, which skin hath spots each like a dinar and whoso sitteth upon it never sickeneth; and a hundred thousand miskals of Indian lign aloes and a slave girl like a shining moon. Then I took leave of him and of all my intimates and acquaintances in the island, and embarked with the merchants aforesaid. We sailed with a fair wind, committing ourselves to the care of the Lord (be He extolled and exalted!), and by His permission arrived at Bassorah, where I passed a few days and nights equipping myself and packing up my bales. Then I went on to Baghdad city, the House of Peace, where I sought an audience of the King and laid the King's presents before him. He asked me whence they came, and I said to him, "By the Lord, O Commander of the Faithful, I know not the name of the city nor the way thither!" He then asked me, "O Sindbad, is this true which the King writeth?" and I answered, after kissing the ground: "O my lord, I saw in his kingdom much more than he hath written in his letter. For state processions a throne is set for him upon a huge elephant eleven cubits high, and upon this he sitteth having

his great lords and officers and guests standing in two ranks, on his right hand and on his left. At his head is a man hending in hand a golden javelin and behind him another with a great mace of gold whose head is an emerald a span long and as thick as a man's thumb. And when he mounteth horse there mount with him a thousand horsemen clad in gold brocade and silk, and as the King proceedeth a man precedeth him, crying, 'This is the King of great dignity, of high authority!' And he continueth to repeat his praises in words I remember not, saying at the end of his panegyric, 'This is the King owning the crown whose like nor Solomon nor the Mihraj ever possessed.' Then he is silent and one behind him proclaimeth, saying, 'He will die! Again I say he will die!' and the other addeth, 'Extolled be the perfection of the Living who dieth not!' Moreover, by reason of his justice and ordinance and intelligence, there is no kazi in his city, and all his lieges distinguish between truth and falsehood." Quoth the King: "How great is this King! His letter hath shown me this, and as for the mightiness of his dominion thou hast told us what thou hast eyewitnessed. By the Lord, he hath been endowed with wisdom, as with wide rule." Then I related to the Commander of the Faithful all that had befallen me in my last voyage, at which he wondered exceedingly and bade his historians record my story and store it up in his treasuries, for the edification of all who might see it. Then he conferred on me exceeding great favors, and I repaired to my quarter and entered my home, where I warehoused all my goods and possessions. Presently my friends came to me and I distributed presents among my family and gave alms and largess, after which I yielded myself to joyance and enjoyment, mirth and merrymaking, and forgot all that I had suffered. Such, then, O my brothers, is the history of what befell me in my sixth voyage, and tomorrow, The Lord-willing! I will tell you the story of my seventh and last voyage, which is still more wondrous and marvelous than

that of the first six. (Saith he who telleth the tale): Then he bade lay the table, and the company supped with him, after which he gave the porter a hundred dinars, as of wont, and they all went their ways, marveling beyond measure at that which they had heard. Sindbad the Landsman went home and slept as of wont. Next day he rose and prayed the dawn prayer and repaired to his namesake's house, where, after the company was all assembled, the host began to relate

