

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

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“The Seventh Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor”

Know, O company, that after my return from my sixth voyage, which brought me abundant profit, I resumed my former life in all possible joyance and enjoyment and mirth and making merry day and night. And I tarried sometime in this solace and satisfaction, till my soul began once more to long to sail the seas and see foreign countries and company with merchants and hear new things. So, having made up my mind, I packed up in bales a quantity of precious stuffs suited for sea trade and repaired with them from Baghdad city to Bassorah town, where I found a ship ready for sea, and in her a company of considerable merchants. I shipped with them and, becoming friends, we set forth on our venture in health and safety, and sailed with a wind till we came to a city called Madinat-al-Sin. But after we had left it, as we fared on in all cheer and confidence, devising of traffic and travel, behold, there sprang up a violent head wind and a tempest of rain fell on us and drenched us and our goods. So we covered the bales with our cloaks and garments and druggot and canvas, lest they be spoiled by the rain, and betook ourselves to prayer and supplication to Almighty the Lord, and humbled ourselves before Him for deliverance from the peril that was upon us. But the captain arose and, tightening his girdle, tucked up his

skirts, and after taking refuge with the Lord from Satan the Stoned, clomb to the masthead, whence he looked out right and left, and gazing at the passengers and crew, fell to buffeting his face and plucking out his beard. So we cried to him, "O Rais, what is the matter?" and he replied, saying: "Seek ye deliverance of the Most High from the strait into which we have fallen, and bemoan yourselves and take leave of one another. For know that the wind hath gotten the mastery of us, and hath driven us into the uttermost of the seas world." Then he came down from the masthead and opening his sea chest, pulled but a bag of blue cotton, from which he took a powder like ashes. This he set in a saucer wetted with a little water, and after waiting a short time, smelt and tasted it. And then he took out of the chest a booklet, wherein he read awhile, and said, weeping: "Know, O ye passengers, that in this book is a marvelous matter, denoting that whoso cometh hither shall surely die, without hope of escape. For that this ocean is called the Sea of the Clime of the King, wherein is the sepulcher of our lord Solomon, son of David (on both be peace!), and therein are serpents of vast bulk and fearsome aspect. And what ship soever cometh to these climes, there riseth to her a great fish out of the sea and swalloweth her up with all and everything on board her." Hearing these words from the captain, great was our wonder, but hardly had he made an end of speaking when the ship was lifted out of the water and let fall again, and we applied to praying the death prayer and committing our souls to the Lord. Presently we heard a terrible great cry like the loud-pealing thunder whereat we were terror-struck and became as dead men, giving ourselves up for lost. Then, behold, there came up to us a huge fish, as big as a tall mountain, at whose sight we became wild for affright and, weeping sore, made ready for death, marveling at its vast size and gruesome semblance. When lo! a second fish made its appearance, than which we had seen naught more

monstrous. So we bemoaned ourselves of our lives and farewelled one another. But suddenly up came a third fish bigger than the two first, whereupon we lost the power of thought and reason and were stupefied for the excess of our fear and horror. Then the three fish began circling round about the ship and the third and biggest opened his mouth to swallow it, and we looked into its mouth and, behold, it was wider than the gate of a city and its throat was like a long valley. So we besought the Almighty and called for succor upon His Apostle (on whom be blessing and peace!), when suddenly a violent squall of wind arose and smote the ship, which rose out of the water and settled upon a great reef, the haunt of sea monsters, where it broke up and fell asunder into planks, and all and everything on board were plunged into the sea. As for me, I tore off all my clothes but my gown, and swam a little way, till I happened upon one of the ship's planks, whereto I clung and bestrode it like a horse, whilst the winds and the waters sported with me and the waves carried me up and cast me down. And I was in most piteous plight for fear and distress and hunger and thirst. Then I reproached myself for what I had done and my soul was weary after a life of ease and comfort, and I said to myself: "O Sindbad, O Sailor, thou repentest not and yet thou art ever suffering hardships and travails, yet wilt thou not renounce sea travel, or an thou say, 'I renounce,' thou liest in thy renouncement. Endure then with patience that which thou sufferest, for verily thou deservest all that betideth thee!" And I ceased not to humble myself before Almighty the Lord and weep and bewail myself, recalling my former estate of solace and satisfaction and mirth and merriment and joyance. And thus I abode two days, at the end of which time I came to a great island abounding in trees and streams. There I landed and ate of the fruits of the island and drank of its waters, till I was refreshed and my life returned to me and my strength and spirits were restored

and I recited: "Oft when thy case shows knotty and tangled skein, Fate downs from Heaven and straightens every ply. In patience keep thy soul till clear thy lot, For He who ties the knot can eke untie." Then I walked about till I found on the further side a great river of sweet water, running with a strong current, whereupon I called to mind the boat raft I had made aforetime and said to myself: "Needs must I make another. Haply I may free me from this strait. If I escape, I have my desire and I vow to the Lord Almighty to foreswear travel. And if I perish, I shall be at peace and shall rest from toil and moil." So I rose up and gathered together great store of pieces of wood from the trees (which were all of the finest sandalwood, whose like is not albe' I knew it not), and made shift to twist creepers and tree twigs into a kind of rope, with which I bound the billets together and so contrived a raft. Then saying, "An I be saved, 'tis of God's grace," I embarked thereon and committed myself to the current, and it bore me on for the first day and the second and the third after leaving the island whilst I lay in the raft, eating not and drinking, when I was athirst, of the water of the river, till I was weak and giddy as a chicken for stress of fatigue and famine and fear. At the end of this time I came to a high mountain, whereunder ran the river, which when I saw, I feared for my life by reason of the straitness I had suffered in my former journey, and I would fain have stayed the raft and landed on the mountainside. But the current overpowered me and drew it into the subterranean passage like an archway, whereupon I gave myself up for lost and said, "There is no Majesty and there is no Might save in the Lord, the Glorious, the Great!" However, after a little the raft glided into open air and I saw before me a wide valley, whereinto the river fell with a noise like the rolling of thunder and a swiftness as the rushing of the wind. I held onto the raft, for fear of falling off it, whilst the waves tossed me right and left, and the craft continued to descend

with the current, nor could I avail to stop it nor turn it shoreward till it stopped me at a great and goodly city, grandly edified and containing much people. And when the townfolk saw me on the raft, dropping down with the current, they threw me out ropes, which I had not strength enough to hold. Then they tossed a net over the craft and drew it ashore with me, whereupon I fell to the ground amidst them, as I were a dead man, for stress of fear and hunger and lack of sleep. After a while, there came up to me out of the crowd an old man of reverend aspect, well stricken in years, who welcomed me and threw over me abundance of handsome clothes, wherewith I covered my nakedness. Then he carried me to the hammam bath and brought me cordial sherbets and delicious perfumes. Moreover, when I came out, he bore me to his house, where his people made much of me and, seating me in a pleasant place, set rich food before me, whereof I ate my fill and returned thanks to God the Most High for my deliverance. Thereupon his pages fetched me hot water, and I washed my hands, and his handmaids brought me silken napkins, with which I dried them and wiped my mouth. Also the Sheikh set apart for me an apartment in a part of his house, and charged his pages and slave girls to wait upon me and do my will and supply my wants. They were assiduous in my service, and I abode with him in the guest chamber three days, taking my ease of good eating and good drinking and good scents till life returned to me and my terrors subsided and my heart was calmed and my mind was eased. On the fourth day the Sheikh, my host, came in to me and said: "Thou cheerest us with thy company, O my son, and praised be the Lord for thy safety! Say, wilt thou now come down with me to the beach and the bazaar and sell thy goods and take their price? Belike thou mayest buy thee wherewithal to traffic. I have ordered my servants to remove thy stock in trade from the sea, and they have piled it on the shore." I was silent awhile and

said to myself, "What mean these words, and what goods have I?" Then said he: "O my son, be not troubled nor careful, but come with me to the market, and if any offer for thy goods what price contenteth thee, take it. But an thou be not satisfied, I lay em up for thee in my warehouse, against a fitting occasion for sale." So I bethought me of my case and said to myself, "Do his bidding and see what are these goods!" and I said to him: "O my nuncle the Sheikh I hear and obey. I may not gainsay thee in aught, for the Lord's blessing is on all thou dost." Accordingly he guided me to the market street, where I found that he had taken in pieces the raft which carried me and which was of sandalwood, and I heard the broker crying it for sale. Then the merchants came and opened the gate of bidding for the wood and bid against one another till its price reached a thousand dinars, when they left bidding and my host said to me: "Hear, O my son, this is the current price of thy goods in hard times like these. Wilt thou sell them for this, or shall I lay them up for thee in my storehouses till such time as prices rise?" "O my lord," answered I, "the business is in thy hands. Do as thou wilt." Then asked he: "Wilt thou sell the wood to me, O my son, for a hundred gold pieces over and above what the merchants have bidden for it?" and I answered, "Yes, I have sold it to thee for monies received." So he bade his servants transport the wood to his storehouses, and, carrying me back to his house, seated me, and counted out to me the purchase money. After which he laid it in bags and, setting them in a privy place, locked them up with an iron padlock and gave me its key. Some days after this the Sheikh said to me, "O my son, I have somewhat to propose to thee, wherein I trust thou wilt do my bidding." Quoth I, "What is it?" Quoth he: "I am a very old man, and have no son, but I have a daughter who is young in years and fair of favor and endowed with abounding wealth and beauty. Now I have a mind to marry her to thee, that thou mayest abide with her in this our

country. And I will make, thee master of all I have in hand, for I am an old man and thou shalt stand in my stead." I was silent for shame and made him no answer, whereupon he continued: "Do my desire in this, O my son, for I wish but thy weal. And if thou wilt but as I say, thou shalt have her at once and be as my son, and all that is under my hand or that cometh to me shall be thine. If thou have a mind to traffic and travel to thy native land, none shall hinder thee, and thy property will be at thy sole disposal. So do as thou wilt." "By the Lord, O my uncle," replied I, "thou art become to me even as my father, and I am a stranger and have undergone many hardships, while for stress of that which I have suffered naught of judgment or knowledge is left to me. It is for thee, therefore, to decide what I shall do." Hereupon he sent his servants for the kazi and the witnesses and married me to his daughter, making for us a noble marriage feast and high festival. When I went in to her, I found her perfect in beauty and loveliness and symmetry and grace, clad in rich raiment and covered with a profusion of ornaments and necklaces and other trinkets of gold and silver and precious stones, worth a mint of money, a price none could pay. She pleased me, and we loved each other, and I abode with her in all solace and delight of life till her father was taken to the mercy of the Lord Almighty. So we shrouded him and buried him, and I laid hands on the whole of his property and all his servants and slaves became mine. Moreover, the merchants installed me in his office, for he was their sheikh and their chief, and none of them purchased aught but with his knowledge and by his leave. And now his rank passed on to me. When I became acquainted with the townsfolk, I found that at the beginning of each month they were transformed, in that their faces changed and they became like unto birds and they put forth wings wherewith they flew unto the upper regions of the firmament; and none remained in the city save the women and children. And I said in my mind,

“When the first of the month cometh, I will ask one of them to carry me with them, whither they go.” So when the time came and their complexion changed and their forms altered, I went in to one of the townsfolk and said to him: “the Lord upon thee! Carry me with thee, that I might divert myself with the rest and return with you.” “This may not be,” answered he. But I ceased not to solicit him, and I importuned him till he consented. Then I went out in his company, without telling any of my family or servants or friends, and he took me on his back and flew up with me so high in air that I heard the angels glorifying God in the heavenly dome, whereat I wondered and exclaimed: “Praised be the Lord! Extolled be the perfection of the Lord!” Hardly had I made an end of pronouncing the tasbih — praised be the Lord!— when there came out a fire from Heaven and all but consumed the company. Whereupon they fled from it and descended with curses upon me and, casting me down on a high mountain, went away exceeding wroth with me, and left me there alone. As I found myself in this plight, I repented of what I had done and reproached myself for having undertaken that for which I was unable, saying: “There is no Majesty and there is no Might save in the Lord, the Glorious, the Great! No sooner am I delivered from one affliction than I fall into a worse.” And I continued in this case, knowing not whither I should go, when lo! there came up two young men, as they were moons, each using as a staff a rod of red gold. So I approached them and saluted them; and when they returned my salaam, I said to them: the Lord upon you twain. Who are ye, and what are ye?” Quoth they, “We are of the servants of the Most High the Lord, abiding in this mountain,” and giving me a rod of red gold they had with them, went their ways and left me. I walked on along the mountain ridge, staying my steps with the staff and pondering the case of the two youths, when behold, a serpent came forth from under the mountain, with a man in her jaws whom she had swallowed even to

below his navel, and he was crying out and saying, "Whoso delivereth me, the Lord will deliver him from all adversity!" So I went up to the the serpent and smote her on the head with the golden staff, whereupon she cast the man forth of her mouth. Then I smote her a second time, and she turned and fled, whereupon he came up to me and said, "Since my deliverance from yonder serpent hath been at thy hands I will never leave thee, and thou shalt be my comrade on this mountain." "And welcome," answered I. So we fared on along the mountain till we fell in with a company of folk, and I looked and saw amongst them the very man who had carried me and cast me down there. I went up to him and spake him fair, excusing to him and saying, "O my comrade, it is not thus that friend should deal with friend." Quoth he, "It was thou who well-nigh destroyed us by thy tasbih and thy glorifying God on my back." Quoth I, "Pardon me, for I had no knowledge of this matter, but if thou wilt take me with thee, I swear not to say a word." So he relented and consented to carry me with him, but he made an express condition that so long as I abode on his back, I should abstain from pronouncing the tasbih or otherwise glorifying God. Then I gave the wand of gold to him whom I had delivered from the serpent and bade him farewell, and my friend took me on his back and flew with me as before, till he brought me to the city and set me down in my own house. My wife came to meet me and, saluting me, gave me joy of my safety and then said: "Beware of going forth hereafter with yonder folk, neither consort with them, for they are brethren of the devils, and know not how to mention the name of the Lord Almighty, neither worship they Him." "And how did thy father with them?" asked I, and she answered: "My father was not of them, neither did he as they. And as now he is dead, methinks thou hadst better sell all we have and with the price buy merchandise and journey to thine own country and people, and I with thee; for I care not to tarry in this

city, my father and my mother being dead." So I sold all the Sheikh's property piecemeal, and looked for one who should be journeying thence to Bassorah that I might join myself to him. And while thus doing I heard of a company of townsfolk who had a mind to make the voyage but could not find them a ship, so they bought wood and built them a great ship, wherein I took passage with them, and paid them all the hire. Then we embarked, I and my wife, with all our movables, leaving our houses and domains and so forth, and set sail, and ceased not sailing from island to island and from sea to sea, with a fair wind and a favoring, till we arrived at Bassorah safe and sound. I made no stay there, but freighted another vessel and, transferring my goods to her, set out forthright for Baghdad city, where I arrived in safety, and entering my quarter and repairing to my house, forgathered with my family and friends and familiars and laid up my goods in my warehouses. When my people, who, reckoning the period of my absence on this my seventh voyage, had found it to be seven and twenty years and had given up all hope of me, heard of my return, they came to welcome me and to give me joy of my safety. And I related to them all that had befallen me, whereat they marveled with exceeding marvel. Then I foreswore travel and vowed to the Lord the Most High I would venture no more by land or sea, for that this seventh and last voyage had surfeited me of travel and adventure, and I thanked the Lord (be He praised and glorified!), and blessed Him for having restored me to my kith and kin and country and home. "Consider, therefore, O Sindbad, O Landsman," continued Sindbad the Sailor, "what sufferings I have undergone and what perils and hardships I have endured before coming to my present state." "the Lord upon thee, O my Lord!" answered Sindbad the, Landsman. "Pardon me the wrong I did thee." And they ceased not from friendship and fellowship, abiding in all cheer and pleasures and solace of life till there came to them the Destroyer of

delights and the Sunderer of Societies, and the Shatterer of
palaces and the Caterer for Cemeteries; to wit, the Cup of
Death, and glory be to the Living One who dieth not! And
there is a tale touching

