

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

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“The Lady and Her Five Suitors”

A woman of the daughters of the merchants was married to a man who was a great traveler. It chanced once that he set out for a far country and was absent so long that his wife, for pure ennui, fell in love with a handsome young man of the sons of the merchants, and they loved each other with exceeding love. One day the youth quarreled with another man, who lodged a complaint against him with the Chief of Police, and he cast into prison. When the news came to the merchant's wife his mistress, she well-nigh lost her wits. Then she arose and donning her richest clothes, repaired to the house of the Chief of Police. She saluted him and presented a written petition to this purport: “He thou hast clapped in jail is my brother Such-and-such, who fell out with Such-a-one, and those who testified against him bore false witness. He hath been wrongfully imprisoned, and I have none other to come in to me nor to provide for my support, therefore I beseech thee of thy grace to release him.” When the magistrate had read the paper, he cast his eyes on her and fell in love with her forthright, so he said to her: “Go into the houses till I bring him before me. Then I will send for thee and thou shalt take him.” “O my lord,” replied she, “I have none to protect me save Almighty the Lord! I am a stranger and may not enter any man's abode.”

Quoth the Wali, "I will not let him go except thou come to my home and I take my will of thee." Rejoined she, "If it must be so, thou must needs come to my lodging and sit and sleep the siesta and rest the whole day there." "And where is thy abode?" asked he, and she answered, "In such a place," and appointed him for such a time. Then she went out from him, leaving his heart taken with love of her, and she repaired to the Kazi of the city, to whom she said, "O our lord the Kazi!" He exclaimed, "Yes!" and she continued, "Look into my case, and thy reward be with the Lord the Most High!" Quoth he, "Who hath wronged thee?" and quoth she, "O my lord, I have a brother and I have none but that one, and it is on his account that I come to thee, because the Wali hath imprisoned him for a criminal and men have borne false witness against him that he is a wrongdoer, and I beseech thee to intercede for him with the Chief of Police." When the Kazi looked on her, he fell in love with her forthright and said to her: "Enter the house and rest awhile with my handmaids whilst I send to the Wali to release thy brother. If I knew the money fine which is upon him, I would pay it out of my own purse, so I may have my desire of thee, for thou pleaseth me with thy sweet speech." Quoth she, "If thou, O my lord, do thus, we must not blame others." Quoth he, "An thou wilt not come in, wend thy ways." Then said she, "An thou wilt have it so, O our lord, it will be privier and better in my place than in thine, for here are slave girls and eunuchs and goers-in and comers-out, and indeed I am a woman who wotteth naught of this fashion, but need compelleth." Asked the Kazi, "And where is thy house?" and she answered, "In such a place," and appointed him for the same day and time as the Chief of Police. Then she went out from him to the Vizier, to whom she preferred her petition for the release from prison of her brother, who was absolutely necessary to her. But he also required her of herself, saying, "Suffer me to have my will of thee and I will set thy brother free." Quoth she: "An

thou wilt have it so, be it in my house, for there it will be privier both for me and for thee. It is not far distant, and thou knowest that which behooveth us women of cleanliness and adornment." Asked he, "Where is thy house?" "In such a place," answered she, and appointed him for the same time as the two others. Then she went out from him to the King of the city and told him her story and sought of him her brother's release. "Who imprisoned him?" enquired he, and she replied, "'Twas thy Chief of Police." When the King heard her speech, it transpierced his heart with the arrows of love and he bade her enter the palace with him, that he might send to the Kazi and release her brother. Quoth she: "O King, this thing is easy to thee, whether I will or nill, and if the King will indeed have this of me, it is of my good fortune. But if he come to my house, he will do me the more honor by setting step therein, even as saith the poet: "O my friends, have ye seen or have ye heard Of his visit whose virtues I hold so high?" Quoth the King, "We will not cross thee in this." So she appointed him for the same time as the three others, and told him where her house was. Then she left him, and betaking herself to man which was a carpenter, said to him: "I would have thee make me a cabinet with four compartments one above other, each with its door for locking up. Let me know thy hire and I will give it thee." Replied he: "My price will be four dinars. But, O noble lady and well-protected, if thou wilt vouchsafe me thy favors, I will ask nothing of thee. Rejoined she, "An there be no help but that thou have it so, then make thou five compartments with their padlocks." And she appointed him to bring it exactly on the day required. Said he, "It is well. Sit down, O my lady, and I will make it for thee forthright, and after I will come to thee at my leisure." So she sat down by him whilst he fell to work on the cabinet, and when he had made an end of it, she chose to see it at once carried home and set up in the sitting chamber. Then she took four gowns and carried

them to the dyer, who dyed them each of a different color, after which she applied herself to making ready meat and drink, fruits, flowers, and perfumes. Now when the appointed trysting day came, she donned her costliest dress and adorned herself and scented herself, then spread the sitting room with various kinds of rich carpets, and sat down to await who should come. And behold, the Kazi was the first to appear, devancing rest, and when she saw him, she rose to her feet and kissed the ground before him, then, taking him by the hand, made him sit down by her on the couch and lay with him and fell to jesting and toying with him. By and by he would have her do his desire, but she said, "O my lord, doff thy clothes and turban and assume this yellow cassock and this headkerchief, whilst I bring thee meat and drink, and after thou shalt win thy will." So saying, she took his clothes and turban and clad him in the cassock and the kerchief. But hardly she done this when lo! there came a knocking at the door. Asked he, "Who is that rapping at the door?" and she answered, "My husband." Quoth the Kazi, "What is to be done, and where shall I go?" Quoth she, "Fear nothing. I will hide thee in this cabinet," and he, "Do as seemeth good to thee." So she took him by the hand and pushing him into the lowest compartment, locked the door upon him. Then she went to the house door, where she found the Wali, so she bussed ground before him and taking his hand, brought him into the saloon, where, she made him sit down and said to him: "O my lord, this house is thy house, this place is thy place, and I am thy handmaid. Thou shalt pass all this day with me, wherefore do thou doff thy clothes and don this red gown, for it is a sleeping gown." So she took away his clothes and made him assume the red gown and set on his head an old patched rag she had by her. After which she sat by him on the divan and she sported with him while he toyed with her awhile, till he put out his hand to her. Whereupon she said to him: "O our lord, this day is thy day and none shall share

in it with thee. But first, of thy favor and benevolence, write me an order for my brother's release from gaol, that my heart may be at ease." Quoth he, "Hearkening and obedience. On my head and eyes be it!" and wrote a letter to his treasurer, saying: "As soon as this communication shall reach thee, do thou set Such-a-one, free, without stay or delay, neither answer the bearer a word." Then he sealed it and she took it from him, after which she began to toy again with him on the divan when, behold, someone knocked at the door. He asked, "Who is that?" and she answered, "My husband." "What shall I do?" said he, and she, "Enter this cabinet, till I send him away and return to thee." So she clapped him into the second compartment from the bottom and padlocked the door on him, and meanwhile the Kazi heard all they said. Then she went to the house door and opened it, whereupon lo! the Vizier entered. She bussed the ground before him and received him with all honor and worship, saying: "O my lord, thou exaltest us by thy coming to our house. the Lord never deprive us of the light of thy countenance!" Then she seated him on the divan and said to him, "O my lord, doff thy heavy dress and turban and don these lighter vestments." So he put off his clothes and turban and she clad him in a blue cassock and a tall red bonnet, and said to him: "Erst thy garb was that of the Vizierate, so leave it to its own time and don this light gown, which is better fitted for carousing and making merry and sleep." Thereupon she began to play with him and he with her, and he would have done his desire of her, but she put him off, saying, "O my lord, this shall not fail us." As they were talking there came a knocking at the door, and the Vizier asked her, "Who is that?" to which she answered, "My husband." Quoth he, "What is to be done?" Qhoth she, "Enter this cabinet, till I get rid of him and come back to thee, and fear thou nothing." So she put him in the third compartment and locked the door on after which she went out and opened

the house door when lo and behold! in came the King. As soon as she saw him she kissed ground before him, and taking him by the hand, led him into the saloon and seated him on the divan at the upper end. Then said she to him, "Verily, O King, thou dost us high honor, and if we brought thee to gift the world and all that therein is, it would not be worth a single one of thy steps usward." And when he had taken his seat upon the divan she said, "Give me leave to speak one word." "Say what thou wilt." answered he, and she said, "O my lord, take thine ease and doff thy dress and turban." Now his clothes were worth a thousand dinars, and when he put them off she clad him in a patched gown, worth at the very most ten dirhams, and fell to talking and jesting with him, all this while the folk in the cabinet hearing everything that passed, but not daring to say a word. Presently the King put his hand to her neck and sought to do his design of her, when she said, "This thing shall not fail us, but I had first promised myself to entertain thee in this sitting chamber, and I have that which shall content thee." Now as they were speaking, someone knocked at the door and he asked her, "Who is that?" "My husband," answered she, and he, "Make him go away of his own goodwill, or I will fare forth to him and send him away perforce." Replied she, "Nay, O my lord, have patience till I send him away by my skillful contrivance." "And I, how shall I do!" inquired the King. Whereupon she took him by the hand and making him enter the fourth compartment of the cabinet, locked it upon him. Then she went out and opened the house door, when behold, the carpenter entered and saluted her. Quoth she, "What manner of thing is this cabinet thou hast made me?" "What aileth it, O my lady?" asked he, and she answered, "The top compartment is too strait." Rejoined he, "Not so," and she, "Go in thyself and see. It is not wide enough for thee." Quoth he, "It is wide enough for four." and entered the fifth compartment, whereupon she locked the door on him. Then she took the

letter of the Chief of Police and carried it to the Treasurer, who, having read and understood it, kissed it and delivered her lover to her. She told him all she had done and he said, "And how shall we act now?" She answered, "We will remove hence to another city, for after this work there is no tarrying for us here." So the twain packed up what goods they had and, loading them on camels, set out forthright for another city. Meanwhile, the five abode each in his compartment of the cabinet without eating or drinking three whole days, during which time they held their water until at last the carpenter could retain his no longer, so he staled on the King's head, and the King urined on the Vizier's head, and the Vizier piddled on the Wall, and the Wali pissed on the head of the Kazi. Whereupon the Judge cried out and said: "What nastiness is this? Doth not what strait we are in suffice us, but you must make water upon us?" The Chief of Police recognized the Kazi's voice and answered, saying aloud, "the Lord increase thy reward, O Kazi!" And when the Kazi heard him he knew him for the Wali. Then the Chief of Police lifted up his voice and said, "What means this nastiness?" and the Vizier answered, saying, "the Lord increase thy reward, O Wali!" whereupon he knew him to be the Minister. Then the Vizier lifted up his voice and said, "What means this nastiness?" But when the King heard and recognized his Minister's voice, he held his peace and concealed his affair. Then said the Vizier: "May the Lord damn this woman for her dealing with us! She hath brought hither all the chief officers of the state, except the King. Quoth the King, "Hold your peace, for I was the first to fall into the toils of this lewd strumpet." Whereat cried the carpenter: "And I, what have I done? I made her a cabinet for four gold pieces, and when I came to seek my hire, she tricked me into entering this compartment and locked the door on me." And they fell to talking with one another, diverting the King and doing away his chagrin. Presently the neighbors came up to the

house and, seeing it deserted, said one to other: "But yesterday our neighbor, the wife of Such-a-one, was in it, but now no sound is to be heard therein nor is soul to be seen. Let us break open the doors and see how the case stands, lest it come to the ears of the Wali or the King and we be cast into prison and regret not doing this thing before." So they broke open the doors and entered the saloon, where they saw a large wooden cabinet and heard men within groaning for hunger and thirst. Then said one of them, "Is there a Jinni in this cabinet?-and his fellow," Let us heap fuel about it and burn it with fire." When the Kazi heard this, he bawled out to them, "Do it not!" And they said to one another, " Verily the Jinn make believe to be mortals and speak with men's voices." Thereupon the Kazi repeated somewhat of the Sublime Koran and said to the neighbors, "Draw near to the cabinet wherein we are." So they drew near, and he said, "I am So-and-so the Kazi, and ye are Such-a-one and Such-a-one, and we are here a company." Quoth the neighbors, "Who brought you here?" And he told them the whole case from beginning to end. Then they fetched a carpenter, who opened the five doors and let out Kazi, Vizier, Wali, King, and carpenter in their queer disguises; and each, when he saw how the others were accoutered, fell a-laughing at them. Now she had taken away all their clothes, so every one of them sent to his people for fresh clothes and put them on and went out, covering himself therewith from the sight of the folk. Consider, therefore, what a trick this woman played off upon the folk! And I have heard tell also a tale of

