

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

[8]

[continues]

“The Third Kalandar’s Tale”

Know, O my lady, that I also am a king and the son of a king and my name is Ajib son of Khazib. When my father died I succeeded him, and I ruled and did justice and dealt fairly by all my lieges. I delighted in sea trips, for my capital stood on the shore, before which the ocean stretched far and wide, and near hand were many great islands with sconces and garrisons in the midst of the main. My fleet numbered fifty merchantmen, and as many yachts for pleasance, and a hundred and fifty sail ready fitted for holy war with the unbelievers. It fortun'd that I had a mind to enjoy myself on the islands aforesaid, so I took ship with my people in ten keel and, carrying with me a month's victual, I set out on a twenty days' voyage. But one night a head wind struck us, and the sea rose against us with huge waves. The billows sorely buffeted us and a dense darkness settled round us. We gave ourselves up for lost, and I said, “Whoso endangereth his days, e'en an he 'scape deserveth no praise.” Then we prayed to the Lord and besought Him, but the storm blasts ceased not to blow against us nor the surges to strike us till morning broke, when the gale fell, the seas sank to mirrory stillness, and the sun shone upon us kindly clear. Presently we made an island, where we landed and cooked somewhat of food, and ate heartily and

took our rest for a couple of days. Then we set out again and sailed other twenty days, the seas broadening and the land shrinking. Presently the current ran counter to us, and we found ourselves in strange waters, where the Captain had lost his reckoning, and was wholly bewildered in this sea, so said we to the lookout man, "Get thee to the masthead and keep thine eyes open." He swarmed up the mast and looked out and cried aloud, "O Rais, I espy to starboard something dark, very like a fish floating on the face of the sea, and to larboard there is a loom in the midst of the main, now black and now bright." When the Captain heard the lookout's words, he dashed his turban on the deck and plucked out his beard and beat his face, saying: "Good news indeed! We be all dead men, not one of us can be saved." And he fell to weeping and all of us wept for his weeping and also for our lives, and I said, "O Captain, tell us what it is the lookout saw." "O my Prince," answered he, "know that we lost our course on the night of the storm, which was followed on the morrow by a two days' calm during which we made no way, and we have gone astray eleven days' reckoning from that night, with ne'er a wind to bring us back to our true course. Tomorrow by the end of the day we shall come to a mountain of black stone called the Magnet Mountain, for thither the currents carry us willy-nilly. As soon as we are under its lea, the ship's sides will open and every nail in plank will fly out and cleave fast to the mountain, for that Almighty the Lord hath gifted the loadstone with a mysterious virtue and a love for iron, by reason whereof all which is iron traveleth toward it. And on this mountain is much iron, how much none knoweth save the Most High, from the many vessels which have been lost there since the days of yore. The bright spot upon its summit is a dome of yellow laton from Andalusia, vaulted upon ten columns. And on its crown is a horseman who rideth a horse of brass and holdeth in hand a lance of laton, and there hangeth on his bosom a tablet of lead graven

with names and talismans.” And he presently added, “And, O King, none destroyeth folk save the rider on that steed, nor will the egromancy be dispelled till he fall from his horse.” Then, O my lady, the Captain wept with exceeding weeping and we all made sure of death doom and each and every one of us farewelled his friend and charged him with his last will and testament in case he might be saved. We slept not that night, and in the morning we found ourselves much nearer the Loadstone Mountain, whither the waters drave us with a violent send. When the ships were close under its lea, they opened and the nails flew out and all the iron in them sought the Magnet Mountain and clove to it like a network, so that by the end of the day we were all struggling in the waves round about the mountain. Some of us were saved, but more were drowned, and even those who had escaped knew not one another, so stupefied were they by the beating of the billows and the raving of the winds. As for me, O my lady, the Lord (be His name exalted!) preserved my life that I might suffer whatso He willed to me of hardship, misfortune, and calamity, for I scrambled upon a plank from one of the ships and the wind and waters threw it at the feet of the mountain. There I found a practicable path leading by steps carven out of the rock to the summit, and I called on the name of the Lord Almighty and breasted the ascent, clinging to the steps and notches hewn in the stone, and mounted little by little. And the Lord stilled the wind and aided me in the ascent, so that I succeeded in reaching the summit. There I found no resting place save the dome, which I entered, joying with exceeding joy at my escape, and made the wudu ablution and prayed a two-bow prayer, a thanksgiving to God for my preservation. Then I fell asleep under the dome, and heard in my dream a mysterious voice saying, “O son of Khazib! When thou wakest from thy sleep, dig under thy feet and thou shalt find a bow of brass and three leaden arrows inscribed with talismans and characts. Take the bow and

shoot the arrows at the horseman on the dome top and free mankind from this sore calamity. When thou hast shot him he shall fall into the sea, and the horse will also drop at thy feet. Then bury it in the place of the bow. This done, the main will swell and rise till it is level with the mountain head, and there will appear on it a skiff carrying a man of laton (other than he thou shalt have shot) holding in his hand a pair of paddles. He will come to thee, and do thou embark with him, but beware of saying Bismillah or of otherwise naming the Lord Almighty. He will row thee for a space of ten days, till he bring thee to certain islands called the Islands of Safety, and thence thou shalt easily reach a port and find those who will convey thee to thy native land. And all this shall be fulfilled to thee so thou call not on the name of the Lord." Then I started up from my sleep in joy and gladness and, hastening to do the bidding of the mysterious voice, found the bow and arrows and shot at the horseman and tumbled him into the main, whilst the horse dropped at my feet, so I took it and buried it. Presently the sea surged up and rose till it reached the top of the mountain, nor had I long to wait ere I saw a skiff in the offing coming toward me. I gave thanks to the Lord, and when the skiff came up to me, I saw therein a man of brass with a tablet of lead on his breast inscribed with talismans and characts, and I embarked without uttering a word. The boatman rowed on with me through the first day and the second and the third, in all ten whole days, till I caught sight of the Islands of Safety, whereat I joyed with exceeding joy and for stress of gladness exclaimed, "the Lord! the Lord! In the name of the Lord! There is no god but the God and the Lord is Almighty." Thereupon the skiff forthwith upset and cast me upon the sea, then it righted and sank deep into the depths. Now I am a fair swimmer, so I swam the whole day till nightfall, when my forearms and shoulders were numbed with fatigue and I felt like to die, so I testified to my faith, expecting naught but death.

The sea was still surging under the violence of the winds, and presently there came a billow like a hillock and, bearing me up high in air, threw me with a long cast on dry land, that His will might be fulfilled. I crawled upon the beach and doffing my raiment, wrung it out to dry and spread it in the sunshine. Then I lay me down and slept the whole night. As soon as it was day, I donned my clothes and rose to look whither I should walk. Presently I came to a thicket of low trees and, making a cast round it, found that the spot whereon I stood was an islet, a mere holm, girt on all sides by the ocean, whereupon I said to myself, "Whatso freeth me from one great calamity casteth me into a greater!" But while I was pondering my case and longing for death, behold, I saw afar off a ship making for the island, so I clomb a tree and hid myself among the branches. Presently the ship anchored and landed ten slaves, blackamoors, bearing iron hoes and baskets, who walked on till they reached the middle of the island. Here they dug deep into the ground until they uncovered a plate of metal, which they lifted, thereby opening a trapdoor. After this they returned to the ship and thence brought bread and flour, honey and fruits, clarified butter, leather bottles containing liquors, and many household stuffs; also furniture, table service, and mirrors; rugs, carpets, and in fact all needed to furnish a dwelling. And they kept going to and fro, and descending by the trapdoor, till they had transported into the dwelling all that was in the ship. After this the slaves again went on board and brought back with them garments as rich as may be, and in the midst of them came an old old man, of whom very little was left, for Time had dealt hardly and harshly with him, and all that remained of him was a bone wrapped in a rag of blue stuff, through which the winds whistled west and east. As saith the poet of him: Time gars me tremble. Ah, how sore the balk! While Time in pride of strength doth ever stalk. Time was I walked nor ever felt I tired, Now am I tired albe' I

never walk! And the Sheikh held by the hand a youth cast in beauty's mold, all elegance and perfect grace, so fair that his comeliness deserved to be proverbial, for he was as a green bough or the tender young of the roe, ravishing every heart with his loveliness and subduing every soul with his coquetry and amorous ways. They stinted not their going, O my lady, till all went down by the trapdoor and did not reappear for an hour, or rather more; at the end of which time the slaves and the old man came up without the youth and, replacing the iron plate and carefully closing the door slab as it was before, they returned to the ship and made sail and were lost to my sight. When they turned away to depart, I came down from the tree and, going to the place I had seen them fin up, scraped off and removed the earth, and in patience possessed my soul till I had cleared the whole of it away. Then appeared the trapdoor, which was of wood, in shape and size like a millstone, and when I lifted it up, it disclosed a winding staircase of stone. At this I marveled and, descending the steps tier I reached the last, found a fair hall, spread with various kinds of carpets and silk stuffs, wherein was a youth sitting upon a raised couch and leaning back on a round cushion with a fan in his hand and nosegays and posies of sweet scented herbs and flowers before him. But he was alone and not a soul near him in the great vault. When he saw me he turned pale, but I saluted him courteously and said: "Set thy mind at ease and calm thy fears. No harm shall come near thee. I am a man like thyself and the son of a king to boot, whom the decrees of Destiny have sent to bear thee company and cheer thee in thy loneliness. But now tell me, what is thy story and what causeth thee to dwell thus in solitude under the ground?" When he was assured that I was of his kind and no Jinni, he rejoiced and his fine color returned, and, making me draw near to him, he said: "O my brother, my story is a strange story and 'tis this. My father is a merchant jeweler possessed of great wealth, who hath

white and black slaves traveling and trading on his account in ships and on camels, and trafficking with the most distant cities, but he was not blessed with a child, not even one. Now on a certain night he dreamed a dream that he should be favored with a son, who would be short-lived, so the morning dawned on my father, bringing him woe and weeping. On the following night my mother conceived and my father noted down the date of her becoming pregnant. Her time being fulfilled, she bare me, whereat my father rejoiced and made banquets and called together the neighbors and fed the fakirs and the poor, for that he had been blessed with issue near the end of his days. Then he assembled the astrologers and astronomers who knew the places of the planets, and the wizards and wise ones of the time, and men learned in horoscopes and nativities, and they drew out my birth scheme and said to my father: "Thy son shall live to fifteen years, but in his fifteenth there is a sinister aspect. An he safely tide it over, he shall attain a great age. And the cause that threateneth him with death is this. In the Sea of Peril standeth the Mountain Magnet called, on whose summit is a horseman of yellow laton seated on a horse also of brass and bearing on his breast a tablet of lead. Fifty days after this rider shall fall from his steed thy son will die and his slayer will be he who shoots down the horseman, a Prince named Ajib son of King Khazib." My father grieved with exceeding grief to hear these words, but reared me in tenderest fashion and educated me excellently well till my fifteenth year was told. Ten days ago news came to him that the horseman had fallen into the sea and he who shot him down was named Ajib son of King Khazib." My father thereupon wept bitter tears at the need of parting with me and became like one possessed of a Jinni. However, being in mortal fear for me, he built me this place under the earth, and stocking it with all required for the few days still remaining, he brought me hither in a ship and left me here. Ten are already past, and

when the forty shall have gone by without danger to me, he will come and take me away, for he hath done all this only in fear of Prince Ajib. Such, then, is my story and the cause of my loneliness." When I heard his history I marveled and said in my mind, "I am the Prince Ajib who hath done all this, but as the Lord is with me I will surely not slay him!" So said I to him: "O my lord, far from thee be this hurt and harm and then, please the Lord, thou shalt not suffer cark nor care nor aught disquietude, for I will tarry with thee and serve thee as a servant, and then wend my ways. And after having borne thee company during the forty days, I will go with thee to thy home, where thou shalt give me an escort of some of thy Mamelukes with whom I may journey back to my own city, and the Almighty shall requite thee for me." He was glad to hear these words, when I rose and lighted a large wax candle and trimmed the lamps and the three lanterns, and I set on meat and drink and sweetmeats. We ate and drank and sat talking over various matters till the greater part of the night was gone, when he lay down to rest and I covered him up and went to sleep myself. Next morning I arose and warmed a little water, then lifted him gently so as to awake him and brought him the warm water, wherewith he washed his face, and said to me: "Heaven requite thee for me with every blessing, O youth! By the Lord, if I get quit of this danger and am saved from him whose name is Ajib bin Khazib, I will make my father reward thee and send thee home healthy and wealthy. And if I die, then my blessing be upon thee." I answered, "May the day never dawn on which evil shall betide thee, and may the Lord make my last day before thy last day!" Then I set before him somewhat of food and we ate, and I got ready perfumes for fumigating the hall, wherewith he was pleased. Moreover I made him a mankalah cloth; and we played and ate sweetmeats and we played again and took our pleasure till nightfall, when I rose and lighted the lamps, and set before him somewhat to

eat, and sat telling him stories till the hours of darkness were far spent. Then he lay down to rest and I covered him up and rested also. And thus I continued to do, O my lady, for days and nights, and affection for him took root in my heart and my sorrow was eased, and I said to myself: "The astrologers lied when they predicted that he should be slain by Ajib bin Khazib. By the Lord, I will not slay him." I ceased not ministering to him and conversing and carousing with him and telling him all manner tales for thirty-nine days. On the fortieth night the youth rejoiced and said: "O my brother, Alhamdolillah!— praise be to the Lord— who hath preserved me from death, and this is by thy blessing and the blessing of thy coming to me, and I prayed God that He restore thee to thy native land. But now, O my brother, I would thou warm me some water for the ghusl ablution and do thou kindly bathe me and change my clothes." I replied, "With love and gladness," and I heated water in plenty and carrying it in to him, washed his body all over, the washing of health, with meal of lupins, and rubbed him well and changed his clothes and spread him a high bed whereon he lay down to rest, being drowsy after bathing. Then said he, "O my brother, cut me up a watermelon, and sweeten it with a little sugar candy." So I went to the storeroom and bringing out a fine watermelon, I found there, set it on a platter and laid it before him saying, "O my master, hast thou not a knife?" "Here it is," answered he, "over my head upon the high shelf." So I got up in haste and, and, taking the knife, drew it from its sheath, but my foot slipped in stepping down and I fell heavily upon the youth holding in my hand the knife, which hastened to fulfill what had been written on the Day that decided the destinies of man, and buried itself, as if planted, in the youth's heart. He died on the instant. When I saw that he was slain and knew that I had slain him, mauger myself I cried out with an exceeding loud and bitter cry and beat my face and rent my raiment and said: "Verily

we be the Lord's and unto Him we be returning, O Muslims! O folk fain of the Lord! There remained for this youth but one day of the forty dangerous days which the astrologers and the learned had foretold for him, and the predestined death of this beautiful one was to be at my hand. Would Heaven I had not tried to cut the watermelon! What dire misfortune is this I must bear, lief or loath? What a disaster! What an affliction! O the Lord mine, I implore thy pardon and declare to Thee my innocence of his death. But what God willeth, let that come to pass." When I was certified that I had slain him, I arose and, ascending the stairs, replaced the trapdoor and covered it with earth as before. Then I looked out seaward and saw the ship cleaving the waters and making for the island, wherefore I was afeard and said, "The moment they come and see the youth done to death, they will know 'twas I who slew him and will slay me without respite." So I climbed up into a high tree and concealed myself among its leaves, and hardly had I done so when the ship anchored and the slaves landed with the ancient man, the youth's father, and made direct for the place, and when they removed the earth they were surprised to see it soft. Then they raised the trapdoor and went down and found the youth lying at full length, clothed in fair new garments, with a face beaming after the bath, and the knife deep in his heart. At the sight they shrieked and wept and beat their faces, loudly cursing the murderer, whilst a swoon came over the Sheikh so that the slaves deemed him dead, unable to survive his son. At last they wrapped the slain youth in his clothes and carried him up and laid him on the ground, covering him with a shroud of silk. Whilst they were making for the ship the old man revived, and, gazing on his son who was stretched out, fell on the ground and strewed dust over his head and smote his face and plucked out his beard, and his weeping redoubled as he thought of his murdered son and he swooned away once more. After a while a slave went and

fetches a strip of silk whereupon they lay the old man and sat down at his head. All this took place and I was on the tree above them watching everything that came to pass, and my heart became hoary before my head waxed gray, for the hard lot which was mine, and for the distress and anguish I had undergone, and I fell to reciting: "How many a joy by the Lord's will hath fled With flight escaping sight of wisest head! How many a sadness shall begin the day, Yet grow right gladsome ere the day is sped! How many a weal trips on the heels of ill, Causing the mourner's heart with joy to thrill!" But the old man, O my lady, ceased not from his swoon till near sunset, when he came to himself and, looking upon his dead son, he recalled what had happened, and how what he had dreaded had come to pass, and he beat his face and head. Then he sobbed a single sob and his soul fled his flesh. The slaves shrieked aloud, "Alas, our lord!" and showered dust on their heads and redoubled their weeping and wailing. Presently they carried their dead master to the ship side by side with his dead son and, having transported all the stuff from the dwelling to the vessel, set sail and disappeared from mine eyes. I descended from the tree and, raising the trapdoor, went down into the underground dwelling, where everything reminded me of the youth, and I looked upon the poor remains of him and began repeating these verses: "Their tracks I see, and pine with pain and pang, And on deserted hearths I weep and yearn. And Him I pray who doomed them depart Some day vouchsafe the boon of safe return." Then, O my lady, I went up again by the trapdoor, and every day I used to wander round about the island and every night I returned to the underground hall. Thus I lived for a month, till at last, looking at the western side of the island, I observed that every day the tide ebbed, leaving shallow water for which the flow did not compensate, and by the end of the month the sea showed dry land in that direction. At this I rejoiced, making certain of my safety, so

I arose and, fording what little was left of the water, got me to the mainland, where I fell in with great heaps of loose sand in which even a camel's hoof would sink up to the knee. However, I emboldened my soul and, wading through the sand, behold, a fire shone from afar burning with a blazing light. So I made for it hoping haply to find succor and broke out into these verses: "Belike my Fortune may her bridle turn And Time bring weal although he's jealous called, Forward my hopes, and further all my needs, And passed ill with present weals requite." And when I drew near the fire aforesaid, lo! it was a palace with gates of copper burnished red which, when the rising sun shone thereon, gleamed and glistened from afar, showing what had seemed to me a fire. I rejoiced in the sight, and sat down over against the gate, but I was hardly settled in my seat before there met me ten young men clothed in sumptuous gear, and all were blind of the left eye, which appeared as plucked out. They were accompanied by a Sheikh, an old, old man, and much I marveled at their appearance, and their all being blind in the same eye. When they saw me, they saluted me with the salaam and asked me of my case and my history, whereupon I related to them all what had befallen me and what full measure of misfortune was mine. Marveling at my tale, they took me to the mansion, where I saw ranged round the hall ten couches each with its blue bedding and coverlet of blue stuff and a-middlemost stood a smaller couch furnished like them with blue and nothing else. As we entered each of the youths took his seat on his own couch and the old man seated himself upon the smaller one in the middle, saying to me, "O youth, sit thee down on the floor, and ask not of our case nor of the loss of our eyes." Presently he rose up and set before each young man some meat in a charger and drink in a larger mazer, treating me in like manner, and after that they sat questioning me concerning my adventures and what had betided me. And I kept telling

them my tale till the night was far spent. Then said the young men: "O our Sheikh, wilt not thou set before us our ordinary? The time is come." He replied, "With love and gladness," and rose and, entering a closet, disappeared, but presently returned bearing on his head ten trays each covered with a strip of blue stuff. He set a tray before each youth and, lighting ten wax candles, he stuck one upon each tray, and drew off the covers and lo! under them was naught but ashes and powdered charcoal and kettle soot. Then all the young men tucked up their sleeves to the elbows and fell a-weeping and wailing and they blackened their faces and smeared their clothes and buffeted their brows and beat their breasts, continually exclaiming, "We were sitting at our ease, but our frowardness brought us unease!" They ceased not to do thus till dawn drew nigh, when the old man rose and heated water for them, and they washed their face and donned other and clean clothes. Now when I saw this, O my lady, for very wonderment my senses left me and my wits went wild and heart and head were full of thought, till I forgot what had betided me and I could not keep silence, feeling I fain must speak out and question them of these strangenesses. So I said to them: "How come ye to do this after we have been so openhearted and frolicsome? Thanks be to the Lord, ye be all sound and sane, yet actions such as these befit none but madmen or those possessed of an evil spirit. I conjure you by all that is dearest to you, why stint ye to tell me your history, and the cause of your losing your eyes and your blackening your faces with ashes and soot?" Hereupon they turned to me and said, "O young man, hearken not to thy youthtide's suggestions, and question us no questions." Then they slept and I with them, and when they awoke the old man brought us somewhat oi food. And after we had eaten and the plates and goblets had been removed, they sat conversing till nightfall, when the old man rose and lit the wax candles and lamps and set meat and drink before us. After we had

eaten and drunken we sat conversing and carousing in companionship till the noon of night, when they said to the old man, "Bring us our ordinary, for the hour of sleep is at hand!" So he rose and brought them the trays of soot and ashes, and they did as they had done on the preceding night, nor more, nor less. I abode with them after this fashion for the space of a month, during which time they used to blacken their faces with ashes every night, and to wash and change their raiment when the morn was young, and I but marveled the more and my scruples and curiosity increased to such a point that I had to forgo even food and drink. At last I lost command of myself, for my heart was aflame with fire unquenchable and love unconcealable, and I said, "O young men, will ye not relieve my trouble and acquaint me with the reason of thus blackening your faces and the meaning of your words, 'We were sitting at our ease, but our frowardness brought us unease'?" Quoth they, "'Twere better to keep these things secret." Still I was bewildered by their doings to the point of abstaining from eating and drinking and at last wholly losing patience, quoth I to them: "There is no help for it. Ye must acquaint me with what is the reason of these doings." They replied: "We kept our secret only for thy good. To gratify thee will bring down evil upon thee and thou wilt become a monocular even as we are." I repeated, "There is no help for it, and if ye will not, let me leave you and return to mine own people and be at rest from seeing these things, for the proverb saith: 'Better ye 'bide and I take my leave; For what eye sees not heart shall never grieve.'" Thereupon they said to me, "Remember, O youth, that should ill befall thee, we will not again harbor thee nor suffer thee to abide amongst us." And bringing a ram, they slaughtered it and skinned it. Lastly they gave me a knife, saying: "Take this skin and stretch thyself upon it and we will sew it around thee. Presently there shall come to thee a certain bird, called roe, that will catch thee up in his pounces and tower

high in air and then set thee down on a mountain. When thou feelest he is no longer flying, rip open the pelt with this blade and come out of it. The bird will be scared and will fly away and leave thee free. After this fare for half a day, and the march will place thee at a palace wondrous fair to behold, towering high in air and builded of khalanj, lign aloes and sandalwood, plated with red gold, and studded with all manner emeralds and costly gems fit for seal rings. Enter it and thou shalt will to thy wish, for we have all entered that palace, and such is the cause of our losing our eyes and of our blackening our faces. Were we now to tell thee our stories it would take too long a time, for each and every of us lost his left eye by an adventure of his own." I rejoiced at their words, and they did with me as they said, and the bird roc bore me off and set me down on the mountain. Then I came out of the skin and walked on till I reached the palace. The door stood open as I entered and found myself in a spacious and goodly hall, wide exceedingly, even as a horse course. And around it were a hundred chambers with doors of sandal and aloe woods plated with red gold and furnished with silver rings by way of knockers. At the head or upper end of the hall I saw forty damsels, sumptuously dressed and ornamented and one and all bright as moons. None could ever tire of gazing upon them, and all so lovely that the most ascetic devotee on seeing them would become their slave and obey their will. When they saw me the whole bevy came up to me and said: "Welcome and well come and good cheer to thee, O our lord! This whole month have we been expecting thee. Praised be the Lord Who hath sent us one who is worthy of us, even as we are worthy of him!" Then they made me sit down upon a high divan and said to me, "This day thou art our lord and master, and we are thy servants and thy handmaids, so order us as thou wilt." And I marveled at their case. Presently one of them arose and set meat before me and I ate and they ate with me whilst others warmed

water and washed my hands and feet and changed my clothes, and others made ready sherbets and gave us to drink, and all gathered around me, being full of joy and gladness at my coming. Then they sat down and conversed with me till nightfall, when five of them arose and laid the trays and spread them with flowers and fragrant herbs and fruits, fresh and dried, and confections in profusion. At last they brought out a fine wine service with rich old wine, and we sat down to drink and some sang songs and others played the lute and psaltery and recorders and other instruments, and the bowl went merrily round. Hereupon such gladness possessed me that I forgot the sorrows of the world one and all and said: "This is indeed life. O sad that 'tis fleeting!" I enjoyed their company till the time came for rest, and our heads were all warm with wine, when they said, "O our lord, choose from amongst us her who shall be thy bedfellow this night and not lie with thee again till forty days be past." So I chose a girl fair of face and perfect in shape, with eyes kohl-edged by nature's hand, hair long and jet-black, with slightly parted teeth and joining brows. 'Twas as if she were some limber graceful branchlet or the slender stalk of sweet basil to amaze and to bewilder man's fancy. So I lay with her that night. None fairer I ever knew. And when it was morning, the damsels carried me to the hammam bath and bathed me and robed me in fairest apparel. Then they served up food, and we ate and drank and the cup went round till nightfall, when I chose from among them one fair of form and face, soft-sided and a model of grace, such a one as the poet described when he said: On her fair bosom caskets twain I scanned, Sealed fast with musk seals lovers to withstand. With arrowy glances stand on guard her eyes, Whose shafts would shoot who dares put forth a hand. With her I spent a most goodly night, and, to be brief, O my mistress, I remained with them in all solace and delight of life, eating and drinking, conversing and carousing, and every night lying with one

or other of them. But at the head of the New Year they came to me in tears and bade me farewell, weeping and crying out and clinging about me, whereat I wondered and said: "What may be the matter? Verily you break my heart!" They exclaimed, "Would Heaven we had never known thee, for though we have companied with many, yet never saw we a pleasanter than thou or a more courteous." And they wept again. "But tell me more clearly," asked I, "what causeth this weeping which maketh my gall bladder like to burst?" And they answered: "O lord and master, it is severance which maketh us weep, and thou, and thou only, art the cause of our tears. If thou hearken to us we need never be parted, and if thou hearken not we part forever, but our hearts tell us that thou wilt not listen to our words and this is the cause of our tears and cries." "Tell me how the case standeth." "Know, O our lord, that we are the daughters of kings who have met here and have lived together for years, and once in every year we are perforce absent for forty days. And afterward we return and abide here for the rest of the twelvemonth eating and drinking and taking our pleasure and enjoying delights. We are about to depart according to our custom, and we fear lest after we be gone thou contraire our charge and disobey our injunctions. Here now we commit to thee the keys of the palace, which containeth forty chambers, and thou mayest open of these thirty and nine, but beware (and we conjure thee by the Lord and by the lives of us!) lest thou open the fortieth door, for therein is that which shall separate us for ever." Quoth I, "Assuredly I will not open it if it contain the cause of severance from you." Then one among them came up to me and falling on my neck wept and recited these verses: "If Time unite us after absent-while, The world harsh-frowning on our lot shall smile, And if thy semblance deign adorn mine eyes, I'll pardon Time past wrongs and bygone guile." And I recited the following: "When drew she near to bid adieu with her heart unstrung, While care and

longing on that day her bosom wrung, Wet pearls she wept and mine like red camelians rolled And, joined in sad riviere, around her neck they hung.” When I saw her weeping I said, “By the Lord, I will never open that fortieth door, never and nowise!” and I bade her farewell.

Thereupon all departed flying away like birds, signaling with their hands farewells as they went and leaving me alone in the palace. When evening drew near I opened the door of the first chamber and entering it found myself in a place like one of the pleasaunces of Paradise. It was a garden with trees of freshest green and ripe fruits of yellow sheen, and its birds were singing clear and keen and rills ran wimpling through the fair terrene. The sight and sounds brought solace to my sprite, and I walked among the trees, and I smelt the breath of the flowers on the breeze and heard the birdies sing their melodies hymning the One, the Almighty, in sweetest litanies, and I looked upon the apple whose hue is parcel red and parcel yellow, as said the poet: Apple whose hue combines in union mellow My fair’s red cheek, her hapless lover’s yellow.

Then I looked upon the pear whose taste surpasseth sherbet and sugar, and the apricot whose beauty striketh the eye with admiration, as if she were a polished ruby.

Then I went out of the place and locked the door as it was before. When it was the morrow I opened the second door, and entering found myself in a spacious plain set with tall date palms and watered by a running stream whose banks were shrubbed with bushes of rose and jasmine, while privet and eglantine, oxeye, violet and lily, narcissus, origane, and the winter gilliflower carpeted the borders.

And the breath of the breeze swept over these sweet-smelling growths diffusing their delicious odors right and left, perfuming the world and filling my soul with delight. After taking my pleasure there awhile I went from it and, having closed the door as it was before, opened the third door, wherein I saw a high open hall pargetted with

particolored marbles and pietra dura of price and other precious stones, and hung with cages of sandalwood and eagle wood, full of birds which made sweet music, such as the "thousand-voiced," and the cushat, the merle, the turtledove, and the Nubian ringdove. My heart was filled with pleasure thereby, my grief was dispelled, and I slept in that aviary till dawn. Then I unlocked the door of the fourth chamber, and therein found a grand saloon with forty smaller chambers giving upon it. All their doors stood open, so I entered and found them full of pearls and jacinths and beryls and emeralds and corals and carbuncles, and all manner precious gems and jewels, such as tongue of man may not describe. My thought was stunned at the sight and I said to myself, "These be things methinks united which could not be found save in the treasuries of a King of Kings, nor could the monarchs of the world have collected the like of these!" And my heart dilated and my sorrows ceased. "For," quoth I, "now verily am I the Monarch of the Age, since by the Lord's grace this enormous wealth is mine, and I have forty damsels under my hand, nor is there any to claim them save myself." Then I gave not over opening place after place until nine and thirty days were passed, and in that time I had entered every chamber except that one whose door the Princesses had charged me not to open. But my thoughts, O my mistress, ever ran on that forbidden fortieth, and Satan urged me to open it for my own undoing, nor had I patience to forbear, albeit there wanted of the trusting time but a single day. So I stood before the chamber aforesaid and, after a moment's hesitation, opened the door, which was plated with red gold, and entered. I was met by a perfume whose like I had never before smelt, and so sharp and subtle was the odor that it made my senses drunken as with strong wine, and I fell to the ground in a fainting fit which lasted a full hour. When I came to myself I strengthened my heart, and entering, found myself in a chamber whose floor was

bespread with saffron and blazing with light from branched candelabra of gold and lamps fed with costly oils, which diffused the scent of musk and ambergris. I saw there also two great censers each big as a mazer bowl, flaming with lign aloes, nadd perfume, ambergris, and honeyed scents, and the place was full of their fragrance. Presently, O my lady, I espied a noble steed, black as the murks of night when murkiest, standing ready saddled and bridled (and his saddle was of red gold) before two mangers, one of clear crystal wherein was husked sesame, and the other also of crystal containing water of the rose scented with musk. When I saw this I marveled and said to myself, "Doubtless in this animal must be some wondrous mystery." And Satan cozened me so I led him without the palace and mounted him, but he would not stir from his place. So I hammered his sides with my heels, but he moved not, and then I took the rein whip and struck him withal. When he felt the blow, he neighed a neigh with a sound like deafening thunder and, opening a pair of wings, flew up with me in the firmament of heaven far beyond the eyesight of man. After a full hour of flight he descended and alighted on a terrace roof and shaking me off his back, lashed me on the face with his tad and gouged out my left eye, causing it roll along my cheek. Then he flew away. I went down from the terrace and found myself again amongst the ten one-eyed youths sitting upon their ten couches with blue covers, and they cried out when they saw me: "No welcome to thee, nor aught of good cheer! We all lived of lives the happiest and we ate and drank of the best. Upon brocades and cloths of gold we took our rest, and we slept with our heads on beauty's breast, but we could not await one day to gain the delights of a year!" Quoth I, "Behold, I have become one like unto you and now I would have you bring me a tray full of blackness, wherewith to blacken my face, and receive me into your society." "No, by the Lord," quoth they, "thou shalt not sojourn with us, and

now get thee hence!" So they drove me away. Finding them reject me thus, I foresaw that matters would go hard with me, and I remembered the many miseries which Destiny had written upon my forehead, and I fared forth from among them heavy-hearted and tearful-eyed, repeating to myself these words: "I was sitting at mine ease, but my frowardness brought me to unease." Then I shaved beard and mustachios and eyebrows, renouncing the world. and wandered in Kalandar garb about the Lord's earth, and the Almighty decreed safety for me till I arrived at Baghdad, which was on the evening of this very night. Here I met these two other Kalandars standing bewildered, so I saluted them saying, "I am a stranger!" and they answered, "And we likewise be strangers!" By the freak of Fortune we were like to like, three Kalandars and three monoculars all blind of the left eye. Such, O my lady, is the cause of the shearing of my beard and the manner of my losing an eye. Said the lady to him, "Rub thy head and wend thy ways," but he answered, "By the Lord, I will not go until I hear the stories of these others." Then the lady, turning toward the King and Ja'afar and Masrur, said to them, "Do ye also give an account of yourselves, you men!" Whereupon Ja'afar stood forth and told her what he had told the portress as they were entering the house, and when she heard his story of their being merchants and Mosul men who had outrun the watch, she said, "I grant you your lives each for each sake, and now away with you all." So they all went out, and when they were in the street, quoth the King to the Kalandars, "O company, whither go ye now, seeing that the morning hath not yet dawned?" Quoth they, "By the Lord, O our lord, we know not where to go." "Come and pass the rest of the night with us," said the King and, turning to Ja'afar, "Take them home with thee, and tomorrow bring them to my presence that we may chronicle their adventures." Ja'afar did as the King bade him and the Commander of the Faithful returned to his palace, but

sleep gave no sign of visiting him that night and he lay awake pondering the mishaps of the three Kalandar Princes, and impatient to know the history of the ladies and the two black bitches. No sooner had morning dawned than he went forth and sat upon the throne of his sovereignty and, turning to Ja'afar, after all his grandees and officers of state were gathered together, he said, "Bring me the three ladies and the two bitches and the three Kalandars." So Ja'afar fared forth and brought them all before him (and the ladies were veiled). Then the Minister turned to them and said in the King's name: "We pardon you your maltreatment of us and your want of courtesy, in consideration of the kindness which forewent it, and for that ye knew us not. Now however I would have you to know that ye stand in presence of the fifth of the sons of Abbas, Harun al-Rashid, brother of King Musa al-Hadi, son of Al-Mansur, son of Praiseworthy the brother of Al-Saffah bin Mohammed who was first of the royal house. Speak ye therefore before him the truth and the whole truth!" When the ladies heard Ja'afar's words touching the Commander of the Faithful, the eldest came forward and said, "O Prince of True Believers, my story is one which were it graven with needle gravers upon the eye corners, were a warner for whoso would be warned and an example for whoso can take profit from example." And she began to tell

