

The next night, when the sultan was settled  
in his bed, Sheherazade began...

## Voyage 7

### Elephant Island



**W**hen the caliph told me I had to take some gifts to the king I'd met on my previous voyage, I knew I had no choice but to go to sea again. I set sail in the caliph's finest ship. We were blessed with fine winds and calm seas, and reached Sarandib, the Land of Jewels, without any trouble.

The king was delighted to see me again, and so pleased with his gifts that he loaded my ship with yet more riches to take home to the caliph.

Unfortunately, my return journey did not go as smoothly. On the third day at sea, we spotted another ship in the distance.

"Pirates!" shouted the lookout, and we sailed away as fast as we could. But our ship was heavy with treasure and not made for fast sailing. The pirates quickly caught up with us, drew alongside, and boarded our ship.

With glinting cutlasses and rough shouts, they rounded us up in the middle of the ship, and bound us together with rope. Once they had loaded the treasure from our ship onto their own, they led us aboard and threw us in their hold.

We huddled together in the dark all day and all night, sick with fear and wondering what would become of us. In the morning, the ship docked in a busy port. The hatch was flung open and we were dragged, blinking, into the sunlight.

We were taken to a marketplace to be sold as slaves. As we stood there, in shackles, people prodded and poked us, and argued with the pirates about how much we were worth.

An important-looking tribesman wearing carved-tusk necklaces paid a gold coin for me.



He led me to his cart and bundled me into the back of it. The cart bumped along and soon entered a village of mud houses with thatched roofs. As we drove along, everybody stopped and nodded to my new master. I realized that he must be the chief of the village.

We stopped outside the largest hut. My master led me into a courtyard, untied me, and gave me a dish of food and some water. When I had finished eating, he put his face next to mine. "Obey me and I will treat you well," he said. "Defy me and I will kill you."

He locked me in a small hut for the night. The next morning, he unlocked the door and said, "Come." I ate breakfast in the courtyard as he sharpened a set of arrows. "Your job," he told me, "is to kill elephants and bring me their ivory

tusks. Have you killed an elephant before?"

I shook my head sadly.

The man noticed my expression. "The elephants are bad. They kill people whenever they have the chance. They come into the village, destroy our houses and even crush our children. We have no choice but to kill them."

He led me through the village and into the forest beyond. Many houses had been flattened, especially those near the forest. Villagers were trying to rebuild them, and I noticed that many people wore necklaces made from carved elephant tusks.

My master led me into the forest and stopped by a very large tree. "Climb this tree," he said. "When an elephant comes, kill it, before it can kill you. Come back to my house at sunset.

Bring me elephant tusks or there will be trouble." My master went back to the village, and I climbed the tree and waited.

The slow crashing of foliage told me that an elephant was coming. Nervously, I raised my bow and arrow, and it appeared.

It was the most magnificent beast I had ever seen. It was a huge bull elephant, with a broad forehead, wide shoulders, and two long, gleaming white tusks. As soon as it came through the trees, it saw me. It glared and let out an angry bellow that shook the leaves from the trees.

I stared down the wavering tip of my arrow at the furious elephant and shook with terror. It could have easily plucked me from the tree like a cherry and crushed me underfoot. "I should kill it now," I thought, "before it kills me." Yet

something in its eyes made me hesitate.

Slowly, I lowered the tip of my arrow and waited. The elephant reached into the tree with its trunk and plucked the bow and arrow from my hand. Very deliberately, it snapped them like twigs and threw them on the ground.

Then it curled its trunk around my waist. It lifted me onto its back, and started off through the forest. I sat astride its lumbering, powerful body with my heart pounding, wondering what would happen next.

The elephant gave a deep rumble that felt as if it vibrated through the earth, and an answering rumble came from the depths of the forest. One by one, the rest of the herd appeared and fell in line behind us.

There were about fifteen elephants, along with



a couple of babies with fuzzy heads that flung their short trunks up and squeaked humorously as they trotted along behind their mothers.

Deeper and deeper we went into the forest, until at last we emerged in a sunny glade, where the elephants stopped. I gasped at the sight that lay before me there.

The bare bones of what must have been hundreds of elephants lay in the clearing, arranged neatly side by side, with flowers growing up and around them. The older ones were entwined with ivy; the newer skeletons had fresh flowers arranged around them. This was an elephants' graveyard.

The entire herd of elephants stood in silence looking at their dead relatives. One or two used their trunks to straighten some of the bones and

to sweep them clean of dead leaves.

Gazing around the graveyard, I noticed that not a single one of the skeletons still had its tusks. There were several skeletons of smaller elephants too – no bigger than the tiny baby elephants that now huddled under their mothers' bellies.

I suddenly understood the elephants in a different way. They were losing their lives just for the sake of their tusks. All they were doing was fighting back. I had to do something to help stop this bloody war.

I had no idea whether the elephant would understand me, but I spoke to it nevertheless. "I was sent to kill you for your tusks," I began. "I want to tell the people who sent me what I have seen, and tell them to stop attacking you. Will

you come with me to show them how peaceful you can be?”

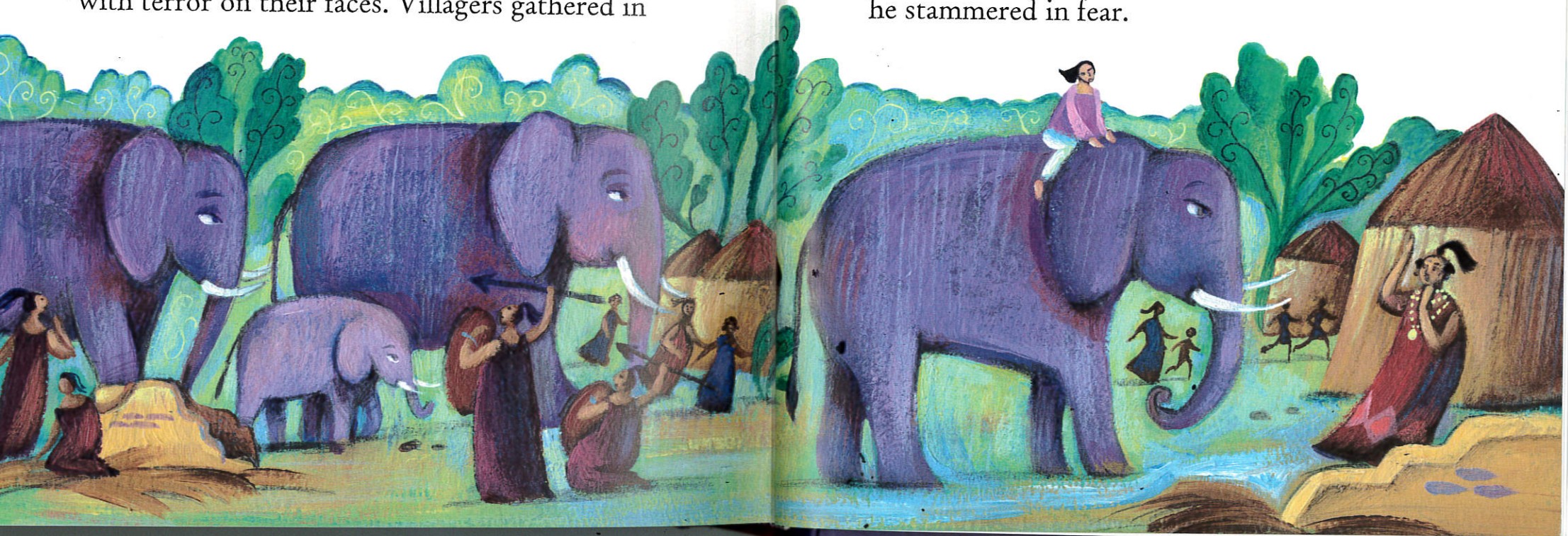
The elephant gave a deep rumble, and began to move. It led the herd through the depths of the forest, past the tree with my broken arrows at its foot, and out into the village.

When the elephants entered the village and marched past the half-rebuilt houses, people fled with terror on their faces. Villagers gathered in

doorways clutching their weapons, but the solemn procession of the entire herd of elephants was impressive enough to ward off any attack.

We stopped outside my master's house. “I have brought the elephant tusks you asked for,” I called out. “But I've left them on the elephant.”

My master came out. “W— what kind of demon are you, who can tame wild elephants?” he stammered in fear.



"I didn't tame them," I replied. "I think it may have been they who tamed me. Anyway, they have come to show you that there can be peace between man and elephant. They only attack you because you keep slaughtering them for their tusks."

"They are animals," shouted my master indignantly. "They don't reason like that."

"They showed me the elephant graveyard today," I said. "They mourn the loss of their dead, the same as we do."

"How do we know they'll stop harming us if we drop our guard?" came a voice behind me, and I turned to see the villagers gathered in a timid crowd around the elephant herd.

"If you let them leave the village peacefully and stop all violence towards them, they will

leave you alone," I said, hoping that this would be true.

"Very well," said my master. "We will try it."

The villagers parted to allow the elephants through. The bull elephant wrapped his trunk around my waist and lifted me down to stand in front of my master.

The great creature nodded his head very slightly to me, then turned and led the other elephants out of the village. The villagers lined the roads to watch, their eyes round with wonder.

My master frowned. "You do not behave like a slave," he told me.

"No man is truly a slave," I replied.

"Since you have talked us out of our livelihood, how do you propose that the village earns money now?" he asked. "We used to sell

engraved tusks to merchants who passed by on ships. Now we will have nothing to sell.”

I thought for a moment. Then I remembered my previous voyage and the kingdom I had discovered. “I am a merchant by trade, and I happen to know of a land where wood is valued more highly than precious jewels,” I said. “You can use your skill at engraving to carve wood into all kinds of things, and sell them to these people. I can even take you there and introduce you to the king, if you’ll let me.”

After talks with the village elders, my master agreed to travel with me to the Land of Jewels. We went to the port and he paid for our passage on board a ship that was going there.

When the chief tribesman and I arrived, the King of Sarandib welcomed me with open arms.

It was a great surprise to my master to see his slave embraced by a king.

I told the King of Sarandib everything that had happened, and at first he regarded the tribesman angrily. But I explained that I bore no grudge and told him all about my idea. He was very interested.

He and my master discussed the terms and shook hands on the deal. The king would send a fleet of ships in a month’s time with payment for the first shipment of wooden carvings. And I was free at last to go home.

My master granted my freedom and we parted as friends. I set out for home, on





yet another ship laden with gifts. The journey home was smooth and uneventful, much to my delight.

I'd never been so glad to be home before. I'd had enough adventure to last me the rest of my days. I settled happily at home, and can honestly say I've never felt the need to go to sea again since.



Sindbad the sailor sat back in his chair. "And that was my very last voyage," he said. "When I delivered news of my journey to the caliph, he insisted I tell him the story of all seven voyages."

"Did he enjoy hearing them?" asked Sindbad the porter.

"Oh yes," replied Sindbad the sailor. "He told me they must be preserved for everybody to share, and ordered his scribe to write them down in golden ink. They were kept in the caliph's own library, and have been read by many visitors and retold many times since then."

Sindbad paused a moment, and then he added, "I cannot be sure, but I believe the scribe and tellers of the stories may have added a detail or two of their own... but a story is a story after all; it is there for the teller to tell and the listener to be entertained."

