

The Arks What Weren't

by strannikov

Mrs. Noah eyed the thickening clouds from the front stoop. Noah was still out in the yard kicking up sand in disgust, arguing with himself the whole time. Piles of cedar timber lay strewn all about. Maybe if they'd lived even three days' journey closer to the coast. Or it might not have looked so implausible had he started the project years back when they still had the lake house: why couldn't he've taken up boat building then? The ark's keel had been laid, but the little else that'd been done made the thing look like the headless carcass of some immense beast that died well outside of its element. Two horizons away, a low rumble of thunder lifted its voice.

Maybe it was Ham's example that turned his mind to begin with. There he goes now, the lanky geek, trudging over the ridge there carrying his newspapers with the Second Coming fonts "HEAVY RAINS IN FORECAST".

Off to the side of the construction site stood the small flimsy corral. It held only a meagre menagerie of mating pairs of alpacas, hippopotamuses, lemurs, musk oxen, and rats, along with one gazelle and one lion cub (whose parents had both disappeared after chasing down and devouring the other gazelle).

With some of the spare lumber, Shem and Japheth had set up a little lean-to next to the winepress and were sipping Mesopotamian merlot in the shade. Mrs. Noah had had the good sense to warn them not to carouse, so the pair murmured in low tones and took turns filling each other's cups while she continued her remonstrations with their father. "But Mount Ararat is so lovely in the spring!"

"No, nothing doing, I've had it! I'm not building it!" Noah groused.

"Is it the hippopotamuses? We'll have plenty of shovels, plus we'll have Shem and Japheth for the really heavy lifting, if they can load all those heavy barrels. Look, see! I'll even pick up a shovel myself, it won't be half as bad as you think!" As if on cue, the hippo

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not frolicking in the little pond relieved itself copiously along the bank there. No response from Noah. "I know we can't expect as much from Ham, but I'm sure we can get him to take care of the feeding and—"

"No, it's not the hippos," Noah's voice bottomed out with a deflating wheeze of exhaustion.

She had to divert his attention, if possible. "The rats?" Mrs. Noah asked of her husband. "I know you don't care for rodents, but surely they serve some purpose in the long run—?"

"No, the rats are the least of my concerns," Noah gnawed on his lips.

Mrs. Noah had also had the good sense to warn Ham to keep a discreet distance, but he really wasn't helping things. Now he ambled by along the ridge, going the other way, umbrellas looped over his arms for sale.

She'd run low on arguments. Maybe she needed to lighten things. "Well, it can't be the unicorns, because they're imaginary creatures—"

"Idiot! Of course not!" Noah exploded in rage, his face mottled with crimson here, purple there, veins bulging dangerously on his forehead. "It's these damned human beings! Nothing but wars and incessant squabbling and squalor! Profit and lucre! Gaud, glitz, and glitter! Filth and disease! Ignorance and stupidity! Look, you and I are so old we don't have to worry about reproducing even accidentally. But I refuse to carry one pair of human beings! The most pernicious race of little odious vermin that—(here, Noah jabbed upwards with his right index finger)—ever allowed to crawl on the face of the earth. To hell with them all!"

That Ham! What timing! There he goes loping by in the other direction again, now he's carrying oars for sale!

As Ham disappeared over the ridge, though, the eyes of Noah, Mrs. Noah, Shem, and Japheth all turned to the other ridge, where three stomping figures were vociferous in their descent. Oh no, Mrs. Noah instantly concluded, not those three again, this is all we need! She could hear them bellyaching a thousand cubits away!

Minutes later, Utnapishtim, Deucalion, and Jonah were conferring with Noah. “No, nothing doing!” Jonah roared. “I told—(here, Jonah jabbed upwards with his right index finger)—we’re all on strike, we’ve seen and heard enough of this nonsense, too!” Utnapishtim and Deucalion nodded in vociferous assent. “Cretinous humanity!” Utnapishtim spat. “Bipedal imbeciles!” Deucalion sneered.

Perfect! Mrs. Noah scowled, lifting her head to the ridge. Thunder boomed closer than it had all day, just as Ham stumbled along with his arms full of goggles, snorkels, and fins.

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