

Arabah el Madfunah
Jan 5th 1937.

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Dear Mother

As the mail after this may be late for your birthday I am wishing you Many Happy Returns of the Day in this letter

We had a very enjoyable evening last Sunday our old friend the wandering minstrel came so we had a performance after supper.

He had with him his son in law & two nephews

The son in law played a second fiddle & the eldest nephew a lad of about 18 played the drum & the younger one had no instrument but sang beautifully.

At first our old friend sang us the traditional songs of Abu Zaid, he related how Abu Zaid had disguised himself & by some trick had got the Sultan to promise to give him a sword, a horse & his daughter, but the daughter protested & suggested as a way out of the difficulty that Abu Zaid be requested to bring fruit from a certain garden in the mountains that had been abandoned because lions had taken up

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then abode there, Abu Zaid went, & slew the lions & came back carrying a ^{lion} cub which he offered to the Sultan saying here is the fruit from the garden. so the Sultan was obliged to give him his daughter.

There were many subsequent adventures ~~and~~ we found it a little difficult to follow everything but we gathered that Abu Zaid was chivalrous enough to offer the lady her liberty to return to her father if she wished.

There was a brief interval while the performers were offered refreshments, then the old man exchanged his fiddle for the drum & the two boys sang a duet in our praise with numerous topical allusions, it was all in verse & had a jolly chorus in which they all joined, it reminded me a little of the sea chantys, there were roars of applause from the native audience, it went something like this. "Very great are the ladies, there are none like them in the land," sang one boy

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"they are more important than the Prime Minister
no man dare aspire to them" sang the other
boy - so on. We cannot think how they
managed it. they never faltered & rhyme &
rhythm were perfect. We had on the table
a tiny Xmas tree with little candles on it
that had been sent to us & we noticed how
they gazed at it, so to please them Amice
lighted the little candles & turned the lamp
very low, of course they had never seen such
a thing before & were delighted, & the old man
said. "We will make a song to the tree"
So one boy sang. Do you see the wonderful tree
oh my brother. & the other answered "I see it
indeed & it has 8 lighted candles." & then the
first sang, from whence came this tree oh my
brother & the second replied I know not, may
be from Cairo or Alexandria then the first
rebuked him saying Oh thou of little intelligence
such a tree as this must come from a foreign
land." and they kept this up all the time

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the candles were burning they sang it to the
tune of their previous song & the wonderful
thing was that it was all in perfect verse,
the end of each line rhymed & it was all
done on the spur of the moment. you
can imagine how delighted we were.
We had some crackers over from Xmas
so we produced them & told them to pull
one, you should have seen the consternation
when it went off & then the eagerness to
pull the rest to hear the exciting bang
& the thrilling hunt for the contents, the
trinkets that were disclosed were regarded as
great treasures, it was the most successful
evening we have ever had
The performers spent the night with our men
& I imagine the entertainment continued long
after we had gone to bed.
We are very glad to find that the police officer
who we had nicknamed the camel fly
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so that we can be pleasantly polite without being afraid of endless invitations to tea

The King is coming to see the temple on the 14 of this month & there are great preparations being made, the Queen will be with him & the two Princesses, so we will have to be in attendance, all the road from Baliana is being decorated with pylons & obelisks & flags & all sorts of things. He will have lunch in the temple & depart about 4 o'clock so it will be an all day affair.

If you can find my mineralogy book will you send it out to me, it is a dull brown book & may be on my studio shelves or among the odd books in the library, but do not trouble if you cannot find it easily

Thank you very much for the calendars we have one in each room, also the sand paper we have quite enough now to last us all the season. To night (12th night) is the coptic Christmas Eve so we are going to the service in the Coptic church as this may be our last opportunity

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I hope you have a very nice time on your
Birthday, Amice & I send you both lots of love
Your affectionate daughter
Myrtle.

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