

Waiting for an Ark

'Five whole days I've been waiting here. Five whole days, and not a sign, not a peep of the Ark. They promised. They promised quite faithfully. "Just you wait up at the top of that tall mountain", they said, "And we'll come along and get you". In an Ark, they said. Not that I was too sure what an Ark was, mind you. But the Zebra just along there told me all about it. Did you know that that Zebra's brother-in-law has been in a zoo! Just think of it - locked up with I don't know what kind of riff-raff. It rubs off, you know. I've known people who could never get the stink of the zoo off their fur. Anyway, this Zebra was telling me - not the one who'd been in the zoo, the one just along there... Oh dear, just look at that now! How they let beavers do that sort of thing, I don't know. Disgusting, I call it.

'An Ark? Well, it's some kind of big boat they've built. Oh, don't ask me how they knew to do it. All kinds of new-fangled things people get up to these days. They can build Arks, you know - but can they get the Ark to arrive on time? Can they horsewash, if you'll forgive my Nubian! It was different in my day - when we said we'd be somewhere at a certain time, that's where we were - sooner if possible. Arks did not run late then, certainly not!

'No, all right, we didn't have Arks in our days. Did we need Arks? Did it rain and rain and rain like this all day long and all night too? Did it tush, if you'll pardon my Aramaic! The point is, they said quite openly "Just you wait up at the top of that tall mountain", they said, "And we'll come along and get you". In an Ark, they said. Well, I've been waiting here five days now and they're late. You mark my words - I'll be writing a strong letter of complaint when I get back home. Here we all are, stuck on top of this boggy mountain, looking out at that! Look at it - mile after mile of water. Yesterday you could still see the other mountain-tops. Can't see them now, eh? I've stood up here and watched the waters rise, and seen all these creatures arrive. You've got to feel sorry for some of them, I suppose, but you'd think refugees could be a bit quieter. Be off with you, you little bleeders, or you'll feel the back of my hand! Does your mother know where you are? - pesky little water rats - loving all this, aren't they? Me, I'm a dry-land sort of person. Don't hold with all this water. Never did anyone any good. See what it's done out there.

'Now that bunch of alligators over there - you want to watch out for them. They'll have you on the ground and your throat open as soon as say "Good Day". No, well, they haven't dared touch anyone since they arrived up here. But base nature will out - they'll be after some poor unfortunate before too long, you just mark my words. Perhaps they'll do us all a favour and dispose of that bunch of warthogs over there: what an unruly bunch! Bet they never paid their taxes, but here they are bold as brass and twice as ugly, expecting to be picked up when the Ark turns up. If they get let on before me, so help me I'll cry blue murder. Oughtn't to be allowed, those dirty little beasts.

'Did you meet Noah and his family? Quite respectable, I thought. It just shows you, though. Don't go by appearances! There they stood, bold as brass and nice as ninepence and promised to get the Ark to us by last Tuesday. "Tuesday next, Mr C. , we'll be there", said that son of his, Ham. Sometimes I just stand on my four legs and shake my fists at the state of the world.

Sometimes I think it's right and proper that a Flood be visited upon the world. It wasn't like that in my day. When I was younger, animals knew their place, humans knew theirs, we knew ours, and we got along just fine. No handouts, we just accepted our place in the natural order of things and got on with it. Not these days! - oh no, these days it's all grab this, I want that, gimme gimme. See those kangaroos down there, just past the flock of vultures? Hopping about like they was in a picture book. You wouldn't believe some of the stories I've heard. Make your mane just bristle right up, it would. Still, it's not my place to judge, I suppose.

'Just look at that rain teeming down, will you. Have you come far - you look rather wet? Oh, over from Mesopotamia, eh? Must be years since I last met up with a Mesopotamian Roc - not much call for it these days, I'm afraid. I remember Mesopotamia as it was in the old days, before things went from bad to worse. I suppose you've just got here? Forty-seven days on the trip, eh? Well, I've been here five days, and I suppose two or three days getting my old bones up this mountain. Not easy for someone of my age you know, oh no, it isn't. You look at me and think: well, that's a good strong chap, he'll make it no bother. Probably what Noah and his bunch thought: nice strong chap, he'll have no difficulty getting up the mountain to our Ark. That's what he'll have thought. Of course, I'm a martyr to lumbago, gets me just here, and I can't really walk all that far. Now, if I'd thought, I would have asked them to send the Ark round to my home and pick me up before the Flood waters started. But I'm proud, don't like to complain too much. In my youth, old folks didn't complain, just accepted their fate and got on with it. Don't see any reason to change that, do you, eh?

'Blimey, just take a look at the way these wolverines are behaving. Bunch of animals, aren't they? Impolite too - you wouldn't believe what one of them said to me last night. Of course, I just ignored them: too proud to lower myself to their level. I think it's an absolute disgrace that animals like that should get on the same Ark as me and you. Something ought to be done. Someone ought to complain. I think I'll have a quiet word with Noah when he gets here.

'If he gets here. Look here's the dawn coming again. My sixth day. Oh, I can't tell you how my lumbago's playing up again. Here, could you just hop up and rub me here, over my hind leg. No, not there, you idiot, here! Oh, that's better. I'm a real martyr to it, you know. "Just you wait up at the top of that tall mountain", they said, "And we'll come along and get you". In an Ark, they said. Well, do you see any Arks this morning?

'See that Bactrian Camel down there, the one with the long nose and the grumpy look. You wouldn't think to look at him that he'd travelled over ten weeks to get here. Five weeks - goodness, that's almost fifty days. No, no, not thirty-five days, you stupid bird: what did they teach you in Mesopotamia? By heaven, education has gone downhill fast since my day. Come on, don't let up on that hind leg - it's making me feel much better. That Bactrian, what a fellow he is! Takes no insolence from the snakes or the ibises, gives as good as he gets.

Now, look: here's the sun up, and still no Ark. This is quite unacceptable - six days now and they still aren't here! I'm going to raise hell when we get off this - hang on! What's that out there? My eyesight's not as good as it used to be. Can you see anything? A big boat, you say? Must be the Ark they promised.

Not a moment too soon, I say - just look at the waters lapping around the feet of those buffalo over there. Well, here they come at last. I'll give them a piece of my mind when I get on board. Oh, stop fussing at my hind leg like that! - too much rubbing just makes it hot and itchy. Goodbye, I'm getting myself into the queue.

'Out of my way, lions, can't you see I've been here longer than you? You, the cheetah, get to the back of the queue - I know for a fact you only got here last night! Get your children from under my feet, Warthog, I have an urgent message for Mr Noah.

'Oh, now, will you just look at that? Not just one, but three boats coming! You wait for days on end for an Ark - and then three turn up at once! Outrageous!

'Well, can't stop, must get myself aboard. Don't like the look of the bunch getting aboard that first Ark - common, common. That second Ark, now - dragons, gryphons, unicorns - that's more my crowd. You coming?'