



Will it float ?

It took a little while for the elephant's eyes to adjust to the half-light. Noah had just ordered the closing of the hatches. Light came through the slatted panel high up in the side of the ark, but little of it reached down to the floor. Within moments the humid air was stifling. Incessant rain on the parched earth had not yet cooled the world. The hot air drew out the pungent smell of the thick layers of tar which covered the acacia beams. Through the slats the elephant could see water everywhere. The rain had been falling many days now. The river, alongside which Noah had built his ark had long since burst its banks. Water covered the plain for as far as the eye could see. People and cattle had moved to higher ground. The ark creaked as the waters moved against it, but the vessel lay firmly on its flattened keel, heavy with its living cargo. The elephant could see more clearly now. A mouse scurried around his feet. He saw a quick slithering movement behind the mouse. A snake bellied towards it across the boards.

'Remember the truce,' said the elephant, waving his trunk at the snake. 'Every animal is safe whilst we're in the ark.'

'Only playing,' hissed the snake, pointing his fangs defiantly towards the elephant's trunk. The mouse stayed behind the elephant's leg. Truce or no truce, he was taking no chances. 'In any case,' said the snake, 'The truce won't be for long. It'll stop raining soon and we'll all be out with everything back to normal.' He pointed his fangs towards the half-hidden mouse.

'That's not so,' said the elephant. 'It will rain till the whole world is covered with water. We shall be here for a long time yet.'

'Who said ?' hissed the snake.

'Noah said.'

'Nonsense,' the snake muttered. 'We're just here till the rain stops. We'll all be out in a day or two.'

'The rain won't stop till we're floating above the mountains,' the elephant replied with the superior air of one who knows. 'Noah told me.'

'Floating !' the snake hissed. 'This wood house will never float. All the animals and Noah and his family, plus all those provisions he's carried on board. If the water does cover everything, it'll cover this ark for sure.'

'We'll all drown ! squeaked the mouse.

'Those of you who can't swim, or don't get eaten,' the snake grinned, showing his teeth and fangs.

'No-one's going to drown, or have to swim,' said the elephant. 'This ark was designed to float, and float it will.'

'Who says ?' asked the snake.

'Noah says.'

'Huh,' the snake hissed again, 'Noah's just an old, man. He's just a dreamer. If he knew what he was doing why didn't everybody else want to come along in the ark. Why didn't they all build arks ?'

'I don't know,' said the elephant, 'but I do know that Noah is a good, wise man. In fact I'd go as far as to say, he's one of the very few good people left on the earth today.'

'He's the kindest and wisest may I've ever seen,' the mouse had ventured out again.

'Rubbish.' The snake hissed so loudly the mouse stood back behind the elephants foot. 'There's millions of good people in the world. They all cheat a bit and quarrel at times, and like to do their own thing, but that's just people.'

'No,' said the elephant firmly. 'The while world is a mess because people live like that. God made people to be good, like him.'

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'Huh,' hissed the snake. 'It won't float, you'll see. The water will go down, you'll see. The whole world will be laughing at you and Noah.'

The conversation was cut short by a creaking and groaning which echoed through all the timbers of the ark. The animals could hardly discern the moment when the ark lifted off the ground.

The elephant could see the movement against the tree-tops. 'We're afloat,' he said quietly. It's just as Noah said. He peered down into the gloom around his feet at the snake, but the snake had already slithered away.

As the elephant looked up again he thought he saw the faintest suspicion of a rainbow against the storm clouds and marvelled at this beautiful new thing God had surely given them.