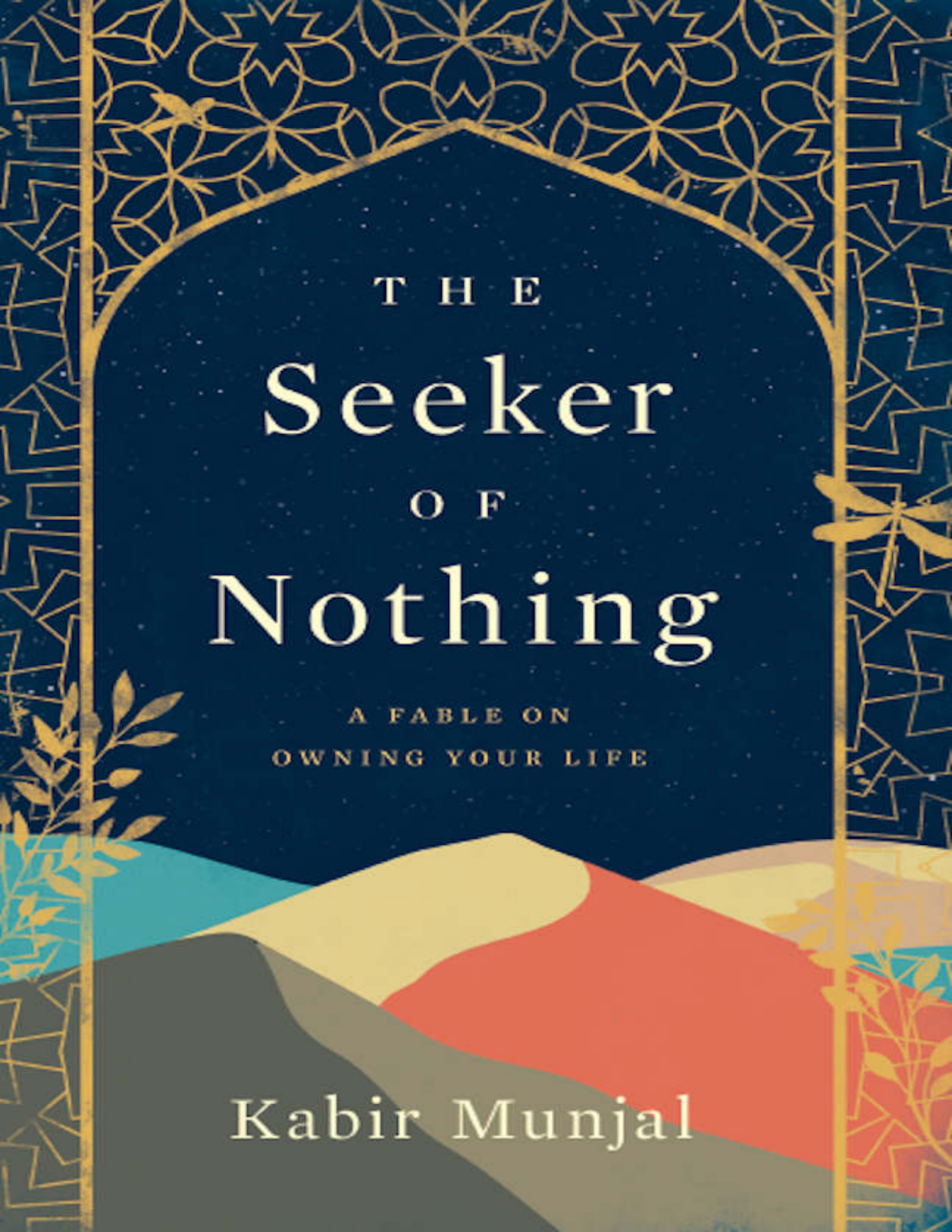
THE
Seeker
OF
Nothing
A FABLE ON
OWNING YOUR LIFE
Kabir Munjal

THE Seeker OF Nothing

A FABLE ON OWNING YOUR LIFE

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Om Swamiji, words cannot encapsulate what my heart knows. This book is yours. Thank you for being by my side every step of the way. Your grace and blessings make my life beautiful.

Mom, this would not be possible without you. Your thoughts, input, and support have been invaluable in making this a reality.

Dad, thank you for always being the father I needed.

Bee, I am grateful for your love and support. Thank you for standing by me.

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A big thank you to everyone who helped me have the experiences I needed to make this happen.

Ned-Har

“Will you get off the ship tomorrow?”

I peer into Andahar’s cabin and find him sitting at his shabby desk, trying to fix himself a pipe. With those trembling hands? He may be here until hell freezes over.

I use my stick to push my way in as much as I can. The door only opens a little. What could be blocking the way always escapes me. He never seems to change his clothes, so I don’t think there are many of those lying around. Although he could not be called a poor man, a peasant is likely to have more possessions than he does, prized or otherwise. Yet, something obstructs the doorway.

“Is it sinking?” Andahar says without shifting his gaze from the mission at hand. The storm outside does not make his task any easier.

The gatekeeper of heaven must be more welcoming to the greatest sinner than Andahar is to anyone who would dare to enter his cabin. Sinner or not, today I push the door harder and begin to move a little further into the room. Even with only half of me inside, it’s difficult to ignore the assault on my senses. Having lived on a ship for so long, I may have been a constant courtier to a larger variety of sharp odours than anyone else. Whether it is the stench of moisture and mould where he lives, the barely edible, gnarly-smelling meat on his plate, or the clothes soaked in bodily fluids on his men, a sailor would be damned if he stopped to think. Or smell.

But Andahar’s cabin is unbearable. The air is stale. It reeks of sweat and an overpowering wetness. His foul breath fills the small chamber, stinking of meat and rum. Lots of rum. I can’t help but let out a cough as I squeeze through from behind him and open the window, testing the limits of my courage.

He glares at me before getting up and slamming it shut. He sits down again, takes a huge gulp from the black bottle, re-adjusts his position, and resumes attending to his immediate objective. Although I have been trying my best to avoid it, my eyes meet his neck. I shut them immediately. How I hate seeing that crinkled leathery skin, which creeps out from under his dirty

tunic as if it means to antagonise me and set ablaze the little peace I have left.

I take a deep breath and try again. “We dock at Corcusia, the city of dreams.”

“Ah.” A glimpse of joy runs across his face, making sure to vanish as quickly as it arrived. He lights the pipe and turns towards me.

“Tell me, oh captain, do these eyes look like they need more dreams?”

I don’t know what bothers me more, his back or those eyes. They reflect a dark emptiness. A blackness so deep, I know not where it ends. An abyss of misery. They used to be brown, a beautiful dark brown. Now, you can very clearly see in them—nothing. I am often plagued by the thought that if I inspected a dead man’s eyes, they would look exactly like his. But I stop myself. I would rather try to forget than find yet another bleak truth about my brother’s present state.

Yes. Beneath that unkept beard, the matted hair, and the perpetual intoxication lie the remains of the man who was once my brother. It’s hard to believe that he is the same man who cared for me after my accident.

“Let’s go out tomorrow. A change of scenery might be good,” I say, hoping that the gods will smile upon me today.

“You may leave now,” he mutters, blowing a ring of smoke towards the ceiling.

“Is seven years not long enough?” I foolishly allow some of my helplessness to slip through.

Now, *my* hands are trembling, my mouth a little dry, as I continue to scorn the Goddess of Luck.

“How dare you?” He gets up in a fit of rage and hurls the chair against the wall. “Get out of my sight!” he shouts, pointing at the door.

I look down, lean on my stick and squeeze out of his chambers. Soon enough, the door is slammed. I hear the barrel being dragged back into its place. I should remember that the next time we go to the trouble of arranging for his rum.

His hostility no longer bothers me, nor does his anger. These are merely ways to make me stop coming. To make me give up. What *does* bother me are the countless days of silence that screech through the recesses of my

soul. Although I would like for him to speak to me, I shudder at the thought of knowing what goes on inside that mind of his.

The winds are a little calmer as I limp onto the deck to ensure we are on course. Corcusia. I have been there many a time, but I cannot leave it to anyone else. Not this once. After a short inspection, I make my way to my chambers. My leg hurts, but tonight my mind is not with me. It's out there, swimming in the ocean of possibilities.

Could it finally happen?

There is a knock on my door.

"Who is it?"

"It is me Master, Ulgar. I bring your medicine."

"Oh yes, my boy, bring it in."

I sit on my bed with my leg stretched out. If the herbs are not applied by this time, I might as well banish myself to the dungeons of despair for the rest of the night.

The storm outside is remarkably beautiful. The ship always goes silent on nights like these. No sounds of drunken singing and dancing. And none of the screaming that comes along with the games of dice echoes from the quarters. Only a storm, or the loss of a man to the disease, engenders the eeriness that engulfs the ship.

For me, the roaring sky and the sound of rain lashing against the mast are triggers of little wonder. The fresh rain saves me from drinking the horrible water stored in those ale-laced barrels. I remember how Master Yaromi chided me. "Never trust a merchant who doesn't like his ale." However, I would rather not be trusted than be any more out of my senses than I already am. Moreover, after looking at Andahar, the thought of alcohol boils my blood. Even if there are only traces of it in the water.

Tonight, the weather seems angrier than usual, as if nature is telling me to shed the little bit of hope secretly building in my heart. We rise on the back of one angry wave and get flicked off the top like an unwanted insect, straight down into the belly of another. Up again and then down, continuously riding a furious sea of mountains. Lightning illuminates the grey clouds that envelop us, obscuring even a glimpse of the dark face of

death, which could be lurking just ahead. I have not a worry though, not this time. This time, Corcusia has to be different.

“Is there a problem, Master?” Ulgar asks, trying to maintain his balance.

“A problem? Where?” I am pulled back into my chambers and immediately turn towards my safe.

Ulgar maintains a confused expression.

“Go on, boy, what’s the problem?” My heart is beating a little faster. Could I have missed something? No, it cannot be. We sail as per plan. The load is full. The ship is heavy enough to ride out the storm. The men are all inside and protected. Most importantly, my safe is intact. What in the heavens could stop us now?

“No—no problem, Master,” he adds nervously.

I don’t understand him and shift my gaze to the porthole, back into the raging storm. The city lamps are not yet visible. It must be the clouds. But I can sense it. We are not too far now. That this storm is so bad tells me something good is coming soon.

“May I apply the herbs now, Master?”

“We reach Corcusia tomorrow,” I whisper, staring into the distance.

“Will we conduct large business there, once again?”

“Business?”

“Selling the artefacts you sourced, Master?”

“Oh, right.” I had almost forgotten about those.

“May I apply the herbs, Master?” the boy says, looking at me strangely.

“What? No—no herbs for me today.”

“But Master, how will you—”

“Please shut the door on your way out.”

I am awake long after my candle has gone out, partly due to the pain but more because of the hollow pit in my stomach. It is not from the rocking of the ship, but from the anxiety that grips my being. My mind is playing tricks, throwing questions at me as incessantly as the rain that falls from the sky, as if determined to douse the little flame of hope that is trying hard to stay alive. And that is the most painful thing about hope. It comes with the fear of losing it.