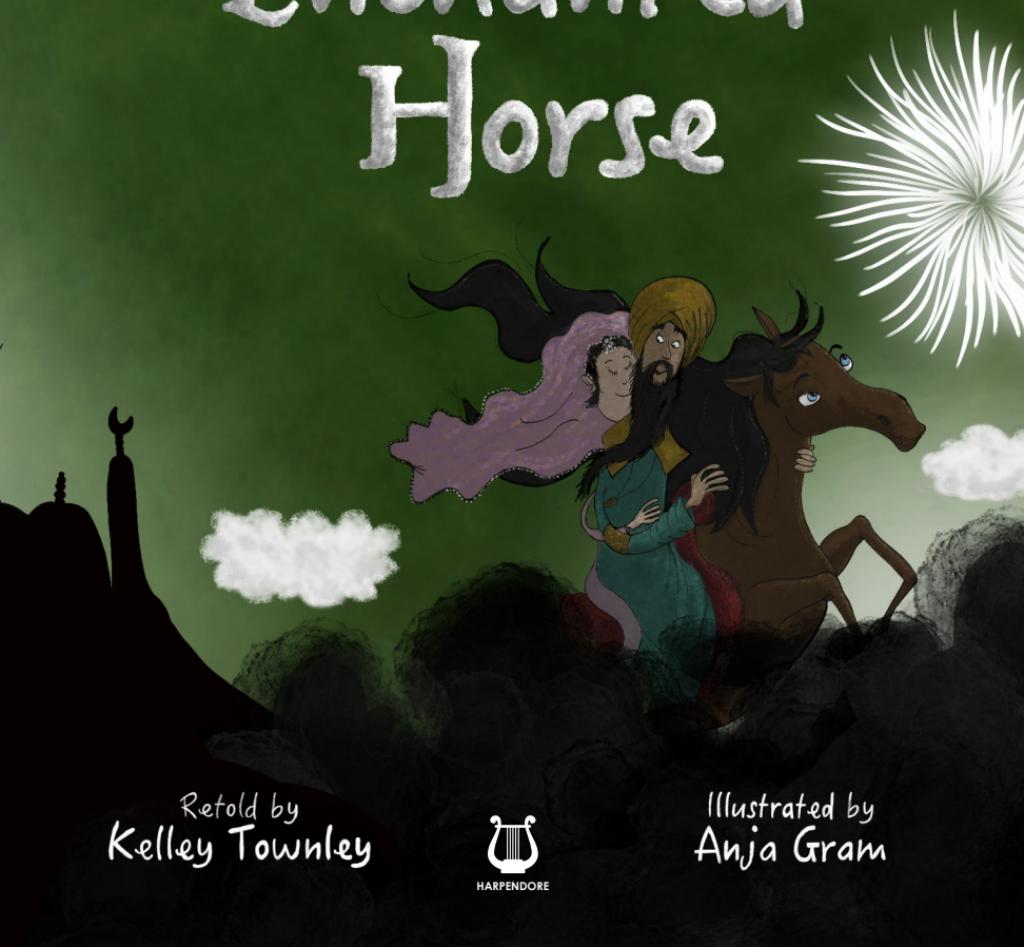


Arabian Nights Adventures

The Enchanted Horse



Retold by
Kelley Townley



Illustrated by
Anja Gram



Arabian Nights Adventures

Many moons ago a great king sentenced his innocent wife to death, but every night she tells the king a story, leaving the tale unfinished until the next night so that the king would spare her life to hear the ending. This lasted for one thousand and one Arabian nights, until the king finally released her. This is just one of those tales ...





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The Enchanted Horse





It was the great festival of New Year, the oldest and most splendid of all the celebrations in the kingdom of Persia. The day had been spent by all enjoying many games and entertainments, magnificent spectacles and fantastic feasts.

Also on this day it was customary to give each other small gifts and many took the opportunity to honour their sultan by giving him elaborate presents. He sat on his throne with his son, Prince Firouz, beside him and received the gifts with great glee and delight.

None would say the sultan was a bad ruler, but it could be said that he was easily distracted by novelty.

The festivities had been long and wonderfully exhausting for the sultan with his magnificent pile of presents, but by now Prince Firouz was quite bored. With the sun turning orange as it sank behind the palace walls, the long line of gift-givers was finally coming to an end. Soon the court would retire for the evening festivities, but for now it was the turn of the last present bearer.

From the far end of the great hall a tall, thin man appeared with a life-sized replica of a horse on wheels. He pulled the horse behind him as he approached the sultan. Everyone marvelled at how incredibly lifelike and richly decorated

the horse was. It was a fine, black stallion with a black mane and tail. The saddle and bridle were made of gold thread with a red velvet seat. Although tired, the sultan was gripped by a deep desire to touch this new toy.

‘You have brought me a most accomplished gift,’ the sultan declared, inching forward in his seat to touch the silky-smooth black coat that looked like shiny coal.

The man leading the horse prostrated himself in front of the sultan.

‘O wise and generous ruler. I am Murad, and I present to you something that far exceeds any present you have received today.’

The sultan was surprised by the man’s arrogance.

'I agree that this horse is an amazing work of craftsmanship,' he said, 'but I have received many such wonderful gifts today. I am afraid yours does not eclipse them.'

'Ah, but this is no ordinary trinket,' said Murad. 'Yes, it looks beautiful, exquisite even, but there is much, much more to it.'

'Pray show us then,' said Prince Firouz who was eager for his couch and some hot tea.

Murad bowed and explained. 'This horse can take you wherever you want to go in the blink of an eye!'

'How so?' asked the sultan in astonishment.

'I have only to mount him and wish myself somewhere, and no matter

how distant it may be, in only a few moments I shall find myself there. It is this, sire, that makes the horse so marvellous. Perhaps you would like a go?'

Delighted, the sultan got to his feet immediately, but Prince Firouz held his father's arm.

'Maybe a demonstration by your good self first would be more appropriate?' he suggested to Murad.

The sultan frowned and nodded. 'Oh yes, quite so, safety first. Please, show us how it is done.'

Murad nodded and climbed up into the saddle of the enchanted horse.

'Where shall I go, sire?' he asked.

'Do you see those mountains?' said the sultan, pointing to a range that towered



The Enchanted Horse

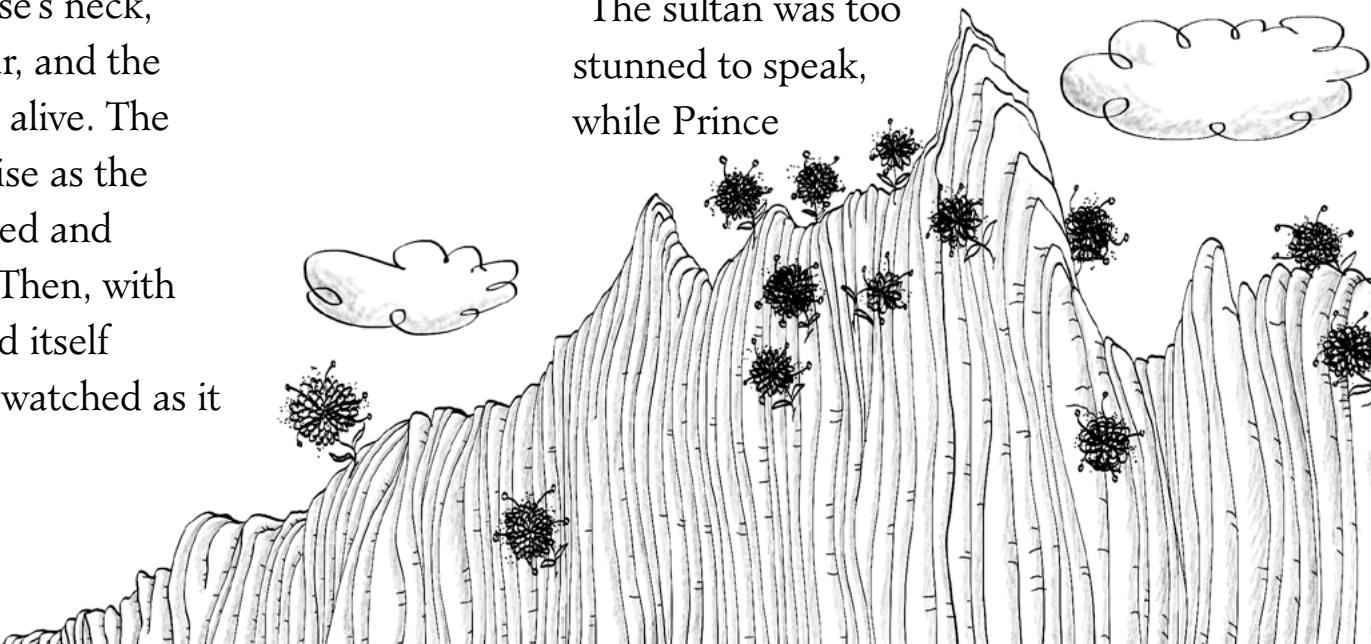
into the sky about three leagues away. 'There grows a special flower of orange and pink only there. It is my wife's favourite. Fetch me one and prove the nature of your horse.'

The words were hardly out of the sultan's mouth when Murad turned a screw placed upon the horse's neck, directly behind his right ear, and the animal suddenly reared up alive. The court shrank back in surprise as the magnificent creature snorted and kicked out its front hoofs. Then, with lightning speed, it launched itself powerfully into the air. All watched as it

quickly disappeared into the clouds.

It seemed strange to just sit and wait for its return, but wait they did and within a quarter of an hour there was the excited shout of the horse's return. Murad guided the horse in to land and then it calmly trotted onto its wooden plinth before becoming a statue once again. Murad climbed down and presented the sultan with the orange and pink flower he had asked for.

The sultan was too stunned to speak, while Prince



Firouz was quickly on his feet to examine the marvellous device.

‘Truly you really have delivered to me the greatest gift,’ marvelled the sultan.

‘Alas, my great ruler,’ said Murad. ‘I cannot just gift this horse to you. To get this horse I had to give its inventor something very precious, and it was with the understanding that if I ever wanted to trade the horse again it could only be for something equally precious.’

‘That is completely understandable,’ declared the sultan. ‘Name your price, for I must own this most amazing horse! You can have rubies or gold or saffron, in any amount you wish!’

‘I’m afraid that, although very generous, it would not equal what I

gave for it,’ said Murad.

‘Land, then,’ said the sultan. ‘I will give you territory for you to lord over and call your own.’

‘Alas even that does not equal what I gave for it,’ said Murad.

‘Then what did you give?’ asked Prince Firouz.

‘Yes! Tell us!’ cried an exasperated sultan.

‘I gave my only daughter,’ Murad said.

‘Your daughter?’ frowned the sultan.

‘Are you saying you want my daughter in return for the horse?’

‘I am, my liege,’ said Murad. ‘I would love and honour her as my wife, if you will permit it.’

The court had gone very quiet while the sultan frowned in thought. Prince

Firouz stopped examining the horse to look at his father in alarm.

‘Surely you are not considering it?’ he said.

The sultan shrugged. ‘Why not? Your sister is in need of a husband; why not this fine man?’

‘Sire,’ smiled Murad. ‘I never doubted that a sovereign so wise and accomplished as Your Highness would do justice to my horse.’

Prince Firouz strode to his father’s side and whispered into his ear. ‘But what if she does not like him?’ he asked.

‘My son, you speak nobly,’ said the sultan. ‘But truly no wife ever likes her husband. It is only a partnership of necessity. She will be happy enough when she has a collection of children to

look after. And besides, if I reject this man’s gift he will only attempt to offer it to some other monarch who might use it against us. For the good of my kingdom it is my duty to obtain this toy, er, I mean great device.’

‘If your mind is already made up,’ said Prince Firouz, ‘I think it best we thoroughly test this enchanted horse so that we do not fall for some kind of trick.’

‘Quite right!’ said the sultan, pleased to be getting his own way. ‘With the owner’s permission, my son, the prince, will now make trial of the enchanted horse’s powers.’

‘Of course,’ said Murad, bowing low, and he helped Prince Firouz mount the horse.

The horse's body felt rigid and unfamiliar to Firouz who was used to riding on real beasts. Murad assisted Prince Firouz into the stirrups and instructed him to sit further back.

'Here is the screw that sets the horse free ...,' he said, pointing to the horse's right ear.

Prince Firouz turned the screw. 'Not yet!' cried Murad, but it was too late.

The horse's body magically changed into one warm and agile. It reared back as before, and Prince Firouz had to cling on tightly. With sudden speed, the amazing black stallion launched itself into the air.

'... I haven't told you how to get back down!' Murad shouted in alarm.

He looked at the sultan in fear. The sultan was currently still smiling, looking up into the sky after his flying son with delight.

'My liege, the prince, he didn't listen to all the instructions!' said Murad in fear.

The sultan looked at him and then back at the sky. They waited some time, expecting any moment that the prince might return. Murad became more and more concerned.

'I fear the prince is not returning,' he said eventually.

'What have you done?' cried the king in a burst of fear and anger. 'How did you let this happen?'

'He was too fast,' said Murad. 'We can only hope he discovers the second

screw that brings the horse back to earth.'

'But supposing he doesn't!' answered the sultan. 'Or what if the horse descends straight into some rocks, the sea, or some other danger?'

'Have no fear of that, Your Highness,' said Murad. 'The horse can only land somewhere where it is safe.'

'Safe may not be good enough if he cannot return to his home,' declared the sultan. 'Take this man and hold him in our dungeon. If my son, the prince and heir to this kingdom, is not returned to me within three months, I shall have his head!'

Meanwhile, up in the air, Prince Firouz was having the most exhilarating time. He had discovered the horse

would simply follow his thoughts, and together they soared through the clouds and raced through the blue and orange sky at speeds never reached on land. Presently, though, it began to get dark.

'Why, we have travelled so far we have reached lands where it is already night-time,' Prince Firouz marvelled. 'Let us descend and explore.'

The enchanted horse, however, stayed aloft.

'Down, I say!' said Firouz. 'Down!' But still the horse remained in the air and Firouz began to feel panicked. He realised he had not listened to all the instructions and now he did not know how to get back to the ground. His irate thoughts were confusing the horse

who bucked and reared as they crested over the white tops of great mountains. Firouz had to grab the animal around the neck and hold on tightly so as not to fall off. He found the screw on the right that made the horse go skyward and thought, perhaps, there was a matching one on the left that made it go earthwards?

He searched with frightened fingers until ... yes! There it was. A screw, just like the other, behind the left ear. Firouz gently turned the screw and the horse calmly dropped down to land. In his panic Firouz hadn't noticed they were now above a grand palace. The horse gently trotted to a stop in a small empty courtyard, and Firouz dismounted to gratefully touch

solid ground.

'We were nearly in trouble there,' he said, patting the horse, although now it was rigid and statuesque once more.

'We must be incredibly far from home,' he marvelled, looking at the structure of the buildings that were most unlike the rounded curves and beautiful geometric shapes of Persia. Here they were more pointed and sloping with some animal, similar to a sea serpent, decorating every available space.

It was all very quiet, and Firouz guessed he must be at the very heart of the palace because no guards had spotted him and come running to arrest him. He was desperate to know where he was though, and after hiding the horse safely away his curiosity drove

him to explore. Some people might have hesitated, but not so the prince.

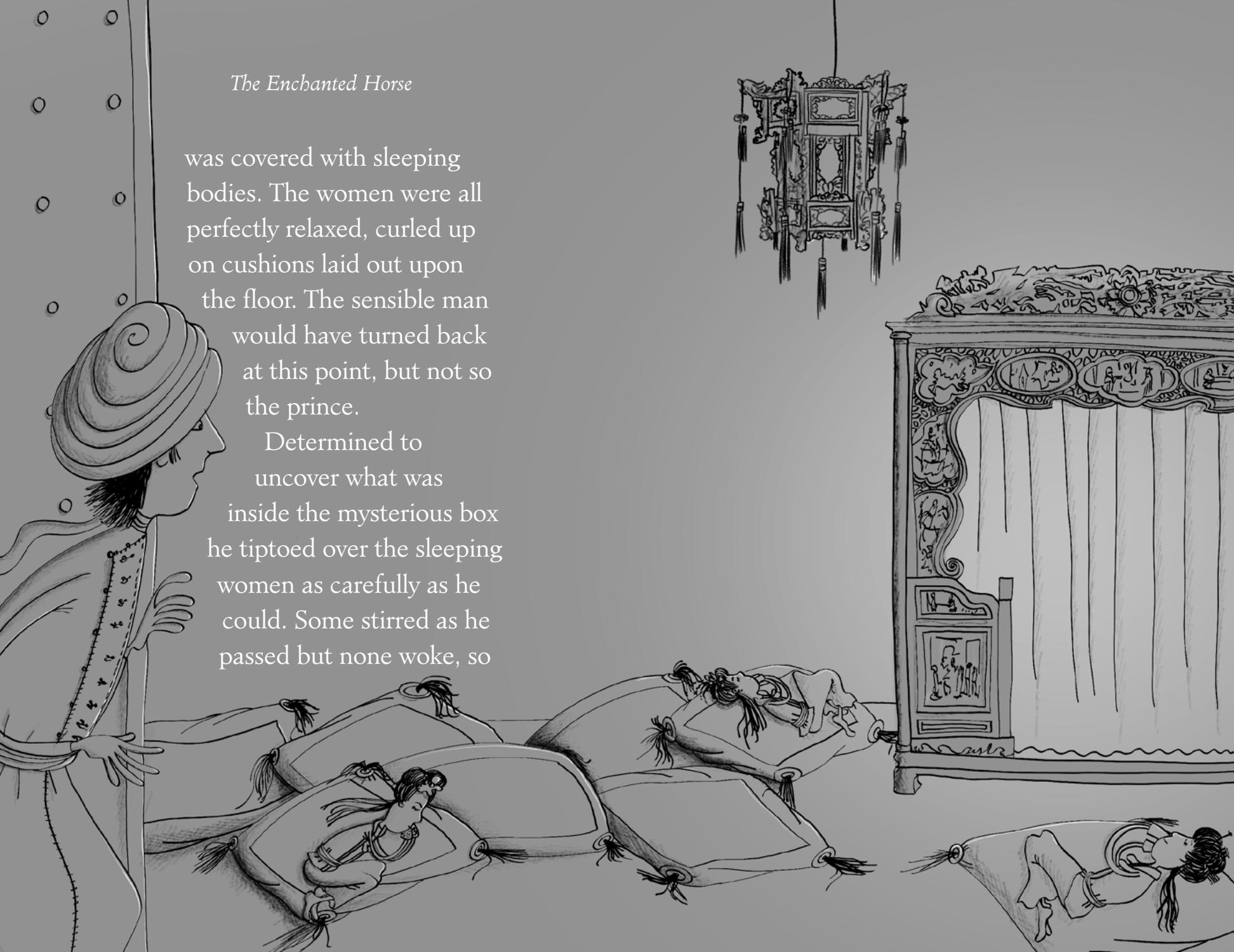
Firouz was aware that if he was caught he would certainly be in a lot of trouble, if not sentenced to death straightaway, but his blood ran wild with excitement as he drank in the unusual spiked roofs and foreign symbols painted on the doors. He especially liked the use of bold colours. Persia was beautiful but subtly so with its gentle tones. Here he saw hundreds of bright red columns, grand sloping roofs in blocks of dark green, walls of deep blue, and everywhere these golden sea serpents with legs!

It came to his attention then that someone must be awake nearby. He

could see a very faint light coming from one of the buildings. He knew it was not wise to expose himself but truly he could not help his curious nature.

Pulling open a very heavy door he could see a room full of detail: from the simple line paintings of exotic fish on the walls to the colourful, lacquered furniture depicting scenes of gentle animals and spring blossoms. In the centre of the room there was a highly decorated wooden box as tall and wide as a man and this was where the light came from.

Entranced, Firouz decided to open the door fully and quietly step into the room. It was only then that he discovered the floor of the room



The Enchanted Horse

was covered with sleeping bodies. The women were all perfectly relaxed, curled up on cushions laid out upon the floor. The sensible man would have turned back at this point, but not so the prince.

Determined to uncover what was inside the mysterious box he tiptoed over the sleeping women as carefully as he could. Some stirred as he passed but none woke, so

that with a burst of triumph he finally reached his goal.

The box had an opening that was thinly covered in ivory fabric and out of this spilled the little pool of light. In the silence of the night Firouz reached out and drew back the curtain of fabric.

He was startled to meet the eyes of an equally startled woman sitting up in bed reading. A lady in such a fine palace with so many women to attend her could only be a princess!

‘I am so sorry,’ he declared in panic, and instantly dropped the curtain.

He had been foolish to trespass here. They would surely kill him horribly for approaching uninvited the resting place of a princess! He turned to leave as quickly as possible.

The princess immediately stuck her head out and called to him.

Firouz froze.

‘You are not from my household,’ she said in perfect Persian. ‘How is it that you have found yourself here but not disturbed the palace guards?’

Firouz turned and bowed deeply.

‘Truly,’ he said. ‘I am here for no reason at all except my curiosity. I have travelled far from home and not known where I landed. I was ... exploring.’

The princess looked delighted and all around him the sleeping women began to awake. He shuffled backwards in fear. They did not raise the alarm, however, but rather looked peacefully to their mistress for guidance.

About this series

The Arabian Nights tales are some of the most enduringly entertaining stories ever written. Compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age, numerous tales depict legends, sorcery and magic intermingled with real people, places and events. Some tales are framed within other tales while others are perfectly self-contained. The result is a superb collection of richly layered narratives; whether adventure, historical, tragic, comic or romantic, they have delighted audiences for centuries.

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Kelley Townley provides masterful contemporary renderings of these ancient treasures while Anja Gram's illustrations are full of the spice, wit and magic of the stories themselves. The series style is

fresh and vibrant and the print inside is clear and beautifully typeset. When placed on bookshelves the distinctive spines reveal a wonderful image that grows as new stories are added: a design made specially for one thousand and one nights' tales! And with the highest of editorial standards and attention to detail, this series will delight readers everywhere and bring the Islamic Golden Age gloriously to life.

About Kelley Townley

Kelley Townley trained as a teacher and gained her MA in creative writing with distinction from Bath Spa University. She may be found either writing children's stories – happily losing herself in the dream world of the human imagination – or plotting new ways to engage readers, which are the same things really. Kelley lives near Bath with her family, the writer's obligatory cats and an ever growing number of woodlice.

About Anja Gram

Anja Gram has illustrated numerous children's books and magazines. Her highly distinctive style captivates and endears readers around the world. She lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Arabian Nights Adventures

*Kelley Townley
Illustrated by Anja Gram*

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Today is the great festival of New Year. A gigantic statue of a horse is brought to the palace of the sultan, a gift for His Majesty. Intrigued, the young prince seizes the reins. But this is no ordinary horse and little does Prince Firouz realise the magical journeys that lie in store for him. An adventure set amidst a dazzling backdrop of mountain kingdoms, winter gardens and exquisite palaces, *The Enchanted Horse* offers young readers all the wonderment of an Arabian Nights world in rich, sumptuous detail.

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