

Arabian Nights Adventures

Gulnare of the Sea



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 King's Jester

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HARPENDORE

Published in Great Britain in 2016
by Harpendore Publishing Ltd
34 Priory Road, Richmond TW9 3DF, United Kingdom

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A Catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-911030-02-7 (paperback)

Designed by Anne-Lise Jacobsen
www.behance.net/annelisejacobsen

www.harpendore.co.uk

Gulnare of the Sea



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Chapter 1 *The Strange Lady*

There once was a sultan of Persia called Osman who ruled over the beautiful kingdom of Khorassan from his palace overlooking the sea. Osman had fought many fine battles and won many glorious conquests so the people under his care lived in peace and tranquillity. He was proud of his achievements but they had left him little time to have a family; he had no wife and no children. He lived in a wonderful palace right by the beautiful sea but had nobody to share it with.

One day, as Osman watched the

clouds roll across the sapphire sky, he was told he had a visitor. 'My Lord,' said a servant, 'there is a merchant at the door who says he seeks your wise counsel. He brings with him a veiled lady.'

Osman was greatly intrigued. 'Bring them in!' he said.

When the merchant entered he bowed low to his ruler and said, 'Sire, I have with me a woman who is lost and I do not know how to help her.'

The veiled lady with the merchant looked weary and sad. She was wrapped in a simple cloth but even so Osman could see she was unlike any woman he had met before. She was tall and slender with the grace of the waves about her. The merchant

removed her veil and Osman felt the breath leave his chest as he beheld this extraordinary woman. She had delicately pale features and big bold eyes that stared at him, all framed by jet-black hair that fell to her ankles.

'It seems Your Majesty sees what I see,' said the merchant. 'I am but a simple man of simple means; may I leave this great lady in your care, Your Highness?'

Osman could only nod, mesmerised by the woman. He called for attendants to wash and change her, bring her food and drink, and provide the best rooms for her to stay in.

The apartment chosen for her was one of the most beautiful in the whole palace, large and spacious with

Gulnare of the Sea

beautiful decorations. The main room had doors that opened right onto the golden sands, mere steps from the sea at high tide.

While the lady recovered from her travels, Osman sent her many presents: beaded dresses, exotic perfumes, pearl



The Strange Lady

necklaces and bracelets. At the end of three days Osman dressed smartly and styled his hair neatly so that he might call upon the lady. He found her alone in her chamber, magnificently dressed in a lilac gown with her long black hair beautifully brushed and oiled. She was sitting upon a sofa positioned in the open doorway to the beach so that she

could stare out at the sea.

Osman stood tall and proud, ready to be welcomed into the room, but the lady did not move. He frowned and coughed to get her attention. She turned her head and saw it was him and then turned back to look out to sea again, as if he had been the most insignificant person in the world.

‘What bad manners she has!’ thought Osman.

It was clear that she was a great lady by her delicate grace and her soft-skinned hands, but where on earth had she come from to show such little regard to a sultan? Unsure what to do, Osman could either turn and walk away or he could join her watching the sea. In the end he dropped his kingly

stature and dragged a chair over to the doorway. Still she did not acknowledge him. He felt awkward and a bit silly sitting there next to a woman who ignored him but after a while, as he watched the water roll in and out, he began to relax. It was actually very pleasant to sit and watch the waves as the birds circled and the sun shone. So nice in fact that he returned the next day and the next. He would talk to the lady about his day and they would sit in comfortable silence together. He enjoyed their time together immensely. The only thing that worried him was that maybe she did not.

‘My dearest,’ said Osman, ‘I come every day to sit with you and yet you never say anything in return or even

acknowledge that I am here. Are you unhappy? Would you rather I did not come? Is there anything I can do to make you happier? Please, I beg you. Show me a sign that I do not keep you here against your will!"

But the fair lady continued her astonishing reserve, keeping her gaze fixed upon the water through the open doorway. After they had dined together in absolute silence Osman went to the women who looked after the lady and asked them if they had ever heard her speak.

The women bowed their heads and said, 'Sire, we have neither seen her open her lips nor heard her speak since she arrived. At your request we have cared well for her: combed

and styled her hair, dressed her every morning and undressed her every night, waited upon her in her chamber and delivered her food and drink, and yet still she has never uttered a word. Not one "please" or "thank you" or even a scold. We have often asked, "Madam, is there anything you wish for? Do but ask and command us and you shall have it," but still she remains completely quiet. And this is all we can tell Your Majesty.'

Although Osman was relieved to hear it was not just him that got the silent treatment, he was very worried that something must be terribly wrong with the lady. He tried everything to bring her out of her shell, every game and amusement to bring her to life

but nothing worked. One day he even offered to kiss her. She did not push him away but she still did not speak.

‘Would you like to get married?’ he asked in desperation. ‘We could be husband and wife and watch the sea together until we grow old!’

Again she did not resist and so a wedding was planned and a dress was made and together they became a married couple, but still she did not speak. A year past and Osman had almost given up hope of ever hearing her voice.

‘My queen,’ he said sadly as they sat and watched the rolling of the mighty waves one evening. ‘If you love me won’t you please show me a sign? It breaks my heart to think you might

be unhappy.’

To his utter astonishment the lady turned away from the sea to look at him. Not only that but her usually rigid features broke into a genuine smile that lit up her entire face. Osman looked at her in shock and excitement and the lady’s cheeks flushed pink with the attention.

‘Dear husband,’ she said softly. ‘Now that I have spoken I have so many things to say that I don’t know where to start! However, I think the first thing I should do is thank Your Majesty for all the kindness you have shown me, for all the favours and honours you have so graciously given me.’

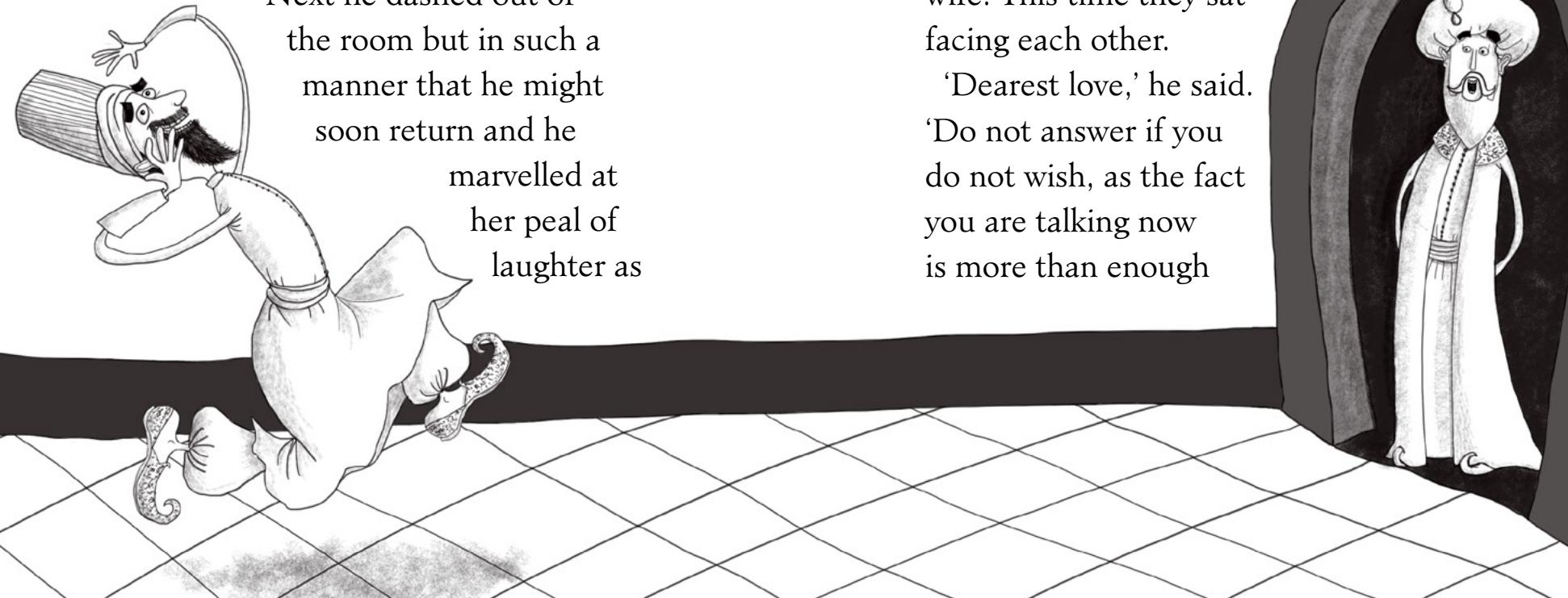
Osman just stared at her in awe and

she blushed even more.

‘And the second thing I should tell you, my love, is that we are soon to have a child.’

At this Osman fell to his knees at her feet and put his head in her hands and kissed them. Then he jumped up and down and paced the room. Now it was he who was speechless!

Next he dashed out of the room but in such a manner that he might soon return and he marvelled at her peal of laughter as



he called for his Grand Vizier. As soon as the man arrived Osman ordered him to distribute a thousand pieces of gold among the poorest people of his land by way of returning thanks to Heaven for this most wonderful of news.

Once he had calmed down Osman returned to his wife. This time they sat facing each other.

‘Dearest love,’ he said. ‘Do not answer if you do not wish, as the fact you are talking now is more than enough

for me, but I am desperate to know of your past. Tell me, my dearest soul, what were the powerful reasons that kept you silent for so long?’

The queen sighed. ‘I thank you for your patience. My behaviour may have seemed extreme but you must put yourself in my position. I have suffered a great trauma: my home destroyed, my family torn apart and then I was lost in a foreign world where no one understood me, nor me them. No longer free, I was passed from one master to the next until I was finally given to you. I yearned to be with my family again but I was also very afraid of what might have happened to them. All I could do was sit here every day and watch the sea.’

The king began to feel very bad. He had thought a lost woman with no money or family would be very happy living in a palace married to the sultan, but he had not thought about the terrible sadness in losing your home and your family.

‘I am sorry,’ he said.

The queen nodded. ‘I thought I would always hate you,’ she said. ‘He who would presume to share my company without invitation, without even knowing my name!’

At this Osman hung his head in shame.

‘But you have shown me much kindness and I have grown to love you.’

Osman looked up hopeful. ‘You do? But that is wonderful because I love

you too!'

'You cannot truly love me,' said the lady sternly, 'because you do not know who I am.'

'Then tell me, please,' said Osman, 'and I will fall in love with you all over again.'

'We will see,' she said, and she began her tale.



Chapter 2

The Kingdoms Under The Sea



'My name is Princess Gulnare, Rose of the Sea. My father was one of the kings of the ocean. When he died, he left his kingdom to my brother, Saleh. Although young, Saleh was a good king and ruled well, until another king decided to invade us with a mighty army. We were completely unprepared and he stormed into the castle and took over our kingdom! We were just able to escape without capture!

'My brother vowed to fight back against the tyrant and rescue our

people from his control, but he worried for my safety. "Dear sister," he said, "if I should fail in my attempt to win back our kingdom they will come looking to hurt you in revenge. To prevent this, and to secure you from all affairs of this war under the water, I wish to place you on a remote island above the waves, in the land of men."

'At this I fell into a violent passion. "Brother," I said, "I am just as responsible for the people as you are. They are our father's people and we are here to protect them! I can no more abandon them than you can. If you fail, I fail! We will succeed together or lose together!"

'Needless to say my brother would hear none of it. We fought bitterly

about it until at last I was dragged kicking and screaming away from my family when it needed me the most. I broke free of the folk who carried me and I washed up ashore with nothing but moonlight on a beach in your lands.

'Unused to life on land I struggled to adapt. A man came and spoke words at me that I did not understand. He took me with him and gave me shelter and food but then grew angry with me when I didn't do what he wanted me to, so he gave me to another man. Gave me! Like an object or a piece of meat! Although gentler, this man also said things to me that I did not understand, using sounds that were meaningless to me. After a while he

too grew tired of me and gave me to you.'

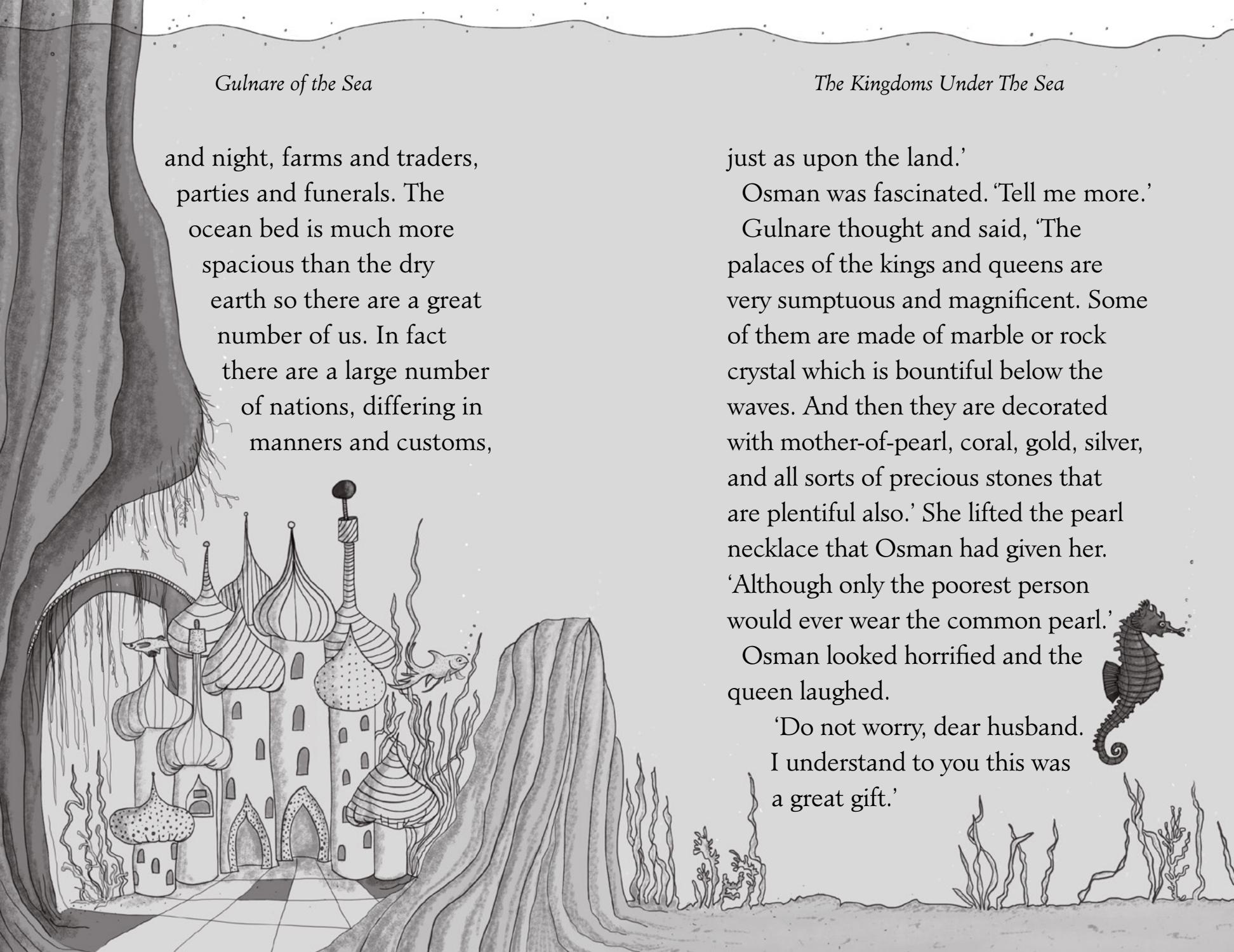
The sultan looked sheepish. When said like that it did sound bad.

'As for Your Majesty,' Gulnare continued, 'you took me and confined me in these rooms knowing nothing about me. Every day I have sat and stared at the sea thinking any moment I could get up and dive back in. I could return to my family and my home, but I am scared about what I might find there. Did they win? Did they all die? And yet every day you came to sit with me, speaking your strange words until they began to make sense, and every day I have wanted to leave a tiny bit less. And now we are to have a child together and I feel no more the pull

of the sea.'

'Dearest Gulnare, my beautiful wife,' said Osman, holding his wife tenderly. 'What wonders you have told me! And now I can truly say I love you even more for the bravery and courage you have shown. But please, will you tell me more? I have heard of the people from the sea but believed it to be a myth! How is it possible for you to live or move in the water without being drowned?'

Queen Gulnare laughed. 'It is not so difficult. We can walk and move through the sea with as much ease as you can upon land. We can breathe in the water as you do in the air. Down below the waves there is a whole nation of other people. We have day



Gulnare of the Sea

and night, farms and traders, parties and funerals. The ocean bed is much more spacious than the dry earth so there are a great number of us. In fact there are a large number of nations, differing in manners and customs,

The Kingdoms Under The Sea

just as upon the land.'

Osman was fascinated. 'Tell me more.'

Gulnare thought and said, 'The palaces of the kings and queens are very sumptuous and magnificent. Some of them are made of marble or rock crystal which is bountiful below the waves. And then they are decorated with mother-of-pearl, coral, gold, silver, and all sorts of precious stones that are plentiful also.' She lifted the pearl necklace that Osman had given her. 'Although only the poorest person would ever wear the common pearl.'

Osman looked horrified and the queen laughed.

'Do not worry, dear husband. I understand to you this was a great gift.'



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.

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*Kelley Townley
Illustrated by Anja Gram*

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A mysterious lady is brought to the palace of a great sultan, but she utters not a word and does nothing but stare at the sea – all day, every day. As her story unfolds we are treated to a sumptuous tale of sorcery, enchantment, magical transformations and adventure. With twists and turns in abundance, the story of Gulnare remains one of the enduringly entertaining tales from *The Arabian Nights*. Prepare to be spellbound by this sparkling new retelling full of sea kings, sorceress queens, magnificent underwater kingdoms and raging under-the-sea battles!



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