

Arabian Nights Adventures

The Adventures  
of  
Harun al-Rashid,  
Caliph of  
Baghdad



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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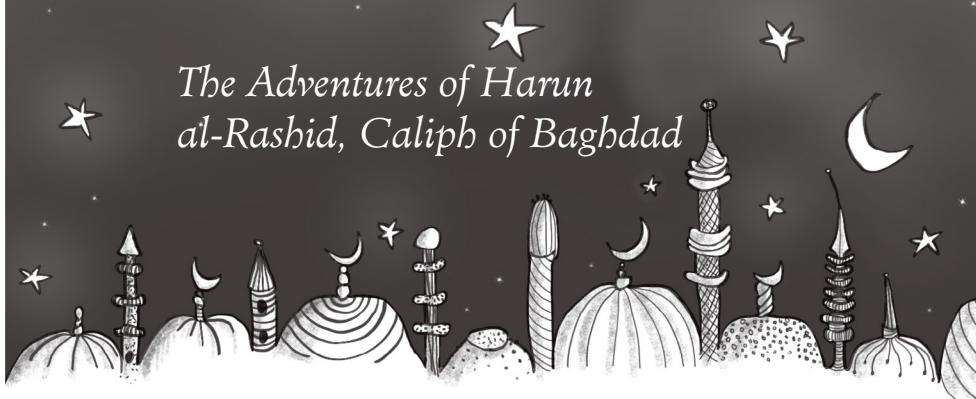
# The Adventures of Harun al-Rashid, Caliph of Baghdad



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*The Adventures of Harun  
al-Rashid, Caliph of Baghdad*



In ancient times the great city of Baghdad was governed by the esteemed caliph Harun al-Rashid. Caliph Harun was a clever man with a curious mind. He had a full dark beard and often wore a turban embroidered with gold. During his reign he encouraged science, art and education and built a wonderful new library filled with many important books. He was married to the strong-willed lady Zubaidah and everyone in the land felt happy and safe.

One day Harun was lounging in his

palace wondering if there was anything left in the world that could possibly distract him. He had done everything that needed doing and even Zubaidah had got bored of him pestering her. What he needed was an adventure!

A knock at the door signalled the arrival of his Grand Vizier. Ja'far was a very old and trusted friend who acted as Harun's advisor on all things. The old man cleared his throat ready to speak, and Harun sank into his chair thinking that Ja'far had come to bother him with something boring and bureaucratic.

Now it is true that Ja'far did have something mundane to tell the caliph, but he could see his friend was in no mood for such news and so he thought of something else to say instead.

'Why, my dear Harun,' he said, 'I think you must have forgotten.'

Harun looked over curiously.  
'Forgotten what?'

'What we had planned for today,' said Ja'far.

The caliph sat up. 'What did we have planned? I remember nothing.'

'How could you forget such a good idea! You said why don't we undertake a secret mission to enter the city in disguise and observe the people to make sure justice is being done and order is being kept.'

'You are quite right, my friend. I had forgotten all about it,' said the caliph cheerfully, knowing full well the Grand Vizier had just made this up on the spot – but then that was why he was such an

excellent advisor.

A little while later they were both disguised as merchants with colourful robes and attentive eyes. They left the palace through a secret door so that no one would know where they'd gone, and slipped out into the bustling city.

Ja'far and Harun walked freely amongst the many people in the market place – something the beloved caliph would never be able to do dressed as himself as all the people would flock to him to give thanks and blessings. As they sauntered along they marvelled at the many strange and wonderful sights. All was a delight to the senses: the noisy banter and clinking coins changing hands; the silky touch of exquisite Chinese silks and soft fluffy

peaches; the heady scents of exotic spices like cinnamon and resins such as frankincense; and the stunning pandanus flowers which many women, including Zubaidah, liked to steep in water and wash with to perfume their hair.

The world was teeming with activity yet all seemed at peace. There was no arguing or aggressive selling, no one was peddling anything they shouldn't be, and everyone seemed content. All except one man.

Standing on the street corner a blind man was begging for spare coins. He looked very poor and very underfed. Harun immediately went for his purse to give the man some money. He dropped a couple of coins into the

man's outstretched hand but instead of being grateful the blind beggar grabbed the caliph by the arm and held him fast.

'Charitable person,' he said, 'whoever you may be, grant me another favour. Strike me, I beg of you. I have deserved it richly.'

Harun, much surprised by this request, replied gently. 'My good man, I cannot hit you. How could I offer you love with one hand by giving you a coin and then violence with the other? What you ask is impossible.'

As he spoke he tried to loosen the grasp of the beggar but the man held tight.

'Then take back your coins and your charity and give me only the violence,' said the man. 'For I have sworn a

solemn oath that I will receive nothing without chastisement, and if you knew my story you would feel that even this is not a tenth of what I deserve.'

Harun did not want to deprive the poor man of his coins and so he relented and struck him lightly on the shoulder. Then he quickly continued on his way, followed by calls of blessings from the beggar. When they were out of earshot he turned to Ja'far. 'There must be something very odd about that man to make him act like that and I should like to know what it is. Go back and tell him who I am, and then tell him to come to the palace tomorrow morning.'

So the Grand Vizier gave a short sigh and went back to the beggar to relay the message. After this they continued

on their walk where they came upon an open square where a crowd was gathered watching some event.

‘This looks interesting,’ said the caliph.

‘Alas, sire, we will never get close enough to see,’ said Ja’far, looking at the large crowd. The caliph frowned. As the ruler of this land he was used to getting his own way so he strode up to the crowd and attempted to get through, only to be brutally pushed back.

‘Wait your turn,’ snarled a man, and the caliph slunk back to where Ja’far was laughing softly at him.

‘If you want to be one of the people, you have to be prepared to be treated like one of the people,’ he said, and Harun scowled even more.

‘But we’re missing whatever it is,’ he whined.

‘Don’t worry. He’s here every day. You can always come back tomorrow,’ said a young voice from above.

The men looked up to see a little boy grinning down at them from the roof of a market stall.

‘Can you tell us what the show is?’ Ja’far asked the boy kindly.

‘I could,’ said the boy. ‘Or you could climb up here and see for yourself.’

Ja’far stayed where he was but the caliph nimbly climbed up beside the boy. He looked out over the heads of the crowd and saw a well-dressed young man riding a beautiful brown horse at full speed round the open space. Using his spurs and a whip he mercilessly

forced the animal to perform until it panted and sweated with its muzzle covered with foam and blood.

‘Whatever is that man doing?’ asked Harun.

‘I cannot say,’ said the boy, ‘but he comes here every day and performs the same act.’

‘It’s barbaric,’ frowned the caliph, and he could see that many in the audience agreed with him. He called down to Ja’far. ‘When the man has finished tell him to come to the palace tomorrow morning for I wish to speak to him.’

Ja’far sighed and nodded, while the little boy gave the caliph a curious look. Harun grinned.

‘And you never saw me or my friend,’ he said, handing the boy a gold coin.

‘No sir,’ said the boy, smiling from ear to ear before quickly running off.

The next morning the caliph entered the grand hall of the palace and sat down in his raised chair to greet his guests. There was the blind beggar, the horse rider, and also a third man that he didn’t know. Ja’far was also present.

‘Your Highness,’ said Ja’far, ‘I present to you the men you asked me to invite to the palace yesterday.’

The three guests all bowed themselves low before the caliph who bade them then rise so that he might begin.

‘Thank you all for coming,’ he said. ‘I should like to ask you some questions if I may?’

The men all bowed again, eager to please their glorious leader.

‘First the blind man,’ he said. ‘Pray, tell me, what is your name?’

‘Abdullah, Your Highness,’ said the beggar nervously; he felt very out of place in this grand echoey building in his smelly rags.

‘Dear Abdullah,’ said the caliph, ‘your way of asking alms yesterday caused me some concern. I am worried for your well-being and would ask of you the reason you think you need punishment with your charity?’

These words greatly troubled Abdullah who threw himself down at Harun’s feet.

‘O great and benevolent ruler,’ he said. ‘You should not concern yourself with such a wretch as me. Believe me when I say it is just atonement for a fearful sin

I have committed.’

‘Indeed I believe you think this true,’ said the caliph, ‘but if you will, I should like to hear the tale and decide for myself.’

Abdullah bowed low. ‘As you wish.’

## 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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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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