

Arabian Nights Adventures

The King's Jester



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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HARPENDORRE

Published in Great Britain in 2018
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 978-1-911030-12-6 (paperback)

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

www.harpendore.co.uk

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The King's Jester

Long ago in the kingdom of Kashgar, which is an oasis city surrounded by desert sands, there lived a tailor. The tailor had a shop where he worked making clothes. He liked his work but it could be a bit methodical and so it cheered him greatly one day to see a jester walking past. This was the king's own jester and he was very well known in the city as he had a distinctive outfit and a hunchback. He was a very jolly man and his jollity was infectious: he always made everybody around him happy, as was his job.

'Hello there,' called the tailor. 'Are you in need of a rest? I can offer you my doorstep as a seat. Maybe you would care to entertain me while I work and I could give you some bread and olives? Maybe even a drink?'

The jester had in fact already had quite a lot to drink that day but, as is often the case, this simply encouraged him to drink more.

'I would be delighted to entertain you,' said the jester and he settled himself down on the steps of the shop to sing and joke with the tailor while he worked.

At the end of the day the tailor felt so cheered by the man's presence that he invited the jester back to his house to share a meal. Delighted, the

jestor agreed.

'Will there be more drink at your house?' he asked the tailor.

'No doubt,' the tailor replied. 'My wife will be charmed with your company and we shall have a very merry evening indeed.'

And so it was that they wandered arm in arm back to the tailor's house where the tailor's wife was more than happy to have such a fun guest and quickly prepared some fish. They had a marvellous meal together and much drink was drunk which was all very good until suddenly the jester keeled over.

'Good heavens!' said the wife. 'What has happened?'

The tailor tried to wake the jester but

all his shaking achieved was an awful noise from the jester's throat.

The tailor paled in shock. 'He is dead!' 'How so?' said the wife.

'He must have choked on a fish bone,' said the tailor. 'Did you not hear that dreadful noise coming from his throat?'

'But he is the king's own jester,' said the wife. 'Whatever will become us?'

'We will be punished for sure,' worried the tailor.

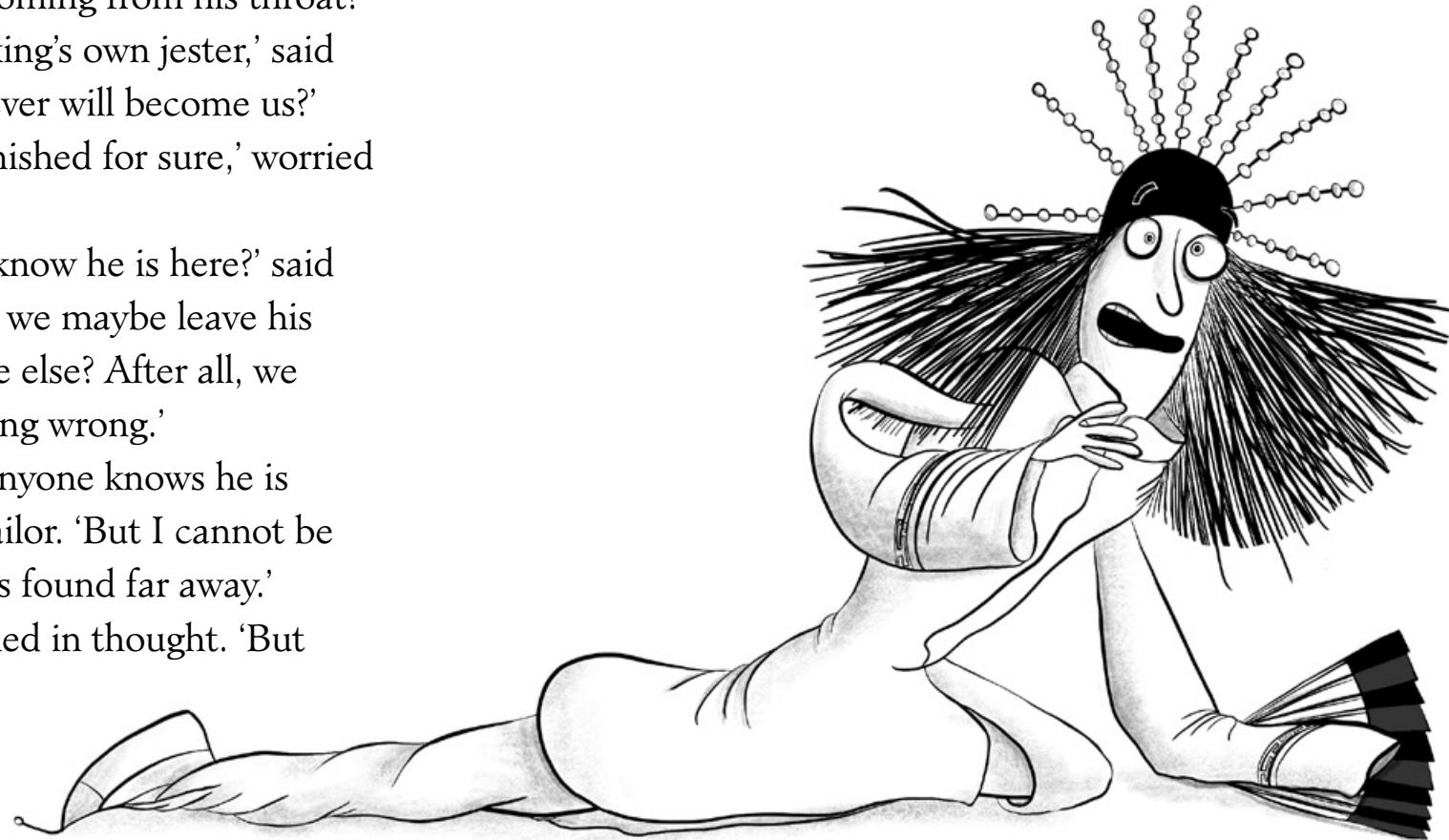
'Does anyone know he is here?' said the wife. 'Could we maybe leave his body somewhere else? After all, we have done nothing wrong.'

'I don't think anyone knows he is here,' said the tailor. 'But I cannot be sure. Better he is found far away.'

The wife frowned in thought. 'But

even then people will still suspect foul play if his body is just left somewhere and maybe that will lead back to us.'

'I have an idea,' said the tailor, and so he and his wife hoisted the jester up between them and left the house.



They took the jester down the road to the home of a doctor. The doctor was new to town and still unfamiliar with many of the locals, which made the tailor think he would not recognise them.

The tailor mounted the steps of the doctor's house and knocked loudly. It was late now and all the lights were off. The tailor had to knock again. From upstairs there was a noise and then the doctor leaned out of his window.

'Who goes there?' he called.

The tailor and his wife exchanged nervous glances.

'Our friend is sick,' the tailor called out. 'Please come down and help him!'

'Okay,' sighed the doctor. 'I'll be right down.'

He disappeared back inside and the tailor and his wife quickly propped the jester up against the door before running off down the steps, all the way home, safe in the knowledge that they couldn't be blamed for the jester's death if no one knew it had been them who left him there.

Back inside, the doctor put on a robe and clomped down the stairs. He didn't much like being woken in the middle of the night but he was new to town and any business he could get would be very worthwhile.

'What seems to be the problem?' he asked as he opened the front door.

The jester's body was just on the other side and so when the door was opened it pushed the body and made it tumble

down the steps.

'Good heavens!' cried the doctor, quickly running down to see his patient. 'Are you all right?'

The jester's body did not move.

'Oh no! I have killed him!' said the doctor.

He felt quite panicked. He couldn't be seen to be killing his patients! How could he ever expect the locals to trust him if they heard about this? Quickly he dragged the body inside and wondered what to do. It was a good deal later when he finally came up with a plan.





With great difficulty he lugged the jester all the way up the stairs to the roof of his house. He tied a rope under the jester's arms and then positioned him over his neighbour's chimney. Now, the doctor knew that the man next door was a keen eater and had a great storeroom that was so well stocked with delicious food that it attracted lots of rats and mice. This neighbour was also currently away and not due back for some time. The storeroom would surely be fairly empty and all the poor rats and mice will be going hungry.

'A nice tasty corpse is what they want,' said the panicked doctor and he lowered the poor jester down the chimney and into the storeroom.

'I am sure his body will be all eaten up

by the time my neighbour returns,' he said.

Having done this the doctor returned to bed, safe in the knowledge that he could not be blamed for the man's death.

Next door, however, his neighbour was home after all. He had returned early from his trip away and was just getting a midnight snack from his storeroom when a shadowy figure came down his chimney.

'Aha!' he cried. 'So it is you, and not those pesky rats and mice, who steals my food!'

The neighbour was lame and always carried a walking stick and so, being naturally courageous, it was with this stout cane that he then hit the

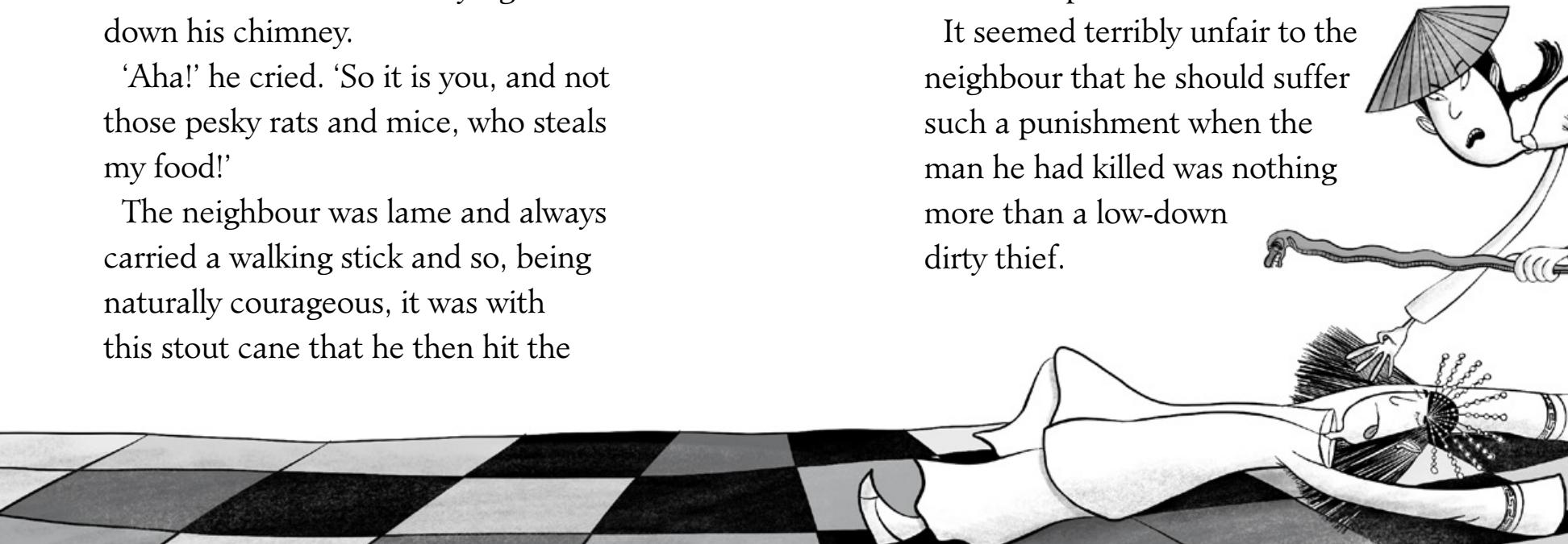
suspected thief.

'I'll make sure you never think to come back again!' he cried triumphantly while repeatedly beating the intruder.

Suddenly the body crumpled to the floor.

'Good heavens!' said the neighbour. 'I do not know my own strength! I have killed the man. Whatever shall I do? I'll be sent to prison or worse!'

It seemed terribly unfair to the neighbour that he should suffer such a punishment when the man he had killed was nothing more than a low-down dirty thief.



'Better he be discovered in the street and I be left out of it,' thought the neighbour.

And so thinking, under cover of darkness, he picked up the body and dragged it outside to prop upright in the doorway of a shop. Then he crept back into his own house, safe in the knowledge that he couldn't possibly be blamed for the murder of this man.

It was nearly dawn by then and the first tendrils of orange light were starting to weave their way into the city. A merchant was already on his way to open his shop. He was carrying a lot of money and this always made him nervous so when he saw a figure standing in the doorway of his shop he felt quite alarmed.

'Ho there,' he said. 'Be on your way now please. This here is my shop and I need entrance to it!'

The figure, however, did not move and the merchant was forced to step up and prod it for a response. No sooner had he touched the figure than it lunged towards him. The merchant panicked and threw out a punch



to defend himself. The figure dropped to the floor and the merchant leaped back in alarm.

'Help! Help!' he cried. 'I'm being attacked!'

The figure remained unmoving on the floor and so the merchant gently nudged it with his foot. When it didn't move he nudged it again, harder this time. On the third attempt he nudged it so hard that the figure was flipped over and revealed to be not a robber but the king's own jester.

'O heavens! What have I done!' exclaimed the merchant. 'The king will take my life for this for sure!'

Hopping from one foot to the other he racked his brains for what best to do. Then checking there was no one in

sight the merchant quickly picked up the jester's feet and began dragging him into a nearby alley where he hoped to hide the body.

Now it just so happened that the senior law man of the city was walking nearby and had heard the merchant's cries for help. He had hurried over and as he rounded the corner he saw one man dragging the body of another. The merchant instantly let go of the jester's legs and looked terribly sheepish.

'What has happened here?' asked the law man.

'He tried to rob me!' said the alarmed merchant. 'He very nearly choked me!'

The law man bent down to assess the condition of the fallen man.

'Well, you have had your revenge,' he said. 'For this man is dead!'

'Dead?' said the merchant. 'But I barely hit him!'

'Hold on,' said the law man. 'This is no thief! This here is the king's jester! What have you done?'

And so saying the law man seized the merchant in a firm grasp and led him all the way to prison.

Quite alarmed by his plight the merchant desperately tried to work out what had happened, but the more he thought about it the less he could understand how the jester could have died from the single punch he had given him.

'But it's not my fault!' he tried to tell the law man.

'Do you deny that you struck a man and now that man is dead?' said the law man.

'No,' admitted the merchant. 'That is all true.'

'Well then, it is the gallows for you, I'm afraid,' he said. 'For all who murder here are put to death themselves.'

The merchant slumped onto the bench in his cell: there was nothing he could do about it.

All morning he had to listen to hammering and sawing as the wooden stage for the gallows was erected outside, from where he would be hung from the neck until dead. All through the city the news spread that the merchant would soon be hung for killing the king's jester.

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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