

The Horse's Head

Storyteller: Moumen Nawaf, 17 years

City: Quneitra(παράπομπή 30), currently residing in Wadi Az Zeneh, Lebanon

A poor woodcutter lived with his wife near the forest and they had no children. One day as he was cutting wood in the forest he heard a deep voice saying:

-Look down between your feet and you will find me.

He mustered up his courage and looked down and to his astonishment he saw a horse's head! He panicked and hid behind a tree. The horse's head called upon him not to fear and told him that if he took him home he would make him rich beyond his wildest dreams. The woodcutter returned to the horse's head and looked at it closely with amazement and eventually decided to take him home and see what would happen. He put the head in a bag and instead of loading wood on his donkey he loaded the horse's head and brought it home. When his wife saw the head she panicked and asked her husband to remove it from the house, but the horse's head pleaded with her nicely, saying that he would be the source of good and happiness in the house and that he would be at her beck and call. Her heart softened at those words, especially when he called her "mother" and told her: *"consider me your son."*

His words touched a sensitive chord in her heart, so she allowed him to stay. She even made him a special bed covered with the best bed-covers, and found some walnuts to feed him. Then they all went to sleep. In the morning, the horse's head greeted them with a heart-warming smile and asked the woodcutter's wife to put her hand in his mouth. When she did she found a huge jewel as big as a chicken's egg. The woman was delighted and her husband immediately took it to the jewellers and sold it for lots of money, which he used to buy food and clothes and everything else that a poor household needs to last them a month. When he returned home carrying all the goods, his wife received him with joy and cleared a space for the donkeys and put away all his shopping. She gave the horse's head a hug and a kiss and offered him almonds and sugar for dinner. The same thing happened every day for a month and more. The couple would find a jewel in the horse's mouth and stash it away in a safe place and they pampered this new guest as if he was their own son. Until one day they found him sad and pale.

-What's wrong with you, son?

- I want to get married. I am tired of being alone!

-Who will you marry?

-I will marry no one else but the king's daughter.

- But how will the king's daughter marry a horse's head?

-Well, leave that up to me!

He gave them a parcel containing the finest and most expensive jewels for the bride's dowry. They carried the parcel, shaking with fear, up to the king's castle. Before asking for his daughter's hand in marriage they put the parcel in front of the king. His eyes lit up when he saw the jewels and he agreed to give his daughter's hand in marriage to the horse's head. He called on his daughter, Noor al Sabah(παράπομπή 31), and he informed her that he had agreed to marry her off to a horse's head, and he signed the official marriage documents, totally oblivious to her whines and moans, and ordered her to leave the castle and go with her in-laws to the groom's abode. When they arrived to the woodcutter's house - who was no longer a woodcutter - they found instead a huge castle, beautifully designed, with ornate balconies. They entered and, after eating and drinking, they sent the bride to the groom's room. There she found a bedroom and bedding such as she had never seen before in her father's house. As she was looking around at this beautiful ornamented room she heard a voice asking her to come closer to the bed. She looked around for the source but couldn't see anyone. When she approached the bed she saw a parcel made of the best silk and sewn with golden threads. She opened it and there was the horse's head! Noor al Sabah was terrified at this sight but the horse's head soon soothed her fears. He told her that he was her legal husband and would not harm her. She calmed down and started talking to him and found that he was very clever and smart and well-informed, in addition to being kind and generous. All that he lacked was a body to complement his head! Noor al Sabah did her best to love the horse's head and every day he gave her a present as a token of his love and appreciation and everyone in that house was happy and bountiful. One day Noor al Sabah woke up petrified because she felt that there was a human being in her bed. When she removed the covers she found that this, in fact, was true. But before she could scream, the beautiful young man lying next to her jumped up and begged her not to. He told her that he was none other than the horse's head, and that an evil witch had cast a spell on him because he had refused to marry her. It was a spell that could not be removed until a woman loved him for who he was, and until he found a family who would take care of him as their own son. This time, a proper wedding was arranged for the king's daughter and the brave prince, and everyone lived happily ever after.

30. Quneitra is a town in the south west overlooking the Golan Heights. It was established during the Ottoman period as a station on the Caravan route to Damascus. It's name means "the little bridge"

31. Morning light.