

The Ramadan lantern story

Once upon a time there was a young prince who lived alone with his father, the caliph, after his mother died. The caliph married again, but his new wife was often unkind to the prince. The caliph didn't care much and this made the young prince very unhappy.

On the fifteenth day of the month of Sha'aban, the son said to his pet pigeon, 'Let's not stay here any more. Let's run away because nobody here cares about us.' So they both ran away into the jungle.

After a long time, they came to a grand palace which belonged to a lonely ghoul. 'This is the awful ghoul's palace,' said the prince, 'but we are very hungry and cold and he might be asleep. Let's sneak in and rest till the morning.' But the ghoul wasn't asleep. He was watching them.

The prince found a bed and fell asleep. When he woke up, he was surrounded by golden prison bars: he was in a jail! The ghoul said, 'I know all about your evil stepmother. Your father doesn't love you. I'm lonely, so I'll keep you here as my pet!'

The little prince pleaded with the ghoul to set him free. Finally, the ghoul growled, 'I'll send your pigeon home. If the caliph misses you, he'll follow the pigeon back here and save you. If not, you'll spend the rest of your life here!' The pigeon raced to the caliph's palace.

Since his son had run away, the caliph cried and prayed every night that he would see him before the holy month of Ramadan. On the last night of Sha'aban, he felt that his son was close. He opened the window and found the pigeon sitting on the ledge! He knew that he had to follow the pigeon, but it was really dark.

A princess, the caliph's sister, suggested that everyone in the palace held a candle and lit the way for the grieving father. In minutes the news spread. Every man, woman and child held a candle and followed the caliph.

On their way, the children sang songs to celebrate the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. The prince heard the songs and saw the light from his prison window. He knew it was his father. The ghoul was touched by the whole scene. He whispered, 'I was mistaken. Your father deserves a second chance. Go back home.'

The young prince was reunited with his father. They returned to the caliph's palace and fasted together on the first day of Ramadan. To reward his loyal subjects, the caliph gave them gold lanterns to put outside their houses. Then he ordered his ministers to light the streets and mosques with colourful lamps.

Since that day children have bought lanterns to mark the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan.

Circus escape

Billy was getting excited. It was the day of the circus! Billy loved the circus – all the animals and the people. It was so much fun!

At eight o'clock Billy and his parents arrived at the huge red and white striped tent called the 'Big Top'.

The ringmaster shouted with his huge booming voice, 'Good evening, ladies and gentlemen!'

Then the lights went up to the top of the tent and Billy saw a man and a woman dressed in sparkly clothes balancing on a huge swing. They flew through the air. 'Ooooo!' shouted the people every time they flew. It was very, very exciting.

A door opened and the lions bounced into the ring – there were six of them all looking huge and fierce and dangerous. The man in the middle was the lion tamer. Billy watched as he put his head in the biggest lion's mouth. 'Ooooo!' shouted the people in horror and amazement.

After the lions came the clowns. They were wearing brightly coloured clothes – blue and yellow and red with spots of green. They had red noses and painted faces and funny red hair. They fell over, told lots of jokes and did lots of very silly things. 'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed the people – and Billy laughed too.

Finally the elephants arrived in the ring - there were three enormous grey elephants and one smaller one. The small one balanced on one leg and did lots of tricks.

Then it stopped and looked up at Billy. 'Hello,' said Billy to the elephant. 'I'm Billy.' 'I'm Minny,' replied the elephant to Billy's surprise.

Then suddenly the small elephant turned around and ran towards the door of the tent. It ran out of the tent into the street and off into the town. All the people rushed out of the circus tent screaming, 'Aagh! The elephant – it's escaped!'

'Help!' cried the ringmaster. 'Minny the elephant has escaped!'

Minny was a very happy elephant. It was the first time she had been out of the circus! It felt good to be free!

She ran along the main street towards the main square. She saw the fountain in the middle of the square. She climbed into the big fountain and sat down in the water.

People tried to walk by but Minny sprayed water at them using her huge trunk! 'Oh, this is much more fun than the circus!' cried Minny.

After a while Minny decided to explore. She went along the street and into the big supermarket. All the people who saw Minny ran out of the supermarket screaming! Minny had a wonderful time – she helped herself to the bananas and scoffed a large chocolate cake, ten packets of biscuits and a large number of buns.

When she had finished eating Minny decided to explore again so she went out into the street. In the distance Minny saw a big house, but there was something strange about it – there was a red light all around it.

Minny got nearer to the house and then she heard the people in the house shouting and screaming. 'Help!' they shouted. 'Save us!'

Minny rushed into the garden opposite the house. There was a big pond with lots of water. She put her trunk in the water and took in as much water as she could. Then she rushed over to the house and sprayed the house with water. She did this many times and the flames and fire died away.

From the top window Minny could see a small boy. He opened the window and Minny took him out of the house using her trunk.

‘Minny!’ he cried. ‘It’s me!’

‘Hello, Billy,’ said the elephant.

‘You saved me!’ cried Billy. ‘You are the bravest elephant in the world!’

Billy’s mother and father came rushing out of the house. They couldn’t believe what they saw! Billy was safe and their house was safe – and all because of an elephant.

The next day all the people in the town made a crowd outside the town hall. They gave Minny the elephant a special medal. Billy rode around the square on Minny’s back, waving and smiling at all the people.

They went slowly back to the circus to rejoin the other elephants. Minny was so happy that she never wanted to escape from the circus again.