

# The Noble Horse





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My little ones, how you would have loved to stroke the silky neck of so fair a creature as the beloved horse of Brahmadatta, King of Benares.

More beautiful, more handsome than any other horse in the world he was, swift as a deer and graceful as a swan. There was a tender light in his eyes and his steps were so majestic that he could not have been other than a king.

His stable was a palace. A lamp with perfumed oil burned in it day and night, and soft rose curtains with stars of gold hung above his head.

At that time Benares was the happiest kingdom in India. It was rich and flourishing, and far grander than any other state. Therefore many other kings were envious and some of them resolved to fight against it, fearing that it would become more powerful than they.

Seven of these kings gathered their armies and marched towards the mighty state, and Brahmadatta called one of his knights.

"Our enemies," he said, "are approaching the gates of the city; your King and your

country are in danger. Can you, my brave warrior, fight against seven kings?"

"Not only against seven kings," the knight replied, "but against a hundred kings, lord, if I may ride your horse, your noble one."

"Take my horse," replied Brahmadaṭṭa, "and fly to the battle. Return to us victorious; your King and your country trust you."

Thus the knight, mounted on the gallant horse, dashed to the battle, and as a storm passing over a field of wheat he laid the first enemy low, captured the King, and brought him prisoner to Benares.

Again he rushed to the battlefield, defeated the second army, and took the second King prisoner.

A similar fate befell the third, fourth, and fifth Kings, but in capturing the sixth the knight's horse was wounded.

On returning to the palace the noble creature sank to the ground and the knight tenderly removed its harness. But he might not stay, and so another horse was brought.

As the knight was about to mount his new steed the wounded horse opened his eyes, and

he thought: "My brave rider will be killed; on another horse he could never prevail against the seventh army. Benares will be taken by the enemy."

And, calling the knight, he spoke to him in a deep voice.

"Brave knight," he said, "be wise. Do not take another horse, for I alone can enable you to defeat the seventh army. Put my armor on my back once more, and together we will gain the victory."

The knight bound up the noble creature's wounds, mounted on his back, and rode away to the battlefield. The foe were many and the fight was hard, but at last the seventh army was defeated, and the seventh King captured.

But when the battle was over the noble horse fell bleeding to the ground.

The King knelt at his side and caressed him, and a soft whisper came from his lips.

"Be not sad, my King," he said; "my wounds do not pain me, for the victory is won. But do not slay those who are now your prisoners. Let them return to their homes promising never to attack Benares again."

Then, having spoken these words, the great one closed his eyes and died.

But his memory lived long in the land and Brahmadatta heeded his counsel.

The seven kings were released, and war never again broke out. The people of all the kingdoms loved each other, and they all lived happy ever after.