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Opening extract from

Ahmed and the Feather Girl

Written & Illustrated by

Jane Ray

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For Joe

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There was once a little orphan boy with big dark eyes called Ahmed.
He lived with a travelling circus.
The circus was owned by an old woman called
Madame Saleem. She was cruel and bad-tempered,
and Ahmed was afraid of her.
She made Ahmed work very hard. He fetched firewood
and carried water. He swept out caravans and fed the animals.
He washed the clothes and cooked the food.
At night he huddled near the embers of the dying
camp fire and stared up at the stars, until he fell asleep.

One winter's day, Ahmed was out picking up firewood in the forest. As he wandered, he came across a large golden egg lying in the middle of the path. Where had the egg had come from?

Ahmed worried that it would get cold lying in the snow, so he made a nest of willow branches close to the fire to keep it warm.



When Madame Saleem saw the golden egg she grew very excited. She snatched it up and locked it away in a golden cage.

From a distance, Ahmed kept a careful watch on the egg.



Spring came, and the days grew warmer.

One morning,while Ahmed was hanging out the washing, he heard a cracking sound. The egg was hatching! He watched in amazement as the egg opened to reveal, not a bird, but a beautiful little child. She uncurled her limbs, opened her big, dark eyes and smiled straight at Ahmed.

The circus people named the little girl Aurelia. Her hair was as soft as feathers, her eyes were dark and shining, and each morning, as the sun came up, she sang and sang.

When Madame Saleem saw the little child, she danced with delight. "We'll put her on show!" she cried.

Everywhere the circus went, people queued up to see The Girl Hatched From a Golden Egg. Madame Saleem counted in the money…

