

## THE BEAST IN THE BARN

It was a pleasant afternoon in spring. The flowers were dancing in the sunshine and the apple tree was covered in clouds of white blossom. Dil and Kabir were sitting by the pond, watching the ducks that were having a rest on their way north for the summer.

‘They come every year,’ said Dil.

‘How do they know where to go?’ asked Kabir.

‘They just know the way—it’s inside them,’ replied Dil.

‘Look!’ said Kabir. There were two men coming their way, leading a huge, shuffling animal covered by a great veil. Dil and Kabir could not tell what the animal looked like because of the covering, but the boys were sure they had never seen anything so big.

The men called out, ‘Come to the old barn this evening and touch the wild beast! See if you can guess what it is in the dark!’

Dil and Kabir ran to the village and watched as the men took the covered animal into the barn. The word spread through the village like wild fire. Soon everyone had heard about the Beast in the Barn. The men waited until it was dark. By that time everyone from the village was lined up, and one by one they were let into the dark barn to feel the beast, whose veil had now been removed. The villagers were all a little scared and nervous – feeling around for a beast in the dark! – but they were dying to know what it was.

After a minute or so, the first person came out in a hurry. He said very confidently, ‘It’s like a water pipe, long and round.’

“Hmmm...” said the villagers, trying to think of water-pipe shaped animals.

The second person went in. She came out and said, ‘No, it’s like a fan. It moves back and forth, and is very thin.’

“How odd,” murmured the villagers to each other.

The third person went in. When she came out she said, ‘It’s nothing like a water pipe or a fan. It’s like a pillar in a mosque or church. It’s very still and very solid.’

“What could it be?” said the villagers to each other.

The fourth person went in. He came out and said, ‘Listen to me: It’s like a huge box, a kind of leathery dome you could ride or sit on.’

A fifth person went in. She came out and said, ‘The rest of them have been talking rubbish! This beast is like a pointed stick made of something very smooth.’

When the sixth person came out, he was scratching his head. He said, ‘It’s like two giant cheeks with a rope in between.’

That was the last straw. All the people who had felt the beast started arguing in loud voices. ‘I’m right, you’re wrong!’ they shouted. They wouldn’t listen to each other and were very rude.

Kabir and Dil had been listening to what each person had said about the beast and had drawn a picture on the ground in the moonlight. They put each piece of the jigsaw together as best as they could, but it did not look right to their eyes.

Suddenly, Dil had an idea. He went home, got a candle, and he and Kabir tiptoed into the barn while everyone was arguing. They lit the candle and what do you think they saw?