

Wanted!

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Author's Note

About the Author

Also by Kate Thompson

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About the Book

Where has the sleek, beautiful horse come from? Why have his golden chains been passed to Marcus? Suddenly, Marcus is in grave danger . . .

By the winner of the 2005 Whitbread Children's Book of the Year Award and the 2005 Guardian Children's Fiction Prize.

WANTED!



KATE THOMPSON

Illustrated by Jonny Duddle

RHCP DIGITAL

CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS EARLY afternoon on a cold February day. I had just finished my deliveries and was making my way home across the city with my handcart. The streets were quiet, as they usually were at that time of day, so I had no trouble hearing the horse when it came trotting up behind me, and I moved aside with my cart to let it pass.



But it didn't. The young man who was leading it stopped beside me, and when I turned to look at him I was astonished by what I saw. He was a slave, and I might have been struck by how well-dressed he was if I hadn't noticed that the horse was dressed even better. It wore a blanket of royal purple and its head collar was decorated with precious stones which sparkled in rainbow colours. Its lead rope was a chain of solid gold. I stood with my mouth open, astonished. I ought to have known immediately what horse this was, for everyone in the city knew about Incitatus, but

sometimes my mind doesn't work very quickly, and especially when it comes up against the impossible.



‘There is a rumour going round,’ the slave boy said. ‘Terrible news.’

He was panting hard and gasping out the words, and he had a strong English accent as well, so it wasn’t easy for me to understand what he was saying.

‘News?’ I said.

‘But it can’t be true,’ he said. ‘I have to go and find out.’

‘Find out what?’ I said.

‘Here,’ he said, thrusting the golden chain into my hand. ‘Take care of him. I’ll find out the truth and come straight back.’

And before I could object he was gone, running down the street the way he had come. The nerve of him! A slave, telling me what to do! I couldn’t hold his horse for him, no matter how smartly it was dressed. I called out after him, but if he heard me he paid no attention. At the end of the street he hesitated and looked up and down. Then he slipped round the corner and was gone.



My brother needed the handcart to collect flour from the mill, and I had to get home. If I was late I would be in serious trouble. I had been out on my round since before dawn, and I needed to get something to eat and go to bed for a few hours, because my whole family had to work through the night to have fresh bread ready for the