

LEVELED BOOK • Z²

Ali Baba

MULTI
LEVEL
Y-Z¹ • Z²

An Arabian Folktale
Retold by Lori Polydoros and Elizabeth Jane Pustilnik
Illustrated by Mike McCarthy

www.readinga-z.com

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Focus Question

Do the intentions of Ali Baba make his actions acceptable as opposed to those of the robbers? Why or why not?

Words to Know

abode	expeditiously
accomplice	flabbergasted
acquiesced	incensed
anecdotes	pretense
apprehensive	prosperous
callous	querulous
candor	spurious
cognizant	suet
condolences	surreptitiously
destitute	unscrupulous
euphoric	

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Level Z2 Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL Z2	
Fountas & Pinnell	Y–Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



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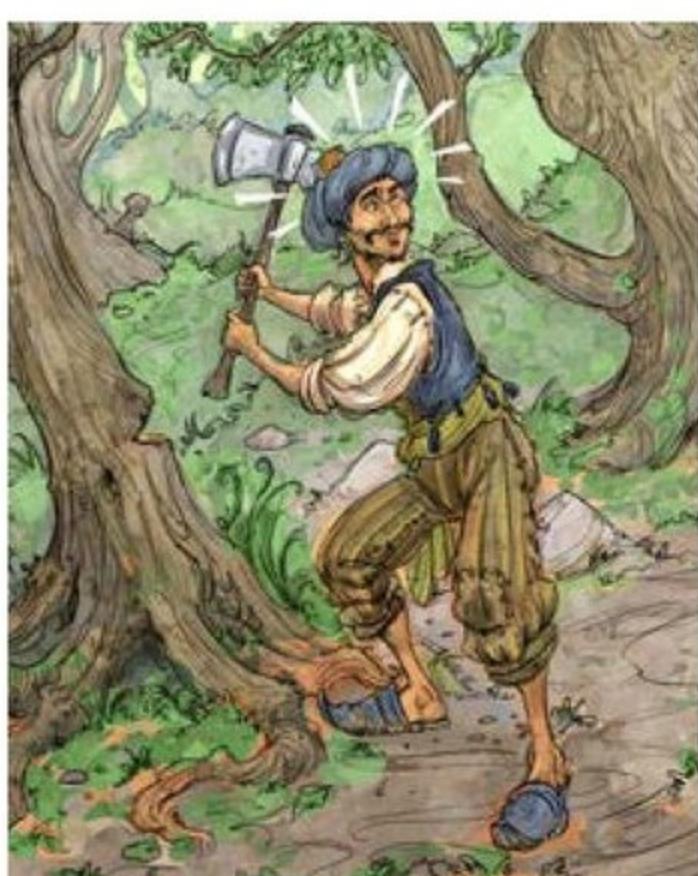
Chapter I

Many moons ago in a small town in Persia, a father divided his belongings equally between his two young sons, Cassim and Ali Baba. Although their property was equally divided, in no way would fortune treat them alike.

Cassim married Vashti, the widow of a wealthy innkeeper, and managed their inn. While husband and wife were **prosperous**, they hardly saw each other in the large mansion they shared in town. Ali Baba, on the other hand, was wed to Fatima, the daughter of a poor shepherd, and was employed as a woodcutter. They resided in a shack but nevertheless shared a life full of love and happiness.

One warm summer afternoon deep in the forest adjacent to the town, Ali Baba was chopping wood to sell. As he swung his axe into the trunk of a tree, the ground began to rumble, startling

Ali, and he promptly recognized the sound of horses' hooves—many horses, by the sound of it, and they were approaching fast! Grabbing his axe, Ali quickly scaled a tree and hid in its leafy foliage. There he silently watched and waited.



From this vantage point, Ali saw no fewer than forty men on horseback come into view and halt not far from his hiding place. He watched as they dismounted, tied up their horses, and boosted heavy saddlebags onto their shoulders. Scrutinizing their unsavory look, Ali theorized that the men were robbers and the saddlebags contained stolen loot.



The group congregated below the shade of a tree that had a large, craggy boulder at its base. Their leader was obvious, for he towered over the others and looked even crueler than the other **querulous** men. As he approached the boulder, he uttered a strange phrase—"Open, sesame!"

As soon as the man spoke, the boulder swiftly slid to the side to reveal a cave. *What kind of magic am I witnessing?* Ali thought as the thieves hurriedly disappeared inside the cave.

Ali Baba held his breath as his mind raced: *This must be their secret hideaway!*

Eventually, the men and their leader exited the cave. He heard the leader call out, “Close, sesame!” and observed as the boulder slid back to mask the cave’s entrance. The men then hastily mounted their horses and galloped out of the forest.

Chapter 2

Flabbergasted, Ali Baba lingered in the tree until he resolved that it was safe to move again. Then he gingerly descended and stood in front of the concealed rock door as sweat trickled down his forehead and face, dripping onto his already soaked tunic. Curiosity made him want to speak the words and see what lay within the cave, while fear of the thieves’ return held him at bay.

At last, Ali Baba willed himself to recite the magic words—“Open, sesame.” The boulder creaked and then slid open to reveal a sight so magnificent that Ali nearly fell to his knees.

The cave wasn't shadowy and gloomy, as he had expected, but spacious and well lit by a crack in the ceiling where sunlight poured in. Gathering his wits, Ali looked around at the bags upon bags of gold and silver coins, stacks of fine silk rugs, and chests overflowing with colorful gems. From the sheer amount of treasure in the cave, Ali Baba surmised that the robbers must have built up the stash over generations.



Surely they won't notice a few missing bags of gold and jewels, Ali thought. He gathered what treasure he could carry and exited the cave. Outside, he called, "Close, sesame," and the boulder slid back.

Chapter 3

Fatima observed her husband carrying stuffed bags into their humble **abode**. *These don't look like wood*, she reflected. Beckoning her to sit beside him, Ali emptied the bags into a heap of gold coins and jewels on the floor. Fatima's eyes became wide. "Whom did you rob?" she gasped.

Ali Baba replied, "I am no robber, unless one who steals from robbers is also himself a robber." Fatima raised an eyebrow as he commenced to tell her the whole story.

Ali Baba and Fatima discussed what they should do with their newfound wealth. They couldn't spend it freely without raising suspicions. They would bury it in their garden, but they decided to weigh it first to estimate its worth. So Fatima went to Vashti and Cassim's mansion and asked to borrow a scale to weigh grain.

Vashti was skeptical about how the **destitute** Ali Baba and Fatima would have enough grain to warrant measuring with a scale, so she placed a bit of **suet** underneath the scale. Whatever they were weighing would stick to the suet. Later, when Fatima returned the scale, the astonished Vashti discovered a gold coin stuck to the bottom. Where could Ali Baba and Fatima have found such a treasure?

Chapter 4

That evening, Vashti addressed Cassim, “You’ll never guess what happened this afternoon. Your poor brother’s wife came here to borrow a scale. What could they have to weigh? I stuck some suet to the bottom of the scale to find out. Guess what I discovered after she returned the scale?”

Cassim snatched the gold coin from her hand, holding it up in the flickering candlelight. “My little brother is up to something, this much is sure.”

“There must be more,” Vashti asserted haughtily. “Think about it—you only count your money, but he has enough to necessitate weighing it. Go see your brother tomorrow and find out where the rest of the gold is hidden.”

The next morning while Fatima was at the marketplace, Cassim pushed open the door to Ali’s shack. Grasping his brother by his tunic, Cassim roared, “Do not keep secrets from your brother!” He threw the gold coin at Ali’s face and spat, “I know all about your gold—you can blame your foolish wife.”

Beside himself with shock, Ali disclosed all he knew about the hidden cave to his **callous** brother. Cassim barked, “Take me there *now*.”

Chapter 5

As Ali Baba and Cassim stood before the magic boulder in the forest, Cassim asked with disdain, “You expect me to believe that your precious gold came from within this decrepit rock?”

Ali didn’t reply. Instead, he pronounced, “Open, sesame” and watched his brother’s amazement as the door to the cave slid open. After the moment of shock had subsided, Cassim elbowed Ali aside and sprinted into the cave.

“Remember the magic words,” Ali Baba warned. Cassim waved dismissively at Ali as the boulder slid back into place.

With a shake of his head, Ali began to walk home.

Inside the cave, Cassim felt **euphoric** as he explored the treasures. He rolled around on the luxurious carpets, tossed handfuls of gold coins in the air, and draped himself in glittering jewels and elaborate silk robes. Pulling out the bags he brought, he filled them with loot.

Once he was ready to leave, he paused and said, “What was that phrase again? Oh, yes, ‘Open, barley.’”

Nothing happened.

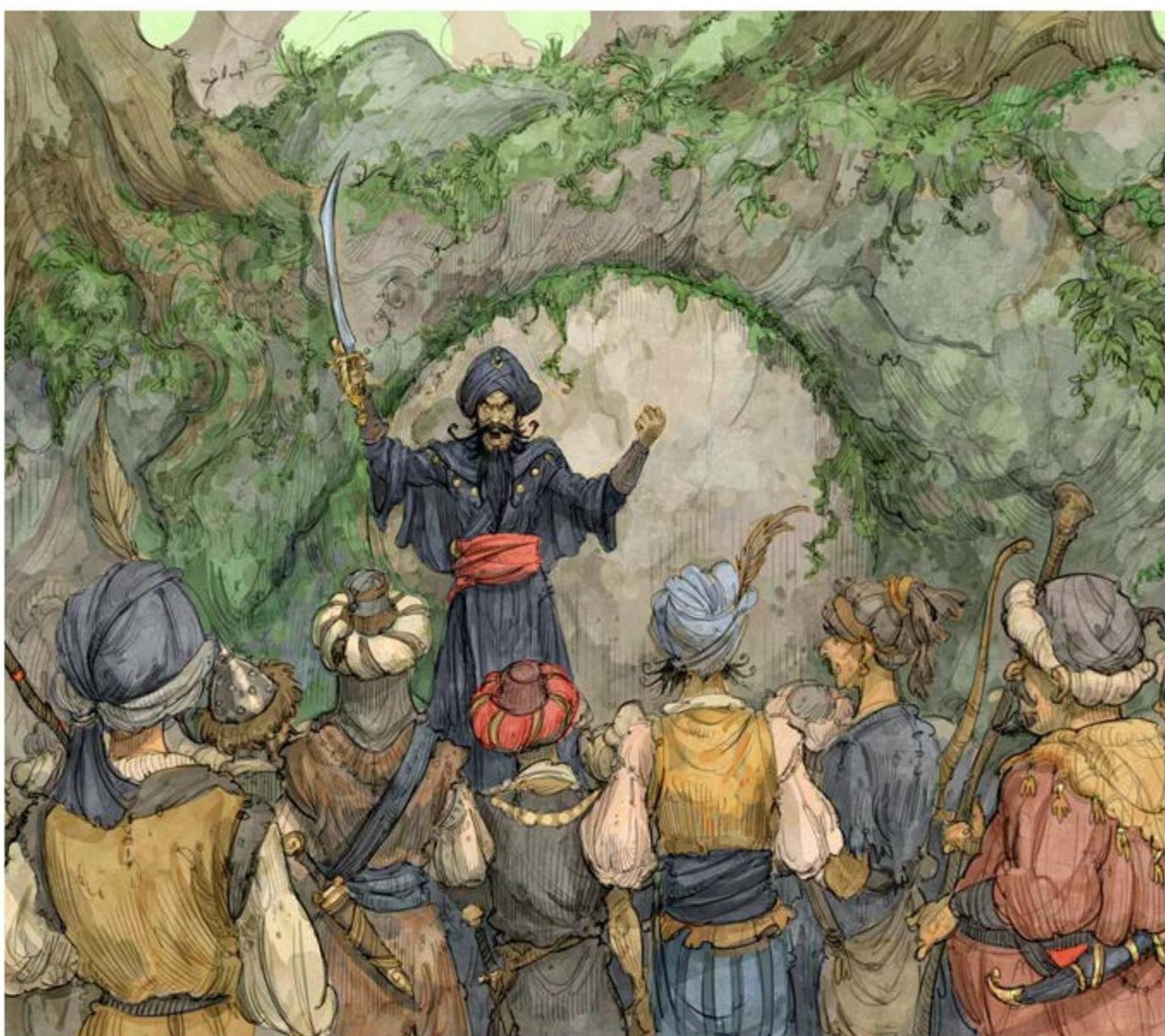
"I could have sworn those were the words Ali spoke to open the cave. Was it a different grain, or was it a spice?" he wondered aloud. "Open, ginger," he cried. But yet, nothing happened.



Growing frantic, he yelled, "Open, cinnamon! Open, paprika! Open, rice!" Still, nothing happened. Cassim panicked and clawed at the cave door like a caged tiger until his fingers started to bleed.

At dusk, the robbers returned to the cave to deposit newly gained riches. A surprise awaited them—the desperate Cassim! The leader expeditiously put an end to him.

The robbers were greatly disturbed by Cassim's presence in their secret cave. They wondered how he had attained knowledge of its location and the magic words required to access it. Most alarming was that others might now know about it, too. As a warning to potential looters, they left Cassim's body inside the cave atop the riches.



Chapter 6

That same evening, Fatima and Ali Baba ate dinner together. They had exchanged some harsh words but soon realized that Cassim had intentionally caused Ali to doubt Fatima. Vashti burst through the door, looking distressed. “Is Cassim here?” she probed, her voice fraught with emotion.

Ali and Fatima exchanged perceptive glances. “No,” Ali answered. “I last saw him in the forest.”

Vashti implored him, “Go back there to look for him.”

Ali knew that Vashti was more concerned about the treasures Cassim was to bring than Cassim himself, but Ali was still loyal to his family.

The moon was high when Ali came home. Vashti looked up from her tea. “Where is my beloved?” she asked.

Ali replied in a near whisper, “Vashti, he has departed for the next world.”

Ali took the distraught Vashti back to her home that night, where her dedicated maid, Morgiana, awaited. Once Morgiana put Vashti to bed, she brought Ali a cup of tea with her **condolences**.

"Thank you," Ali said. They sat in silence for a moment before Ali spoke again. "My brother and Vashti trust your **candor**, and so I must, too." With that, he related the entire story of the treasure and Cassim's death. Forthwith, Morgiana realized the predicament that Ali, Fatima, and Vashti were in, and she furthermore recognized an opportunity.

"I will help you," Morgiana said when he finished, "but despite my compassion for you, my services are not complimentary. When this matter is settled, you will reward me. Agreed?"

Straightaway, Ali **acquiesced**, and Morgiana suggested their first step was to make Cassim's fate appear accidental so as not to draw attention.

The following day, Morgiana went to the marketplace to spread the news that a donkey had kicked Cassim in the head and he had died.

That evening when the robbers returned to their cave to stash more plunder, they were perplexed to find that Cassim's body had been removed. **Incensed**, and with fury clouding his dark eyes, the leader of the thieves shouted, "Now we can be certain that someone else is **cognizant** of the cave!" He turned to another man. "You, go into town tomorrow morning. We must learn who his **accomplice** is."

Chapter 7

The next day, the robber, under the **pretense** of being a holy man, surfaced in town, offering his condolences to bereaved families. In the marketplace, he inquired about the names of families who had recently suffered the loss of a loved one. Dismissing the deaths of unlikely people, he focused on the death of one man named Cassim.

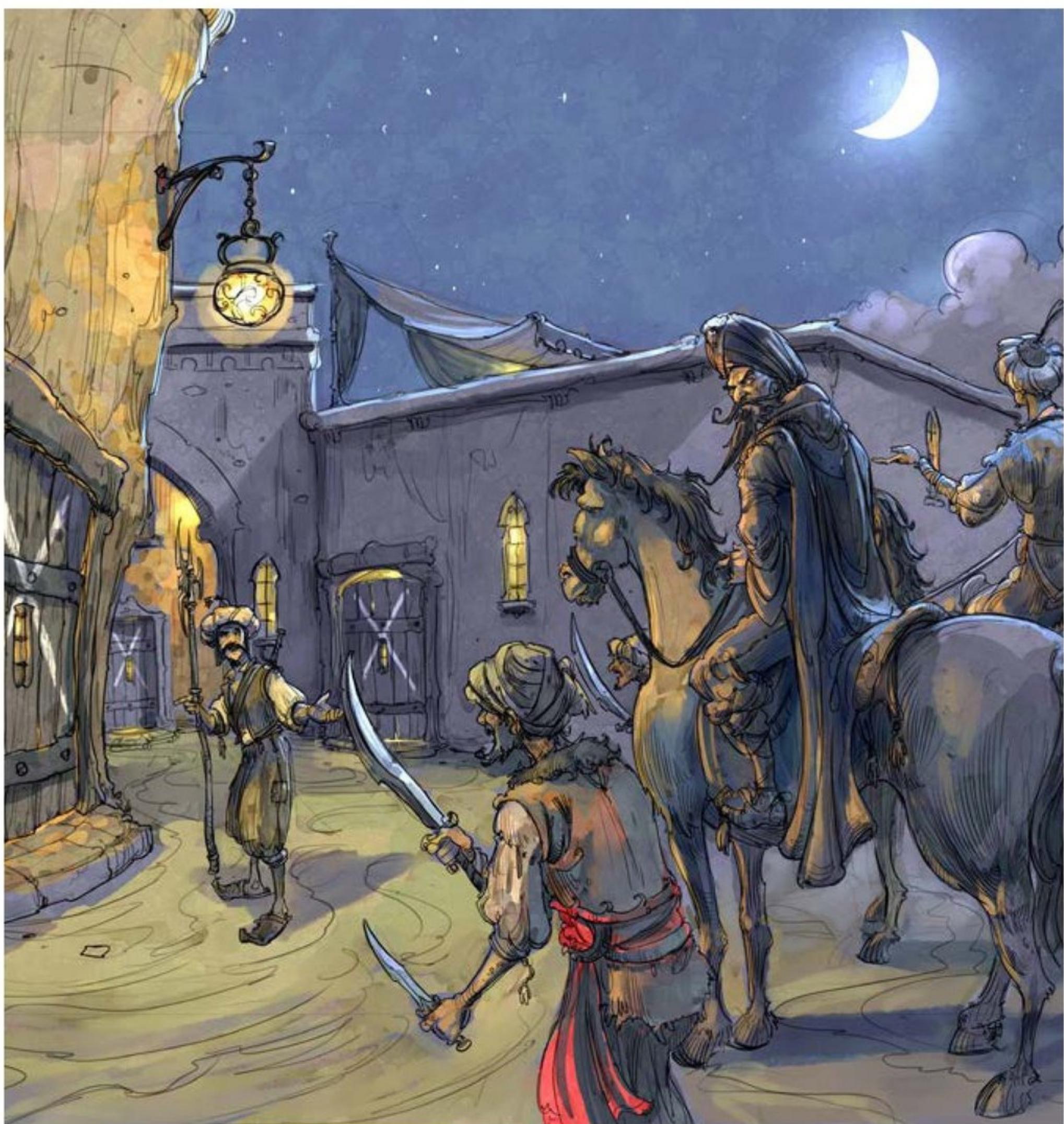
Vashti was in mourning and was not receiving any visitors, but Morgiana allowed the holy man inside the mansion to recite a prayer over Cassim's body. The robber instantly recognized Cassim, and in his excitement (paying no mind to the female servant watching him) murmured a few quick words before standing to leave.

Morgiana had seen much of the world, and this dirge sounded strange to her. Also, the man had an **unscrupulous** manner about him. After escorting him back to the front door, Morgiana peered from behind a curtain to observe the robber use chalk to draw a giant X on the mansion's front door.

Morgiana sighed and shook her head. *Simple tricks for simple men*, she thought as she searched the pantry's cupboards for a piece of chalk. Finally locating one, she ran outside and drew an X on each of the houses on the street.

That night, the **spurious** holy man led the group to Cassim's street. He abruptly stopped in his tracks. Now all the front doors had an X, and they looked increasingly similar to one another. Which house had he been to earlier?

Frustrated, the leader declared that he would have to figure out another way to ascertain the identity of the dead man's conspirator.



Chapter 8

The next day, the leader of the thieves posed as an oil merchant, and the robber who had posed as the holy man was disguised as his helper. They knocked on the doors of all the houses on Cassim's street. When Morgiana answered the door to Cassim's home, the robber subtly nudged the leader.

"May I see the master of the house?" the leader inquired.

Ali Baba identified himself. "I am the brother of Cassim, master of this house who has recently perished. How can I help you?"

"I have oil for sale," the merchant said, gesturing to the many barrels loaded on carts in the street. Morgiana glanced at the barrels. Something about them made her **apprehensive**.

"Yes, we will purchase a few barrels," Ali said.

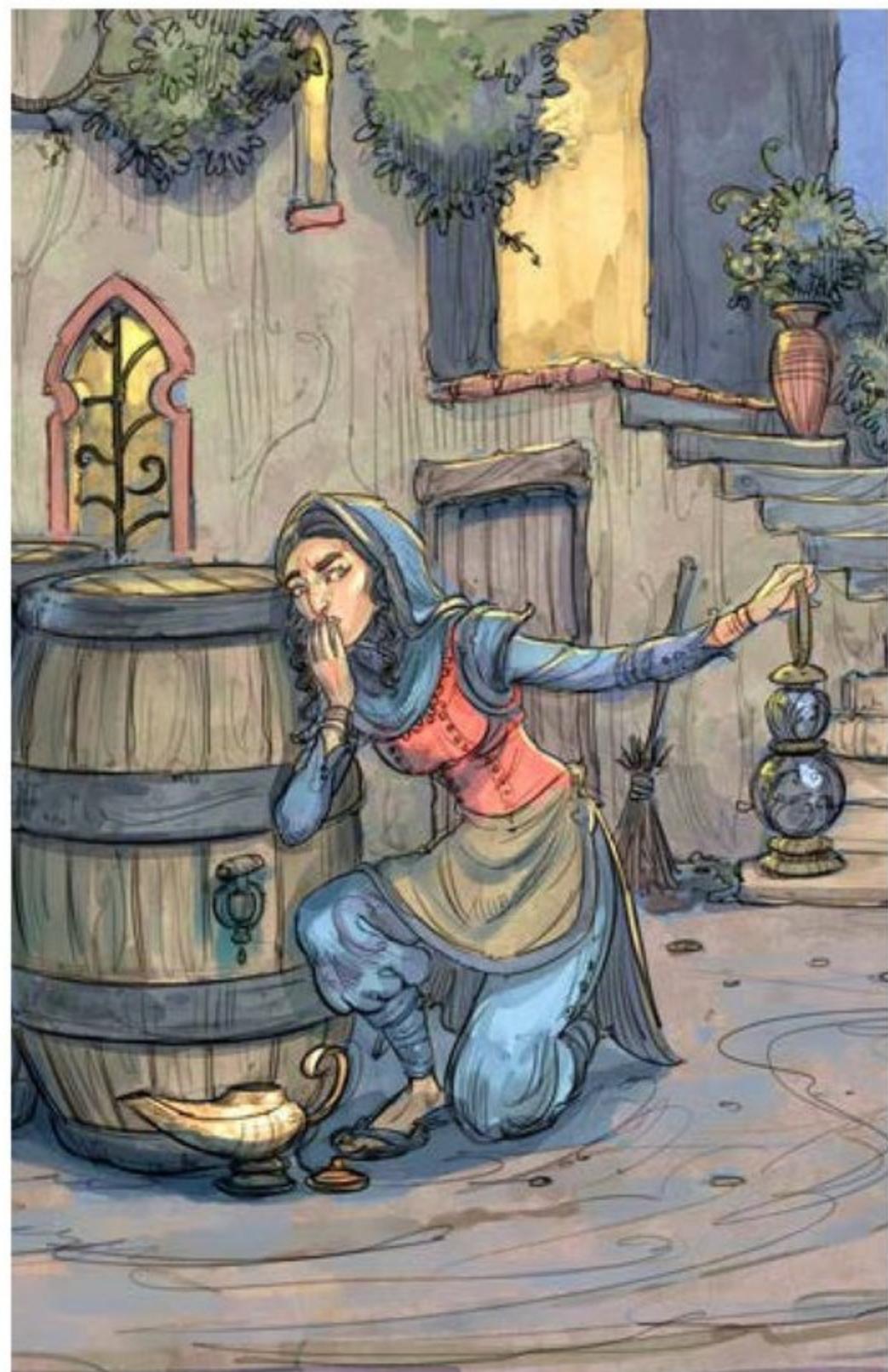
"Thank you. May we also lodge here tonight and store our wares in your yard?" he inquired.

Ali, feeling bound by the rules of hospitality, and his interest piqued in what stories an oil merchant might recount, ignored Morgiana's troubled expression as he replied, "You may stay here, my friend."

Chapter 9

As Morgiana prepared dinner that night, her lantern went out. "Good thing Ali Baba purchased some oil," she remarked to herself.

She went out to the yard and selected a barrel from which to get oil. She turned the spigot. No oil. She tried the next barrel and was pleased to find it worked. As she finished filling her lantern, she heard something move inside one of the barrels. Then she heard a barely audible grunt and a muffled cough.



Despair crept up Morgiana's spine as she headed back into the house, where she nearly collided with the oil merchant's assistant. In the moment of surprise, the assistant forgot to cover himself, and Morgiana instantly recognized him as the holy man from the previous day. She realized why she had intuitively felt uneasy earlier.

The thieves' plan materialized in Morgiana's mind like puzzle pieces falling into place. She smiled tactfully and apologized for her clumsiness before leading the man to the dining room, where Ali Baba entertained the oil merchant. Her repeated attempts to pull Ali Baba from the room were met with dismissive gestures, as he was enraptured with one of the merchant's enchanting **anecdotes**.

Exasperated at Ali Baba's foolishness and suppressing an urge to chide him, Morgiana left the room and contemplated her next step. Then she **surreptitiously** gathered all the servants, told them about the robbers hiding in the barrels, and instructed them to find all the glue they could. They reconvened in the yard, where they silently glued the barrels closed. Then, one by one, they rolled the barrels out of the yard and down the hill to where the city soldiers stood guard.



Morgiana addressed the captain and explained, "There is a thief posing as an oil merchant at my master's house. He schemes to release his men from these barrels and rob and murder us tonight."

The soldiers first laughed at this outrageous tale, but then they broke open one of the barrels to find a confused, and dizzy, robber armed to the teeth. As one group of soldiers set about opening the barrels and arresting the woozy robbers, Morgiana led the captain and his men to the mansion.



Chapter 10

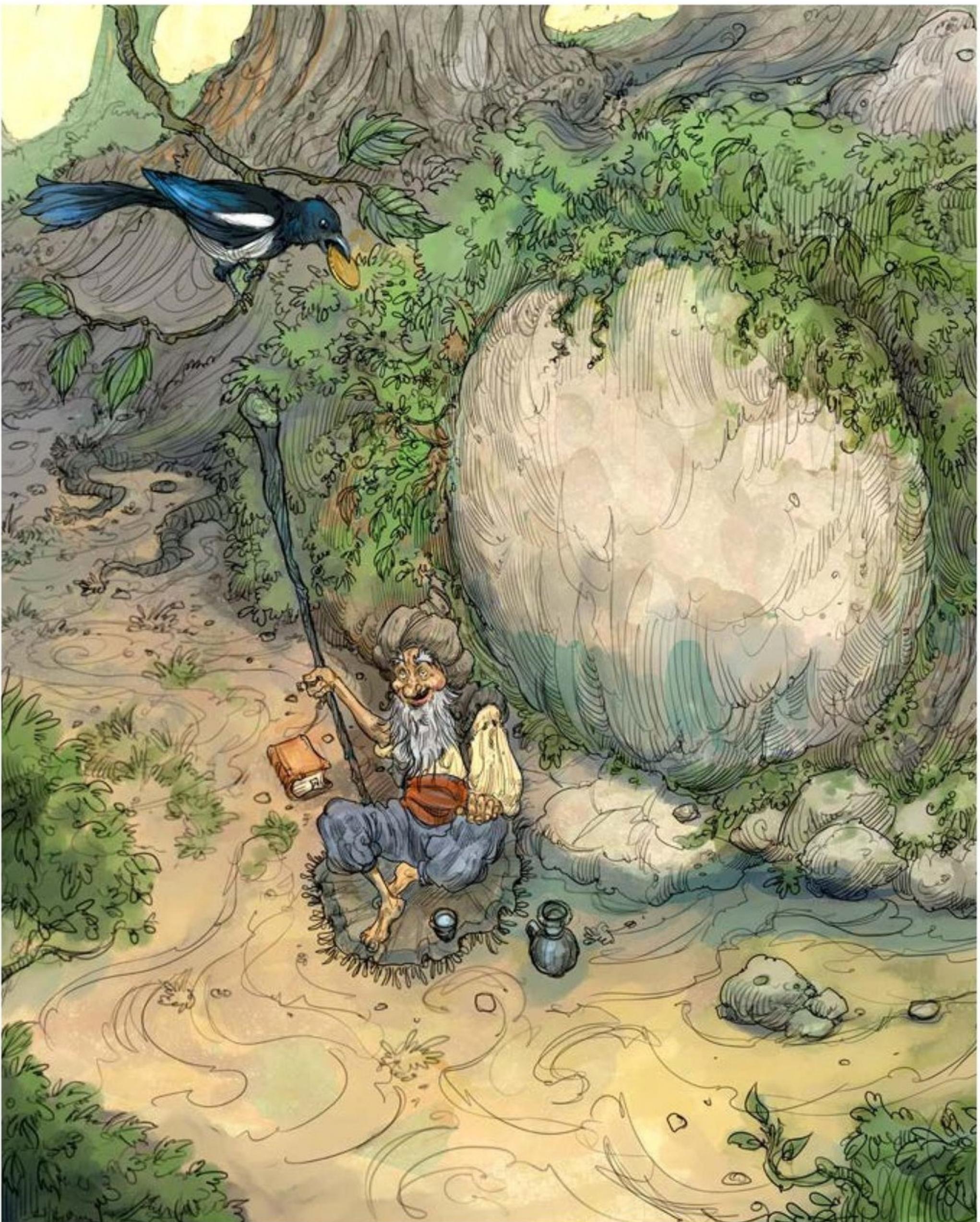
The thieves were tried and sent to faraway prisons, where their stories of a magical cave filled with plunder were treated as imaginative fairy tales.

As promised, Ali Baba gave Morgiana ample gold to return to her homeland and live the rest of her days comfortably. Vashti begged her to stay, promising her more riches and even the secret of the cave's locale if she would continue as Vashti's servant.

Morgiana politely declined the offer and left. Being a shrewd woman, she used the gold to establish a trading business that kept her family affluent for generations to come.

Once Morgiana had departed, Ali Baba, Fatima, and Vashti returned to the cave again and again, taking more and more riches. They passed its secret location and the magic words needed to enter it on to their children, who lived satisfactorily with what remained of the treasure.

By the time Ali Baba, Fatima, and Vashti's great-grandchildren were born, inevitably there was no treasure left.



One enterprising great-grandchild made some money by showing people the wondrous moving rock, but the novelty soon wore off. He spent the rest of his days living in the empty cave. After he expired, there was no one left to remember the magic words, and the rock never moved again.

Glossary

abode (<i>n.</i>)	a home or the place where someone lives (p. 8)
accomplice (<i>n.</i>)	someone who helps another person to do something wrong or illegal (p. 14)
acquiesced (<i>v.</i>)	accepted or gave in without an argument (p. 14)
anecdotes (<i>n.</i>)	short accounts of events or incidents that are often entertaining (p. 19)
apprehensive (<i>adj.</i>)	fearful or worried that something bad is going to happen (p. 17)
callous (<i>adj.</i>)	unfeeling or uncaring about the feelings or problems of others (p. 9)
candor (<i>n.</i>)	honesty or openness (p. 14)
cognizant (<i>adj.</i>)	aware or informed (p. 14)
condolences (<i>n.</i>)	expressions of sympathy or comfort, especially after the death of a loved one (p. 13)
destitute (<i>adj.</i>)	very poor or lacking resources such as food, shelter, or clothing (p. 8)

euphoric (<i>adj.</i>)	extremely happy or excited (p. 10)
expeditiously (<i>adv.</i>)	in a way that is quick and efficient (p. 12)
flabbergasted (<i>adj.</i>)	utterly astonished or amazed (p. 6)
incensed (<i>adj.</i>)	extremely angry (p. 14)
pretense (<i>n.</i>)	a false purpose or impression (p. 15)
prosperous (<i>adj.</i>)	having success; well-off (p. 4)
querulous (<i>adj.</i>)	complaining or whining (p. 5)
spurious (<i>adj.</i>)	fake or deceitful (p. 16)
suet (<i>n.</i>)	a hard fat around the kidneys of some animals that can be used in cooking or in making products such as soap (p. 8)
surreptitiously (<i>adv.</i>)	in a way that is secret or stealthy (p. 19)
unscrupulous (<i>adj.</i>)	dishonest or showing a lack of moral principles (p. 15)

Ali Baba

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book

Word Count: 2,702

Connections

Writing

Write an essay analyzing how Morgiana's actions influence the series of events in the story.

Drama

Work in a group to rewrite *Ali Baba* as a script for a play. Perform the play for your class.

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