

Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves

Long ago in a certain city there lived two brothers. Kasim, the elder, married a rich disagreeable wife and with the money she brought him set up a shop in a market. He was a hard, shrewd, grasping fellow and got very fat for he made a good living. But he loved himself so dearly that nobody loved him except his younger brother Ali Baba. Luckily, he and his wife had no children. So much for the fat Kasim.

Ali Baba who earned a poor living as a woodcutter was very different. He married a good sort of girl with no money but a kind heart. Allah blessed them with a son whom they named Ahmad. But they had no daughter, so they managed to buy a baby-girl whom they named Morgiana. The good woodcutter and his wife grew to love this Morgiana and brought her up more like a daughter than a slave. Though indeed as soon as she was big enough, she was so willing and clever that she did a great deal of work for them. Ali Baba, too, worked hard. And though at first he was so poor that he had to carry his loads of wood on his back all the way down from the hills and into the market, the time came when he could afford to buy a donkey, and after a time two more. But all this while, when even a small loan of money would have been most welcome, he got no help from his fat selfish brother. This unbrotherly conduct of Kasim's was all the worse, because they lived quite near to each other, so that Kasim and his wife knew perfectly well that while, for instance, they were saving up for money to buy another donkey, Ali Baba and his family were often hard put to it to get enough to eat.



One day Ali Baba was cutting wood in the part of the forest where some great rocks marked the foot of the mountains. And while he worked, his three donkeys grazed nearby. His axe rang out loudly among the trees, but pausing for a moment, he heard in what should have been the silence of that lonely place another sound. Listening intently, he decided that it was the sound of galloping horses. And he was afraid, for he knew that such a sound in such a place boded no good either to him or to his precious donkeys. So he quickly led the beasts off and tied them up where the thick undergrowth hid them. And praying to Allah that none of them would bray and so betray their hiding place, Ali Baba, who had a peaceable nature, climbed up into a tree that stood on a little hill and gave a good view of the rocks. Not a moment too soon the noise of galloping grew louder and then a band of wicked looking horsemen, each heavily armed with daggers and scimitars, swept into sight. They had dark faces, their great black beards were as coarse as the bristles of pigs and were parted in the middle in such a way that they looked like the two wings of a carrion-crow.

Ali Baba counted thirty of them and then nine more. And last he saw their gigantic captain who looked more evil and ferocious than the rest. At the signal from him they all dismounted, tied up their horses and each began to unload his heavy saddle-bags. One by one they took these saddlebags to the foot of the great rock and when they had them all piled up ready the robber chief, standing in front a part of the rock which was as steep as a wall, called out in a loud voice: «Open, Sesame!» With a noise like thunder for rock began to gape. First there was a crack and then a great split. And when the split was wide enough, each man took up his pair of saddle-bags and disappeared inside. When all were in, they were followed by the robber captain. Then Ali Baba heard his voice again: «Shut, Sesame!» And with the same noise the rock shut upon them.

«Allah grant that they don't by their sorcery find me in this tree», said the terrified Ali Baba to himself. And he fixed the anxious eyes on the place where he could see the branches moving as his three precious donkeys stamped on the flies and tugged at their tethers. As he had no idea what was likely to happen next, or when the robbers might reappear, he thought it best to stay in his tree. After some time the rock opened again, and the robbers all began to file out, this time carrying empty saddlebags. They went straight to their horses. And when all thirty nine were out and had mounted again the terrible looking robber chief came out too and called out: «Shut, Sesame!» As soon as the rock had shut again, he, too, mounted when the whole black-faced hog-bearded band of ruffians made off at a gallop.

At last, when all the sounds of shouting and horse hooves had died away, poor frightened Ali Baba thanking Allah that not one of his excellent donkeys had brayed came down from his tree. His first thought had been for his donkeys, for it was on them that he and his family depended for a living. But now Ali Baba was overcome with curiosity and, going up to the rock, he examined it carefully. He looked, he felt with his finger, but the rock showed no sign of the split he had seen. Indeed, there seemed not to be even a crack into which he could have got the point of a needle. «This place is certainly guarded with a spell oath,» said he to himself. «And yet all I heard them say was the name of a harmless grain, sesame, the grain that my wife buys sometimes to make cakes. I wonder if that is really enough.» And then in a trembling voice, Ali Baba turning again to the rock said softly: «Open, Sesame!»

To his amazement the rock at once obeyed, and with a noise like thunder the great split appeared in its smooth face. And then once more the forest was still. Ali Baba was almost too frightened to look inside. But at last, plucking up his courage, he took a step forward and then he stared with all his eyes. What he had expected to see will never be known. But what is certain is that this was not a dreadful cavern dripping with horror. On the contrary, a dry level gallery led to a large hall hollowed out of the mountain and cunningly but rather dimly lit by the slits contrived in the roof. Ali Baba turned back to the opening and saying the words which shut the rock (for he feared that, if one of the robbers came back, he might be seen) he walked boldly on and in a few steps found himself in a great cavern.

As his eyes got used to the light he saw that all along the walls piled up to the roof were bales of silks, bars of silver and gold and great chests which were so full of treasure that their contents spilled out onto the floor. Ali Baba could hardly put down a foot without treading or tripping on something precious. Looking more closely, he saw that some of the gold cups and necklaces and bracelets were of ancient workmanship and some were new, so that it seemed to him as if this cavern must have been for hundreds of years the secret store place of many generations of robbers.

«Allah be praised,» said Ali Baba, «for he who loves to reward the simple has made me, a poor woodcutter, master of the fruit of terrible crimes. Now instead of being used by these ruffians the treasure will be put to the innocent use of a poor family.

Then Ali Baba began to think once more of his three donkeys and sat down to consider how much treasure each could carry without being overloaded. He calculated that each must also carry a small load of wood, so that no one should guess his secret. He decided to take only coined gold, for if a poor woodcutter would try to sell even one of these emeralds and diamonds or a single gold cup or bracelet, then who knows what questions and troubles might follow. So with modest good sense Ali Baba only gathered up what it seemed prudent to take, that is what the robbers would not be likely to miss immediately and what his precious donkeys could easily carry. Safely Ali Baba once more opened and then closed the rock. Safely he brought up his three donkeys. Safely he put onto the back of each two small bags of gold nicely hidden with wood. As they all four walked down the mountain to the city, Ali Baba found himself speaking quite softly and respectfully to his donkeys instead of shouting at them. He told them that they had eyes like dark pools of water (which was true). He called them Grey Pearl, Silken Ears, and Nightingale instead of Obstinate Pig or Stumbler or Daughter of Evil, as he often did just to make them mind their work, for now he kept remembering that on their humble gray backs they carried enough gold to make a dowry for a princess.

So the donkeys, for such is the nature of donkeys, loitered and stopped often to snatch a nice-looking mouthful of grass and, in short, took double their usual time to get back home.

Once safe in his own courtyard, Ali Baba threw down the bundles of wood and began to take the six small but heavy bags of gold into the house. Now, these were bags from the cave. And since they were poor, his wife knew every bag and basket that they had. So she was surprised to see six strange bags. And still more surprised when to help him she lifted one of them and found how heavy it was. So she began to ask where they came from.

«These bags are from Allah, good wife. Help me to carry them and don't torment me with questions.»

«Honey,» said the good woman to herself as she heard she clinking. And she supposed that it must be full of copper coins. But six bags even of copper coins seemed to her a great treasure. And she began to be frightened thinking that in some way her good, honest, timid Ali had been up to no good. She even began to beg him to take them away in case they brought bad luck. So before letting her see what the bags really held, Ali Baba swore her to secrecy. And when after locking the door he had poured the flashing gold out onto the floor she became so frightened that he thought it best to tell her the whole story. When she heard it and knew that Ali Baba had been able to bring it all safely and secretly to the house, the poor woman's joy was as great as her terror had been.

«Help me now, wife,» said Ali Baba when he'd finished the tale of the robbers and the treasure cave. «We will only keep out a few coins at present. And we will dig a trench under the floor of the kitchen and hide the rest of the money.»

«But we must count it first,» said his wife.

Ali Baba laughed «Poor foolish woman!» said he, «you could never count all that. «She said she could. He said it would take too long. She began but after an hour she gave it up.

«But surely, husband, we must at least weigh or measure it. I will do the measuring while you dig under the floor,» she went on. «Like this we shall know how much our dear son will inherit from us.»

«But we have no measuring bowl or scoop, for we've never been able to buy enough grain or flour at a time to measure anything,» he answered.



«That is true,» said his wife, «but I will just step round and borrow a measuring scoop from our sister-in-law, Kasim's wife.

«Be sure you don't say a word about the treasure,» said Ali Baba. And his wife, agreeing, promised not to say a word.

Now, though Kasim's wife was so mean that she'd never given her nephew Ahmad or the girl Morgiana so much as a sugar chick-pea, the very cheapest kind of sweet, while they were children, she could not very well refuse the loan of a wooden measure for a few minutes. All the same, she was curious to know what sort of grain these poor people had in such quantities that a measure was needed.

«Will you have this small measure or the large one?» she asked. «The small one, oh my mistress, if you please», answered Ali Baba wife humbly. As she was fetching the measure, Kasim's wife thought how interesting it would be just to know what it was wanted for

«My poor silly sister-in-law,» said she to herself, «is sure to put the measure down on the grain, so if I rub a nice thick bit of suet onto the under side, a little of whatever she is measuring is sure to stick and then I shall know.»

Sure enough, when Ali Baba's wife got home, the first thing she did was to put the borrowed measure down on the top of the pile of gold. And just as Kasim's wife had intended, the suet stuck to the it had been put on, so that a single gold coin remained on the under side. And in this way Ali Baba's wife, poor creature, was the innocent means of giving away their great secret. No sooner measuring done and the money buried, that back she ran in a great hurry to her sister-in-law's house and thanking her for her kindness gave her back the measure. Hardly was her back turned, when Kasim's wife turned the measure upside down. And what was her amazement to see sticking to the under side a shining gold dinar.

Kasim's wife at once fell furiously jealous. The thought that in her sister-in-law's house they had so much gold that they measured instead of counting it was poison to her. However, she just had enough sense not to go shouting to the neighbours about this strange affair. But as soon as her husband came back, she showed him the gold and told him what had happened. Instead of rejoicing at his kind brother's good luck, Kasim grew yellow with envy. And he felt that he could never rest till he not only knew the secret, but got some of that gold for himself. So, without waiting a moment, he rushed round to his brother's house. He found Ali Baba in the kitchen still with a peak axe in his hand. And without a word of greeting and speaking low between clenched teeth, Kasim hissed in Ali Baba's ear: «Ah, you, well-meant brother, how dare you be so secretive. Tell me immediately how it is that you, dirty, starved-looking creature that you are have so much gold that you measure instead of counting it?»

Poor Ali Baba was dumbfounded. And when his horrible brother shook the gold dinar under his nose and threatened to tell the rulers of the town that Ali Baba was a robber and to have his donkeys killed and the whole house pulled about his ears, he at last told Kasim the story, but without telling him the magic words which opened the rock. «The words! The words that open the caves» said Kasim looking furious. «Don't dare to hide anything!»

«Dear brother,» answered Ali Baba gently, «we are the children of one father and one mother. I will willingly share the treasure with you, good brother, but don't ask me the words. To prove that I am in earnest, you can have half of all that I brought home today.»

«No,» answered the black-souled Kasim. «The words! I must know the words. I want to be able to go there myself. Tell me directly or I will tell everyone that you stole the gold.»

So though he feared that evil would come of it, Ali Baba was obliged to tell his brother both the way to the rock and the words which opened the treasure cave.

Now, Allah contrives many ways in which to bring the wicked and heartless to distraction. And it was through his own selfish and greed that Kasim met with his just reward.

The very next morning, as soon as it was light, Kasim who had refused to Ali Baba's offer to act as guide stole off secretly with ten mules each carrying empty sacks. He found his way to the place, tethered the mules, stood before the smooth face of the rock and cried with all his might: «Open, Sesame!» When the rock opened, she rushed into the cavern. And almost stunned by the sight before him had hardly breath to give the order that closed the rock again. He saw gleaming silks, cups made of chaste gold of exquisite workmanship, jewels fit for the turban of a sultan, anklets, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, bars of gold, minted money. All this was piled in great heaps right up to the top of the cavern. All was littered and scattered about. The sight quite dazzled Kasim and he began to mutter, «Ten mules ... not enough ... 20 mules ... only a beginning. Not all the camels of all the merchants that visit our city at the great fair will be enough to caring away all this splendour.» Talking out loud to himself and rushing from one side of the cavern to the other fat Kasim began to beat his forehead and scratch his head trying to think how he would ever be able to contrive to get in all for himself. Soon he began to collect «just a little» as he called it to himself, into the sacks that he had brought. But he was so greedy that he was always unpacking a sack in order to put in something still more valuable that just had caught his eye. And being very fat, he was soon quite breathless and exhausted. At last, still thinking how he could get yet more, he began to drag his heavy sacks to the end of the gallery and to pile them up. It was not till he was nearly fainting with his effort and his wild excitement, that he decided to go. And now it was that Allah turned Kasim's shocking greed against him, for in his excitement and thinking only of his wild plans to keep all the treasure to himself he found that when he needed to speak it, he had forgotten the word. He stood thinking: «I-i-it was the name of a grain» Yes, he knew that much. «But which grain? Open, barley!» he cried. «Open, millet! Open, wheat!» But all in vain. The rock remained shut.

He began to be afraid. «Eh-eh-eh open, rice! Open, rye!» Still that was of no use. There he stood speechless now and growing more and more terrified and confused. At last he heard a noise like thunder and a crack of light began to appear.



It was the robbers. They had come back, had seen the mules, had leapt from their horses, had looked everywhere for the mules' owner and now their chief pointing his drawn sword at the rock had spoken the magic words: «Open, Sesame». Kasim guessing the terrible truth, made a wild rush for the freedom as the rock split only at the very entrance to be cut into six pieces by the swords of the furious robbers. The thieves laughed loudly, wiped their swords, tossed the wretched fragments inside, emptied out the sacks of treasure that Kasim had piled up, and then had a look to see if anything else seemed to have gone. But so great was the mass of treasure that they never missed the six small bags of gold that the careful Ali Baba had gathered from here and there.

And now the forty robbers sat in a circle discussing, as well they might, how this greasy citizen who had not looked, the sort of man who ever came to the forest could have discovered their secret. They got angry. So that if it seemed that one of them had accidentally betrayed it on a visit to the town, the others were soon quite ready to cut off his head and to leave him to keep company with Kasim. Unable, talk as they would, to guess how the strange and awkward event had happened, they decided to leave Kasim's body in the gallery where, said the robber chief, it would be a warning if anyone else by ill fortune had also discovered the way to the cave.

Now, all that day Kasim's, wife, who alone knew where he had gone waited in vain for him. And so it was that when night fell, she went wailing to Ali Baba's house to beg his help. But it was now pitch dark, so that till morning came all that Ali Baba and his wife could do was to try to comfort the weeping woman. She, to tell the truth, was quite as much crying and wailing because the treasure might be lost as for fear of what might have happened to her fat husband. As for Ali Baba, he was truly troubled about his brother. He had forgotten all Kasim's heartlessness and only remembered how they had played together as boys.

So the dawn was scarcely grey in the sky before the good Ali Baba and his three donkeys once more set out for the forest. First he hunted about for his brother's mules, but the robbers had taken them all. And when he did not see them, Ali Baba grew terribly afraid. When at the threshold of the rock he saw a stain of blood, he shuddered for pity. So that it was in a trembling voice that he cried once more, «Open, sesame!» Alas, what a sight met his eyes! His knees knocked together with terror when he saw the six pieces into which the robbers had hacked Kasim. And cruel and heartless as the dead man had been to him, Ali Baba wept. «The only thing I can do for you now, my brother, is to give you decent burial, so that your poor ghost shall find rest», said he to himself. And though he very well understood the danger of what he was doing (for it would mean that the robbers would know that this dead man was not the only one who knew their secret) he found sacks and divided the new load in such a way that it could be put on the backs of his three donkeys and hidden as the gold had been with branches of wood. Then when all was finished, closed the rock once more, Ali Baba set out sadly on his journey home.

When Ali Baba got back with Kasim's body it so happened that it was not his wife, but their adopted daughter, the slave girl Morgiana who came out to meet him and help him tie up the donkeys. Ali Baba was glad to see who it was, for he was rather superstitious. Indeed, as he was walking back sadly from the forest, with his donkey he'd been thinking that perhaps as it had been through his wife who had insisted on measuring the gold that his brother and sister-in-law had discovered their secret, the less the good woman had to do with it all the better. Though innocent, she might, he thought, bring their all bad luck again. So he was pleased that it happened to be young Morgiana who helped him to unload. And it was to her that he first told what had happened. «Morgiana, my pretty one,» he ended, «we shall need all your wit and cleverness over this. While I go with your adopted mother to break this terrible news to my sister-in-law, you try to think of some way in which we can manage to have a proper funeral. We don't want questions. Somehow the neighbours had better be made to believe that poor Kasim died of a natural illness. But I can't think how it's to be managed». With that Ali Baba left her and went into the house, and telling his wife briefly what had happened, they both went off to try to break the news to Kasim's widow in such a way that she would not let out the secret. She really must be persuaded not to do too much loud crying and wailing or else the neighbours would guess that there'd been a death.

So young Morgiana sat down and thought and being a very clever girl she soon hit upon an excellent plan. She went off to a certain neighbouring druggist who, she knew, was a great gossip. When she got to his shop she told him with a very long face and in a tone as though she were rather frightened that she'd been sent by her master to buy a certain very expensive mixture that was well-known to be good against the fever called the red evil. «My master's brother,» she added, «Kasim, the merchant, has suddenly fallen very ill». Some hours later she went again. «Alas,» said she, «the merchant Kasim grows no better. We fear it may indeed be the red evil, his face is yellow, he cannot speak and seems blind. Allah help him. He hardly moves or breathes. Our only hope is now in your skill, most learned druggist». Here she seemed ready to burst into tears. «Let cost not be thought of! Mix us something so powerful that it will bring my master's poor kinsman back from the very edge of the grave».

On each walk to this gossiping druggist as she came and went Morgiana had taken care to chat with everyone she knew about the sad illness of her master's brother. She told them, moreover, that Kasim had been moved to Ali Baba's house for better care. The consequence was that next morning the neighbours were not surprised to hear piercing cries and lamentations and to be told the news that Kasim, the merchant was dead.

Now, Kasim, as has been told, had been chopped into six pieces. And it was the custom in that city not to have the dead put into coffins but to bury them well wrapped in costly shawls.

«We shall have succeeded in nothing, master, if we cannot manage to make him seem to be all in one piece», said Morgiana thoughtfully to Ali Baba when he praised her for what she'd already done. Ali Baba dolefully agreed, but could think of no way of managing this.

Now, there was a poor old cobbler who lived in the district. And what did the excellent Morgiana do but hurry off to him. Slipping one of the gold dinars from the treasure into the old man's hand she said to him, «Oh, most excellent of cobblers, we have need of your best skill. Also», and here Morgiana dropped her voice to a whisper, «we have two more of these gold dinars». «Eh, if it's any-thing lawful that you ask me to do, oh excellent and charming one, I will do it», answered the delighted old cobbler whose work very seldom brought him one let alone three gold pieces. «It is indeed lawful. In fact it's only a little sewing. But also it is a secret», replied she. «So my master has told me that unless when you came with me you'll consent to be blindfolded I am to take the other two gold dinars elsewhere». The end of it was that that night Morgiana came to fetch him and the old cobbler agreed to have his eyes bandaged and Morgiana, taking an extra turn or two for safety, led him round about to the cellar under Ali Baba's house.

When the cobbler's first surprise and dismay were over, he finally did his work very neatly and was taken back just as he had come. Thus it came about that Kasim was once more all in one piece, and neatly wrapped in thick shawls, and tidily arranged on the carrying litter. When the imam, who was the priest of the nearby mosque, and all the neighbours assembled for the funeral, no one could possibly guess that it had been the swords of forty furious thieves and not the red evil that had brought the greedy merchant to his end.

And now for almost a whole month peace descended upon two households. Ahmad, Ali Baba's son, who was a pleasant handsome young man, took over the shop of his dead uncle. And the customers found him so much more agreeable and so much more honest, that the shop prospered more than ever. Ali Baba's wife, who, though perhaps rather a silly, fussy woman, had a very kind heart and a forgiving nature, went to be with her sister-in-law during the time of her widow's mourning. Then, as otherwise Morgiana would now have had all the work at their house on her hands, Ali Baba bought a strong cheerful young slave named Abdullah, so that after all that the clever girl had done for them, his dear Morgiana's work should be light. Morgiana, who truly loved her master and mistress, who were indeed the only father and mother she had ever known, would hardly accept the pretty bracelets, anklets, earrings and other small presents that the grateful Ali Baba gave her. As for Ali Baba himself, he knew that he had secrets to keep and that he had many inquisitive neighbours, so he was careful not to alter his way of life and so draw attention to himself. So he used very little of the gold under the kitchen floor, but went on, just as before cutting wood and selling it.

Indeed, except the buying of the young man, the only change in Ali Baba's way of life and that of his three donkeys was that never, never did he turn their grey noses down any path that led anywhere near the rock of the robbers, but cut his wood as far away from it as he could.

Now, the reason why for nearly a whole month all had been so peaceful was that the thirty nine thieves and their captain had ridden off far out into the desert to attack a caravan. And it was only after this long journey that they came back to their cave. As soon as the captain had said the magic words and they began to go in with their booty, the very first man saw at once that Kasim's body had disappeared. They were all now much alarmed, for they realized, as Ali Baba had been sure they would, that this meant that some living man knew their secret. Again they searched the cave, this time more thoroughly. Still they did not miss the small amount of treasure that Ali Baba had taken. Finding that only the dead body had vanished, their surprise was all the greater. And they began to quarrel violently with each other. And each man accused another of having in some way betrayed the secret. At last the ferocious robber captain clapped his hands for silence. Then and there he told them that one of his followers would have to venture disguised into the city as a spy and try to find news of a man who had been cut into six pieces. «Lo! Before anyone offers in himself for this task that if he fails or in any way betrays our secret, I shall myself strike off his head with my scimitar!» In spite of this one of the thieves at once agreed to go.

So next morning, before it was light, this thief disguised himself carefully as a wandering dervish or holy man and went down to the market.

Now, when he got there it was still so early that it was scarcely light and most of the shops were still shut. But seeing an old cobbler already in his shop and busy threading a needle, the pretended dervish greeted him politely and remarked what excellent eyesight he must have.

«Ah, yes, thanks be to Allah, my eyes are good,» answered the cobbler pleased at the compliment. «Indeed, I can do even better than that. Why, not long ago I even sewed together the six parts of a dead body in a cellar, and that had less light than we have now»

The pretended dervish, who'd already made out that he came from far away, said that he was surprised to hear that sewing up the dead was one of the customs of the city.

«O-ho-ho, indeed, it's not a custom here. This was done secretly,» answered the cobbler.

«How very interesting,» answered the pretended dervish. «I should dearly like to see the house». And with that he offered the cobbler a piece of money if he would show him.

«How can I show the house to you, oh, holy man? I was blindfolded and led there by a young slave girl who took me there and back with many turns and twists».

The end of it was that partly by bribery and partly by flattery the pretended dervish persuaded the old cobbler that he was sure to be clever enough to find the place if he were again blindfolded and allowed to grope his way there. Alas for Ali Baba and all in his house, the cobbler did in the end succeed in



leading the disguised robber to the very door. Now, the street was a long one with many doors and courtyards all rather like those of Ali Baba. Determined that there should be no mistake when he brought along the others, the robber at once pulled a piece of white chalk out of his girdle and marked the door with it. And then having paid and thanked the old cobbler for his trouble, he hurried back to the forest. And there he boasted to the robber captain about how well and quickly he had done his errand.



Now, it so happened that hardly had the cobbler and the pretended dervish left the street than Morgiana, on her way to the market, came out of the house. Ever since the strange events of nearly a month ago, the clever girl had been on the alert. And more than ever quick at noticing every little thing, for she felt only too sure that they would not be left in peace forever. So now as she left the house, she turned back for a moment upon which her eye fell on the white chalk mark. «Ha! This did not write itself», thought Morgiana. «Some enemy has marked our house for misfortune». And slipping back into the house, she got another piece of white chalk and quickly marked every door and gateway on both sides of the street. Then, well pleased, but still a little uneasy she went off to do her marketing.

Early next morning, on their captain's orders the robbers began to come two by two into the city. Not wanting to attract attention, each pair chose a different road. What was their bewilderment when they met in the street which the first thief had described to find that not only one, but more than a dozen houses were each marked with the white chalk which was to be in a signal. There was nothing for it but to go back to the forest where in his rage the robber captain cut off the head of his first unsuccessful spy. The robbers were now more uneasy than ever, for it seemed to them that their enemy must be very much alive and also exceedingly clever. There seemed nothing for it but to send another thief to bribe the old cobbler once more. This time, with no difference, except that the second robber dressed himself up as a foreign merchant, the same thing was done. This time the pretended foreign merchant made a very small red mark instead of a large white one. But Morgiana was on the lookout now, found the red mark almost as soon as it was made, and when the robbers crept two by two into the city again, it was to find small red marks on all the doors for half a mile around. When they all got dolefully back to the forest, the second thief met his end.

Then it was that the robber captain decided that he would go himself. The old cobbler, who was growing quite rich and had decided that sewing corpses paid much better than sewing shoes, told his curious story again to someone who seemed to be a peddler and led this third inquisitive stranger to the house.

But the captain, wiser than his followers, only looked and remembered and made no mark which could tell Morgiana to be on her guard. As soon as he was back in the forest, he quickly ordered his followers (there were now thirty seven of them) to go disguised to the market and there to buy thirty eight large oil jars with wide necks. Each was to be large enough for a man to crouch in. Thirty seven would be empty and one was to be full of the very best olive oil. «I know the house now, and the fate of all who live in it shall be terrible», added he. And as they got ready they all sharpened their daggers and scimitars.

Next evening the unsuspecting Ali Baba who was tired from his day's work of cutting wood, was sitting at his door to enjoy the cool air. And as he sat he saw a string of laden horses coming up the street. There seemed to be only one man with them. And as he came opposite the house this man greeted him politely. «Oh, master», said the traveller, «I am an oil merchant and my horses have come far today. I am a stranger here and as I have fodder for the horses, I venture to ask you of your kindness to allow me to tie my horses in your yard and also to give me shelter for the night. If you consent, Allah will bless you and your hospitality».

Now one of the things that delighted the good Ali Baba was that now he was no longer so poor and now that his son Ahmad was an independent shop-keeper, he was usually able to give just such help to strangers. So, answering joyfully, he rose immediately, opened the gates of his yard and calling to Morgiana and to the slave he told them that they had an honoured guest and that an excellent supper was to be prepared. He himself bustled about helping the supposed oil merchant to set down the heavy oil jars and tether the horses.

Later, as they ate together at supper, he found the traveller a most interesting companion, for he seemed to have been in many strange lands and had many interesting tales to tell. At last, it grew late and the oil merchant

said that before going to bed he would just like to see that all was well with his horses. So while Ali Baba and Morgiana went to bring out pillows and mattresses to make him a comfortable bed, the robber captain, for it was none other, began to talk loudly to his horses in the yard. «Stop that stamping and fidgeting, White Star», he would call. And then, when he was near one of the jars he whispered under his breath, «When I throw a pebble out of my bedroom window». Then aloud he said again, «Steady mare, don't rove a fidgety fiend if your hoof isn't over your picket rope». And then whispering again, «When I throw a pebble out of my window». And so he went on speaking in turn to each robber hidden in each of the thirty seven jars and telling him the signal at which he was to come out and help in the slaughter.



To the last jar he did not speak, for that one really did contain oil.

When Morgiana had finished helping her master with the bed and when the supposed oil merchant was comfortably lying in it, there were still the supper dishes to wash. As she worked in the kitchen at the washing up, what should happen but that her lamp should run out of oil. She was put out and called the news to the slave Abdullah saying how silly she'd been to forget to get in enough oil. «By Allah!» answered Abdullah laughing, «how can you say, oh, my foolish sister, that we are out of oil, when tonight there are thirty eight jars of the very best oil just outside in our yard». Morgiana hadn't thought of that. But now, taking a ladle out she went in the moonlight and taking out the fibre stopper from the first jar she came to she put in her ladle which, as luck would have it, hit one of the hidden robbers bang on the head. «Pebble, captain?» said a deep hoarse voice from the jar. «That was more like a rock. But we are ready. And with that the jar began to rock as the crouching robber began to raise himself. Anyone but the excellent Morgiana would now surely have screamed with fright. But though her mouth was dry and she felt her heart pounding, she managed to whisper, «Be quiet! Not yet, not yet». As she

put back the fibre stopper, she began to realize what the plot must be. And though her knees shook and her lips trembled and her long black hair almost stood up with fright, she went steadily from one jar to another tapping on each, and when the deep voice of a robber answered, she repeated again her «not yet, not yet». At last she came to the jar from which there was no answer. Then once more she took out the fibre stopper, put in her ladle, filled it with excellent oil and returning to the kitchen, at last relighted her lamp. What was she to do? This had taken some time. All the three men were now asleep — the slave Abdullah, her master Ali Baba and the man whom she now knew to be the dreadful captain of the robbers. Then Morgiana thought of a fresh plan. First she lit a great fire in the kitchen fireplace and over it she hung the largest cauldron in the house, one which was generally used for boiling clothes. Backwards and forwards went Morgiana with ladle and bucket to the real oil jar until she had filled the cauldron. As soon as the oil was boiling, she filled their largest bucket with it. And going softly to the first jar, she relentlessly poured into it a great dollop of the boiling oil which killed the first robber directly. She went in this way from jar to jar till at last her work was done. Then she went back to the kitchen, put out the fire and her lamp and hid herself. Silently she waited and at last she heard that upstairs a window was being opened. The robber captain cautiously put out his head and, seeing all the house in darkness, he supposed that all his intended victims were safely asleep. Then he took up the pebbles that he



had ready prepared and began to throw them one by one at the jars.

Though the moon was down and it was very dark, he could tell by the sound as they struck the jars, that his pebbles were reaching their marks. But there was no answer, no stirring, no rush of armed men. «Eh, dogs», he said to himself in a fury, «they've all gone to sleep». Then, creeping downstairs he went to the jars. To his horror, each jar felt as hot as an oven. And opening each of them in turn, he realized that they now contained only lifeless corpses. With that the robber captain took one leap onto the top of the courtyard wall, let himself down into the road, ran for his life down the empty street and did not stop running till he reached the safety of his cave.

Morgiana, though she could not see, had heard it all and realising with thankfulness that they were now safe, waited till the first light of the morning

before she waked her master.

Not until it was light did Morgiana wake Ali Baba. Then, asking him to come down to the courtyard, she begged him to lift the cover of the first jar. Ali Baba started back in horror at what he saw. But when Morgiana had told him the whole story of the night, he wept tears of joy «Oh, Daughter of Good Fortune, oh, Moon of Excellence», he cried, «Surely, the bread that you have eaten in our house is a little thin compared to this. Hands forward, dear Morgiana, you shall be our eldest child and the head of the house». So he and his slave Abdullah spent the rest of the day digging a great pit in the garden. And there, when it was dark, they buried the thirty seven robbers. It only remained to dispose of the horses, and these they sold one by one, so that the curiosity of the neighbours should not be aroused. And now once more they lived peacefully for a while. But Morgiana was so watchful, for she could not believe that they had heard the last of the terrible captain of the robbers.

It happened that one day Ali Baba's son Ahmad, who as it was told had inherited his uncle Kasim's shop, mentioned that a new merchant who called himself Hussein had set up a shop near his own. Soon Ahmad began to tell them more about this Hussein. He said he was a venerable man with a long silvery beard and very pious. He said he was a most excellent and hospitable neighbour and was continually doing him some little service or other. At last Ahmad said to his father, «Five times have I shared the midday meal with this excellent old man. Do you not think, oh my father, that we should return his hospitality?» Ali Baba agreed at once. So it was arranged that the white-bearded merchant who called himself Hussein should be asked to supper the very next Friday, the day of rest. Hussein, after making a few polite excuses, agreed to come. All day Morgiana, Abdullah, the slave, and the woman who now did most of the cooking worked to make a really splendid supper. Hussein was duly welcomed and while he, Ali Baba and his son Ahmad ate, Morgiana waited on them. Now, it certainly seemed, as young Ahmad had said, that their venerable visitor had a particularly splendid long silvery beard. And as she passed the dishes, Morgiana looked rather closely at this beard. She also noticed that this Hussein had in his girdle a particularly long dagger. And it presently seemed to Morgiana that she had somewhere seen this dagger before.

However, she said nothing and when the last dish had been served, she retired to her own room, leaving the three men to their wine. What was Ali Baba's surprise, when a few minutes later he saw Morgiana entering the room again dressed not in her usual clothes, but as a dancing girl. She seemed to have put on every trinket that he had ever given her. On her forehead were glittering sequins, on her ankles and wrists were tinkling silver bracelets and anklets, each set with little rows of tinkling bells. At her neck hung a long string of amber beads, at her waist was a golden belt, and from the belt hung a jade-hilted dagger. This was an ornament, such as dancers often wear, so that the dagger in its long decorated sheath will swing in time to nimble dancing feet and clinking anklets. Young Ahmad gasped at the sight. He had no idea that Morgiana, the girl whom he saw every day busy with the work at the house, could look so lovely. Her eyes which tonight were darkened with coal seemed to glitter with a feverish light. Her slender hands and feet were adorned with henna, her long shining hair swung down to her slim gold-circled waist.

When they could take their eyes off her, they saw that Morgiana was followed by Abdullah, the slave, who beat softly upon a tambourine. First bowing low to the honoured and venerable guest, Hussein, Morgiana began to dance as lightly as a happy bird. And as she danced, the rhythm of the tambourine grew louder and stranger, for the young Abdullah was a master of rhythm. First Morgiana danced the kerchief dance, then she danced the Persian dance and all the while the pace of the beat of the tambourine and the clink of her dancing feet grew swifter and swifter. At last, signalling to Abdullah, she broke into the slow swaying dagger dance.



Slowly she drew the jade-hilted blade from its silver sheath. And then once more the pace quickened and she began to sway and leap with blazing eyes pointing her dagger now here, now there striking the air like a warrior surrounded by enemies. Now the rhythm quickened to fever pace. Faster and faster she whirled, closer and closer she came to the men as they sat as if under an enchantment. And then at last with a sudden movement she plunged her dagger into the heart of Hussein! In

horror at such a deed Ali Baba and his son started up and then she stood before them panted and wiping the dripping blade of her dagger. «Look!» said she and shuddered as she fixed her eyes on the lifeless body. Then they saw that the long venerable silver beard had slipped aside and revealed black hoggish bristles of the cruel face that was by now only well too known by Ali Baba. «The oil merchant! The robber captain!» he cried. Then he took Morgiana to his breast and kissing her between her eyes exclaimed, «Bless you, child! Light of my eyes! Be my daughter of very truth! Marry this handsome son of mine!» Now Morgiana has long secretly loved Ahmad, the master's son, and it seemed to Ahmad now that he had seen Morgiana in her sudden blaze of beauty and courage that no fate could be more fortunate than to marry such a wonderful girl.

And so not so long after Ahmad and Morgiana were married. But not before Ali Baba had buried the robber chief in the grave which held the rest of his cruel band. For a long time Morgiana, who had saved them and who was slow to forget the dangers that they had all survived, begged her young husband and Ali Baba not to visit the treasure cave again. Ali Baba had told her that there had once been forty thieves, and not knowing that two had been beheaded by the captain's own hand, she begged them both to consider that there might very likely still be danger. But time passed, and at last Ali Baba and his son persuaded the prudent Morgiana to come with them to the cave. As they went, she saw for herself that the path had become quite overgrown not only with grasses but with woody shrubs and that now long creepers hung down in front of what had once been the split in the rock. Then even the careful Morgiana agreed that no one could have passed that way for a very long time, and that Allah in his mercy had somehow ended their danger.

So now once more Ali Baba, this time with his son and Morgiana, stood before the rock. Once more he called out in a firm voice, «Open, sesame!» And then for the first time the two young people went in and saw the vastness of the treasure which was to be their inheritance. «Glory be to Allah, who gives abundance beyond counting to the humble!» exclaimed Ali Baba once more and once more he took only a few sacks of gold and precious stones.

And so they all lived for many years in peace and happiness, taking care not to excite the envy of the neighbours by too sudden prosperity but instead earning blessings by their kindness to the poor and their hospitality to strangers.

The End