

ENGLISH BOOK CLUB · CLASSICS IN TODAY'S WORDS

Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves

Andrew Lang's 1889 text in today's words

6 parts · 3,601 words · Level 1 (B1)

Reading time: about 35 min · with the workbook: about 1 hr 10 min · 1 book club meeting (all 6 parts).

Text: Andrew Lang, The Blue Fairy Book (1889), "The Forty Thieves", public domain. Every sentence and event is kept; only words no longer in everyday use were replaced with today's words. Part divisions were added for reading.

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How to Read This Book

The original story is not changed. Only old words like *bade*, *thou* and *whence* were replaced with the words we use today. Three kinds of marks help you:

highlighted — a word studied in the workbook

dotted[†] — an old word kept because there is no good modern replacement (see the workbook)

blue line[※] — an old expression that people no longer use (see the workbook)

READING TIME

Most English learners read about 100 words a minute (1,000 words $\approx$ 10 minutes). With the workbook, plan about twice as long. Our book club reads about 4,300 words per meeting.

PARTS

Part 1	393 words · about 4 min
Part 2	472 words · about 5 min
Part 3	554 words · about 6 min
Part 4	871 words · about 9 min
Part 5	468 words · about 5 min
Part 6	843 words · about 8 min

Part 1

393 WORDS · ABOUT 4 MIN

In a town in Persia there lived two brothers, one named Cassim, the other Ali Baba. Cassim was married to a rich wife and lived in plenty^{*}, while Ali Baba had to support his wife and children by cutting wood in a neighboring forest and selling it in the town. One day, when Ali Baba was in the forest, he saw a **troop** of men on horseback, coming toward him in a cloud of dust. He was afraid they were **robbers**, and climbed into a tree for safety. When they came up to him and **dismounted**, he counted forty of them. They unbridled their horses and tied them to trees. The finest man among them, whom Ali Baba took to be their captain, went a little way among some bushes, and said: "Open, Sesame!"[1] so **plainly** that Ali Baba heard him. A door opened in the rocks, and having made the troop go in, he followed them, and the door shut again by itself. They stayed some time inside, and Ali Baba, fearing they might come out and catch him, was forced to sit **patiently** in the tree. At last the door opened again, and the Forty Thieves came out. As the Captain went in last he came out first, and made them all pass by him; he then closed the door, saying: "Shut, Sesame!" Every man bridled his horse and mounted, the Captain put himself at their head, and they returned as they came.

[1] Sesame is a kind of grain.

Then Ali Baba climbed down and went to the door **concealed** among the bushes, and said: "Open, Sesame!" and it flew open. Ali Baba, who expected a dull, **dismal** place, was greatly surprised to find it large and well lighted, hollowed by the hand of man in the form of a **vault**, which received the light from an opening in the ceiling. He saw rich bales of **merchandise**—silk, stuff[†]-brocades, all piled together, and gold and silver in **heaps**, and money in leather purses. He went in and the door shut behind him. He did not look at the silver, but brought out as many bags of gold as he thought his donkeys, which were grazing outside, could carry, loaded them with the bags, and hid it all with firewood. Using the words: "Shut, Sesame!" he closed the door and went home.

Part 2

472 WORDS · ABOUT 5 MIN

Then he drove his donkeys into the yard, shut the gates, carried the money-bags to his wife, and emptied them out before her. He told her to keep the secret, and he would go and **bury** the gold. "Let me first **measure** it," said his wife. "I will go borrow a measure from someone, while you dig the hole." So she ran to the wife of Cassim and borrowed a measure. Knowing Ali Baba's poverty, the sister was **curious** to find out what sort of grain his wife wished to measure, and artfully put some suet at the bottom of the measure. Ali Baba's wife went home and set the measure on the heap of gold, and filled it and emptied it often, to her great satisfaction. She then carried it back to her sister, without noticing that a piece of gold was sticking to it, which Cassim's wife **perceived** as soon as her back was turned. She grew very curious, and said to Cassim when he came home: "Cassim, your brother is richer than you. He does not count his money, he measures it." He begged her to explain this **riddle**, which she did by showing him the piece of money and telling him where she found it. Then Cassim grew so **envious** that he could not sleep, and went to his brother in the morning before sunrise. "Ali Baba," he said, showing him the gold piece, "you pretend to be poor and yet you measure gold." By this Ali Baba perceived that through his wife's **folly** Cassim and his wife knew their secret, so he **confessed** all and offered Cassim a **share**. "That I expect," said Cassim; "but I must know where to find the treasure, otherwise I will reveal all, and you will lose all." Ali Baba, more out of kindness than fear, told him of the cave, and the very words to use. Cassim left Ali Baba, meaning to be beforehand with him * and get the treasure for himself. He rose early next morning, and set out with ten mules loaded with great chests. He soon found the place, and the door in the rock. He said: "Open, Sesame!" and the door opened and shut behind him. He could have feasted his eyes all day on the treasures, but he now hurried to gather together as much of it as possible; but when he was ready to go he could not remember what to say because he was thinking of his great riches. Instead of "Sesame," he said: "Open, Barley!" and the door **remained** shut. He named several different sorts of grain, all but the right one, and the door still stuck fast. He was so frightened at the danger he was in that he had as much forgotten the word as if he had never heard it.

Part 3

554 WORDS · ABOUT 6 MIN

About noon the robbers returned to their cave, and saw Cassim's mules wandering about with great chests on their backs. This gave them the alarm^{*}; they drew their sabres[†], and went to the door, which opened on their Captain's saying: "Open, Sesame!" Cassim, who had heard the trampling of their horses' feet, resolved to sell his life dearly^{*}, so when the door opened he leaped out and threw the Captain down. In vain, however, for the robbers with their sabres soon killed him. On entering the cave they saw all the bags laid ready, and could not imagine how anyone had got in without knowing their secret. They cut Cassim's body into four quarters, and nailed them up inside the cave, in order to frighten anyone who should venture in, and went away in search of more treasure.

As night drew on Cassim's wife grew very uneasy, and ran to her brother-in-law, and told him where her husband had gone. Ali Baba did his best to comfort her, and set out to the forest in search of Cassim. The first thing he saw on entering the cave was his dead brother. Full of horror, he put the body on one of his donkeys, and bags of gold on the other two, and, covering all with some firewood, returned home. He drove the two donkeys laden with gold into his own yard, and led the other to Cassim's house. The door was opened by the slave Morgiana, whom he knew to be both brave and cunning. Unloading the donkey, he said to her: "This is the body of your master, who has been murdered, but whom we must bury as though he had died in his bed. I will speak with you again, but now tell your mistress I have come." The wife of Cassim, on learning the fate of her husband, broke out into cries and tears, but Ali Baba offered to take her to live with him and his wife if she would promise to keep his counsel^{*} and leave everything to Morgiana; and then she agreed, and dried her eyes.

Morgiana, meanwhile, looked for a pharmacist and asked him for some lozenges. "My poor master," she said, "can neither eat nor speak, and no one knows what his illness is." She carried home the lozenges and returned next day weeping, and asked for an essence[†] only given to those just about to die. Thus, in the evening, no one was surprised to hear the wretched shrieks and cries of Cassim's wife and Morgiana, telling everyone that Cassim was dead. The day after Morgiana went to an old cobbler near the gates of the town who opened his stall early, put a piece of gold in his hand, and told him to follow her with his needle and thread. Having bound his eyes with a handkerchief, she took him to the room where the body lay, pulled off the bandage, and told him to sew the quarters together, after which she covered his

eyes again and led him home. Then they buried Cassim, and Morgiana his slave followed him to the **grave**, weeping and tearing her hair, while Cassim's wife stayed at home uttering sorrowful cries. Next day she went to live with Ali Baba, who gave Cassim's shop to his eldest son.

Part 4

871 WORDS · ABOUT 9 MIN

The Forty Thieves, on their return to the cave, were much **astonished** to find Cassim's body gone and some of their money-bags. "We are certainly discovered," said the Captain, "and will be ruined if we cannot find out who it is that knows our secret. Two men must have known it; we have killed one, we must now find the other. To this end one of you who is **bold** and artful must go into the city dressed as a traveler, and discover whom we have killed, and whether men talk of the strange manner of his death. If the messenger fails he must lose his life, so that we are not **betrayed**." One of the thieves jumped up and offered to do this, and after the rest had highly **commended** him for his bravery he disguised himself, and happened to enter the town at daybreak, just by Baba Mustapha's stall. The thief greeted him, saying: "Honest man, how can you possibly see to stitch at your age?" "Old as I am," replied the cobbler, "I have very good eyes, and will you believe me when I tell you that I sewed a dead body together in a place where I had less light than I have now." The robber was overjoyed at his good fortune, and, giving him a piece of gold, asked to be shown the house where he stitched up the dead body. At first Mustapha refused, saying that he had been **blindfolded**; but when the robber gave him another piece of gold he began to think he might remember the turns if blindfolded as before. This means succeeded; the robber partly led him, and was partly guided by him, right in front of Cassim's house, the door of which the robber marked with a piece of chalk. Then, well pleased, he said goodbye to Baba Mustapha and returned to the forest. Soon Morgiana, going out, saw the mark the robber had made, quickly guessed that some **mischief** was brewing, and fetching a piece of chalk marked two or three doors on each side, without saying anything to her master or mistress.

The thief, meanwhile, told his comrades of his discovery. The Captain thanked him, and told him to show him the house he had marked. But when they came to it they saw that five or six of the houses were chalked in the same manner. The guide was so **confused** that he did not know what answer to make, and when they returned he was at once beheaded for having failed. Another robber was **dispatched**, and, having won over Baba Mustapha, marked the house in red chalk; but Morgiana being again too clever for them, the second messenger was put to death also. The Captain now resolved to go himself, but, wiser than the others, he did not mark the house, but looked at it so closely that he could not fail to remember it. He returned, and ordered his men to go into the neighboring villages and buy nineteen mules, and thirty-eight leather jars, all empty except one, which was full of oil. The Captain

put one of his men, fully armed, into each, rubbing the outside of the jars with oil from the full vessel. Then the nineteen mules were loaded with thirty-seven robbers in jars, and the jar of oil, and reached the town by dusk. The Captain stopped his mules in front of Ali Baba's house, and said to Ali Baba, who was sitting outside for coolness: "I have brought some oil from a distance to sell at tomorrow's market, but it is now so late that I do not know where to pass the night, unless you will do me the favor of taking me in." Though Ali Baba had seen the Captain of the robbers in the forest, he did not **recognize** him in the disguise of an oil merchant. He welcomed him, opened his gates for the mules to enter, and went to Morgiana to tell her to prepare a bed and supper for his guest. He brought the stranger into his hall, and after they had had supper went again to speak to Morgiana in the kitchen, while the Captain went into the yard under **pretense** of looking after his mules, but really to tell his men what to do. Beginning at the first jar and ending at the last, he said to each man: "As soon as I throw some stones from the window of the room where I sleep, cut the jars open with your knives and come out, and I will be with you in a trice※." He returned to the house, and Morgiana led him to his room. She then told Abdallah, her fellow-slave, to put on the pot to make some broth for her master, who had gone to bed. Meanwhile her lamp went out, and she had no more oil in the house. "Do not be uneasy," said Abdallah; "go into the yard and take some out of one of those jars." Morgiana thanked him for his advice, took the oil pot, and went into the yard. When she came to the first jar the robber inside said softly: "Is it time?"

Part 5

468 WORDS · ABOUT 5 MIN

Any other slave but Morgiana, on finding a man in the jar instead of the oil she wanted, would have **screamed** and made a noise; but she, knowing the danger her master was in, thought of a plan, and answered quietly: "Not yet, but soon." She went to all the jars, giving the same answer, till she came to the jar of oil. She now saw that her master, thinking he was **entertaining** an oil merchant, had let thirty-eight robbers into his house. She filled her oil pot, went back to the kitchen, and, having lit her lamp, went again to the oil jar and filled a large kettle full of oil. When it boiled she went and poured enough oil into every jar to **stifle** and kill the robber inside. When this brave **deed** was done she went back to the kitchen, put out the fire and the lamp, and waited to see what would happen.

In a quarter of an hour the Captain of the robbers awoke, got up, and opened the window. As all seemed quiet, he threw down some little **pebbles** which hit the jars. He listened, and as none of his men seemed to stir he grew uneasy, and went down into the yard. On going to the first jar and saying, "Are you asleep?" he smelt the hot boiled oil, and knew at once that his **plot** to murder Ali Baba and his **household** had been discovered. He found all the gang was dead, and, missing the oil out of the last jar, became aware of the manner of their death. He then forced the lock of a door leading into a garden, and climbing over several walls made his **escape**. Morgiana heard and saw all this, and, rejoicing at her success, went to bed and fell asleep.

At daybreak Ali Baba got up, and, seeing the oil jars still there, asked why the merchant had not gone with his mules. Morgiana told him to look in the first jar and see if there was any oil. Seeing a man, he jumped back in **terror**. "Have no fear," said Morgiana; "the man cannot harm you: he is dead." Ali Baba, when he had recovered somewhat from his astonishment, asked what had become of the merchant. "Merchant!" said she, "he is no more a merchant than I am!" and she told him the whole story, assuring him that it was a plot of the robbers of the forest, of whom only three were left, and that the white and red chalk marks had something to do with it. Ali Baba at once gave Morgiana her **freedom**, saying that he owed her his life. They then buried the bodies in Ali Baba's garden, while the mules were sold in the market by his slaves.

Part 6

843 WORDS · ABOUT 8 MIN

The Captain returned to his lonely cave, which seemed frightening to him without his lost companions, and firmly resolved to avenge them by killing Ali Baba. He dressed himself carefully, and went into the town, where he rented a room at an inn. In the course of a great many journeys to the forest he carried away many rich fabrics and much fine linen, and set up a shop opposite that of Ali Baba's son. He called himself Cogia Hassan, and as he was both **civil** and well dressed he soon made friends with Ali Baba's son, and through him with Ali Baba, whom he was continually asking to have supper with him. Ali Baba, wishing to return his kindness, invited him into his house and received him smiling, thanking him for his kindness to his son. When the merchant was about to take his leave* Ali Baba stopped him, saying: "Where are you going, sir, in such a hurry? Will you not stay and have supper with me?" The merchant refused, saying that he had a reason; and, on Ali Baba's asking him what that was, he replied: "It is, sir, that I can eat no food that has any salt in it." "If that is all," said Ali Baba, "let me tell you that there shall be no salt in either the meat or the bread that we eat tonight." He went to give this order to Morgiana, who was much surprised. "Who is this man," she said, "who eats no salt with his meat?" "He is an honest man, Morgiana," replied her master; "therefore do as I tell you." But she could not **withstand** a desire to see this strange man, so she helped Abdallah to carry up the dishes, and saw in a moment that Cogia Hassan was the robber Captain, and carried a dagger under his **garment**. "I am not surprised," she said to herself, "that this wicked man, who intends to kill my master, will eat no salt with him; but I will **hinder** his plans."

She sent up the supper by Abdallah, while she made ready for one of the boldest acts that could be thought of. When the dessert had been served, Cogia Hassan was left alone with Ali Baba and his son, whom he planned to make drunk and then to murder them. Morgiana, meanwhile, put on a headdress like a dancing-girl's, and clasped a belt round her waist, from which hung a **dagger** with a silver hilt, and said to Abdallah: "Take your tabor[†], and let us go and entertain our master and his guest." Abdallah took his tabor and played before Morgiana until they came to the door, where Abdallah stopped playing and Morgiana made a low curtsy. "Come in, Morgiana," said Ali Baba, "and let Cogia Hassan see what you can do"; and, turning to Cogia Hassan, he said: "She's my slave and my housekeeper." Cogia Hassan was by no means pleased, for he feared that his chance of killing Ali Baba was gone for the present; but he pretended great **eagerness** to see Morgiana, and Abdallah began to

play and Morgiana to dance. After she had performed several dances she drew her dagger and made moves with it, sometimes pointing it at her own breast, sometimes at her master's, as if it were part of the dance. Suddenly, out of breath, she snatched the tabor from Abdallah with her left hand, and, holding the dagger in her right hand, held out the tabor to her master. Ali Baba and his son put a piece of gold into it, and Cogia Hassan, seeing that she was coming to him, pulled out his purse to make her a present, but while he was putting his hand into it Morgiana **plunged** the dagger into his heart.

"Unhappy girl!" cried Ali Baba and his son, "what have you done to ruin us?"

"It was to **preserve** you, master, not to ruin you," answered Morgiana. "See here," opening the false merchant's garment and showing the dagger; "see what an enemy you have entertained! Remember, he would eat no salt with you, and what more do you need? Look at him! he is both the false oil merchant and the Captain of the Forty Thieves."

Ali Baba was so **grateful** to Morgiana for thus saving his life that he offered her to his son in marriage, who readily consented, and a few days after the wedding was celebrated with greatest **splendor**.

At the end of a year Ali Baba, hearing nothing of the two remaining robbers, judged they were dead, and set out to the cave. The door opened on his saying: "Open Sesame!" He went in, and saw that nobody had been there since the Captain left it. He brought away as much gold as he could carry, and returned to town. He told his son the secret of the cave, which his son handed down in his turn, so the children and grandchildren of Ali Baba were rich to the end of their lives.