

Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp

Aladdin spent three days beneath the earth. He tried to dig himself out, but wherever he put his hands they met hard rough rock, and no matter how desperately he scraped or how painfully he tore his fingernails, he couldn't dislodge a fragment.

He fell asleep with tears in his eyes, and when he awoke the tears were still there, and nothing had changed. He prayed, he cried for his mother, he cursed the Moor with all the curses he knew and several he invented, and it made no difference. Then he felt hungry, and remembered the fruit he'd snatched from the trees in the magic garden, but it was a mockery: his pockets were full of stones. He was too full of despair even to throw them away. After three days of this hideous torment he was ready to die, and he fell to the ground and wrung his hands in anguish; and as he did so, he happened to rub the iron ring he'd picked up from the terrace. He'd completely forgotten about it.

At once there was a clap of thunder, and a space cleared in the darkness. He could see it, though it was still dark, and there was a figure there: black skin, black beard, black robes, but eyes like windows into a fire.

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Aladdin saw it by the light from those eyes, reflected dimly from the rock all around; and the figure was bowing to him.

“I am here, Master!” said the apparition.

“Who are you?”

“I am the Jinnee of the Ring, your bounden slave. You have summoned me. I have come. How can I help you?”



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Aladdin was so astonished he could hardly breathe, but he gathered his wits and said, "In that case, I order you to take me back to the surface of the earth."

The Jinnee bowed and vanished. Immediately, the earth rumbled and groaned, and Aladdin felt himself being rushed upwards. A moment later he was standing in the open air, blinking and rubbing his eyes at the brightness of the light. When he could see, he recognised the place by the ashes of the fire the Moor had lit three days before.

Blessing his good luck, he set off for the city at once, tired and dirty and hungry as he was. He stumbled into the Street of the Oil-Sellers and up the stairs beside the house of Shaheed the Nervous Poet, and his mother greeted him with sobs of joy.

"Mother!" he cried, embracing her. "I've had a miraculous escape! That wretch of a Moor tried to kill me, but a powerful jinnee brought me out of the ground safely – oh, I'm hungry! Oh, I'm worn out!"

His mother hurried to make a meal with the only food she had in the house. As they ate, he told her everything that had happened.

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“Well, I never did trust him,” she said. “I saw through him, don’t you worry. But go and lie down, dear, I’ve made your bed.”

Aladdin slept for a whole day and night. When he woke up, she could tell his experience hadn’t changed him, because the first thing he did was to call, “Mother! I’m hungry! Get me something to eat!”

The poor woman said, “We’ve got nothing to eat in the house, dear. Let me spin a bit of cotton and I’ll go and sell it to buy food.”

Then Aladdin clapped his hands and said, “What am I thinking of? We can sell the lamp I brought up from the garden of wonders!”

He took it out of his pocket and showed her.

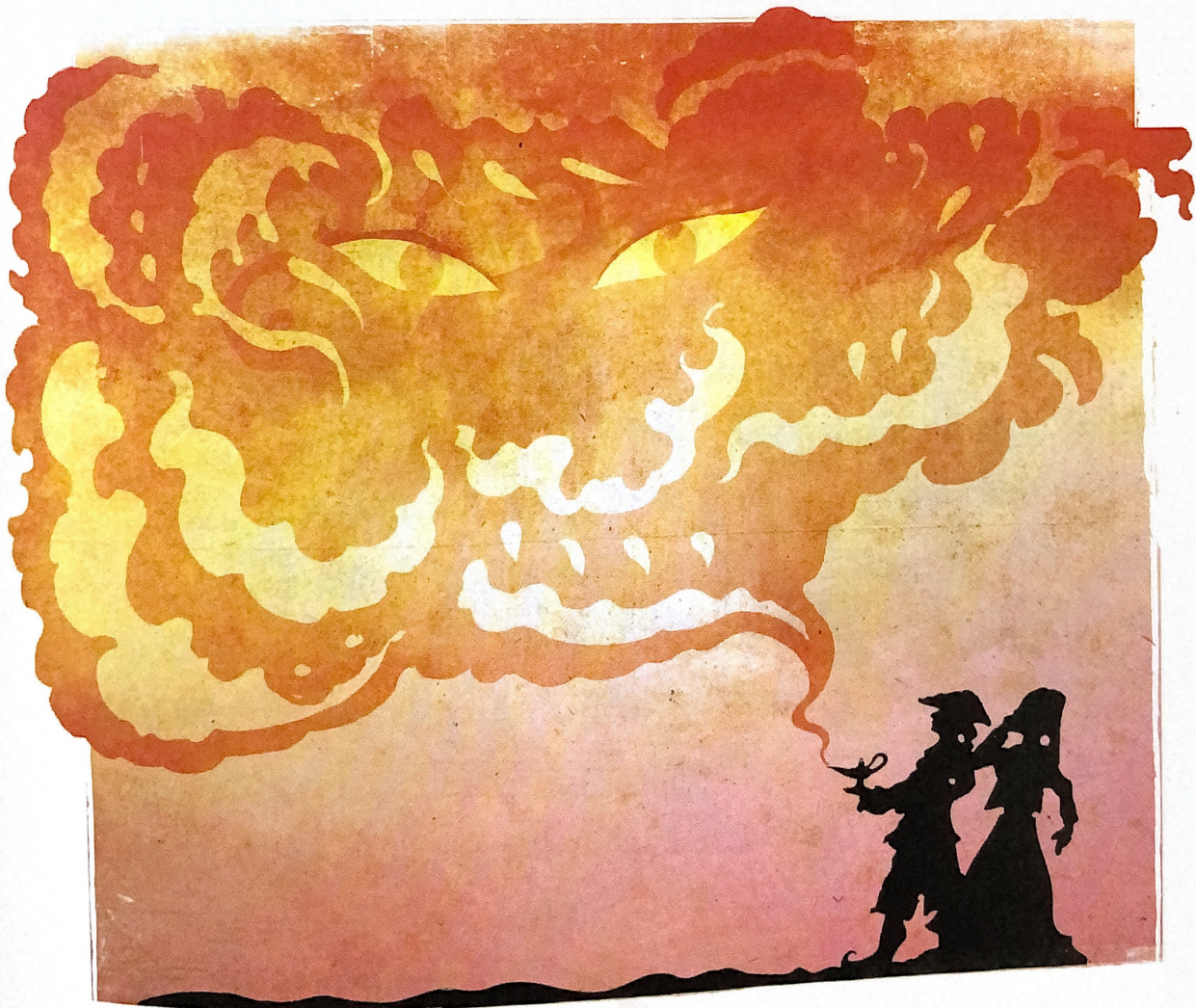
“Well, it’s not very clean, is it?” she said doubtfully. “Let me give it a bit of a polish first.”

So she began to rub it with a cloth, and as soon as she did so there was a phenomenal clap of thunder. She dropped the lamp at once and clung to Aladdin, and he clung to her, because they both thought the house was going to fall down.

But then he pointed. “Look, Mother! The lamp!”
For out of the spout of the lamp, a twist of smoke with two sparks in it was rapidly twirling upwards, and

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the sound of a rushing wind filled the little room. In less than a second, the smoke rose to the ceiling and turned black and solid, bulging and glistening and shining like smooth dark flesh, and the two sparks flared into flame, settled down in their sockets, and became eyes. And then it wasn't smoke at all, nor human flesh: it was a mighty jinnee. He could have reached out his great hand and pinched Aladdin to death as easily as you could pinch a mosquito.



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Aladdin's mother was clinging to him, trembling. She whispered, "It's your jinnee, Aladdin! Make him go away!"

Aladdin said, "This isn't the Jinnee of the Ring! That one was a different shape. Who are you, Jinnee?"

"I am the Jinnee of the Lamp!" said the great spirit, in a voice that shook the rafters. "Whatever you command me, I will obey, I and the other slaves of the lamp."

"In that case, I command you to go and bring us some food at once."

"At once, great master," said the Jinnee courteously, and disappeared with a faint but powerful whooshing noise.

Aladdin's mother was weak with astonishment. She looked at her son with new eyes. There she'd been, thinking Aladdin was an idle good-for-nothing, and all the time he could command jinnees without turning a hair.

After a moment or two, the Jinnee came back and clapped his enormous hands. Up the stairs in through the door of Aladdin's house there came a procession of slaves. Each slave carried a plate or a dish or a bowl of gold or silver, and in each dish there was some

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delicious-smelling food, with the steam still rising from the hot dishes and a frost of condensation on the ice creams and the fruit sherbets.

“Here we are, Mother! All the food we can eat!” cried Aladdin.

When the slaves had set it down, they all bowed and trooped towards the lamp, getting smaller and smaller as they did so, and one after another they popped into the spout and disappeared. The last to go was the Jinnee, who turned himself back into a column of smoke before twisting himself neatly into the same hole.

“Eat, Mother!” said Aladdin.



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They lived on that food for three days, and it was the best food they'd ever had.

When it had gone, Aladdin decided to carry one of the gold plates to the market to sell, because he'd been quite taken with the idea of becoming a merchant, and thought he'd still try his skill.

The first goldsmith he went to could hardly believe his luck. He'd never seen such a fine piece of gold. He stuck out his lower lip and tried to look doubtful.

"Well... I don't know... This style's not very fashionable any more... Tell you what, I'll give you two dinars, as a favour."

Aladdin, who had no idea what the plate was worth, took the money happily and bought some food. When that food ran out he did the same thing again, and each time he took the goldsmith a plate, he only got two dinars for it.

When half the plates were sold, he took the next one to the market as usual, but this time he was stopped by an honest goldsmith who'd seen him pass each day and wondered what he had for sale.

"But this is wonderful!" he exclaimed when he saw the plate. "And is this like all the others?"

"More or less. Some of the others were bigger."

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“And how much did he give you for them?”

“Two dinars each,” said Aladdin. “Are they worth more, then?”

“This dish is worth no less than eighty dinars! In fact, I’ll give you that for it here and now. That man’s been cheating you, my boy!”

So Aladdin saw that there were other rogues in the world as well as the Moor. He took the rest of the plates to the honest goldsmith, who paid him a fair price, and so Aladdin and his mother began to gain a fortune. The honest goldsmith did more than that, though. He told Aladdin a great deal about buying and selling, about the prices and qualities of merchandise. He told Aladdin something else as well: the stones he had brought away from the garden of wonders, the ones he had plucked from the trees thinking they were fruit, were none other than jewels of fabulous value, which only needed cutting and polishing to be seen in all their beauty.

So Aladdin left his old life altogether, and didn’t seek out the company of spongers and loafers as he’d used to. Instead he spent hours talking to jewellers and goldsmiths and other merchants, learning how to judge the quality of goods, and he soon came to realise

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that none of the jewels they sold could compare with even the smallest of those from the garden of wonders, and which he'd tried to eat in desperation when he was imprisoned under the ground. So Aladdin grew both in wisdom and in wealth.

One day Aladdin was in the market when a herald came by shouting: "Make way! Make way for the Princess Badr-al-Budur, the daughter of his Most Exulted Sublimity the Sultan of China! Everyone is to close their shops, their doors, their windows and their eyes until she has passed on her way to the Baths, by the Sultan's orders!"

