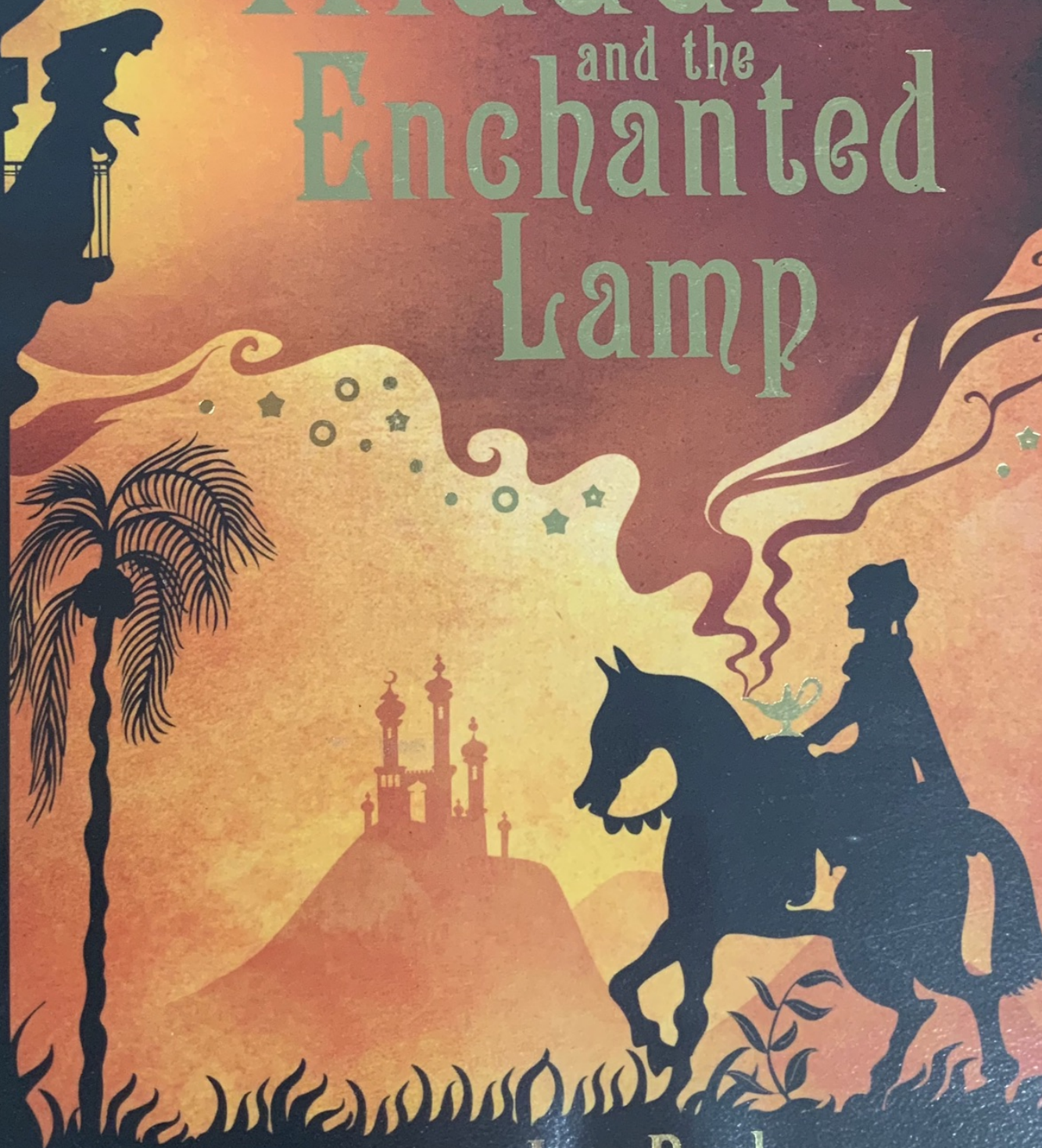


Philip Pullman's

Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp



Illustrated by Ian Beck

Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp

Once upon a time in China, there lived a boy called Aladdin. He was the son of a tailor called Mustafa, and he made his poor father's life a misery. He ran about the marketplace all day long with a lot of other rogues and scoundrels, getting into trouble, making mischief, and laughing at everyone who tried to make him behave. He wouldn't take up any trade, he wouldn't get a job, and in the end it was too much for Mustafa, who went into a decline and died of worry.

Aladdin's mother was left to look after him on her own. The only work she could find was spinning cotton, so she had to do that while Aladdin hung about the streets with his idle friends.

"Why don't you find some decent work to do, you lazy wretch?" she said.

"Everyone to their trade, mother! You spin cotton and I make mischief. That's a fine trade; it suits me well."

She felt like following her husband to the grave.

One day in the bazaar, as Aladdin was sitting by the fountain flicking water at the passers-by, a certain Moor happened to be sipping mint tea in a nearby coffee shop, twisting his beard into a point and listening

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to everything that went on. As he heard the name “Aladdin”, his ears pricked up, his sharp eyes glittered, and his long fingers curled like claws, because he knew something about Aladdin that Aladdin didn’t know.

He watched the boy for some time, and finally he came up to him and said, “Young man, what is your name?”

“Aladdin.”



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“Not Aladdin the son of Mustafa the tailor?”

“Yes, that’s me. But my father’s been dead for a year now; there’s just me and my mother left.”

At that, the Moor began to wail as if his heart was broken. He tore his hair, he pulled his beard, he beat his breast, and the tears ran down his cheeks like rivers down a mountainside. Aladdin was astonished.

“My brother!” the Moor sobbed. “My poor brother Mustafa! I came all this way only to find him dead! Oh, oh, oh, the pity of it – the sorrow of it – but his son is alive, at least! Aladdin, my nephew, heart of my brother’s heart, my blood calls out to you!”

And he threw his arms around Aladdin and kissed him on both cheeks. Aladdin was deeply impressed, and so were all his idle friends watching from the fountain nearby, because the Moor was a rich man: he had a silver buckle on his belt and a golden dagger at his waist, and a blood-red ruby sparkled in his turban.

Then Aladdin was even more impressed, because the Moor took out a purse and gave him ten dinars, saying, “Take these to your mother, Aladdin, my dear nephew, and tell her to buy the best food she can find and prepare a meal, and I’ll call round tonight and pay my respects to my dear brother’s widow. Oh! Oh! Brother

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of mine! Dead! My heart is broken! Where did you say you lived, dear boy?"

Aladdin realised that the Moor's emotions were so stirred that he'd forgotten his brother's address.

"In the Street of the Oil-Sellers," he said. "Over the house of Shaheed the Nervous Poet."

And off he ran to tell his mother of their good luck. Naturally, she didn't believe a word of it.

"Your poor father never had a brother, you impudent boy! What do you mean by this crazy story? Surely *I'd* know if he had a brother! Get out of the house and find a job! You'll break my heart with your lies and deceptions!"

But he showed her the money and she had to believe *that*. So she went out and bought lamb and rice, and saffron and turmeric, and aubergines and plums and pomegranates, and prepared the best meal she knew how to, just in case.

And sure enough, when the meal was cooked there came a knock on the door, and there was the Moor. He'd changed his robe, and oiled his beard with spikenard, and put a gold pin in his turban, and he looked more gaudy and splendid than ever.

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“Oh! My dear brother’s wife! My heart is breaking! Oh, these beloved old rooms – the carpet where he and I knelt to pray side by side – the old copper bowl in which he washed his hands – oh, oh, oh!”

And he flung himself to the floor and rolled from side to side, beating his breast with grief. Aladdin was so moved that he began to cry too, but his mother was still a bit suspicious, for the wife of Shaheed the Nervous Poet had given her that copper bowl only the year before. And something else made her uneasy: every single one of the teeth in the Moor’s mouth was pointed like a needle.

However, tears are tears, and the man was weeping and wailing so much that Aladdin’s mother thought

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he'd die as well, so she raised him up and said, "Peace be with you, sir, and will you sit and eat the meal I've prepared?"

So they sat down to break bread. As they ate, the Moor told them about his life, and a pack of shameless lies it was too, but Aladdin believed every word of it.

"I spent many years trading in spices between China and Morocco, and I made a great fortune, intending one day to leave it to my dear brother and his family.

"Then I became interested in the learning of the dervishes, the holy men whose wisdom shines brighter than any other. I spent thirty years in the desert with these good and devout men, and then I woke up one day and thought of my brother Mustafa and of his family whom I'd never seen. And at once a great longing to see him filled my heart, and I left that very day, pausing only to say my prayers, and set out on the long journey. Only to find – alas! alas! – my dear brother dead, but a fine son taking his place and looking after his mother as a son should do. How happy that makes me!"

Aladdin looked down and twiddled his thumbs. But his mother said: "I wish Aladdin was as good as his father was, sir. I wish he was as good as you.

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But in fact he's a scapegrace and a wastrel, and the only money that comes into this house is the little I earn by spinning cotton. And as soon as I get any money the wretch makes off with it. He won't learn a trade, he won't do a steady job, and altogether it broke his father's heart, the way he carried on."

Aladdin felt ashamed. The Moor frowned severely and said, "Oh, dear me, I'm not pleased to hear that. Aladdin, you're nearly a grown man, it's time you started bearing your share of responsibility. But never mind, I'm sure you mean well, and it's just that you haven't found the right opening. Tomorrow morning we'll go and see about setting you up as a merchant with a fine shop of your own."

Aladdin perked up at once, and that night he could hardly sleep for thinking of the splendid clothes he'd wear, and the lordly way he'd order his slaves about, and the rare and choice goods he'd display to his wealthy customers... What should he sell? Carpets, sweetmeats, gold and silver? His dreams were glorious.

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