Read this story over a two-week period, and complete the short story worksheet available in this Week’s resources. You may also find this story in your local library or bookstore, or at:

http://www.2020site.org/robbinhood/alibaba.html

Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves

A Fairytale

THERE once lived in a town in Persia two brothers, one named Cassim, and the other Ali Baba. Cassim had married a rich wife, but Ali Baba was poor, and made his living by cutting wood, which he brought upon three asses into the town to sell.

One day when he was in the forest cutting wood, he saw a troop of horsemen coming toward him. Fearing they might be robbers, he climbed a tree to hide. Near the tree there was a steep bank formed of solid rock. When the horsemen came up Ali Baba counted them and found they were forty in number. They dismounted in front of the rock, and one, who seemed to be captain, said the words, "Open, Sesame," when instantly a door opened in the rock. Then they all passed through, and the door closed after them.

Ali Baba stayed in the tree, and after awhile the door opened again, and the robbers came out. Then the captain closed the door by saying, "Shut, Sesame," and they all rode away.

When they were out of sight Ali Baba came down, and, going up to the rock, said, "Open, Sesame." The door at once opened, and Ali Baba, entering, found himself in a large cave, lighted from a hole in the top, and full of all kinds of treasure--rich silks and carpets,
gold and silver ware, and great bags of money. He loaded his three asses with as many of the bags of gold as they could carry; and, after closing the door by saying, "Shut, Sesame," made his way home.

When he got there and told his wife of their good luck she was overjoyed, and wished to count the gold to see how rich they were. "No," said Ali Baba, "that will take too long. I must dig a hole and bury it at once." "You are right," said she, "but at least let us form some idea how much there is. Let me measure it while you dig the hole."

But as she had no measure of her own, she ran to Cassim's wife to borrow one. Now Cassim's wife was very inquisitive, and wished to find out what they were going to use the measure for, so she covered the bottom of it with suet. When Ali Baba's wife had done with it she carried it back, but did not notice that a piece of gold had stuck to the suet. When Cassim's wife saw the gold she wondered greatly--knowing Ali Baba to be so poor--and told her husband about it. He went to Ali Baba, and persuaded him to explain how he had become rich enough to have to measure his money, and when he heard the story, he made up his mind that he, too, would get some of the treasure.

So he started for the forest with a lot of mules the next morning. He opened the door by saying, "Open, Sesame," and when he went in, it closed after him. He began to pile up bags of gold near the door, but when he was ready to go he found that he had forgotten the magic words which opened it, and before he could recall them, the robbers returned. The moment they caught sight of him they rushed upon him with their swords and killed him, and then cut his body in four quarters and hung them up in the cave.
When night fell, and Cassim had not returned, his wife was greatly alarmed and ran to Ali Baba. He tried to comfort her; but when morning came, and Cassim did not yet appear, he set out for the cave with his three asses. When he reached there, and saw his brother's body, he was struck with horror at the sight, but he quickly wrapped up the pieces and carried them home on one of the asses loading the other two again with gold.

He now wished to get Cassim buried without letting anyone know that he had not died a natural death. Cassim's wife had a slave named Morgiana, who was very quick-witted, and Ali Baba took her into his confidence, and got her to assist him. She went very early in the morning, to an old cobbler named Mustapha, and bribed him to come and stitch the body together, tying a handkerchief over his eyes as she led him to and from the house, so that he would not know where he had done the work. Then it was given out that Cassim had died, and the funeral was held without betraying the secret of his death.

The customs of the country allowed a man to have more than one wife, and it was also usual when a husband died that his brother should marry his widow. So, in order that he might enjoy his good fortune and live as a man of wealth without causing remarks to be made about his sudden rise in life, Ali Baba married Cassim's widow, who was known to be rich, and went to live in her house.

Meanwhile, the robbers had again visited their cave; and finding that the body had been removed, saw that somebody knew their secret, and resolved not to rest till they found out who it was. One of them proposed to go into the town to see if he could find a clue, and the captain allowed him to do so. He fell in, by accident, with old Mustapha, who told him of how he had been hired to sew up a dead body. The robber at once felt that he was on the track of the one he was looking for, so he offered the old man a large piece of gold to show him the house where he had done the sewing. Mustapha explained that his eyes had been covered on
the way, but the robber thought that if he were again blindfolded he might remember the
turns he had made, and so find the place. They tried this plan. Mustapha walked on and at last
stopped before a house which was, indeed, Ali Baba's. The robber marked the door with
chalk, and returned to his comrades.

Shortly after, Morgiana came out of the house and saw the mark, and thinking it might
mean mischief, she marked two or three doors on each side in the same way.

The robber, in the meantime, had reported his success, and the captain ordered all to go into the town,
separately, and meet together at a certain place, where he
would join them. He took the robber who had found the
house, and went with him to look at it, and see what had
best be done. The robber led him into the street where Ali
Baba lived, and when they came to one of the doors which
Morgiana had marked, he pointed to it, but the captain
noticed that the next house was marked in the same way,
and on looking further found five or six more. He saw that
they were foiled, and ordered his men to return to the
forest. When they got there, they put to death the robber
who they thought had deceived them--a fate which he
admitted he deserved for not taking more pains.

Another of the troop then said he would try the task. He went and engaged Mustapha
to lead him as he had the first one, and when he stopped at the house, he put a mark with red
chalk, in a place where he thought it would not be seen.
But it did not escape the eyes of Morgiana, and she marked the other houses in the same place and manner.

The robbers went to the town as before, but when the captain and the robber came to the street they found that they were baffled again. So all returned, and the second robber was put to death for his failure as the first had been.

Then the captain went himself, and got Mustapha to conduct him in the same way he had the others; but he did not put any mark on the house. Instead, he looked at it so carefully that he would know it when he saw it again. He then sent his men to buy nineteen mules and thirty-eight leather oil-jars, one full of oil and the rest empty. When they had brought them to the cave, he put a man in each of the empty jars, and loaded all the jars on the mules, and set out for the town so as to reach it about dark.

He led his mules through the streets till he reached the house of Ali Baba, to whom he applied for lodging; saying that he was an oil merchant who had just arrived, and could not find a place to stay. Ali Baba was hospitable and allowed him to drive his mules into his yard, where he unloaded them, and set the jars in rows, whispering to his men that when they should hear him throw a stone out of the window, they must come out of the jars, and he would join them. He then went into the house and was shown to a room.

Now it happened that Morgiana needed some oil, and as it was too late to buy any, she thought she would take a little out of the jars in the yard. So she went out with her oil-pot and drew near one of the jars to help herself, when, to her great surprise, she heard a man's voice
within it say, softly, "Is it time?" Startled as she was, she did not lose her presence of mind, but answered, "Not yet, but presently." She went in this way to all of the jars, answering the same until she came, last of all, to the jar of oil.

She at once saw the danger to which her master was exposed, and laid a plan to avert it. She filled a great kettle from the jar of oil, and set it on the fire till the oil was boiling. Then she took it and poured enough into each jar to kill the robber inside. After that she went into the house; and, putting out her light, watched through a window to see what would happen.

She had not waited long before the captain, hearing no one stirring, opened his window and began throwing stones at the jars. But as no movement followed, he became alarmed and stole down into the yard, where he found that all of his men were dead. Full of rage and despair, he climbed over the wall of the yard and made his way off to the cave.

When Morgiana saw him go, she went to bed well pleased to have succeeded in saving her master and his family. The next morning she told Ali Baba of what she had done, and he and one of his servants dug a trench in his garden in which they buried the robbers.

The captain soon laid a plot to be revenged on Ali Baba, whom he now hated worse than ever. First changing his looks as much as he could, he went to the town and rented a warehouse, to which he took a lot of silks and other stuffs, and set up as a merchant under the name of Cogia Hassan.

Now Ali Baba's son was a merchant, and, as it happened, had his warehouse near that of Cogia Hassan; and as Ali Baba often went there, the captain soon discovered their relationship. So he set himself to get into the friendship of the son, and succeeded so well that he was soon invited to Ali Baba's house to dine.
Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves

He went, and carried concealed, a dagger with which he intended to kill Ali Baba at the first chance. At the table he took no salt, for among the Persians, even the wickedest think it wrong to kill a man whose salt they have eaten. Morgiana, who was serving, noticed this, and it caused her to suspect him. On looking at him more closely, she was sure that he was the false oil merchant. She saw his purpose, and thought of a bold scheme to defeat it, and relieve her master of all further danger from him.

She was a fine dancer, and often danced before the guests of Ali Baba; so, after the meal, as Ali Baba and his son and their guest sat smoking, she came to give a performance. She carried a tambourine in one hand, and in the other a dagger, which, in dancing, she pointed playfully at the breast of each as though that were part of the dance. When she was through she went from one to another with her tambourine, according to the custom, and Ali Baba and his son each put in a piece of gold. Then she came to Cogia Hassan, and, while he was reaching his hand to put in a coin, plunged her dagger into his heart, and he fell dead.

Ali Baba cried out with horror; but when Morgiana told him who his guest was, and, opening his garment, showed him the concealed dagger; his feelings changed to joy at his escape, and admiration for Morgiana's shrewdness, courage, and fidelity; and it seemed to him that he could not say nor do enough to thank her.

They soon disposed of the captain's body by burying him in the garden with his comrades, and as the robbers were now all dead, they were free from further danger. After awhile, Ali Baba's son married Morgiana, and they lived long in peace and happiness.