

**The Barber of Bagdad**  
**A Tale from the Middle East**

ACT I

*The setting is Ali's barber shop in the morning.*

WOODCUTTER

I have a load of wood which I have just brought in on my donkey. Would you like to buy it, good barber?

ALI

Well, let me see. Is it good wood?

WOODCUTTER

The best in the country.

ALI

I'll give you five shekels for all the wood upon the donkey.

WOODCUTTER

Agreed. I'll put the wood here by your door. [Lays wood at door.] Now, good sir, give me the silver.

ALI

Not so fast, my good friend. I must have your wooden pack saddle, too. That was the bargain. I said, "All the wood upon your donkey." Truly, the saddle is wood.

WOODCUTTER

Who ever heard of such a bargain? Surely you cannot mean what you say? You would not treat a poor woodcutter so. It is impossible.

ALI

Give me the saddle, or I'll have you put in prison. And take *that*—and *that*—and *that*! [Ali strikes the woodcutter.]

WOODCUTTER

Ah, me, what shall I do? What shall I do? I know. I'll go to the caliph himself.

ACT II

*The setting is the caliph's palace, an hour later.*

COURTIER

My lord, a good woodcutter is at the door and asks permission to come into your presence.

CALIPH

Bid him enter. There is none too poor to be received by me. [Courtier goes out and returns with woodcutter, who kneels and kisses the ground. Then he stands with arms folded.]

[To Woodcutter} Tell me, good man, what brought you here? Has any one done you a wrong?

WOODCUTTER

Great wrong, my lord. The rich barber Ali did buy a load of wood from me. He offered me five shekels for all the wood on my donkey. When I had put down the load, I asked for my money, but he refused to pay me until I had given him my pack saddle. He said the bargain was "all the wood on the donkey," and that the saddle is wood. He

said he would put me in prison if I did not give up the saddle. Then he took it and drove me away with blows.

CALIPH

A strange story, truly. The barber has law on his side, and yet you have right on yours. The law must be obeyed, but—come here and let me whisper something to you. [The woodcutter listens smilingly and bowing low, leaves the room.]

ACT III

*The setting is the barber's shop, a few days later.*

ALI

Ah! here comes my stupid friend the woodcutter. I suppose he has come to quarrel about the wood. No, he is smiling.

WOODCUTTER

Good day to you, friend Ali. I have come to ask if you will be so kind as to shave me and a companion from the country.

ALI

Oh, yes, I suppose so.

WOODCUTTER

How much will you charge?

ALI

A shekel for the two. [To himself] The poor fool cannot pay that sum.

WOODCUTTER

Very good. Shave me first. [Ali shaves him.]

ALI

Now you are shaved. Where is your companion?

WOODCUTTER

He is standing outside. He will come in at once. [He goes out and returns leading his donkey.] This is my companion. Say hello, Jackie.

DONKEY

Heehaw!

WOODCUTTER

Now I want you to shave him.

ALI

[in a rage] Shave him! Shave a donkey, indeed! Is it not enough that I should lower myself by touching you? And then you insult me by asking me to shave your donkey! Away with you!

DONKEY

No, away with *you*, Mister Barber. I may have long hair and a long face, but at least I have character. You have *no* character indeed—wanting to cheat my master of his hard-earned money. Now shave me! Heehaw!

ACT IV

*The setting is the caliph's palace. The time is a half-hour later.*

CALIPH

Well, my friend, did you do as I told you?

WOODCUTTER

Yes, and Ali refused to shave my donkey.

CALIPH

[to the courtier] Bid Ali come to me at once and bring his razors with him. [Courtier leaves and returns with Ali.]

[To Ali] Why did you refuse to shave this man's companion? Was not that your agreement?

ALI

[kissing the ground] It is true, O caliph, such was the agreement, but who ever made a companion of a donkey before?

CALIPH

True enough, but who ever thought of saying that a pack saddle is a part of a load of wood? No, no, it is the woodcutter's turn now. Shave his donkey instantly.

[Ali lathers the beast and shaves him in the presence of the whole court, and then slips away amid the laughter of the bystanders.]

CALIPH

Now, my honest woodcutter, here is a purse of gold for you. Always remember that the caliph gladly listens to the complaints of his people, poor and rich, and will right their wrongs if he can.

WOODCUTTER

Long live the Caliph!

COURTIERS

Long live the Caliph!