

DESCRIBE THE SCENE

Read the following text, then close your eyes for a full minute and allow a scene to appear. When you are ready, complete the exercise below.

As the travellers quenched their thirst and feasted on a meal of roasted goat, the queen explained why they'd been summoned.

'Despite your varied lives and adventures, the three of you are heroes in a collection of tales... the greatest treasury of stories ever set down by humankind.'

Aladdin peered at Scheherazade through the campfire's flames.

'What's its name?' he asked.

'It's called *The Thousand and One Nights*,' the queen replied. 'Or, rather, it will become known as that. You see, the story has not yet been told – so its very existence hangs in the balance, as does mine.'

'How so?'

'Because, unless the telling continues,' Scheherazade explained, 'my life, and those of countless other queens, will be snuffed out as sure as night follows day.'

Aladdin pushed a hand back through his hair.

'Don't know about the others, but I'm not a character from a storyland,' he said. 'I'm a man who has a past and a future.'

The queen rolled her eyes.

'That's what *you* think,' she said. 'Of course you had no idea of who or what you really are, just as you had no notion of each other's existence – or that my voice, guided by certain forces, has conjured you, and shaped each one of your tales.'

Tossing down a mutton bone, Ali Baba spoke for the others:

'If you're not a jinn, then what are you?'

'I am a queen – a queen married to a ruthless king. If the tale I tell falters, as it has apparently done, he'll execute me, and a thousand more women.'

Sindbad reached for another morsel of meat.

'And why should it have faltered?' he said. 'After all, a story's a story and no more than that.'

Scheherazade peered out into the darkness, her mind reliving the predicament in which she found herself.

'The story's been diverted by a sorcerer in the employ of the king. He's thrown it out of kilter. As a result, the only certainty is my appointment with the executioner and his axe at dawn. Once I'm gone, King Shahriyar will marry a fresh bride each sunset and bury her each morning.'

From: *The Arabian Nights Adventures*

In your own time, write a description of what you saw when your eyes were closed.

If you find yourself deviating from the scene you imagined, go with it, and write anything you like.

The important thing is that, if possible, you should try and keep writing without stopping. Write as much or as little as you like.

