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The Travels of Ibn Battuta



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The Travels of Ibn Battuta

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Janet Hardy-Gould has worked as a teacher of English for many years. In her free time she enjoys reading history books and modern novels, visiting other European countries, and drinking tea with her friends. She lives in the ancient town of Lewes in the south of England with her husband and their two children. She has written a number of books, including *Henry VIII and his Six Wives*, and *King Arthur* in the Oxford Bookworms series, and *The Great Fire of London*, *Sinbad*, *Mulan*, *Hercules*, and an adaptation of *Sherlock Holmes: The Emerald Crown* in the Dominoes series.

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Chapter 1 ~ The journey begins

My **uncle**, Ibn Battuta, sat by the window of his house in Tangier. It was the hot time of the day and his eyes were half-open. I went into the room.

‘Uncle?’ I said quietly. He looked up at me suddenly.

‘Ah, Ahmed, it’s you again,’ he smiled.

‘Yes, Uncle,’ I answered. ‘Can you tell me today about your **journeys**, please? I want to **travel** when I’m older, too,’ I said.

‘Is that right?’ he answered. Then he looked carefully at me. ‘How old are you now?’ He could remember things from long ago easily, but things from the day before not very well.

‘I’m eleven,’ I said.

‘Well, perhaps in four or five years you can begin to travel. But it’s not easy, you know. You can see wonderful towns and **cities**, meet interesting people, and do exciting things. But there are bad times, too. You can get ill, meet big, hungry animals, or lose all your money.’

‘No!’ I said. My eyes were big and open.

‘Yes, Ahmed,’ he answered. ‘But listen to my stories, and perhaps you too can learn to come home alive!’ he laughed. ‘Now, where shall I begin?’

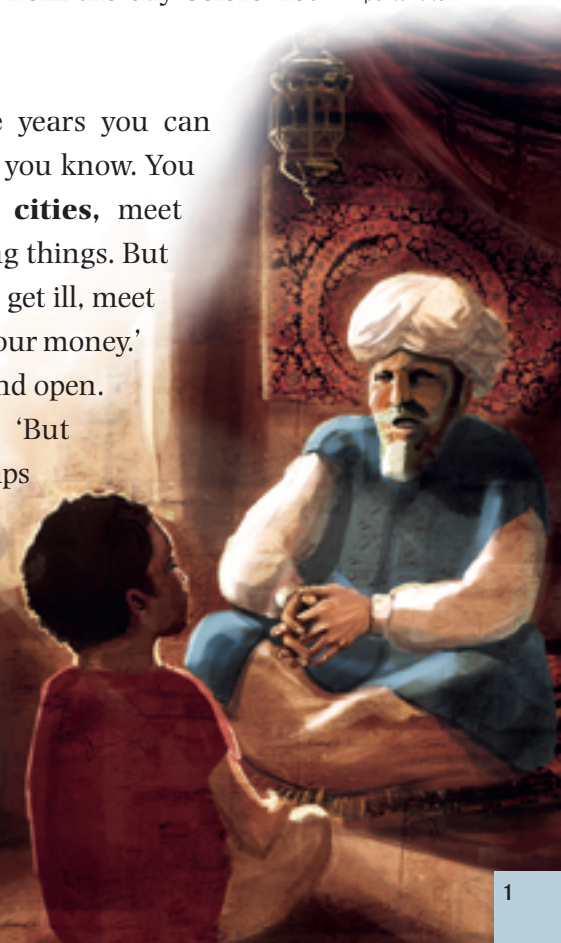
I sat down, ready to listen to him. Every time my uncle told his stories they were different, new, and interesting.

uncle your father’s (or mother’s) brother

journey when you go far; to go far

travel to go; (plural noun) times when you go to different places

city (plural **cities**) a big and important town



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judge a person who says what is right and what is wrong

pilgrimage a journey to a holy town or city

holy a place, person, or thing that is near to God

donkey an animal like a little horse with long ears that makes a lot of noise

pilgrim a person who goes to a holy town or city

ruler someone who tells people what must happen in a country

other different

caravan many people on a journey in an Arab country

lighthouse this tall building by the sea stops ships having accidents

‘I was born here in Tangier,’ he began. ‘But of course, you know that,’ he smiled. ‘My father, and his father before him, were **judges**. So I learnt to be a judge, too. When you’re a judge, it’s easy to travel. You’re important, you see.’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Perhaps I can be a judge too, one day.’

‘Perhaps,’ he smiled. ‘My first journey was a **pilgrimage** to the **holy** city of Makkah. I got on a **donkey** and said “Goodbye” to my mother and father in Tangier when I was twenty-one. My mother cried.

‘After some days’ journey, I came to the town of Algiers. Here I met more **pilgrims**, and we travelled to the city of Constantine. I met the rich **ruler** there. He looked at my dirty old coat, smiled, and gave a beautiful new coat to me!’

‘Why?’ I asked.

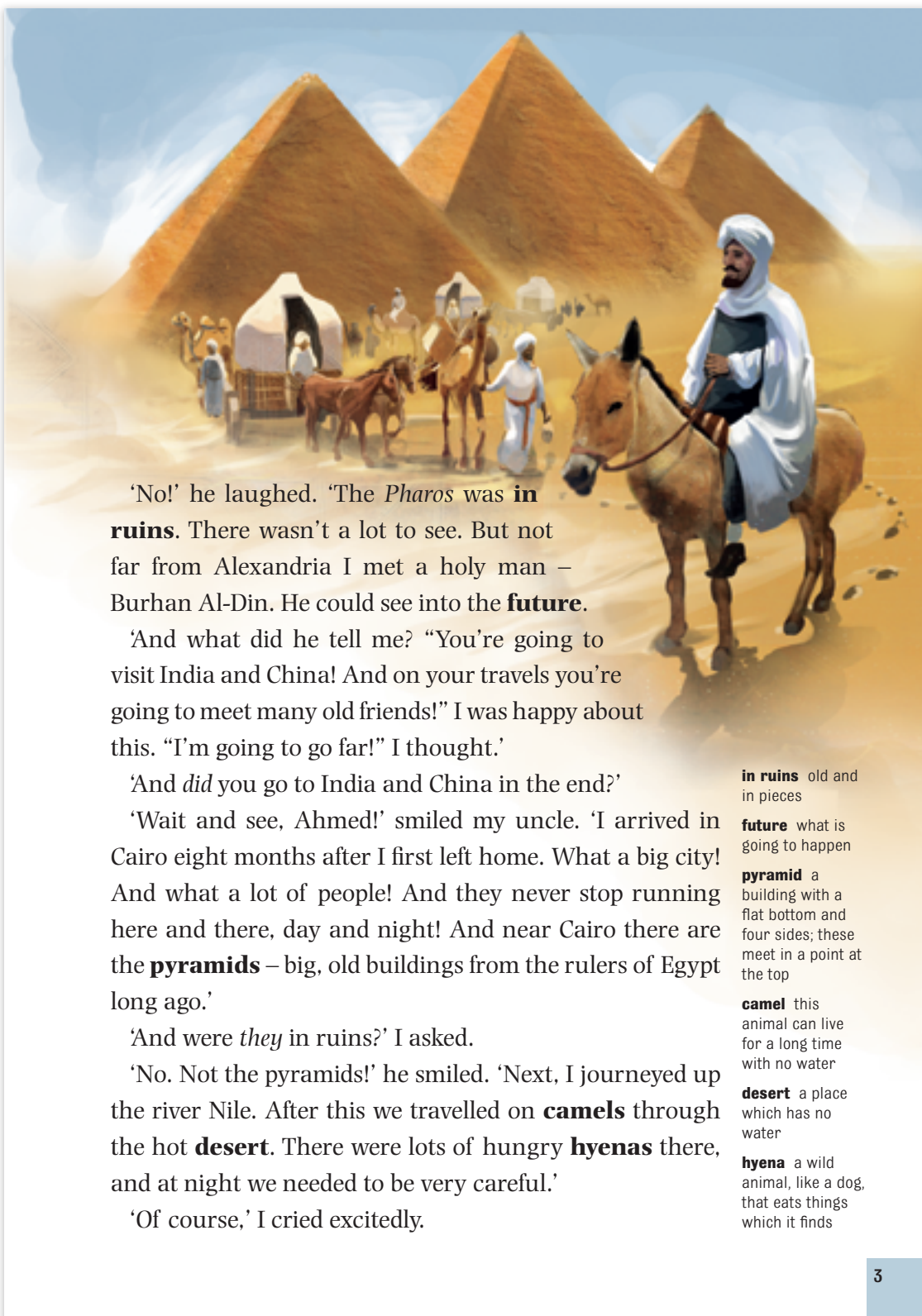
‘Good men help people when they need it. After some days, I left Constantine with the **other** pilgrims. We never stopped moving because we were afraid. Perhaps people could take our money from us when we slept, we thought. I was soon ill, and I wanted to go to bed and die. But my friends put me on my old donkey, and hit the animal from behind to make it go quickly down the road.’

‘Did you want to come home then, Uncle?’

‘Of course,’ he smiled. ‘But I journeyed to Tunis. A good traveller doesn’t stop easily.

‘I left Tunis in a **caravan** of pilgrims. They asked me, “Can you be the judge in our caravan?” Of course I said, “Yes.” A caravan judge! Not bad work for a young man! When our caravan arrived in Alexandria, I was excited. I wanted to see the famous *Pharos* there.’

‘I know,’ I said quickly. ‘That’s a big **lighthouse** from long ago. Did you go up it?’



‘No!’ he laughed. ‘The *Pharos* was **in ruins**. There wasn’t a lot to see. But not far from Alexandria I met a holy man – Burhan Al-Din. He could see into the **future**.

‘And what did he tell me? “You’re going to visit India and China! And on your travels you’re going to meet many old friends!” I was happy about this. “I’m going to go far!” I thought.’

‘And *did* you go to India and China in the end?’

‘Wait and see, Ahmed!’ smiled my uncle. ‘I arrived in Cairo eight months after I first left home. What a big city! And what a lot of people! And they never stop running here and there, day and night! And near Cairo there are the **pyramids** – big, old buildings from the rulers of Egypt long ago.’

‘And were *they* in ruins?’ I asked.

‘No. Not the pyramids!’ he smiled. ‘Next, I journeyed up the river Nile. After this we travelled on **camels** through the hot **desert**. There were lots of hungry **hyenas** there, and at night we needed to be very careful.’

‘Of course,’ I cried excitedly.

in ruins old and in pieces

future what is going to happen

pyramid a building with a flat bottom and four sides; these meet in a point at the top

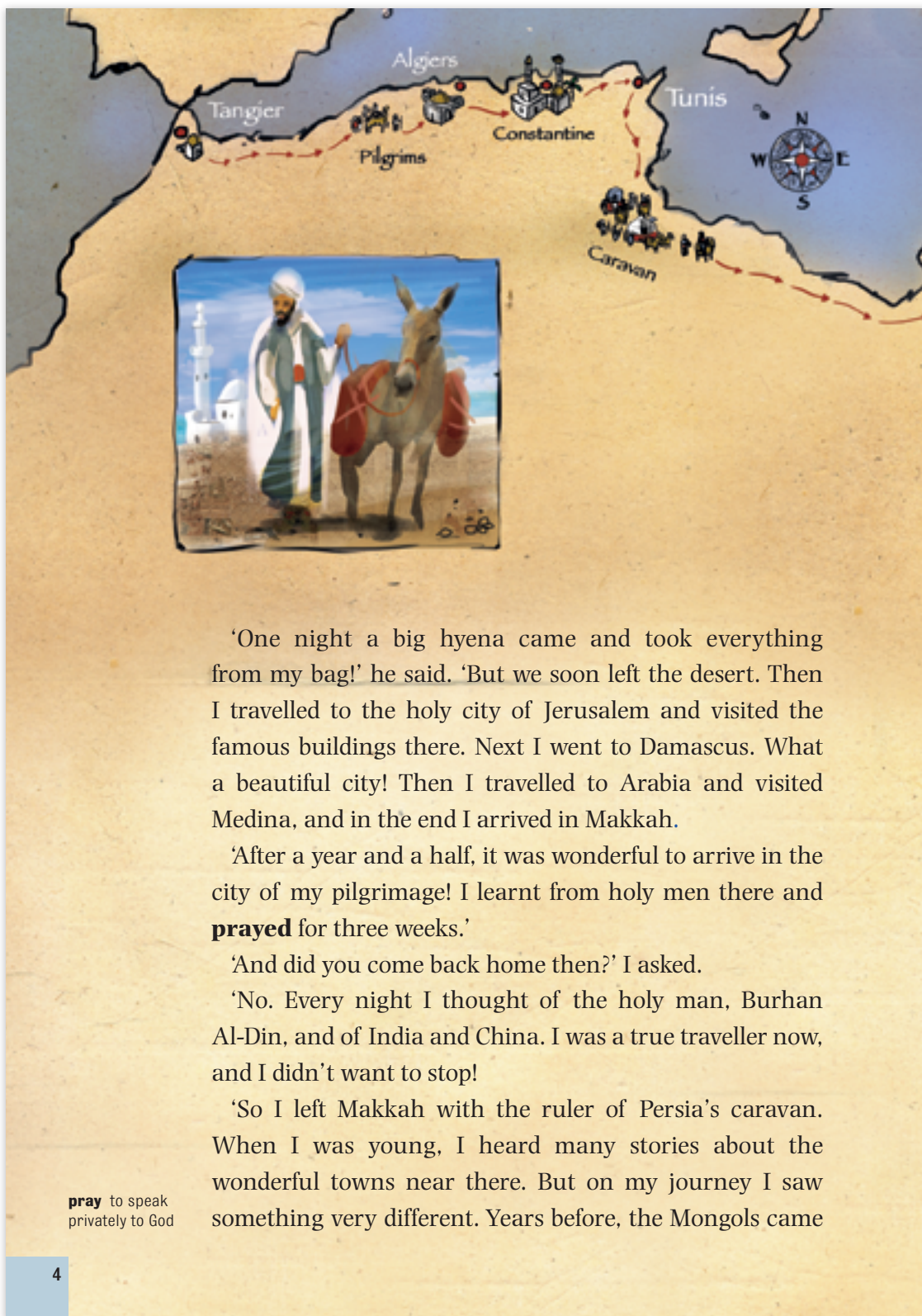
camel this animal can live for a long time with no water

desert a place which has no water

hyena a wild animal, like a dog, that eats things which it finds

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‘One night a big hyena came and took everything from my bag!’ he said. ‘But we soon left the desert. Then I travelled to the holy city of Jerusalem and visited the famous buildings there. Next I went to Damascus. What a beautiful city! Then I travelled to Arabia and visited Medina, and in the end I arrived in Makkah.

‘After a year and a half, it was wonderful to arrive in the city of my pilgrimage! I learnt from holy men there and **prayed** for three weeks.’

‘And did you come back home then?’ I asked.

‘No. Every night I thought of the holy man, Burhan Al-Din, and of India and China. I was a true traveller now, and I didn’t want to stop!

‘So I left Makkah with the ruler of Persia’s caravan. When I was young, I heard many stories about the wonderful towns near there. But on my journey I saw something very different. Years before, the Mongols came

pray to speak
privately to God

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to these towns. They killed a lot of people, and I saw many houses in ruins there.

‘Perhaps the most interesting town on that journey was Wasit. A number of men with no money lived there in a big house. In the evening, they prayed and ate their dinner. Then they sat near a big **fire** and told stories. Suddenly some of them walked into the fire! Then they ate the fire. One man put a **snake’s** head in his mouth and ate it alive!’

‘And you saw all that?’ I cried.

‘Yes,’ he laughed. ‘I visited many interesting towns after that, but I never saw men eat fire and snakes again!’

‘Then I went to Baghdad. What a wonderful city! But I was ill there. So I soon went back to Makkah. I learnt from holy men and prayed there for a year, and slowly I felt better.’

‘And what did you do next?’ I asked.

‘I travelled by sea for the first time. It was my worst journey!’ he said. ‘You can hear all about it tomorrow.’

fire this is red and hot, and it burns

snake a long animal with no legs

YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF THE SAMPLE.

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