



The Merchant of Dreams

Salif Gouany



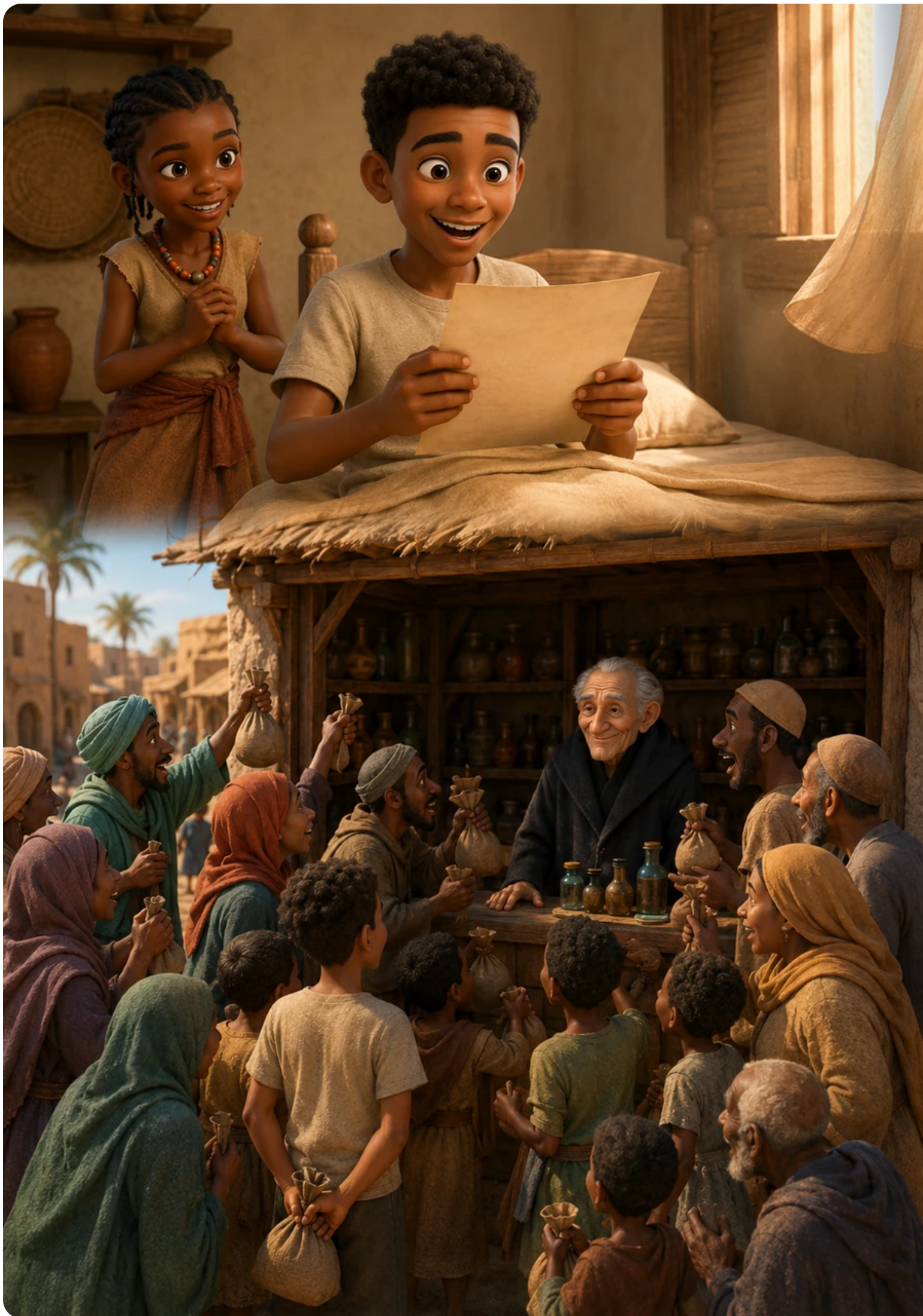
In the quiet town of Koulma, life was simple and predictable, leaving the townsfolk secretly longing for something grander. One evening, under the soft glow of a full moon, a strange new shop mysteriously appeared in the center of the market square.



Suspended above the entrance was a rustic wooden sign reading The Merchant of Dreams. Inside, hundreds of luminous bottles filled with vibrant, swirling colors lined the shelves, each one containing a different beautiful dream.



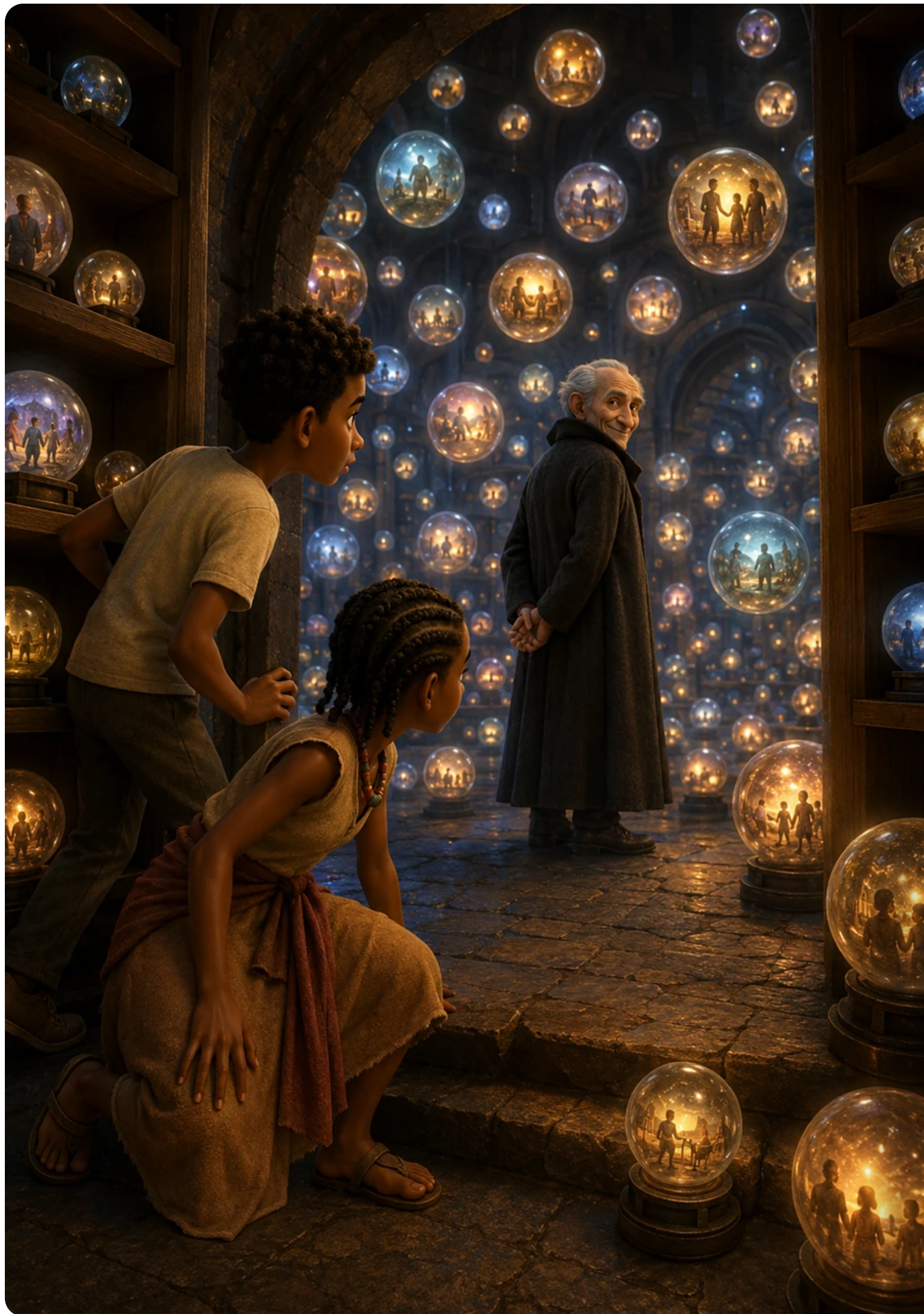
Behind the counter stood a mysterious old man enveloped in a long black cloak, offering to sell life-changing success, wealth, and world travel for a ridiculously low price. While Ibrahim looked on with curiosity, his best friend Awa remained deeply suspicious of how easy it all seemed.



The very next day, Ibrahim woke up to find himself achieving the highest grades in his entire class, just as his purchased dream had promised. Word spread like wildfire, and soon the entire town rushed to the shop to buy their own instant wealth, talent, and fame.



While the town celebrated their newfound success, a chilling change began to sweep through Koulma. An elderly woman could no longer recall her husband's face, a merchant forgot his childhood, and a musician stared blankly at his instrument, entirely forgetting why he loved music.



Determined to find the truth behind the stolen memories, Ibrahim and Awa snuck back into the marketplace shop deep in the dead of night. Hidden behind the glowing shelves, they discovered a massive secret chamber filled with thousands of floating, radiant spheres holding the town's precious memories.



Suddenly, the old merchant stepped out from the shadows, his welcoming smile completely gone. He coldly explained that every dream has a price, and that he simply took what was most valuable from them—their real-life memories of joy, love, and laughter.



Refusing to let the merchant keep the town's soul, Ibrahim spotted a massive, glowing golden sphere in the center of the room that powered all the magic. Before the old man could stop him, Ibrahim lunged forward and pressed his hands against the warm, brilliant surface.



The golden sphere shattered, unleashing a blinding wave of light that caused every bottle in the shop to explode into a dazzling shower of sparks. The stolen memories swirled into the night air like a sea of shooting stars, raining down upon the sleeping town and returning to their rightful owners.



When the brilliant light finally faded, the mysterious shop and the merchant had vanished into thin air, never to be seen again. The people of Koulma woke up with their precious memories restored, forever understanding that while dreams are beautiful, the real moments we live and remember are the most valuable treasures of all.