

# THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

There was once a sultan named Schahriar who had a wife whom he loved more than anything in the world. His greatest happiness was to lavish her with gifts of the finest dresses and the most dazzling jewels. It was therefore with the deepest shame and sorrow that he accidentally discovered, after they had been married several years, that she had been repeatedly unfaithful to him. In fact, her whole conduct during their marriage turned out to have been so bad that King Schahriar had no other choice than to order his grand vizier to put her to death.



So deep was the shock from his wife's betrayal that after much thought the sultan came to the conclusion that all women were as wicked as the sultana, and therefore the fewer there were in the world the better. So he decreed that every evening he would marry a fresh wife and would then have her strangled the following morning by the grand vizier, whose other duty it was to constantly find new brides for the sultan. The poor man, of course, was horrified with his duties, but there was no escape; every day he saw a girl married and a wife dead.

Needless to say, the people of the kingdom were shocked at this state of affairs and terrified that their own daughters or sisters who would be chosen as the king's next bride and victim. The grand vizier himself was the father of two daughters, Scheherazade and Dinarzade. Dinarzade was an average young girl, but her older sister, Scheherazade, was not only beautiful but exceedingly clever and very courageous. In addition she had received a thorough education in philosophy, medicine, history, and the fine arts.

One day, Scheherazade told her father that she had a plan to stop the king's barbarous practice of murdering his wives and asked him to let her be the next girl he brought to marry the king. Knowing that he would be the one who would have to kill his own beloved daughter the next morning if the plan failed, the horrified grand vizier asked the girl if she had lost her senses. It took Scheherazade a long time to persuade him that her plan would work.

Still, it was with a heavy heart that her father agreed. Then Scheherazade made a pact with her sister Dinarzade. "When his Highness receives me," she said, "I shall beg him as a last favor, to let you sleep in our chamber, so that I may have your company during the last night I am

alive. If he grants me my wish, be sure that you wake me an hour before dawn and say, "My sister, if you are not asleep, I beg you, before the sun rises, to tell me one of your charming stories." Dinarzade gladly agreed.

When the time came, the king did indeed grant Scheherazade her wish and Dinarzade was sent for. An hour before daybreak Dinarzade awoke and begged her sister to tell a story, as she had promised. When the sultan gave his permission Scheherazade began.

Drawing on her great knowledge of history and literature, Scheherazade wove an exciting adventure story about a genie and a merchant but just as the tale had reached a particularly suspenseful moment of climax, the sun came up and she stopped. As planned, her sister cried out, "What a wonderful story!" "The rest is even more wonderful," replied Scheherazade, "and if the Sultan would allow me to live another day, I could tell you the rest tonight." King Schahriar, who had been engrossed in Scheherazade's delightful tale, said to himself, "I will wait till tomorrow. After all, I can always have her killed once I hear the end of her story" the next morning, an hour before sunrise, Dinarzade again woke her sister and begged her to continue the story. Again the sultan agreed.

So Scheherazade went on telling stories. Each tale had a tale within a tale and thus one story led right into another so that she was never really finished. Every morning she'd stop at a point of exciting suspense, and every morning the sultan would let her live one more day to finish it. After a thousand and one nights of this, the sultan finally became so fond of Scheherazade that he gave up the idea of killing her.