SCHEHERAZADE
Legend of the Arabian Nights
By SUSAN PARGMAN

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SCHEHERAZADE..........Daughter of the Grand Vizier, she has her father wrapped around her little finger. She’s 20ish and well-known for her ability to spin stories that bring genies and giants to life. She’s intelligent, stubborn, slightly conniving (but only because she must be) and is fed up with the status quo.

DINARZADE ............A miniature version of her sister, “Dinny” looks to Scheherazade as a role model. Her vibrant personality bubbles with enthusiasm at every turn, finding life in an ancient Persian city full of new discoveries and adventures each day. Still not quite a teenager, she looks forward to the day she, too, can become a woman in control of her very own man.

GRAND VIZIER...........Father of these two hot-shots, he serves as main advisor to King Raynah, a position of great power, although he would never abuse it for personal gain. With no wife to help him raise his two daughters, he has often been defeated by their feminine guile, though he appears not to fight too vigorously against their charms. Using the strategy of teaching through parables, he has unwittingly imparted the same abilities to his daughters, which they use persuasively against his authority. He’s in his 50s.

KING RAYNAH ...........Poor man, he’s only trying to run a country, and what happens? His fiancée prefers the kitchen-boy to him. A young king, he decides to gain the respect of his people and punish this wayward fiancée by proclaiming a fresh beheading of another woman each day… or so he says. How
was he to know someone like Scheherazade would thwart his royal efforts? You gotta love this guy for trying! He’s 30ish.

NEFARIO ...................... Another of King Raynah’s advisors, 58 he weaseled his way in from the bottom. He used to be a kitchen boy — yes, the same kitchen boy that the king’s fiancée found so desirable, though no one recognizes him as such. (He grew a beard.) His secret plans include revenge against the king for terminating his love affair and grasping power away from the Grand Vizier by torching his reputation. He’s between 30 and 40.

JORIAH ...................... Without a doubt, the wisest man in 28 the kingdom. He knows so many proverbs that whatever he says has surely been said before. If not, it will surely be printed in Reader’s Digest someday! King Raynah keeps him around for his prophet-like ability to sum up any situation with a platitude. He’s between 40 and 60 years old.

These eligible young ladies serve as Scheherazade’s compatriots. They are frustrated by King Raynah’s decree against marriage among the citizens, yet they feel helpless to do anything about it. They put their trust in Scheherazade’s plan and assist her in bringing it to fruition.

YAZMINA.......................................................... 16
MARIAH............................................................... 21
AMBER ................................................................. 5
SHIMA ............................................................... 24
CASSANDRA ........................................................ 18

LILY .................................................. A long-time royal attendant, she is the 28 motherly influence around the palace. She worries about King Raynah’s physical and emotional state while still disapproving of his actions. She waits on the new queens and picks up groceries now and then in town. She and Joriah have a cooperative relationship, finding one another amusing due to their profound difference in various capabilities. She is as wise as he, yet more
home-spun in expression. She’s in her late 40s.

SKEETER ..................... The town grocer and the only one who knows of Nefario’s nefarious past as a kitchen boy. What he lacks in intelligence, he makes up for in stupidity. He hungers for recognition like Nefario and figures he’ll ride in on his coat tails by helping with his scheme to bring disrepute to the Grand Vizier. He’s between 40 and 50.

HUSSAIN ...................... Captain of the Guards, in love with Cassandra, this handsome 20-something hunk agrees to aid the girlfriends in their involvement with Scheherazade’s plan to outwit King Raynah and bring normalcy back to their lives.

MARA ............................ About 7, innocently gathers intelligence to aid Scheherazade’s plan.

LEANDER ..................... Assists Mara

SHOSHANNA ............... Intended fiancée to King Raynah. She loves Nefario instead.

QUEEN .................................................................6

SHOPKEEPER ..........................................................n/a

WOMAN ONE ..........................................................6

WOMAN TWO ..........................................................6

BRIDE .................................................................n/a

LITTLE GIRL ..........................................................n/a

LITTLE GIRL’S MOTHER ..............................................n/a

OTHERS ....................... Other people in the town serve to keep the story flowing with their generalized activities an involvement in the plot.
SYNOPSIS

The action of this play takes place on the streets of an ancient Persian city and in the Queen's chambers in the Royal Palace.

ACT ONE

Scene One: Late afternoon on the main thoroughfare of an ancient Persian city.

Scene Two: Same location, the next morning.

Scene Three: The Queen's chambers, late evening.

ACT TWO

Scene One: The Queen's chambers, the next evening.

Scene Two: The main thoroughfare, the next day.

Scene Three: The Queen's chambers, late evening.

SETTING

The main thoroughfare of an ancient Persian city, circa 700 B.C.E. Baskets of fruit line the front walk of Skeeter's grocery store. Some of the baskets are quite large — large enough for a person to hide behind. An open-air butcher shop displays its wares. Brass and wood trinkets, baked goods and clothing are all for sale. There is a bench upstage.
SCHEHERAZADE

ACT ONE

Scene One

AT RISE: The STAGE is DARK. In the BLACKNESS, a GONG SOUNDS twice from OFF STAGE followed by a slow, LOW DRUM BEAT as the LIGHTS FADE UP slowly to reveal a somber SKEETEER rolling out the long white cloth that serves as the bride’s path. It runs from UP LEFT to DOWN RIGHT. TOWNSPEOPLE ENTER RIGHT and LEFT as solemn witnesses. Gloomy GIRLFRIENDS (YAZMINA, MARIAH, AMBER, SHIMA and CASSANDRA) ENTER UP LEFT carrying garlands of white flowers to place around the BRIDE’S neck as she passes along. ALL take their positions UPSTAGE from the path. In contrast, a joyful, eager DINNY ENTERS DOWN LEFT with her somber sister, SCHEHERAZADE.

DINNY: Oh, what a wonderful day this is! I’ve never been to a royal wedding before!

SCHEHERAZADE: (Disgusted.) I’ve been to too many, I’m afraid.

DINNY: What happens next? Is the bride coming soon? Where is the groom? Shouldn’t he be here to meet her?

SCHEHERAZADE: You will not see the groom today.

DINNY: But why not? (Dramatic, acting out all parts.) I’ve always heard that the groom comes to his wedding mounted on a white stallion, searching for his bride. Then he sees her and his heart leaps with joy! He jumps from his horse and runs to scoop her up into his waiting arms. It’s tradition.

SCHEHERAZADE: Little sister, the king is not following our tradition these days. Not today, not yesterday, and he won’t again tomorrow.

DINNY: You mean that... (MUSIC: Slow, minor key song with a traditional Middle Eastern flavor begins and continues through following procession.)

SCHEHERAZADE: Hush now, Dinny. The bride is coming. We must all be silent, out of respect. (ENTERS UP LEFT first is CHILD carrying brass incense burner. CHILD walks solemnly, leading the procession. After a space, two more CHILDREN ENTER UP LEFT and walk side by side, dropping white flower petals along the path. After them comes HUSSAIN, preceding a sobbing BRIDE. As they come through town, GIRLFRIENDS place garlands around BRIDE’S neck. She is led away
to the palace OFF DOWN RIGHT. MUSIC STOPS.)

DINNY: I am most disappointed!

SCHEHERAZADE: Are you, Dinny? Why?

DINNY: I thought a wedding was supposed to be a happy affair, and I swear I saw the bride crying! (SKEETER rolls away the bridal path and EXITS UP LEFT.)

SCHEHERAZADE: (Disgusted.) It is because she is marrying the king. (A second thought.) And do not swear.

DINNY: Is the king not handsome?

SCHEHERAZADE: He is very handsome.

DINNY: Is the king not rich?

SCHEHERAZADE: The richest man in all the world.

DINNY: Then I would think she would love him.

SCHEHERAZADE: There is more to love than finding someone who is handsome and rich. You will understand when you are older.

DINNY: (Playful.) Oh, I know. The king’s whiskers tickle too much when they kiss.

SCHEHERAZADE: (Shocked.) And who have you been talking to?

DINNY: Just a friend.

SCHEHERAZADE: (Not in the mood.) You are too young to understand all this. You better just go home at once.

DINNY: (Schemes.) I cannot think of going home... that is, unless you were to tell me a story first. (TOWNSPEOPLE start to become interested. SCHEHERAZADE is famous for her stories. They come closer to listen in.)

SCHEHERAZADE: (Gets nervous.) Not now. I don’t feel like telling a story.

DINNY: You always feel like telling stories. Everyone knows that.

SCHEHERAZADE: (Tense.) And yet, at this time I do not.

DINNY: Just a short one, please? Tell the one about the genie who was trapped in a bottle, and the fisherman who found him, and how the genie said he would kill him but then the fisherman begged...

SCHEHERAZADE: You could tell that one to yourself.
DINNY: Then tell me about “The Cave of the Seven Winds.” I hardly know that one at all. (Tells it dramatically.) The cave was empty... and silent as a tomb, or so it seemed, when suddenly—

SCHEHERAZADE: No! (Explains tenderly.) This is not a time well-suited to telling stories. Go home as I told you to, dear little sister, and I promise I shall entertain you later tonight, as usual. (TOWNSPEOPLE are disappointed and begin to break up and return to business, eventually disappearing into their shops and OFF STAGE.)

DINNY: That’s a promise?

SCHEHERAZADE: A promise.

DINNY: Then I know it shall be done. Everyone knows that Scheherazade always keeps her promises. I’ll be waiting.

SCHEHERAZADE: And remember, don’t fret about what you saw here!

DINNY: (Laughs as she EXITS DOWN LEFT.) Why, my mind will be as empty as... (With a flourish.) the Cave of the Seven Winds! (She’s OUT.)

SCHEHERAZADE: (Looks around to make sure everyone has gone, then moves to a large basket behind which the QUEEN is hiding. She speaks in gentle tones to someone unseen.) It’s all right. You can come out now. No one is around to see. (The QUEEN peers out of hiding, looking about warily.) I am Scheherazade, daughter of the Grand Vizier. He is the one who brought you here.

QUEEN: And no one suspects?

SCHEHERAZADE: No one knows of the escape except my father, myself and a few trusted friends.

QUEEN: No one else? What about my parents? My family? Could you take a message to them? Tell them that I have not been beheaded? That I am well?

SCHEHERAZADE: It would be too risky and would endanger the lives of many, including the other queens.

QUEEN: (Steps out of hiding.) Then I am not the only one still alive?

SCHEHERAZADE: No, all the others are safely hidden as well. (QUEEN looks disappointed.) You are so beautiful. The king is a fool to condemn all women just because he found one to be unfaithful.

QUEEN: It was she who was the fool. (Dreamy.) Such a man deserves the finest wife the world can offer. Are you sure all the other queens are still alive?
SCHEHERAZADE: Are we speaking about the same man? The one who marries a different woman every morning only to... (Makes a motion across her throat.) behead her the next day?

QUEEN: There is no other like him.

SCHEHERAZADE: I count that as a blessing! Still, it is my intention to protect you. My father has prepared a home for you beyond the realm. There you will be cared for and comfortable until a miracle makes it safe for you to return.

QUEEN: Return? Then I shall see him again? And still be his wife and queen?

SCHEHERAZADE: Hopeless... absolutely hopeless. (They EXIT DOWN LEFT as LILY and JORIAH ENTER RIGHT. LILY carries an empty shopping basket and a scroll with a prominent pink ribbon. TOWNSPEOPLE ENTER RIGHT and LEFT and pantomime “business” in background. LITTLE GIRL pretends to be a bride. MOTHER makes her stop. SKEETER pantomimes “business” with others, selling fruit, sweeping, etc.)

LILY: (Looks OFF RIGHT.) Did you see the king’s newest bride, Joriah? I hear she’s from the north. Those people have strange ways up there. They’re not like us.

JORIAH: It is said that “marriages are best made of dissimilar material.”


JORIAH: (Cryptic.) “Beauty is a glorious gift as well as a silent cheat.”

LILY: Well, that’s what got her into this mess in the first place, poor child. He marries the most beautiful women in the kingdom just to get revenge! What good does that ever do? (TOWNSPEOPLE, including MARA and LEANDER, continue to move IN and OUT of the scene, sparsely.)

JORIAH: (Another platitude.) “A man who practices revenge only turns the poison of his own temper in upon himself.”

LILY: What goes around, comes around, I always say. A man reaps what he sows, and one of these days the king is going to end up having a taste of his own medicine. (MARA comes begging as LILY speaks. LILY hands her a coin.)

JORIAH: You have a way with words, my lady. (MARA in background motions for LEANDER to beg from JORIAH. He does so.)
LILY: Day and night, stewing over a faithless woman. I hear him walking the halls day and night. You know, I don't think it's so much that he's mad about her anymore. I think he just had his confidence shaken, and he doesn't know how to get it back. *(JORIAH hands a coin to LEANDER, and the CHILDREN EXIT LEFT together.)*

JORIAH: It is written: “We often pretend to despise what we really fear.”

LILY: I think he's afraid to forgive and forget. Thinks it might make him look weak. But it's just the opposite, really. It's best to forgive and forget. That's what I say.

JORIAH: *(Sees an opening.)* “He who forgives another places his enemy in a position like that of the sea-worm who perforates the oyster’s shell and straightway closes the wound with a pearl.”

LILY: You're making me hungry with talk like that. Have you noticed that the king hardly touches his meals these days?

JORIAH: I have noticed.

LILY: I'm getting sore fingers from sewing new seams in his clothes all the time. That's how thin he's getting.

JORIAH: A sure sign of a troubled heart.

LILY: I've got an idea. Why don't you go to him, Joriah? You're one of his favorite advisors. Tell him to snap out of it. It's not worth losing his kingdom over. And I hate how miserable he is all the time.

JORIAH: “Advice is seldom welcome when not asked for. And those that need it most, like it least.”

LILY: *(Resigned.)* Well, if he's not in the mood to listen to you, then I guess all we can hope for is a miracle.

JORIAH: That is a most sensible sentiment.

LILY: A miracle is sensible? How do you figure that?

JORIAH: Because an act that is beyond the comprehension of the spectator is taken by him to be divine.

LILY: So if he gets confused enough, then he might come to his senses?

JORIAH: Well said, my lady. A miracle is our only hope.

LILY: Well, some kind of hope is better than none at all. That's what I always say.
JORIAH: “Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.”

LILY: *(Checks behind for her shadow.)* That reminds me. We haven’t got much time left to pick up these groceries that Cook sent us out for. *(Unrolls scroll.)* But what in the world he wants with all these things is beyond me.

JORIAH: *(Takes scroll and reads a la “Twelve Days of Christmas.”)* Five sacks of pistachios, four legs of lamb, three pomegranates, two bags of rice and a partridge in a pear sauce. It appears that Cook is preparing the wedding feast.

LILY: I never attend the weddings, and I’m getting tired of wedding feasts.

JORIAH: *(Weary.)* As we all are, miss. As we all are. *(They EXIT LEFT. NEFARIO ENTERS RIGHT. He is sneaking about, hoping no one is there to see him. There are some exchanges of “looks” between himself and the TOWNSPEOPLE. He pretends to EXIT. TOWNSPEOPLE EXIT RIGHT and LEFT. NEFARIO RETURNS. He carries a scroll with a prominent black ribbon. He hunkers down behind a basket of fruit. MARA ENTERS LEFT, comes from behind and taps him on the shoulder, begging for a coin. He waves her away angrily. As she EXITS LEFT, NEFARIO calls to SKEETER in “secret code,” making Morse code like squeaking noises. SKEETER emerges from shop with broom, silently stalking the sound, which he perceives to be a rat. He follows the sound to the basket behind which NEFARIO hides. He sees movement and swiftly swats NEFARIO with broom. NEFARIO jumps out at SKEETER, quite angry. SKEETER is still swatting him.)*

NEFARIO: You idiot! It’s me! Stop swinging that broom! Who do you think I am?

SKEETER: I thought you was a rat, Nefario. And I didn’t want you eatin’ up all my profits.

NEFARIO: Well, I’m not a rat, you imbecile.

SKEETER: *(Under his breath.)* That’s not what some people say.

NEFARIO: What was that?

SKEETER: *(Exaggerated fake hospitality.)* I said, I hope that you’ve come to stay. Would you like a cup of tea? It’s fresh-made and hot.

NEFARIO: I have not come here on a social visit... *(Disgusted.)* as if I’d ever socialize with an imbecile like you.
SKEETER: But you used to socialize with me, Nefario. You wasn’t always such a royal big-shot. I knew you when you were nothing but a kitchen-boy. That was how we met, remember?

NEFARIO: Shut up and listen. We have work to do.

SKEETER: (Continues.) You used to come to my store for fruits and nuts for the cook, and I used to tease you about how scrawny you were. (He tickles NEFARIO.)

NEFARIO: (Grabs him viciously.) No one must know about that! You are never to breath a word about it, you understand?

SKEETER: I swear, I’ll never tell anyone that you used to be scrawny.

NEFARIO: Not that! I mean about my being a kitchen-boy in the palace.

SKEETER: Oh, I get it now. You weren’t ever a kitchen-boy. I got it.

NEFARIO: Why do I even try? (Sighs. Secretive and dramatic.) You are to take this scroll and deliver it to the captain of the guards. Take care that it gets into no one else’s hands. It is for his eyes only.

SKEETER: His eyes?

NEFARIO: (Loses his temper again.) Yes, yes! Are you deaf as well as stupid? (MARA and LEANDER have ENTERED LEFT and are playing in background. They notice what SKEETER and NEFARIO are talking about. SKEETER and NEFARIO do not see the children.)

SKEETER: But the captain of the guards has only one eye. Remember? He wears that little patch over the other one sort of down across his face and under the other...

NEFARIO: (Hits him with scroll.) Take it! Take the scroll!

SKEETER: All right, already. You don’t hafta get so mad about everything.

NEFARIO: This paper charges the Grand Vizier and his daughter, Scheherazade, with perpetrating crimes against the king.

SKEETER: (Worried.) Oh, no. If I give that scroll to the captain, he’ll have the Grand Vizier arrested and probably beheaded!

NEFARIO: (Sarcastic.) You don’t say!

SKEETER: Yes!

NEFARIO: (Bops him over the head with scroll.) That’s the idea, hummus-brain. With the Grand Vizier gone, I take charge, and since
the king spends all his time playing “Royal Revenge,” the realm belongs to me.

SKEETER: Oh, I get it now. (Loud.) That’s how we take over the kingdom. (MARA and LEANDER EXIT LEFT quickly and quietly.)

NEFARIO: (Claps hand over SKEETER’S mouth.) Not we... me!

SKEETER: How come you always get to be the boss?

NEFARIO: So that you can be my... assistant.

SKEETER: (Pleased.) Oh, boy. Your assistant. Do I get to wear a uniform?

NEFARIO: Oh, yes. A bright red one. Would you like that?

SKEETER: And can it have a big gold star right on the chest?

NEFARIO: A gold star... and a silver moon... and a patch of pretty pink pansies cascading down each sleeve.

SKEETER: But I don’t want pink pansies.

NEFARIO: Well, you’re not getting anything if you don’t deliver that scroll, and I do mean now. You will be paid only when the job is done.

SKEETER: And that’s when I get a uniform?

NEFARIO: Just go!

SKEETER: Gee, you don’t have to get so huffy about it. (NEFARIO EXITS RIGHT as upbeat Eastern flavor MUSIC BEGINS and CONTINUES through following action: SKEETER starts to EXIT LEFT, but as he does, he runs into LILY and JORIAH as they ENTER LEFT. Their arms are loaded with the groceries they just acquired. They drop it all, including the scroll in SKEETER’S hand and the scroll in LILY’S hand. The scene is filled with “Pardon me,” and “Sorry,” etc. as they scramble to pick up items, confusing the two scrolls. As they EXIT opposite, the GIRLFRIENDS — YAZMINA, AMBER, MARIAH, CASSANDRA and SHIMA — ENTER LEFT along with MARA and LEANDER who whisper something to MARIAH and then run OFF again. AMBER takes a seat UPSTAGE and hangs her head silently.)

YAZMINA: I hate weddings!

MARIAH: That’s not what you used to say.

YAZMINA: Well, that’s what I say now. I hate weddings.

CASSANDRA: If that king ever asks me to marry him, he will learn
MARA: You mean it? You mean she isn’t... (Motions with a finger across her throat.)

KING RAYNAH: No, of course not! And she’ll come back even sooner than you think! (SCHEHERAZADE stares at him incredulously.)

LEANDE: Really? You’re not just trying to fool us because we’re little kids or anything?

MARA: Yeah, cuz some grownups like to fool kids just so they won’t cry or anything.

KING RAYNAH: Cross my heart. (He crosses his heart.)

LEANDE: She really means it! Let’s tell Mena!

MARA: You really mean it, Blossom?

KING RAYNAH: I really do.

MARA: Thank you! We gotta go tell everybody! (To KING RAYNAH.) Did anybody ever tell you how pretty you are? (She kisses him on the cheek and both EXIT LEFT.)

SCHEHERAZADE: (Bewildered.) Why did you tell them that?

KING RAYNAH: What?

SCHEHERAZADE: That their teacher would be coming back?

KING RAYNAH: Perhaps the magic is starting to work... a change of heart.

SCHEHERAZADE: But what you told those children...

KING RAYNAH: Sweet Scheherazade... I know what you and your father have been doing.

SCHEHERAZADE: You know?

KING RAYNAH: In fact, it was my idea to begin with... to send the queers away.

SCHEHERAZADE: (Stunned.) But you said... everyone thought... what about... (Draws a finger across her throat.)

KING RAYNAH: The beheadings?

SCHEHERAZADE: Yes, that.

KING RAYNAH: Whatever else you take me for, I’m not a murderer.

SCHEHERAZADE: How could I have known?

what the back of my hand across his face feels like!

MARIAH: The king does not ask you to marry him. His Grand Vizier orders you to marry him.

SHIMA: (Bitter.) That must be why Scheherazade has not been chosen yet!

YAZMINA: Don’t be angry at her, Shima. It’s not her fault that her father is the Grand Vizier.

SHIMA: Although it certainly helps.

MARIAH: She will get her turn as well some day.

YAZMINA: I remember when I used to dream about what my wedding would be like. Now, it’s nothing but a nightmare.

CASSANDRA: I, for one, will never marry.

SHIMA: Does that mean I can have Hussain?

CASSANDRA: Keep away from Hussain, he’s mine!

SHIMA: But if you’re not going to marry him...

CASSANDRA: I’m not going to marry him, but neither is anyone else.

MARIAH: No one else is allowed to marry. Only the king.

CASSANDRA: That’s why I said that I shall never marry. (Gives SHIMA the eye.) But if I did, it would be Hussain.

YAZMINA: Isn’t he the Captain of the Guards?

CASSANDRA: Just promoted last week!

SHIMA: (Admiring.) Oooo, the one with the cute little eye patch. Mmmmm, it makes him look so... dangerous!

CASSANDRA: Don’t you even think about it!

YAZMINA: I would think that the king would at least let someone who works for him get married. It just isn’t fair.

MARIAH: Of course it isn’t fair. We’re all being punished because of one woman.

CASSANDRA: What woman?

MARIAH: I think her name was Shoshanna.

CASSANDRA: I used to know a Shoshanna. We went to school together.
SHIMA: How did he find out that his fiancée was unfaithful?

YAZMINA: I heard that he found her in the arms of a kitchen-boy.

CASSANDRA: Must have been some kitchen-boy!

YAZMINA: Actually, I heard that he was pretty scrawny.

SHIMA: So what did they do to him?

YAZMINA: Never caught him. He just disappeared.

SHIMA: Amber is in love with a kitchen-boy! Hey, Amber, was it your boyfriend who was caught with the king’s fiancée? (*AMBER walks away from the group.*)

MARIAH: Don’t tease Amber. She loves her kitchen-boy.

SHIMA: Oh, sorry, Amber. Hey, you don’t look so well. What’s wrong?

MARIAH: *(Concerned.)* Uh-oh... I think I know what’s wrong. I’ve seen this before. *(Gently, to AMBER.)* You’re next, aren’t you? *(AMBER nods sadly, barely looking up. MARIAH hugs her.)*

YAZMINA: You poor thing!

CASSANDRA: Maybe my Hussain could help... or maybe you could disguise yourself and get away... or maybe, uh, maybe... uh... *(She has run out of ideas.)* Maybe you’ll like being Queen for a day?

SHIMA: It ought to be Scheherazade!

MARIAH: *(Defensive.)* You don’t know what you’re saying!

SHIMA: It’s just because her father won’t choose her. It’s not fair!

MARIAH: Of course it’s not fair. It’s not fair to you, it’s not fair to me, or Amber, and it wouldn’t be fair to Scheherazade either.

SHIMA: Well, somebody has to go, and I say it should be her.

MARIAH: How can you talk that way about her? She’s been your friend for so long.

SHIMA: Friend? Hah! With friends like her—

MARIAH: *(Warns her.)* Don’t turn against her now. You would be making a big mistake, believe me.

SHIMA: As far as I’m concerned, she’s the one who turned against us. Because of her, we’re losing Amber when it should have been Scheherazade. If you call that being a friend, then count me out! *(She EXITS LEFT, angry.)*
MARIAH: I’m not quite sure how to tell you this, Amber, but I want you to know that everything is going to be all right. That’s all I can say for now. Will you trust me on this? (AMBER nods her head.) Good. We need something to take our minds off of tomorrow’s worries. What do you say we all take a nice cool swim? A day like this would be wasted if we didn’t.

YAZMINA: You always have the best ideas.

CASSANDRA: Hey, Amber. Race you to the rock slide! Okay? (AMBER nods in agreement with a brave smile. They EXIT LEFT as SCHERERAZADE and GRAND VIZIER ENTER DOWN LEFT.)

GRAND VIZIER: How is our plan going?

SCHERERAZADE: The queens are surviving, if that’s what you mean.

GRAND VIZIER: Good, good. Then our plan is working.

SCHERERAZADE: Oh, Father. The women are still alive, but they have nothing to live for.

GRAND VIZIER: Whatever do you mean, most sweet and obedient daughter? We give them a home, plenty to eat, clothing and amusements.

SCHERERAZADE: I mean that our king takes away what they value most, and then has them removed like the morning garbage.

GRAND VIZIER: But at least they are still alive.

SCHERERAZADE: What kind of a life is that? Living in seclusion, never seeing their families?

GRAND VIZIER: In a way, I see that you are right. But I don’t know what else to do.

SCHERERAZADE: Then perhaps you would be willing to consider another plan.

GRAND VIZIER: That depends. What do you have in mind?

SCHERERAZADE: Father, I want to marry the king.

GRAND VIZIER: What?!

SCHERERAZADE: You have the authority to choose any woman in the kingdom to marry him, and I want you to choose me. (TOWNSPEOPLE begin to ENTER RIGHT and LEFT, mime “business.”)

GRAND VIZIER: That is no plan. You know that if I give you over to
the king, then your fate will be the same as all the others. *(Gentle.)* And you know I cannot bear the thought of losing you.

**SCHEHERAZADE:** I want to marry the king so that I may either succeed in saving the people or become a prisoner like the rest.

**GRAND VIZIER:** What has possessed you so that you want to imperil yourself?

**SCHEHERAZADE:** I cannot stand by and watch my people suffer any longer, Father.

**GRAND VIZIER:** Neither can I, but—

**SCHEHERAZADE:** Father, you must give me to the king. This is absolute and final.

**GRAND VIZIER:** *(Warns.)* Daughter, he who considers not the end, the world is not his friend. I am afraid that what happened to the donkey, the ox and the farmer will happen to you.

**SCHEHERAZADE:** Father, are you going to tell me a story? *(TOWNSPEOPLE perk up and become interested, hoping to hear the tale. They come closer.)*

**GRAND VIZIER:** That is up to you, Daughter.

**SCHEHERAZADE:** It's probably one I've heard before, only with new characters.

**GRAND VIZIER:** That is very likely.

**SCHEHERAZADE:** And I'll probably be sorry I asked but... *(Gives in.)* All right, then, what happened to the donkey, the ox and the farmer?

**GRAND VIZIER:** *(With great satisfaction.)* I begin my tale with the greatest of pleasure. *(He bows. Optional MUSIC PLAYS under following action, accentuating the story.)* It is said, most wise and faithful Daughter, that once there was a prosperous and wealthy farmer... *(SHOPKEEPER volunteers for the role, and GRAND VIZIER nods. He pantomimes hoeing the soil.)* ...who lived in the countryside and labored on his farm. This man owned a fine ox... *(GRAND VIZIER chooses WOMAN ONE from the crowd to be the ox. She steps willingly into the scene, becoming an ox.)* ...who was a strong and willing worker... and a donkey. *(GRAND VIZIER motions for SCHEHERAZADE to become the donkey. She refuses. WOMAN TWO volunteers. She steps willingly into the scene and becomes the donkey.)* The wealthy farmer happened to know the secret of understanding the language of beasts. He overheard a conversation one day between
these two humble barnyard animals. (SHOPKEEPER stands upright and places hand to ear, listening. WOMAN ONE and WOMAN TWO move DOWN STAGE LEFT. They chat together.)

WOMAN ONE: (As the ox, she addresses the donkey.) Oh, Watchful One...

GRAND VIZIER: Said the ox to the donkey.

WOMAN ONE: I hope that you are enjoying the service you are getting. Your ground is swept, they feed you sifted barley and offer you cool, fresh water to drink.

WOMAN TWO: (As the donkey, pantomimes filing her nails.) Yes, it is true.

GRAND VIZIER: Answered the fortunate donkey. (He motions to SCHEHERAZADE, indicating that in his story, she is represented by the donkey character.)

WOMAN ONE: (As the ox.) On the contrary, I am taken out to plow the fields day and night, whipped and offered beans soiled with mud. Why am I not treated with kindness, as you are?

WOMAN TWO: (As donkey.) It is because you exert and exhaust yourself to comfort others. Why don't you take a lesson from me? When they take you out in the field, kick with your hooves and butt with your head. Then when they offer you beans to eat, don't eat them. Just sniff at them and then turn away. If you do this, life will be better and kinder to you, and you will find relief.

GRAND VIZIER: All this conversation took place, Daughter, while the farmer listened and understood. On the following day... (SHOPKEEPER and others continue to pantomime story as told.) ...he took the ox, placed the yoke upon his head and worked him at the plow. The ox followed the donkey's advice and kicked his hooves and butted with his head.

WOMAN ONE: (Butts her head against SHOPKEEPER.) Ow, that hurts!

GRAND VIZIER: When the farmer offered him beans, the ox only sniffed at them and turned away.

WOMAN ONE: I deserve better.

GRAND VIZIER: So the farmer returned the ox to the stable. Instead of the ox, he placed the yoke on the head of the donkey.

WOMAN TWO: Hey, what gives? This wasn't the plan!
GRAND VIZIER: And forced him to work all day, plowing the fields until they were done.

WOMAN TWO: Who do you think you’re dealing with? Do I look like an ox?

GRAND VIZIER: That night, the donkey returned to the stable, tired and worn from plowing all day.

WOMAN TWO: (Worn out, whimpers.) I’m thinking warm blanket. I’m thinking soft hay.

GRAND VIZIER: While the ox, who had been resting and chewing cud, invoked many blessings upon the donkey when he returned.

WOMAN ONE: (Chews.) Blessings on you, Watchful One! You have done me a favor beyond description! I have been sitting in comfort all day.

WOMAN TWO: (Collapses.) Oh, what have I done? (A beat, then ALL EXIT except GRAND VIZIER and SCHEHERAZADE. MUSIC OUT.)

GRAND VIZIER: And you, my daughter, will likewise perish because of your miscalculation. Don’t expose yourself to peril. I advise you out of compassion for you.

SCHEHERAZADE: (Most sober.) Father, I must go to the king. And you must give me to him.

GRAND VIZIER: Didn’t you hear my story?

SCHEHERAZADE: Such tales do not deter me from my purpose. I could likewise tell you many more stories that would prove my point beyond doubt.

GRAND VIZIER: You are, indeed, famous for your many stories.

SCHEHERAZADE: But in the end, if you don't take me to the king, I will go to him myself. I will tell him that you have begrudged him your own daughter.

GRAND VIZIER: Must you really do this?

SCHEHERAZADE: Yes. I must.

GRAND VIZIER: (Tired and beaten.) I know you too well to deny you this request.

SCHEHERAZADE: Do you mean...

GRAND VIZIER: (Reluctant.) I mean that you will marry the king tomorrow.
SCHEHERAZADE: Thank you. I have much to do to prepare. Thank you, Father! (She EXITS DOWN LEFT.)

GRAND VIZIER: Oh, what have I done? (He EXITS RIGHT. BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene One

ACT ONE

Scene Two

SETTING: It is the next morning and we are again on the main thoroughfare of the town.

AT RISE: During the BLACKOUT, a GONG SOUNDS twice from OFF STAGE, followed by a SLOW, LOW DRUM BEAT as in the opening. The LIGHTS FADE UP to reveal SKEETER again rolling out the long white cloth that serves as the bride's fatal path. TOWNSPEOPLE ENTER RIGHT and LEFT as witnesses. Gloomy GIRLFRIENDS, minus AMBER, ENTER UP LEFT carrying garlands of white flowers to place around the BRIDE'S neck as she passes along. ALL take their positions UPSTAGE from the path. DINNY and GRAND VIZIER ENTER DOWN STAGE LEFT.

DINNY: Do you see her coming yet?

GRAND VIZIER: Not yet.

DINNY: I can't wait! My sister is marrying the king today.

GRAND VIZIER: I hope your sister has chosen wisely.

DINNY: (Cheerful.) Don't worry, Father, we have a plan.

GRAND VIZIER: Did you say "we"?

DINNY: Oh, yes! Wait till you see. We have a stupendous plan.

GRAND VIZIER: Not you, Dinny! She hasn't involved you, too?

DINNY: Of course I'm involved. In fact, you might say that the whole thing was my idea to begin with.

GRAND VIZIER: Now I really am worried. (MUSIC: Slow, minor song with a traditional Middle Eastern flavor BEGINS and CONTINUES through following procession.)

DINNY: I think she's coming any minute now. Lift me up, Father, so I can see! (CHILD with incense ENTERS UP LEFT as before followed by CHILDREN with flower petals. Behind them ENTERS
SCHEHERAZADE, face obscured with veil. MUSIC CONTINUES SOFTLY and the procession moves along until nearly all have passed. The GIRLFRIENDS are UPSTAGE. SCHEHERAZADE stops and speaks to DINNY.)

SCHEHERAZADE: Remember our plan and come to me when the moon is at its highest point tonight.

DINNY: I’ll remember. (SCHEHERAZADE EXITS RIGHT, head held high. GIRLFRIENDS gather one by one DOWN STAGE, starting with CASSANDRA and SHIMA. AMBER ENTERS UPSTAGE LEFT unobserved by others. MUSIC OUT.)

CASSANDRA: Amber has certainly changed her tune since yesterday.

YAZMINA: She seemed to be happy under that gruesome wedding veil of hers.

SHIMA: I’ve never seen a girl get over a man so quickly.

YAZMINA: I thought you said she was deeply in love with a kitchen-boy.

SHIMA: She was yesterday. She’s more fickle than I thought.

MARIAH: What are you all talking about over here?

SHIMA: About Amber’s miraculous recovery.

AMBER: Did someone mention my name? (ALL the GIRLFRIENDS register surprise and begin talking all at once.) You look surprised to see me! (Again they babble at once.)

MARIAH: Amber got a break. Someone decided she wanted to take her place.

CASSANDRA: You’re kidding me!

SHIMA: It must be somebody who has nothing else to live for.

CASSANDRA: Or is completely crazy.

YAZMINA: Or thoroughly foolish.

AMBER: Or someone who is completely and thoroughly... wonderful.

SHIMA/CASSANDRA/YAZMINA: What?

MARIAH: That was Scheherazade. She’s marrying the king today instead of Amber. She hopes to put an end to this ridiculous game the king is playing.

End of Script Sample
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

ON STAGE, ACT ONE, Scene One: Baskets of fruit, butcher shop wares, brass and wood trinkets, baked goods, clothing for sale, several large baskets (or stacked baskets) behind which a person can hide, bench.

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene One: Long white cloth, broom (SKEETER); garlands of white flowers (YAZMINA, MARIAH, AMBER, SHIMA, CASSANDRA); brass incense burner (CHILD); white flower petals (CHILDREN); scroll with pink ribbon, shopping basket, coin (LILY); coin (JORIAH); scroll with black ribbon (NEFARIO).

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Two: Long white cloth (SKEETER); garlands of white flowers (YAZMINA, MARIAH, SHIMA, CASSANDRA); brass incense burner (CHILD); flower petals (CHILDREN).

ON STAGE, ACT ONE, Scene Three: Lavish Middle Eastern style bedroom furnishings including a dressing table with chair, a small table with several cushions, a settee and/or several lounge chairs.

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Three: Hairbrush (SCHEHERAZADE); sword (KING RAYNAH).

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene One: Tote bags containing a wig and woman's attire (YAZMINA, MARIAH, AMBER, SHIMA, CASSANDRA); sword (NEFARIO).

ON STAGE, ACT TWO, Scene Two: The same as for ACT ONE, Scenes One and Two.

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Two: Tote bags (SHIMA, AMBER, MARIAH); broom (SKEETER).

ON STAGE, ACT TWO, Scene Three: The same as for ACT ONE, Scene Three and ACT TWO, Scene One with the addition of plates of food on the small table.

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Three: Tote bags containing KING'S attire (YAZMINA, MARIAH, AMBER, SHIMA, CASSANDRA); scroll with pink ribbon (HUSSAIN); kerchief wrapped around crust of bread and raisins (DINNY).

MISCELLANEous

SOUND: Gong, drum, slamming doors, wind, storm, cymbals, knock on door, heartbeat.

MUSIC: All the music should be of a traditional Middle Eastern flavor,
perhaps in minor keys. There need to be separate selections for procession times and for story times.

COSTUMES: The costumes should be colorful, satiny and/or gauzy. Think “Aladdin” or “Arabian Nights.”
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