

# ACT ONE

## Prologue : The Vizier's House

### MUSIC - OPENING

*Open stage full of beautiful drapes and dimly but prettily lit. There are many cushions around the stage which are used for many purposes throughout the play. During the single instrument underscore the stage steadily darkens and Sheherazade and Dinarzade enter. They are slowly lit. Their father the Vizier is dimly lit some way from the girls and quietly watches them. Sheherazade is telling her sister a story - as the music quietens, we hear Dinarzade gasp and laugh ...*

**Sheherazade** ... but before the genie could land the killing blow, the peasant fell to his knees and cried, "Oh, great and powerful one, please spare me. I will tell you the most wondrous story of magic and cunning the like of which you will never have heard". And the genie stayed his hand and said, "Very well you worthless wretch. Tell me the story and if it is as wonderful as you say, I will spare you. But beware. If the tale does not please me I shall remove your head with my thumb and finger". And so the peasant began his tale. *(Pause)*

**Vizier** *(Quietly and gently)* Sheherazade ... *(Sheherazade hears but Dinarzade does not).*

**Dinarzade** Oh, Sheherazade, you can't stop there. What was the peasant's story?

**Sheherazade** I'll tell you tomorrow, dearest Dinarzade, after the King's wedding. But now it's time for sleep.

**Dinarzade** *(Reluctantly)* Oh, very well. Goodnight. But I will dream of the peasant, not the silly old King. *(Sleepily)* Although the princess will be a very beautiful bride. Father says the wedding will be the greatest day the kingdom ... *(she drifts off to sleep).*

**Sheherazade** Goodnight, sweet sister. May all your dreams be happy ones.

## Scene 1: The King's Wedding

*The lights change and the underscore grows into the music for the opening song. The stage is now filled with excited people getting ready for the wedding. They bring on various drapes to decorate the ceremony. Throughout the song the Royal couple, who emerge from the Chorus, are prepared for their marriage.*

### MUSIC #1 - "THE KING'S WEDDING"

**Vizier** All subjects must prepare,  
Republicans beware,  
The whole world is aware,  
That ...

*We'll witness the greatest wedding ever seen,  
As our beloved King brings his land a brand new queen.*

**All** All subjects will prepare,  
Opponents should beware,

**Group I&II** For we are all aware ...

**Group III&IV** For we are all aware ...

**All** That ...

*We'll witness the greatest wedding ever seen,  
As our beloved King brings his land a brand new queen.*

**Women** She is beautiful and dutiful,  
Her virtue is assured

**Men** She's a pretty one, a witty one,  
The king'll ne'er be bored.

**All** The feasting lasts for days,  
Our players play their plays,

**Group I&II** The point is to amaze ...

**Group III&IV** The point is to amaze ...

**All** And thrill ...



*All those who live to say that they have seen,  
The day our noble King gave his land a brand new queen.*

*Her looks appeal, she can cook a meal,  
She is the perfect match.  
There is nothing wrong, so sing a song  
To celebrate this catch.*

Dance - the couple are united as the stage is full of colour and movement.

**Women** *She is beautiful and dutiful,  
Bright as the stars above,*

**Men** *She's a pretty one, a witty one,  
The King is so in love.*

**All** *We subjects have prepared,  
No day will be compared,*

**Group I&II** *For it has been declared ...*

**All** *That ...*

**Group III&IV** *For it has been declared ...*

*We're here to see the joys that will be seen.  
Today our noble King brings his land a brand new-queen,  
A brand new queen,  
A brand new queen!*

*The song ends on a tableau of marriage and celebration, with the Queen wearing a distinctive red veil, which fades into general movement as members of the chorus reveal the story. The events are enacted with stylised movement by the characters.*

#### MUSIC #1A - WEDDING TAG, UNDERSCORE

**Chorus** King Shahryar was the happiest of men.  
**Chorus** He was respected by his kingdom's neighbours,  
**Chorus** Feared by his enemies,  
**Chorus** And loved by all his people.  
**Chorus** His bride was a rare beauty.  
**Chorus** King Shahryar loved her very much.  
**Chorus** They were the perfect couple.

*The King and the new Queen greet their subjects. FANFARE IN MUSIC #1A.*

**Chorus** All the King's subjects rejoiced at his happiness.  
**Chorus** Wherever his beautiful new Queen went she touched the hearts of the people.  
**Chorus** King Shahryar was a just King.  
**Chorus** He worked hard to ensure his subjects were safe,  
**Chorus** Secure,  
**Chorus** Healthy,  
**Chorus** Wealthy,  
**Chorus** (Slight pause - meaningfully) And loyal.  
**Chorus** Perhaps he worked too hard. (Perhaps a brief glimpse of the Queen trying to get the working King's attention and looking a bit glum).  
**Chorus** One day, the King had to visit a distant part of the land.  
**Chorus** He almost left without saying goodbye to the Queen.  
**Chorus** At the city gate he turned back and crept into the palace.  
**Chorus** He wanted to surprise her.  
**Chorus** The Queen was not in their chamber.  
**Chorus** But through an open window King Shahryar heard a familiar voice.  
**Chorus** He stood and watched in horror. (The chorus freeze leaving a large space).  
**Queen:** (Standing alone in the garden) Masoud. Masoud. Come to me.

MUSIC #2 continues. One of the chorus is dressed by Sheherazade and they go through the same ritual as before.

**Vizier**      *She is beautiful and dutiful,  
She is the perfect wife,  
She's a pretty one, a witty one,  
She'll give the King her life.*

There is a brief silence before a roll of drums signifies another execution. Chorus women each produce a red cloth and drop it during the song to symbolise more executions. Sheherazade gathers them all up.

**Chorus**      This brutality went on every day.

**MUSIC #3 - "IT WASN'T ALWAYS LIKE THIS"**

**King**      *It wasn't always like this.  
This life full of hatred and sorrow.  
This fear of betrayal tomorrow.  
It wasn't always like this.*

*I was the happiest child.  
Each day full of playing and laughter,  
I thought I'd be blessed ever after.  
I was the happiest child.*

*I grew to be king,  
Loving and wise:  
I looked to the future,  
With rose-tinted eyes.*

*She was the one I adored.  
I'd discovered the love of my life,  
All my subjects worshipped my wife,  
She was the one I adored.*

*Loving the Queen made me blind,  
But a woman's a woman and sees;  
Waved her love away on a breeze.  
Loving the Queen made me blind.*

*No more will I love,  
Nor will I smile:  
My life now is worthless,  
My heart full of bile.*

[The music continues beneath the following ...]

**Chorus**      For one thousand days,  
**Chorus**      The King married one thousand maidens,  
**Chorus**      And removed the heads of one thousand Queens.  
**Chorus**      King Shahryar trusted no one.  
**Chorus**      He saw no one except the Vizier. *(Another scroll is signed).*  
**Chorus**      His happiness had gone.  
**Chorus**      His heart that had once been so warm was now cold ...  
**Chorus**      ... as ice.

**King**      *Now I've a heart made of steel.  
Each day a new wife comes to my bed,  
The following day, she will be dead.  
Now I've a heart made of steel.*

*Women will never gain trust.  
The flower of their love withers away,  
Now none will last for more than one day.  
Women will never gain trust.*



Women are worthless,  
Women are liars:  
They seem to be roses,  
But grow into briars.

The King exits. **MUSIC #3** continues under the following dialogue.

### Scene 3 : Sheherazade's Wedding

**Chorus** The kingdom was plunged into darkness ...  
**Chorus** ... grief ...  
**Chorus** ... and fear.  
**Chorus** The Vizier did everything he could to protect his two daughters, Sheherazade and Dinarzade, from the King.  
**Chorus** Until one day, his elder daughter made his blood freeze.

Sheherazade approaches the Vizier. **MUSIC #3** stops.

**Sheherazade** Father.  
**Vizier** (Startled) Sheherazade, most precious daughter. You must not approach me in the palace. If the King sees you he will demand to marry you. You must leave at once.  
**Sheherazade** If I leave the King will not see me. (The Vizier appears relieved that she has understood). But I want the King to see me. I want him to marry me.  
**Vizier** (Deeply shocked) My daughter, have you lost your wits? To marry the King is certain death. I have worked tirelessly to protect you and Dinarzade.  
**Sheherazade** I know, Father. But by marrying the King, I believe I can stop the killing.  
**Vizier** (Becoming angry) Do you not think I haven't tried to stop the murderous tyrant? Is there anyone with more ability to persuade him than me? (Sheherazade tries to speak) No. I will hear no more. Now obey your father and return home.  
**Sheherazade** Yes, my lord. (She moves away).  
**Chorus** For seven days Sheherazade begged to marry the King.  
**Chorus** For seven days the Vizier refused to listen.  
**Sheherazade** (Determined) Father, since I asked you to allow me to marry the King, seven more wives have been executed. If you continue to deny me, the blood of this nation's maidens will be as much on your hands as on those of the King.  
**Vizier** But you are my daughter. I cannot bear to let the King kill you.  
**Sheherazade** I promise you, if my plan works he will not kill me. Nor will any other young woman be put to death.  
**Vizier** (After a long and agonised pause) Sheherazade. I will arrange for your marriage to the King. But hear me when I say: if your plan fails not only will you die but so will all the joy left in my heart.

### **MUSIC #4 - "ARABIAN NIGHTS"**

Exit Vizier. Sheherazade is prepared for the marriage. Eventually the chorus backs away and she is left alone with Dinarzade.

**Dinarzade** Oh, Sheherazade. This should be the happiest day for our family but it is the saddest. I will miss you so much. Never will I hear your laughing, your singing and your stories.  
**Sheherazade** Dinarzade, beloved little sister. I think you will hear many more of my stories.  
**Dinarzade** But...

**Sheherazade** Hush, hush, little one, no need for a tear  
So now dry your eyes and have no more fear.  
The stories I tell you will find a new ear,  
To marvel at them for many a year.  
  
Tales of adventure and magic and wonder,  
With heroes and villains and thieves who would plunder,  
Fables with sandstorms and lightning and thunder,  
Mysterious genies who tear skies asunder.



- Chief Thief** Silence you dogs. *(They fall silent)*. This is the cliff. Stand back. Open Sesame! *(The side of the cliff opens, MUSIC #5D starts, and the thieves go through into the cave)*. Leave the booty with all the rest and get out. *(They dump their goodies and go back through with the Chief last. He turns back to the cliff)*. Close Sesame! *(The side of the cliff slides back into place. MUSIC #5D stops)*. Right then you dogs. Who are we?
- Thieves:** We are the Feared and Famous Forty Thieves *(Lots of big baddie laughs)*.
- Chief Thief** *(Picking a dim one)* How many are we?
- Dim Thief** *(Making calculating noises all involving the number '40'; the other thieves start to become bored and restless)* Um ... I think I've got it this time ... Is it forty? *(The other thieves roar with approving laughter)*.
- Chief Thief** *(Picking a little one)* And what are we?
- Little Thief** Errm ... Thieves? *(The others laugh hugely at this schoolboy error)*.
- Chief Thief** Tell him lads!
- Thieves** *(They surround Little Thief)* We are the maddest, baddest, most murderous marauders in all Arabia and we're evil.
- Chief Thief** And what makes us happiest?
- Thieves** Robbing people.
- Chief Thief** *(To the smallest of all the thieves)* And...?
- Tiny Thief** Giving them a good slapping! *(He slaps the Chief Thief who staggers around the stage. Tiny Thief is terrified, but then Chief Thief laughs and they all roar with laughter as the music starts)*.

#### MUSIC #6 - "WE'RE THIEVES"

**Chief Thief** We're thieves, we're thieves,  
And proud of being criminal  
There's nothing we won't nick  
And our success is quite... phenomenal  
We rob, we cheat,  
And we've been known to kill 'n' all.  
We can't explain the reason why,  
We think it's just subliminal.

**All Thieves** Thieving is our livelihood,  
Thieving is our pleasure,  
No defence is any good  
To keep us from your treasure!  
So if you value what you've got,  
You'd better have a care,  
Or we'll sneak in and take the lot,  
And leave your cupboards bare!

**Chief Thief** My dad, the cad,  
An ugly brute, and warty,  
Taught me all he knew about  
The arts of being naughty.  
Now I'm the boss,  
I rule this gang of forty  
And woe betide the thief that dares  
To call his master 'Shorty'.

**All Thieves** Thieving is our livelihood,  
Thieving is our pleasure,  
No defence is any good  
To keep us from your treasure!  
So if you value what you've got,  
You'd better have a care,  
Or we'll sneak in and take the lot,  
And leave your cupboards bare!



*We're thieves, we're thieves,  
For us this life is splendid  
We've got a cave where we can leave  
Our booty unattended,*

**Small Group** *Our password means  
The loot is well defended,  
For strangers getting in the cave,  
A quick death is commended*

**All Thieves** *Thieving is our livelihood,  
Thieving is our pleasure,  
No defence is any good  
To keep us from your treasure!  
So if you value what you've got,  
You'd better have a care,  
Or we'll sneak in and take the lot,  
And leave your cupboards bare!*

*We're thieves, we're thieves,  
Our brains are all unstable,  
We'll raid your house and steal the food  
You've left upon the table.*

**Small Group** *(Poshly) Your gold, your cash  
Your coats of fur and sable,  
Our deeds are so notorious  
One ought to write a fable.*

**All Thieves** *Thieving is our livelihood,  
Thieving is our pleasure,  
No defence is any good  
To keep us from your treasure!  
So if you value what you've got,  
You'd better have a care,  
Or we'll sneak in and take the lot,  
And leave your cupboards bare!  
Yes we'll sneak in and take the lot,  
And leave your cupboards bare!  
Ha!!!*

**Chief Thief** Right then my little brood of bad eggs, let's get out of here. We've got work to do! *(They start to leave and the Chief watches them go off. Tiny Thief is the last to go).*

**Tiny Thief:** So much to steal, so little time, eh Chief?

**Chief Thief** *(Clipping him round the ear) Shaddup! (They exit).*

**Ali Baba** *(Carefully coming out of his hiding place, the donkey also returns) Can I believe what I have seen? Should I tell the city guard about all this stolen treasure? (The donkey gives a derisive snort). No, you're quite right. This could be the end of my days of labouring. Now, how does this cave open? Ah, yes. Open Sesame! (MUSIC #6A starts. The cave opens, Ali Baba nervously walks in). Allah be praised for showing me such wonders. I shall never cut wood again. But I shall not be greedy, I will just take enough for my family to live in comfort. (He loads a couple of bags onto his donkey then turns back to the cave). Close Sesame. (The cave closes. MUSIC #6A stops). Right let's get home. (He and the donkey move away).*

**Sheherazade** Ali Baba raced home to share his good fortune with his wife. She was astonished to see him.

**Raiyah** *(As Ali Baba approaches) Ali Baba, what are you doing back here? You said you'd be gone for days. And why haven't you got any wood? How are we supposed to live without any firewood to sell?*

**Ali Baba** Have you finished oh, beloved?

**Raiyah** Don't you "beloved" me. I've got barely enough grain to last the week. What am I supposed to do to feed us? Well?

**Ali Baba** *(Takes out a gold coin and flicks it to her) Here, use this.*