

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 ...*

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

All *That ...*

*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 #1B - BETRAYAL AND EXECUTION, UNDERSCORE

One of the chorus becomes Masoud.

Chorus A slave crept through the bushes and stood before the Queen.
Chorus Instead of bowing his head ... *(The Queen and Masoud gaze into each other's eyes).*
Chorus He took her in his arms.
Chorus The King cried out, his voice full of sorrow and anger.
King Vizier! Vizier! *(The Vizier runs forward, bowing).* Arrest my wife and her lover. They will be executed in the morning.

The Vizier bows. He and chorus members arrest the Queen and Masoud and take them off. During the following, the chorus slowly turn to face the back of the stage - the King remains facing front.

Chorus The following morning, King Shahryar turned his back on his wife's pleas.

The Queen sobs and tries to catch his eye as she is dragged away.

Chorus He had no mercy. *(Pause).*
Queen: *(Off stage)* Masoud!

A roll of drums ... then silence. The Queen's veil is presented to the King by the Executioner. Everyone but the King bows their head. The stage slowly comes back to life and Sheherazade quietly picks up the red veil.

Scene 2 : Many Weddings

Chorus For months the King stayed alone in his palace.
Chorus Only the Vizier was allowed to see him.

The King signs a scroll - he seems not to care what was on it. The Vizier backs away.

Chorus King Shahryar trusted no one.
Chorus But he was lonely.
Chorus He decided to marry again.
Chorus King Shahryar trusted no one.
Chorus A new wife was chosen.

MUSIC #2 - "THE KING'S WEDDING", REPRISE #1

As the underscore starts, one of the chorus becomes the new wife. Sheherazade prepares her with the dead Queen's veil. The new Queen walks forward with The Vizier to be presented to the King)

Chorus King Shahryar trusted no one.
Chorus This wedding was different.
Chorus There was no celebration.
Chorus No rejoicing.
Chorus For the King announced:
King I can never again trust a woman. Therefore I shall marry a different maiden every day. And each morning she will be taken from my bed chamber and executed.

The new Queen bows and allows the King to take her hands. He lifts the veil from her face. She is gently led off by the Swordsman.

All 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.

After the chorus, there is a brief silence before a roll of drums signifies the execution. After each execution, the Queen's veil is dropped at the King's feet. At an appropriate moment, Sheherazade picks it up.

Chorus And every day
Chorus A new wife was chosen

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.

Dinarzade Nobody tells stories like you.
You tell them and they come alive.
Without you they will never survive.
Sheherazade, what can we do?
What can we do?

Sheherazade Have faith and the future is bright.
The King is only a man,
If all goes according to plan,
The tales will be told every night!

Legends of beasts with ten legs and four tails,
And giants and monsters and twenty foot snails,
Of urchins and sailors who never need sails.
The magic of stories and myths never fails.

Both 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.

Sheherazade By closing your eyes, you'll picture such sights:
Black darkness below, above blinding lights;
You'll be the great hero that wins all the fights.
See everything in the Arabian Nights.

Both: See everything in the Arabian Nights.

After the song, the chorus and The Vizier move into familiar wedding positions while Sheherazade and Dinarzade remain apart from the rest,

MUSIC #5 - "THE KING'S WEDDING", REPRISE #2

As the music starts, Dinarzade is assisting her sister with the red veil.

Dinarzade Sheherazade, what is your plan? How can you avoid the executioner?

Sheherazade Little sister, you must listen and do exactly as I tell you. (As she speaks, the King enters and waits for his next wife. Sheherazade whispers to Dinarzade who nods seriously and fearfully. The Vizier steps forward). I am ready father.

All 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.

Group I-III She'll give the King her life.

Group I- II She'll give the King her life.

Group I She'll give the King her life.

All Her life.

Group IV Her life.

Group III-IV Her life.

Group II-IV Her life.

Sheherazade is brought to the King who removes her veil.

King Vizier, your daughter is a beauty. I do not wonder that you have kept her from me. (The Vizier bows and hides his face). No matter. Come Sheherazade, say farewell to your family.

Sheherazade (Embracing her father) Wish me joy and long life, Father.

Vizier Oh, Sheherazade, if only I ...

Sheherazade (Embracing Dinarzade) Dinarzade. (A meaningful look). I will see you in the morning.

Dinarzade (Tearfully uncertain) Yes, Sheherazade.

The King takes Sheherazade away, the rest of the cast exit slowly.

MUSIC #5A - PROCESSION OF THE BED

When the stage is empty, the royal bed is brought on by four chorus members followed by the King and Sheherazade. The bed is placed, the four chorus members bow to the royal couple and exit. Sheherazade returns the bow, the King remains