

# Scheherazade

**T**HE CHRONICLES of the Sassanians, ancient Kings of Persia, tell us that there was formerly a King of that powerful family who was regarded as the most excellent prince of his time. He was as much beloved by his subjects for his wisdom and prudence as he was dreaded by his neighbors on account of his valor and well-disciplined troops. He had two sons: the elder, Shahriar, the worthy heir of his father, and endowed with all his virtues; the younger, Shahzenan, a prince of equal merit.

After a long and glorious reign, this King died; and Shahriar mounted the throne. Shahzenan, being excluded from all share in the government by the laws of the empire, was so far from envying the happiness of his brother that he made it his whole business to please him, and in this succeeded without much difficulty. Shahriar, who had naturally a great affection for the prince his brother, gave him the Kingdom of Great Tartary. Shahzenan went immediately and took possession of it, and fixed the seat of his government at Samarcand, the metropolis of the country. After they had been separated ten

years, Shahriar, being very desirous of seeing his brother, resolved to send his Vizier to invite him to his court. When he came near the city, Shahzenan was informed of his approach, and went to meet him, attended by the principal lords of his court, who, to show the greater honor to the Sultan's minister, appeared in magnificent apparel.

The King of Tartary received the ambassador with the greatest demonstrations of joy, and immediately asked him concerning the welfare of the Sultan his brother. The Vizier, having acquainted him that he was in health, informed him of the purpose of his embassy. Shahzenan was much affected, and answered, "Sage Vizier, the Sultan my brother does me too much honor; nothing could be more agreeable to me, for I as ardently long to see him as he does to see me. My kingdom is at peace, and I want no more than ten days to get myself ready to return with you. There is, therefore, no necessity for your entering the city for so short a period. I pray you to pitch your tents here, and I will order everything necessary to be provided for yourself and your attendants."

The Vizier readily complied; and Shahzenan, having made his preparations, at the end of ten days took leave of the Queen his wife, and went out of town in the evening with his retinue. He pitched his royal pavilion near the Vizier's tent and conversed with him till midnight. Wishing once more to see the Queen, whom he ardently loved, he returned alone to his palace, when, to his inexpressible grief, he found her trafficking with his enemies for his betrayal. Before the conspirators were aware of his presence, the King, urged by his just resentment, drew his scimitar and slew them, and then pitched their bodies into the fosse which surrounded the palace.

Having thus avenged himself, he returned to his pavilion without saying one word of what had happened, gave orders that the tents should be struck, and before day began his march, with kettledrums and other instruments of music, that filled everyone with joy, excepting the King. He was so much afflicted by the disloyalty of his wife that he was seized with extreme melancholy, which preyed upon his spirits during the whole of his journey.

When he drew near the capital of Persia, the Sultan Shahriar and all his court came out to meet him. The princes were overjoyed to see one another, and having alighted, after mutual embraces and other marks of affection and respect, remounted, and entered the city, amidst the acclamations of the people. The Sultan conducted his brother to the palace provided for him, which had a communication with his own by a garden. It was so much the more magnificent because it was set apart as a banqueting house for public entertainments, and other diversions of the court.

Shahriar immediately left the King of Tartary, that he might give him time to bathe, and to change his apparel. As soon as his guest had completed his toilet, he returned to him again, and they sat down together on a sofa or alcove, and the two princes entertained one another suitably to their friendship and their long separation. The time of supper being come, they ate together, after which they renewed their conversation, till Shahriar, perceiving that it was very late, left his brother to repose.

The unfortunate Shahzenan retired to bed. Although the conversation of his brother had suspended his grief for some time, it now returned again with increased violence. Far into the night, instead of taking his necessary rest, he



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tormented himself with the bitterest reflections. All the circumstances of his wife's treachery presented themselves afresh to his imagination, in so lively a manner that he was like one distracted. Not being able to sleep, he arose, and abandoned himself to the afflicting thoughts, which made such an impression upon his countenance it was impossible for the Sultan not to observe. Shahriar, distressed by the melancholy of his brother, endeavored to divert him every day by new objects of pleasure, and the most splendid entertainments. But these, instead of affording him ease, only increased his sorrow.

One day, Shahriar having appointed a great hunting match, about two days' journey from his capital, in a place that abounded with deer, Shahzenan besought him to excuse his attendance, for his health would not allow him to bear him company. The Sultan, unwilling to put any constraint upon him, left him at his liberty, and went a-hunting with his nobles.



The King of Tartary, being thus left alone, shut himself up in his apartment, and sat down at a window that looked into the garden. In this place, where he could see and not be seen, he soon became a witness of a circumstance which attracted the whole of his attention. A secret gate of the Sultan's palace suddenly opened, and there came out of it several persons, in the midst of whom walked the Sultana, who was



easily distinguished from the rest by her majestic air. This princess, thinking that the King of Tartary was gone a-hunting with his brother the Sultan, came with her retinue near the windows of his apartment, and the prince heard her hold treasonable conversation with some of her companions.

The baseness of his brother's wife filled the King of Tartary with a multitude of reflections. "How little reason had I," said he, "to think that none was so unfortunate as myself? It is surely the unavoidable fate of all in power and high position to have their honor and estate conspired against. Such being the case, what a fool am I to kill myself with grief! I am resolved that the remembrance of a misfortune so common shall never more disturb my peace."

From that moment he forbore afflicting himself. He called for his supper, ate with a better appetite than he had done since his leaving Samarcand, and listened with some degree of pleasure to the concert of vocal and instrumental music that was appointed to entertain him while at table.

He continued after this to be very cheerful. And when he was informed that the Sultan was returning, went to meet him, and paid him his compliments with great gaiety.

Shahriar, who expected to have found his brother in the same state as he had left him, was overjoyed to see him so cheerful.

"Dear brother," said he, "I return thanks to Heaven for the happy change it has wrought in you during my absence. Pray do me the favor to tell me why you were so melancholy, and wherefore you are no longer so."

The King of Tartary continued for some time as if he had been meditating and contriving what he should an-

swer, but at last replied, "You are my Sultan and master. But excuse me, I beseech you, from answering your question."

"No, dear brother," said the Sultan, "you must answer me; I will take no denial."

Shahzenan, not being able to withstand these pressing entreaties, replied, "Well then, brother, I will satisfy you, since you command me." And having told him the story of the Queen of Samarcand's treachery, "This," said he, "was the cause of my grief. Judge whether I had not sufficient reason for my depression."

"Oh! my brother," said the Sultan, "what a horrible event do you tell me! I commend you for punishing the traitors to your state and person. None can blame you for what you have done. It was just; and, for my part, had the case been mine, I should scarcely have been so moderate. I now cease to wonder at your melancholy. The cause was too afflicting and too mortifying not to overwhelm you. O Heaven! what a strange adventure! But I must bless God, who has comforted you. And since I doubt not but your consolation is well grounded, be so good as to inform me what it is, and conceal nothing from me."

Shahzenan was not so easily prevailed upon in this point as he had been in the other, on his brother's account. But being obliged to yield to his pressing insistence he related to his brother the conversation he had overheard. After having heard these things, he continued, "I believed all women to be naturally treacherous. Being of this opinion, it seemed to me to be in men an unaccountable weakness to place any confidence in their fidelity. This reflection brought on many others; and, in short, I thought the best thing I could do was to make myself easy on my own ac-

count, and warn you to anticipate the Sultana in her designs upon you."

On hearing the dreadful tidings which his brother imparted to him, the Sultan fell into an incontrollable rage, and instantly gave instructions for the execution of the Sultana and her fellow conspirators.

After this rigorous measure, being persuaded that no woman was to be trusted, he resolved, in order to prevent the disloyalty of such as he should afterward marry, to wed one every day, and have her strangled next morning. Having imposed this cruel law upon himself, he swore that he would put it in force immediately after the departure of the King of Tartary, who shortly took leave of him, and, being laden with magnificent presents, set forward on his journey.

Shahzenan having departed, Shahriar informed his Grand Vizier of his vow, and ordered him to provide him with a new wife every day. Whatever reluctance the Vizier might feel to put such orders in execution, as he owed blind obedience to the Sultan his master, he was forced to submit. And thus, every day, was a maid married and a wife murdered.

The rumor of this unparalleled barbarity occasioned a general consternation in the city, where there was nothing but crying and lamentation. Here, a father in tears, and inconsolable for the loss of his daughter; and there, tender mothers dreading lest their daughters should share the same fate, filled the air with cries of distress and apprehension. So that, instead of the commendations and blessings which the Sultan had hitherto received from his subjects, their mouths were now filled with imprecations.

The Grand Vizier, who, as has already been observed,



was the unwilling executioner of this horrid course of injustice, had two daughters, the elder called Scheherazade, and the younger Dinarzade. The latter was highly accomplished; but the former possessed courage, wit, and penetration infinitely above her sex. She had read much, and had so admirable a memory that she never forgot anything she had read. She had successfully applied herself to philosophy, medicine, history, and the liberal arts; and her poetry excelled the compositions of the best writers of her time. Besides this, she was of perfect beauty, and all her accomplishments were crowned by surpassing virtue.

The Vizier passionately loved this daughter, so worthy of his affection. One day, as they were conversing together, she said to him, "Father, I have one favor to beg of you, and most humbly pray you to grant it."

"I will not refuse," answered he, "provided it be just and reasonable."

"For the justice of it," resumed she, "there can be no question, and you may judge of this by the motive which obliges me to make the request. I wish to stop that barbarity which the Sultan exercises upon the families of this city. I would dispel those painful apprehensions which so many mothers feel of losing their daughters in such a fatal manner."

"Your design, daughter," replied the Vizier, "is very commendable; but the evil you would remedy seems to me incurable. How do you propose to effect your purpose?"

"Father," said Scheherazade, "since by your means the Sultan makes every day a new marriage, I conjure you, by the tender affection you bear me, to procure me the honor of his hand." The Vizier could not hear this without horror.



"O Heaven!" he replied in a passion, "have you lost your senses, daughter, that you make such a dangerous request? You know the Sultan's vow; would you, then, have me propose you to him? Consider well to what your indiscreet zeal will expose you."

"Yes, dear father," replied the virtuous daughter, "I know the risk I run; but that does not alarm me. If I perish, my death will be glorious. And if I succeed, I shall do my country an important service."

"No, no," said the Vizier, "whatever you may offer to induce me to let you throw yourself into such imminent

danger, do not imagine that I will ever consent. When the Sultan shall command me to strike my poniard into your heart, alas! I must obey. And what an employment will that be for a father! Ah! if you do not dread death, at least cherish some fears of afflicting me with the mortal grief of imbruing my hands in your blood."

"Once more, father," replied Scheherazade, "grant me the favor I solicit."

"Your stubbornness," resumed the Vizier, "will rouse my anger. Why will you run headlong to your ruin? They who do not foresee the end of a dangerous enterprise can never conduct it to a happy issue."

"Father," replied Scheherazade, "I wish you would not take it so ill that I persist in my opinion. Besides, pardon me for declaring that your opposition is vain; for if your paternal affection should hinder you from granting my request, I will go and offer myself to the Sultan."

In short, the father, being overcome by the resolution of his daughter, yielded to her importunity, and though he was much grieved that he could not divert her from so fatal a resolution, he went instantly to acquaint the Sultan that next night he would bring him Scheherazade.

The Sultan was much surprised at the sacrifice which the Grand Vizier proposed to make. "How could you," said he, "resolve to bring me your own daughter?"

"Sire," answered the Vizier, "it is her own offer. The sad destiny that awaits her could not intimidate her. She prefers the honor of being your Majesty's wife for one night, to her life."

"But do not act under a mistake, Vizier," said the Sultan. "Tomorrow, when I place Scheherazade in your hands,



I expect you will put her to death. And if you fail, I swear that your own life shall answer."

"Sire," rejoined the Vizier, "though I am her father, I will answer for the fidelity of my hand to obey your order."

When the Grand Vizier returned to Scheherazade, she thanked her father for having obliged her. And perceiving that he was overwhelmed with grief, told him that she hoped he would never repent of having married her to the Sultan; and that, on the contrary, he should have reason to rejoice at his compliance all his days.

Her business now was to adorn herself to appear before the Sultan. But before she went, she took her sister Dinarzade apart, and said to her, "My dear sister, I have need of your assistance in a matter of great importance, and must pray you not to deny it me. My father is going to conduct me to the Sultan. Do not let this alarm you, but hear me with patience. As soon as I am in his presence, I will pray him to allow you to come early on the morrow, that I may enjoy your company for an hour or two ere I bid you farewell and go to my death. If I obtain that favor, as I hope to do, remember, shortly after your arrival, to address me in these or some such words: 'My sister, I pray

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you that, ere I leave you, which must be very shortly, you will relate to me one of the entertaining stories of which you have recounted so many.' I will immediately tell you one; and I hope by this means to deliver the city from the consternation it is under at present." Dinarzade answered that she would with pleasure act as she required her.

The Grand Vizier conducted Scheherazade to the palace, and retired, after having introduced her into the Sultan's apartment. As soon as the Sultan was left alone with her, he ordered her to uncover her face. He found her so beautiful that he was perfectly charmed; but, perceiving her to be in tears, demanded the reason.

"Sire," answered Scheherazade, "I have a sister who loves me tenderly, and I could wish that she might be allowed to come early on the morrow to this chamber, that I might see her, and once more bid her adieu. Will you be pleased to allow me the consolation of giving her this last testimony of my affection?"

Shahriar having consented, Dinarzade came an hour before dawn on the next day, and failed not to do as her sister had ordered. "My dear sister," cried she, "ere I leave you, which will be very shortly, I pray you to tell me one of those pleasant stories you have read. Alas! this will be the last time that I shall enjoy that pleasure."

Scheherazade, instead of answering her sister, addressed herself to the Sultan: "Sire, will your Majesty be pleased to allow me to afford my sister this satisfaction?"

"With all my heart," replied the Sultan. Scheherazade then bade her sister attend, and afterward addressing herself to Shahriar, proceeded as follows: