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Dramatic Publishing

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

the arabian nights

Adapted from
THE ENTERTAINMENT OF A THOUSAND
AND ONE NIGHTS

BY
LOWELL SWORTZELL



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE ARABIAN NIGHTS)

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THE ARABIAN NIGHTS is dedicated to Matilda Young,
in appreciation of her decades of service to the artistic and
educational needs of the children of Washington, D.C.

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS was first produced by The Children's Theatre Institute of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with the following cast:

The University of Wisconsin presents
The Children's Theatre Institute in

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS
a new play for young people adapted from THE ENTERTAINMENT OF A THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

By Lowell Swortzell

Directed by Nancy Swortzell and John Baumhardt
Setting designed by Alfred Kohout
Costumes designed by Richard Odle
Lighting by Douglas Taylor

CAST

The Royal Vizier *Scott Caywood*
Scheherazade *Marilyn Holewinski*
Dinarzade *Nancy Miller*
The Royal Sultan *Stephen Sundberg*
Members of the Court *Nina Beck, Alicia Diehl, Robin Wasow,
Deborah Milan, Karen Jakobson*

THE STORY OF THE SPEAKING BIRD

The Eldest Sister	<i>Kimberly Eaton</i>
The Middle Sister	<i>Catherine Slautterback</i>
The Youngest Sister	<i>Midori Snyder</i>
The Sultan of Persia.	<i>Pat McGilligan</i>
The Vizier	<i>Eric Plaut</i>
The Cook.	<i>Ann Granger</i>
The Baker	<i>Joann Humleker</i>
The Stream	<i>Jenny Sternbach, Miriam Plaut, Mary Lansing</i>
The Gardener's Wife.	<i>Betsey Fleming</i>
The Princess.	<i>Ann Jefferds</i>
Prince Bahman	<i>Scott Atkin</i>
Prince Perviz.	<i>Jeffrey Wilson</i>
First Old Lady	<i>Nancy Quarton</i>
Second Old Lady.	<i>Mary Jo Van Susteren</i>
First Stone.	<i>Micah Beck</i>
Second Stone	<i>Marla Browning</i>
Third Stone	<i>Jennifer Loyster</i>
Fourth Stone	<i>April Bennett</i>
The Speaking Bird	<i>Lauri Staton</i>

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS
A One-Act Play
For Eight Men, Nine Women. Extras
Smaller With Doubling

CHARACTERS

THE ROYAL VIZIER *father of Scheherazade*
SCHEHERAZADE *daughter of Vizier, teller of tale*
DINARZADE *younger sister of Scheherazade*
THE ROYAL SULTAN *leader of Persian people*
MEMBERS OF THE COURT

Cast of "The Story of the Speaking Bird"

The Eldest Sister	The Gardener's Wife
The Middle Sister	The Princess
The Youngest Sister	Prince Bahman
The Sultan of Persia	Prince Perviz
The Vizier	First Old Lady
The Cook	Second Old Lady
The Baker	Four Stones
The Stream, a chorus	The Speaking Bird
Birds of the World, a chorus (optional)	
Attendants of the Sultan of Persia (optional)	

PLACE: *Persia. The Palace of the Royal Sultan.*

TIME: *Many, many years ago.*

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

We see silhouetted against a dark blue sky, the outline of the throne room of a royal palace in Persia.

It is very early morning, just before sunrise. Doorways, arches, hanging tapestries, and canopies may be seen, but only dimly. The silence is broken by the sound of a man crying in the distance.

Then the ROYAL VIZIER runs in, sobbing. He falls down on the steps of the throne and continues to weep. Next, the silhouetted figures of two girls appear, tiptoeing cautiously. They slip into the room but remain in the shadows of the doorways.

After a moment, during which the ROYAL VIZIER's sobs grow louder, the older girl speaks.

SCHEHERAZADE

(Still out of sight and whispering)

Father, is that you?

ROYAL VIZIER

(Sitting up and listening)

Who is there?

SCHEHERAZADE

Scheherazade.

DINARZADE

And Dinarzade.

ROYAL VIZIER

(Through his tears)

Precious Daughters, I cannot talk to you now.

SCHEHERAZADE

Why, Father?

ROYAL VIZIER

I am ashamed for you to see your father crying like a baby.

DINARZADE

(Rushing to him)

What is the matter?

SCHEHERAZADE

(Comforting him)

Let us help you.

ROYAL VIZIER

(Putting his arms around their shoulders)

My dear, dear daughters. Why are you up before the sun?

DINARZADE

We cannot sleep.

SCHEHERAZADE

Every morning at this time we are awakened by your crying.

ROYAL VIZIER

I hoped you did not hear me.

DINARZADE

What causes your tears?

ROYAL VIZIER

(Kindly)

I cannot tell you.

SCHEHERAZADE

We must know.

ROYAL VIZIER

We are all frightened; the court, the city, the country.

SCHEHERAZADE

If we know the cause, perhaps we can stop it.

ROYAL VIZIER

No one can stop it. It is the Sultan's Law. He is a cruel man.

SHCEHERAZADE

Father, you must not say that.

ROYAL VIZIER

I will be punished if anyone hears me. Yet I speak the truth, It is the Sultan who sends me to the ground weeping as you found me now.

SCHEHERAZADE

Why?

ROYAL VIZIER

Because, many months ago, his wife angered him.

DINARZADE

What did she do?

ROYAL VIZIER

She ran away. And ever since the Sultan has sought revenge.

SCHEHERAZADE

How?

ROYAL VIZIER

You are too young to know.

SCHEHERAZADE

But if we do, we can prevent it.

ROYAL VIZIER

That is unlikely, my child. Nothing can be done.

SCHEHERAZADE

I can think of something. Tell us, Father.

ROYAL VIZIER

You will find out in any case. It is better that you hear the words from me.

SCHEHERAZADE

Thank you!

ROYAL VIZIER

When the Sultan's wife ran away, he became a madman.

DINARZADE

Whisper, Father.

ROYAL VIZIER

He decided that no wife would ever cause him pain again.

SCHEHERAZADE

How can he be certain?

ROYAL VIZIER

Only one way. He marries a new wife every day.

SCHEHERAZADE

And every morning?

ROYAL VIZIER

She is gone. Disappeared. No one ever sees her again.

SCHEHERAZADE

Oh, no!

DINARZADE

The poor creatures!

ROYAL VIZIER

Each lady in the Kingdom is terrified that she will be the next wife...and the next day will be her last.

SCHEHERAZADE

Has he spared no one?

ROYAL VIZIER

(Almost crying again)

Each wife is doomed.

DINARZADE

Now I understand your tears, Father. And I cry with you.

SCHEHERAZADE

(Rising)

No, do not cry, sister. That will not put an end to his villainy.

ROYAL VIZIER

There will be no end until he has married and murdered every maiden in the kingdom.

SCHEHERAZADE

Father, how does he select his wives?

ROYAL VIZIER

Each morning one is brought to him here and they are married.

SCHEHERAZADE

Who brings them?

ROYAL VIZER

It is my horrible duty.

SCHEHERAZADE

(With determination)

Father, this morning you shall bring me.

DINARZADE

(Shocked)

What?

SCHEHERAZADE

I shall marry the Sultan today.

ROYAL VIZER

Scheherazade, you do not realize what you say.

SCHEHERAZADE

Yes, I do. Someone must stop him.

ROYAL VIZIER

But not you, my daughter.

SCHEHERAZADE

I must try, Father. Otherwise, we will all disappear, one by one.

DINARZADE

Oh, no!
(She gasps)

ROYAL VIZIER

Quiet, Dinarzade, someone will hear us.

DINARZADE

Father, don't let her do it.
(She pulls at her FATHER's cloak, desperately pleading)
Don't let her, please.

SCHEHERAZADE

Stop crying, sister. I need your help. You must be calm.

DINARZADE

What can I do?

SCHEHERAZADE

After we are married, you must come to the Sultan and ask one favor.

DINARZADE

I shall be too terrified to speak.

SCHEHERAZADE

(Shaking her)
You must find your voice if we are to stop the Sultan's madness.

DINARZADE

What should I request?

SCHEHERAZADE

Only this. Say that is has long been my custom to tell you a story every day.

DINARZADE

That is true.

SCHEHERAZADE

Ask permission for one more story. If he grants your wish, I will do the rest.

DINARZADE

But suppose he says no.

SCHEHERAZADE

We must risk that.

ROYAL VIZIER

Oh, Scheherazade, don't do this.

DINARZADE

(Looking off)

I hear voices. The Sultan approaches with his court.

(She trembles)

SCHEHERAZADE

Remember, Sister, be calm.

ROYAL VIZIER

Scheherazade, wait one more day, please.

SCHEHERAZADE

No. Each day takes one more life. Here he comes. Father, Sister, I depend on you.

DINARZADE

I will do what you say.

ROYAL VIZIER

May Allah bless you, Scheherazade.

(He takes her hand and kisses it)

(With a fanfare, the Royal Procession enters. Quickly, the great throne room comes to life, filled with color and light. MEMBERS OF THE COURT, including the VIZIER and his daughters, bow low as the SULTAN passes. THE SULTAN wears magnificent raiment and a turban bedecked with pearls. He does not appear to be as cruel as one might expect, yet, his face is sad and eyes are wide and hollow. He never smiles.

When the SULTAN takes his place on the throne, MEMBERS OF THE COURT seat themselves on benches, steps, and at the foot of the throne.

Everyone waits quietly for the SULTAN to speak but he seems to be lost in deep thought as he sits staring into space. Slowly, MEMBERS OF THE COURT look at each other and wonder what they should do. They even begin to whisper. Still, the SULTAN does not stir or change his vacant glance.

Finally, the VIZIER steps forth, kneels, and clears his throat loudly. The SULTAN does not notice him. The VIZIER summons his courage and speaks)

ROYAL VIZIER

Your majesty?

(There is no answer)

Your Majesty, may I speak?

SULTAN

(His head begins to move and he now gazes at the
VIZIER)

How dare you disturb my melancholy?

ROYAL VIZIER

I am sorry, Sire. I wonder only about your health and happiness.

SULTAN

I have outlawed happiness in this kingdom. Don't you know that, Grand Vizier?

VIZIER

If your Highness could find but a few moments of happiness, perhaps you could restore it to our people.

SULTAN

Only one thing makes me happy...

VIZIER

(Pleading)

Surely, you will stop this treachery!

SULTAN

No.

VIZIER

Surely, you will spare our maidens!

SULTAN

(Shouting)

Never!

VIZIER

You must, Your Highness, you must!

(Sobbing, he grovels at the SULTAN's feet)

SULTAN

Vizier, your begging is useless.

VIZIER

Once this was a happy country and you were a ruler loved by everyone.

SULTAN

Everyone except my wife. You forget that, but I do not.

(Suddenly, SCHEHERAZADE runs forth and kneels before the SULTAN)

SULTAN

Who is this?

SCHEHERAZADE

My name is Scheherazade. I am your wife today.

(The COURT reacts in amazement and shock)

SULTAN

Scheherazade? Vizier, is this not your daughter?

VIZIER

Yes, Sire.

SULTAN

Why have you chosen her?

VIZIER

I...I...I...

(He doesn't know what to say)

SULTAN

Speak, or I will have you whipped!

SCHEHERAZADE

Because I have asked to be your wife, Sire.

THE COURT

(Astonished)

What? Can it be? Such a pity! How sad!

SULTAN

Do you know what fate awaits you in the morning?

SCHEHERAZADE

I know.

(Again, the COURT voices its surprise)

SULTAN

And still you wish to marry me?

SCHEHERAZADE

I can think of no greater honor than to be your wife even for so short a time.

SULTAN

Vizier, will you grant your daughter's wish?