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A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity of scripts.

Family Plays

Tales From the Arabian Nights

A stylized illustration of a woman with long, light blue hair, wearing a purple headscarf and a blue and purple dress. She is sitting on a red-bordered rug with intricate geometric patterns. In the background, there is a yellow and orange castle with blue domes and a red conical roof. The overall style is reminiscent of traditional Middle Eastern art.

Book and Lyrics by
MICHAEL BIGELOW DIXON

Music by
JAN COLE

Tales From the Arabian Nights

“A delightful play ... dramatically sound and theatrically exciting ... appropriate for all age levels ... a swift pace ... If a production budget were low, this play could be reduced to its theatrical essentials and still play very well. If the sky were the limit, this play could be a director’s or set designer’s delight.” (CTAA Distinguished Play Award judge’s commentary)

“We placed second in our region which was quite a thrill to my students since they had never won a trophy. We have been invited to perform at the Georgia State Thespian Convention.” (Carolyn Hansard, Villa Rica High School, Ga.)

Fantasy. Book and lyrics by Michael Bigelow Dixon. Music by Jan Cole. Cast: 4 to 5m., 3 to 4w., extras. The Sultan, bewitched by a magic scimitar, decrees that he will marry a new bride every evening and chop off her head the next morning. To save her pretty neck, clever Scheherazade tells her husband a tale which isn’t quite completed by the dawn’s early light. So he postpones the execution a day. Scheherazade keeps up this parade of stories for a thousand and one nights, finally winning him away from the scimitar’s evil spell. As she tells each tale, an ensemble of as few as 6 actors or as many as 25 or more act out the story. Dixon takes a jocular approach to the centuries-old tales “true to basic plot lines and intentions of the tales, but not averse to kidding and stylizing the material. This is fine, for the playful approach makes the show stage worthy and engaging,” Everett Evans, *Houston Chronicle*. A treat for the whole family, this play may be presented as a non-musical, using the four songs as background music along with the other spectacular effects on the sound effects CD. *Tales From the Arabian Nights* ran for 31 performances at Houston’s Alley Theatre. Another notable production was the Indiana Repertory Theatre’s 61 performances. *Every prop and costume piece are placed on the stage, the performers never have to leave. Costumes: basic Arabian Nights costumes with an accessory to suggest the character. Production notes in the playbook describe the Alley Theatre’s colorful staging. Approximate running time: 75 to 90 minutes. Accompaniment CD available. Sound Effect CD available. Music score available. Code: TQ4.*

Family Plays

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ISBN-13 978-0-88680-239-4
ISBN-10 0-88680-239-3



Tales From the Arabian Nights

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A 'Stage Magic' Play

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(TALES FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-2394X

TALES FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

Cast

(This play is designed to be played by six to eight persons. A much larger cast may be used. There is no break in the action between scenes.)

Shahriar, the Sultan
Scheherazade, the Grand Vizier's daughter
Chorus (4 to 25 or more performers play all the other roles,
as listed below)

Scene 1

Chorus
Shahriar
Dalila, the Sultana
Mustafa, a merchant
Omar, a soothsayer
Grand Vizier, the Sultan's adviser
Scheherazade
Dunyazad, the Vizier's other daughter
Scimitar, a vocal property (spoken by Chorus members)

Scene 2

Scheherazade
Shahriar
Khalifah, a fisherman
Fatimah, his wife
(Children, three props)
(Genie, a large and evil prop)

Scene 3

Scheherazade
Shahriar
Scimitar

Scene 4

Scheherazade
Shahriar
Ali Baba, a woodcutter
Kassim, his scheming brother
Morgiana, Kassim's servant
Captain, the chief thief
Thief, a co-thief
(38 Thieves, various murals)

(continued)

Scene 5

Scheherazade
Shahriar
Mohammed, a snake charmer
Cobra, a snake puppet and doll
Scimitar
Chorus

Scene 6

Scheherazade
Shahriar
Mohammed
Zubaida, his wife
Cobra

Scene 7

Scheherazade
Shahriar
Captain
Thief
Morgiana
Ali Baba
(38 Thieves, this time in jars)

Scene 8

Scheherazade
Shahriar
Scimitar
Chorus

Scene 9

Scheherazade
Shahriar
Shukat, Prince of Damascus
Ming, Princess of Ningpo
Speedy, a messenger
Goblin, an evil spirit
Imp, an eviler spirit
Demon, the vilest spirit

(continued)

Scene 10
 Scheherazade
 Shahriar
 Scimitar
 Chorus

TIME: More than a millenium ago.

PLACE: The Scheherazade story is set in Samarkand, Persia.

The other stories are set in:

Cairo—The Fisherman and the Bottle

Baghdad—Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves

Bombay—The Snake Charmer and His Wife

Ningpo and Oriental Oasis—Shukat and the Princess Ming

(All scenes may take place in one stage setting—
 see Production Notes, pp. 38-42)



First presented on the Large Stage of the Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas, September through November, 1984, direction by John Vreeke, original score and musical direction by Jan Cole, setting designed by Michael Holt, costumes designed by Fotini Dimou, lighting designed by Richard W. Jeter, choreography by Lea Geeslin, Terrence Karn, and Abiatha Simpson; stage manager, Mark Tynan. The cast was as follows:

Shahriar—Jeff Bennett	Morgiana—Luisa Amaral-Smith
Scheherazade—Mary Agen Cox	Captain—Scott Fults
Dalila—Kayce Glasse	Thief—Gregory Ruhe
Mustafa—Raan Lewis	Mohammed—Michael Normandy
Omar—Bob Rumsby	Zubaida—Kayce Glasse
Grand Vizier—Scott Fults	Shukat—Bob Rumsby
Dunyazad—Luisa Amaral-Smith	Ming—Kayce Glasse
Khalifah—Gregory Ruhe	Speedy—Gregory Ruhe
Fatimah—Luisa Amaral-Smith	Goblin—Scott Fults
Ali Baba—Raan Lewis	Imp—Michael Normandy
Kassim—Bob Rumsby	Demon—Raan Lewis

ABOUT THE PLAY

A play for the whole family, *Tales from the Arabian Nights* ran for 31 performances on the Large Stage of Houston's Alley Theatre.

The Sultan, bewitched by a magic scimitar, decrees that he will marry a new bride every evening and chop off her head the next morning. To save her pretty neck, clever Scheherazade tells her husband an enchanting tale which isn't quite completed by the dawn's early light. So he postpones the execution a day. Scheherazade keeps up this parade of stories for a thousand and one nights, finally winning the Sultan away from the scimitar's evil spell.

As she tells each tale, an ensemble of as few as 6 actors or as many as 25 (or even more) acts out the story. [NOTE: Actors are assigned numbers (Actor 1, Actor 2, etc.) in the script. This is strictly for the convenience of the director and is not meant to imply that "Actor 1" is the same performer throughout the play.] Scheherazade tells about the fisherman who releases an evil genie from a bottle; Ali Baba, who discovers the treasure trove of 40 thieves by saying, "Open Sesame"; a snake charmer who tries to keep his profession a secret from his wife, with striking results; and a prince who is transformed into a tiger and nearly eats the woman he loves.

The script playfully mixes Arabian cliches with modern figures of speech and attitudes. *Houston Chronicle* reviewer Everett Evans called the play "an effective and colorful entertainment for young audiences" with "clever touches and goofy anachronisms. . . true to basic plot lines and intentions of the tales, but not averse to kidding and stylizing the material. This is fine, for the playful approach makes the show worthy and engaging . . . an adaptation with a sense of humor."

Production notes in this playbook (beginning on page 38) describe the Alley Theatre's colorful staging with a single set—a flying carpet. A cassette tape of an Alley Theatre performance and a separate tape of the Alley Theatre sound effects, licensed to be used in your production, are available from I. E. Clark,

AUTHOR'S NOTE

As the twenty-first century approaches, **THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS** remains a wonderbook of the mysterious East. Its many tales of marvels and enchantment, some of which have been retold for more than a millenium, originated in India, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Turkey, and possibly Greece. Their compilation into a single work was the achievement of many writers. Yet the survival of these fantasies, fables, and historical anecdotes is due to the mastery of storytellers, who through the centuries have embroidered the tales with exotic details and imaginative descriptions.

The art of storytelling has inspired this adaptation of **TALES FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS**. This “contemporized” collection of familiar and obscure stories evokes an ancient world where magic and reality commingle, where sweet daydreams abruptly end in shivering awakenings. In this adaptation anything can happen, and indeed many strange things do. But it is all in the same spirit of creativity, fun, and inventiveness that saved Scheherazade and entertained the Sultan for those thousand and one nights . . . a thousand and one years ago.

—Michael Bigelow Dixon



The Goblin, the Imp, and the Demon (Scene 9)

PRODUCTION NOTES

(The following notes describe the Alley Theatre production. Each producer is at liberty to mount the play as he wishes.)

Props

(All props are onstage, concealed among the pillows, etc.—see “The Set” below)

ACT 1, Scene 1

Coins (to be jingled and perhaps thrown around—see page 2 of playscript)

Small Oriental bells (page 2)

Jewels, gold and silver trinkets—inside Mustafa’s coat (page 2)

Scimitar—wrapped in cloth or small Persian rug (page 3. See note on Scimitar under “Special Effects” below.)

Astrological cape and turban—Omar

Bag of colorful glitter—Omar

Torch—Omar

2 straws—Vizier

Scene 2

Fishing pole—Khalifah

3 dolls—Fatimah (see photo, p. 7)

Turban—caught by Khalifah’s fishing pole

Bottle, with stopper—caught by Khalifah’s fishing pole

Scene 4

Cloth (mural) with drawing of thieves (see photo, p. 11; also the note under “The Set” below)

Sabres—Captain and Thief

2 cloth bags supposedly filled with coins—Ali Baba

2 larger bags (filled with “chopped Kassim”—see photo, p. 17)—Ali Baba and Morgiana

Mural or cardboard cutout of camels laden with oil jars (see “The Set” below)

Large jar (two-dimensional cutout or three-dimensional jar with no bottom. Thief is inside jar—page 16)

Small flask of oil—Captain

Box (containing wiggly rubber snakes)—Ali Baba

Scene 5

Straw basket with cobra inside (performer with hand in snake-puppet—see photo, p. 19)

Scene 6

Flute—Mohammed (which he places in basket)

Robe—in snake basket

Match, lamp, or candle—Mohammed

Cobra doll—Mohammed and Zubaida (later it is attached to Mohammed’s back and then to Zubaida’s arm)

Scene 7

Box of vipers (same as in Scene 4)

Finger cymbals, tambourine—Morgiana

Gold coin in satchel—Ali Baba

Purse—Captain

Scene 9

Letters—Shukat and Ming

Perfume atomizer—Ming

Masks—Imp, Goblin, Demon, Shukat (see drawing under “Costumes” below)

Dates, candy (in a bag)—Ming

Scene 10

Shatterable scimitar—handed to Sultan (see note on scimitar under “Special Effects” below)

Flute disguised as a knife
 Trombone disguised as a spear
 Cymbals disguised as shields } see p. 35

Allah’s all-seeing eye (see note on scimitar under “Special Effects” below)

General

Musical instruments (drums, tambourines, synthesizer, flutes, etc.—as desired; see under “Music and Sound” below)

Costumes

Each performer may wear a basic Arabian Nights costume to which is added a turban, a hat, a scarf, a sash, a vest, a coat—whatever simple accessory is needed to suggest the character being played.

Among specific costume add-ons as called for in the script are **Mustafa’s** coat with jewels, gold and silver trinkets, etc. attached to the lining; **Omar’s** cape and turban with signs of the Zodiac; the Chinese-type demon masks for the **Imp**, **Goblin**, and **Demon**, and the tiger mask for **Shukat**; and an imperial robe for **Ming**.



Sketches by Fotini Dimou, costume designer

All costume pieces were concealed in and among the pillows surrounding the set in the Alley Theatre production. The actor put on the piece covertly while concealed in the shadows or behind other actors—or overtly as he/she took the stage to assume the role.

Music and Sound

The piano/vocal score available for this play includes the three songs designated in the text. The accompaniment for these songs is included on the Alley Theatre's sound effects cassette tape available from I. E. Clark, Inc. The other music and sounds mentioned in the stage directions are also on the tape. Each producer may, of course, use music and sound effects of his/her choosing. The music should have a timeless yet contemporary quality.

Whenever possible in the original production, the music and sound effects were produced live by the actors. The music for the three songs came from the sound effects tape, as did the explosion and implosion for the Genie escaping and returning to his bottle. The voices of the Genie and the scimitar were produced by the actors "live" with some electronic assistance.

The Alley Theatre's sound effects tape includes virtually all the other effects noted in the stage directions. This tape is licensed for use with any performance for which royalty has been paid.

Special Effects

This play provides ample opportunity for the use of spectacular effects to thrill the heart of every child and dazzle the mind of every adult in the audience.

All the technical elements, including sound and light, should be consistent with the show's eclectic mix of classic and contemporary styles.

The Alley Theatre setting resembled a huge Persian rug. In the floor of the rug were pop-up camels, horses, jars, and baskets. In the part of the rug sweeping upward as a backdrop were the "Open Sesame" parting doors of the Ali Baba story. Lying on the floor were silken folds which, when raised, became the huge Genie escaping from the fisherman's bottle.

Props appeared as if by magic—skillfully extracted from behind a pillow or beneath a coat. The evil scimitar shattered into bits. And above it all was the watchful eye of Allah, as detailed in the next paragraph:

The Scimitar

In the Alley Theatre production, an actual scimitar was used onstage only at the beginning and end of the play: first when Mustafa presents it to Dalila and later when the Sultan struggles with it at the climax. Otherwise, the scimitar was represented by a silvery shadow above the action. When not in the scene the lighting made the scimitar and its frame appear to be the eye of Allah. This effect was achieved with a painted scrim.

To make the scimitar shatter, a scimitar of several pieces was held together by a string running through all the pieces. A trigger in the handle then let loose the string at the appropriate moment and the scimitar appeared to snap or break apart. The scimitar used by Mustafa at the beginning of the play and the one used by the Sultan were two different props, so there would be no chance of the prop breaking apart at the beginning of the play. [WARNING: Any time weapons are used in a play there is danger of serious accident or death. The publisher advises the use of a stage combat expert to supervise all handling of weapons and the planning and carrying out of stage stunts. If a stage combat expert is not available, we strongly advise the purchase and careful study of and adherence to the techniques described in a good book on using weapons, such as Claude Kezer's *Principles of Stage Combat*.]

Lights

No special lighting effects are essential. However, lighting can be effectively used to set the mood and spotlight specific areas of the stage.

The stage lighting may be "murky and moody" at the beginning of the play, brightening at the happy moments and clouding at tragic moments. No curtains or blackouts are used between scenes, but a change in lighting can symbolize the transition from location to location.

The Set

Every prop and costume piece needed in the play were onstage at the beginning of the Alley Theatre production so that the performers never had to leave the stage. "Enter" and "exit" in stage directions indicate that the performer separates from the Chorus to join the action or returns to the Chorus on the pillows surrounding the set. Some of the props, like Fatimah's three children, were pillows. Other props and costume pieces like Mohammed's cobra, Khalifah's bottle, the flutes and other musical instruments, and the masks for Scene 9, were concealed in or under the pillows arranged around the Down Right and Down Left edges of the magic carpet.

All of the action in the Alley Theatre production took place on the gigantic magic carpet, which consisted of two parts: a raked stage and a vertical backing that made it appear that the carpet bent skyward as it swept upstage.

In the raked stage, which was carpeted, were "pop-up," two-dimensional props hinged to the stage so that they could be lifted like trap doors. These props included the camels and oil jars for the Ali Baba scene. The horses for the thieves lifted out completely so the actors could "ride" them. The 38 thieves were painted on a mural lying beneath the raked stage and raised when needed.

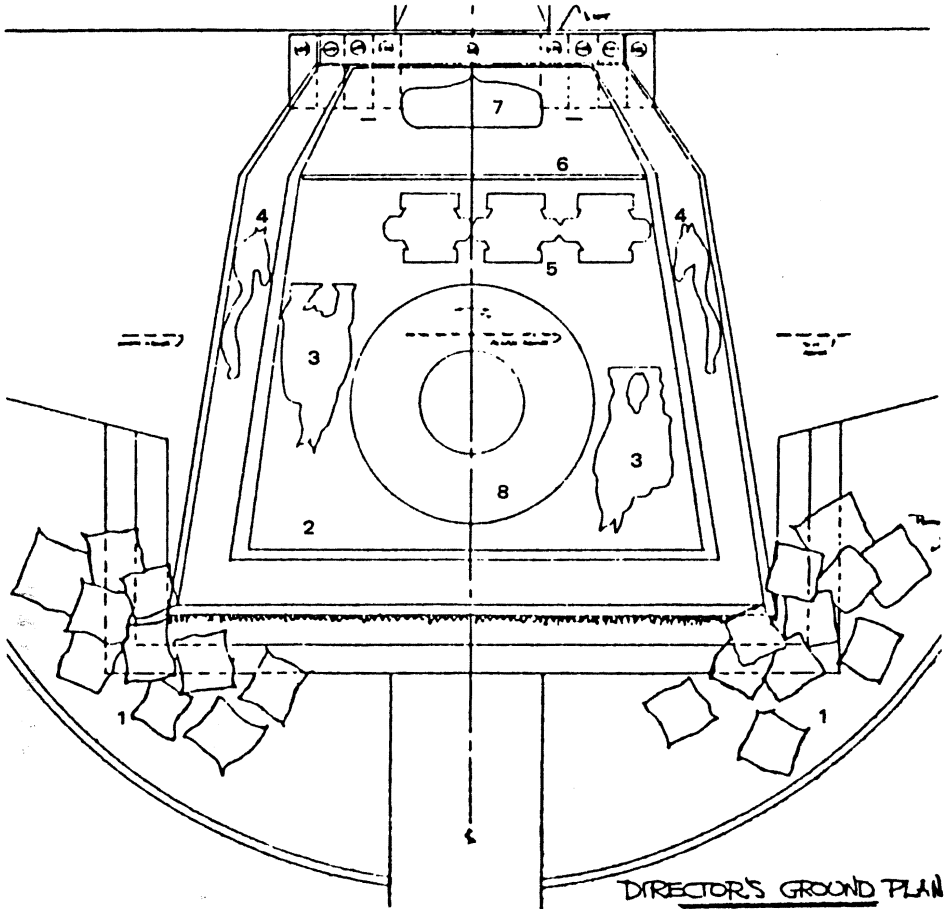
In the vertical section of the magic carpet were the doors that opened and closed for the thieves' cave. They were painted to look like carpet, also, and were not used until the Ali Baba story. Once used, the doors were then utilized for entrances and exits throughout the remainder of the play.

A sun and moon hung suspended from the ceiling Stage Right and Left above the pillows surrounding the stage. These were on a balance, so that when one was raised the other lowered to indicate the passing of the night as Scheherazade told each tale.

Actors not in the various scenes sat around the edge of the magic carpet and assisted with sound effects and other actions.

See "Floor Plan" next page

NOTE: An audio cassette tape of an Alley Theatre performance is available from the publisher.



Alley Theatre Set Design by Michael Holt

- 1—pillows (props, costume pieces, etc., concealed among and under pillows)
- 2—the "magic carpet"
- 3—camel cut-outs
- 4—horse cut-outs
- 5—oil jar cut-outs
- 6—mural of 39 thieves (in slot in raked stage)
- 7—sliding doors to All Baba's cava
- 8—rotating disk (representing water for Khalifah's fishing scene)

Each producer may design his own set

TALES FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

By Michael Bigelow Dixon

ACT I

Scene 1

[MUSIC 1 begins in darkness. We hear a Muslim chant echoing through the corridors of an ancient mosque. There is a timeless yet contemporary quality to the music, which sets the mood for this production. LIGHTS come up revealing a gigantic magic carpet, surrounded by pillows which are or which contain all the properties and musical instruments that the actors will use throughout the performance. In the murky and moody light the actors begin the snake-like movements of whirling dervishes, which will, in the course of the song, develop into contemporary dance rhythms. As the music accelerates, so do the WHIRLING DERVISHES, who are also doing modern dance steps, until at last, when the music stops, they drop from exhaustion into the Muslim position of prayer]

Music 1: ALLAH!

CHORUS. *[Singing]* Al-lah!

Al-lah!

Al-lah!

Al-la-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah—Allah!

Help us!

Lead us!

From the darkness out into your light—Allah!

Tell us!

Show us!

Shadows separating wrong and right—Allah!

Only!

You can!

Save us from disaster with your might—Allah!

We are!

Waiting!

For salvation. Please give us a sight—Allah! *[MUSIC out]*

ACTOR 1. It is told . . .

CHORUS. But Allah alone is all-knowing and all-seeing . . .

ACTOR 2. That more than a millenium ago . . .

ACTOR 3. Between the lands of Africa and Asia . . .

ACTOR 4. On the sands of ancient Arabia . . .

ACTOR 5. In a kingdom known as Samarkand . . .

ACTOR 6. There lived the greatest Sultan of all Sultans . . .

SHAHRIAR. [*Leaving the Chorus, taking Center Stage*] Shahriar!

CHORUS. Salaam. Salaam.

SHAHRIAR. Now Shahriar, I don't mind saying, was a brave and intelligent Sultan who ruled his kingdom wisely . . .

ACTOR 1. For which he was admired . . .

ACTOR 2. Respected . . .

ACTOR 3. And loved . . .

ACTOR 4. By the people of Samarkand.

CHORUS. Salaam!

SHAHRIAR. Don't mention it.

ACTOR 5. Now Shahriar was married to a beautiful Sultana . . .

DALILA. Named Dalila . . . [*Leaves Chorus to join Shahriar*]

ACTOR 6. Who was adored by all the people for her kindness and generosity . . .

DALILA. May Allah bring all of you happiness and wealth . . .

CHORUS. Salaam. Salaam.

ACTOR 1. And under their rule the people of Samarkand prospered . . .

[*Prosperous sound—coins?*]

ACTOR 2. And pleased . . . [*Pleasureful sound—bells?*]

ACTOR 3. And life was harmonious . . .

CHORUS. Hnnnnnnnn . . . [*harmonious hum*]

ACTOR 4. Until one day . . .

CHORUS. Hnnnnnn . . . [*discordant hum. Discordance continues underneath:*]

ACTOR 5. A merchant named Mustafa came to Samarkand . . .

ACTOR 1. To hawk his precious wares to the Sultana . . .

DALILA. Show the gem-monger in . . .

MUSTAFA. Salaam, Sultana. I offer you the most precious jewels in all Arabia . . . [*He opens one side of his coat revealing incredible jewels sewn to the fabric*]

DALILA. They are pretty, but I'm not interested.

MUSTAFA. Then how about this gold and silver crafted by the most

gifted artisans of the east? [*He opens the other side of his coat*]

DALILA. No, I don't see anything there I like either. Thank you for...

MUSTAFA. But wait! I have saved the best for last. [*MUSTAFA picks up a cloth containing the scimitar, and the "Scimitar Theme" MUSIC plays underneath*] This cloth conceals a magic metal that inspires greatness in those who hold it. Listen, it can speak . . .

SCIMITAR (ACTORS' VOICES). Usssss-e me, Ssss-ultana, assss I wassss made to be ussss-ed!

DALILA. Where on earth did you find that magic?

MUSTAFA. Eons ago it was mined by the Pharoahs of ancient Egypt and forged into a plough with which they cultivated the great valley of the Nile. Later the plough was transformed into great tools that built the giant pyramids and the sphinx. The tools have been recast again and the metal is more powerful than ever.

SCIMITAR. Yesssssssss!

DALILA. What shape is it now?

MUSTAFA. You must pay me first everything you have . . .

DALILA. It is yours.

MUSTAFA. May Allah protect you. [*MUSTAFA fades away*]

DALILA. And this is mine.

SCIMITAR. Releassssssss-e me, Sssssss-sultana, and gazzzzzzzzzz-e upon me. [*She removes the scimitar from its cloth*]

DALILA. A scimitar?

SCIMITAR. Now usssssss-e me!

DALILA. But your only use is death?!?

SCIMITAR. Yesssssssss! Yesssssssss!

ACTOR 1. In another part of the palace . . .

ACTOR 2. Meanwhile . . .

ACTOR 3. A soothsayer approached the Sultan . . . [*OMAR enters with cape and turban topped with a sack of glittering sand*]

OMAR. Gift of Allah, bright flame and fire,

What prophecy do you inspire?

What darkness hidden in your light,

Foretells events beyond tonight?

[*The light he's holding flares*]

Beware of what this old soothsay!

Shahriar, your life may end today.

SHAHRIAR. Why? What secrets do you know?

OMAR. You must cast these sands onto the ground,

And let them scatter round and round!
 Then look where lines and swirls converge,
 It's there your future will emerge.

[*SHAHRIAR spreads the glitter on OMAR's astrological cape, which he has laid on the ground*] Ohhh!

SHAHRIAR. What?

OMAR. Look at that schism in the line;
 That is the scar of fate's design.
 And over there, that sinking arc,
 It is the very devil's mark!

SHAHRIAR. But what does it mean?

OMAR. Tomorrow we may find you dead,
 Or you might be alive instead.
 The evil is not very far.

Be wary of the scimitar! [*OMAR vanishes*]

SHAHRIAR. This is some sort of riddle. Grand Vizier!

VIZIER. Salaam.

SHAHRIAR. Send at once for the Sultana Dalila.

VIZIER. As you command, my Sultan. DALILA!!!! DALILA!!!

DALILA. [*Possessed*] You summoned, Shahriar?

SHAHRIAR. Yes, my dear, come closer. I must whisper this. A very strange thing has happened. According to a soothsayer, my life is in danger . . .

SCIMITAR. Yessssss.

SHAHRIAR. But who would want to murder me, and why? That's what you must help me learn.

DALILA. Sit down, Shahriar.

SHAHRIAR. Good idea. I must remain calm. The one thing I can't afford to do is lose my head over this.

SCIMITAR. Ussssssss-e me, Sssss-sultana.

SHAHRIAR. Now, I don't think the Grand Vizier would want me killed.

SCIMITAR. Ssssss-strike! [*DALILA does, and misses*]

SHAHRIAR. And the eunuchs seem harmless enough.

SCIMITAR. Ssssss-swing! [*DALILA misses barely*]

SHAHRIAR. But what about those maids of yours . . . WAAAAAA!
 [*DALILA and SHAHRIAR engage in musical combat until SHAHRIAR finally gains control of the scimitar*] Dalila, how could you?

DALILA. It wasn't me. It's the scimitar!

ACTOR 1. But it was too late . . .

ACTOR 2. The Sultan was enchanted, too.

SCIMITAR. Ssssss-shahriar, sssss-strike back!

SHAHRIAR. *[Possessed]* You betrayed me, Dalila. You destroyed our love. Now you must pay the penalty.

SCIMITAR. Yessssss!

SHAHRIAR. Vizier!

VIZIER. Yes, my Sultan?

SHAHRIAR. Take the Sultana to the chopping block . . .

SCIMITAR. YESSSSSSSSSS!

SHAHRIAR. And give the executioner this blade . . .

SCIMITAR. YESSSSSSSSSS!

SHAHRIAR. And order him to do his job.

SCIMITAR. CUT OFF THE SULTANA'S HEAD!!!!!!

ACTOR 1. So the executioner sharpened the blade . . . *[sound of knife sharpening]*

ACTOR 2. And the sounds echoed throughout Samarkand . . .

ACTOR 3. And when the sharpening stopped . . . *[Silence. In silhouette we see the shape of a gigantic scimitar drop suddenly. It is accompanied by the MUSICAL representation of death, a haunting, mysterious sound]*

CHORUS. May Allah have mercy on her soul.

SCIMITAR. Usssss-e me again and again, Ssssss-shahriar. My blade can cut the hurt and anguish from your heart. Defeat your enemiessss with my sss-sharp edge. Avenge this attempt on your life.

SHAHRIAR. I am your servant, scimitar. *[MUSIC]*

ACTOR 1. A proclamation. A proclamation. The Sultan has a proclamation!

SHAHRIAR. Citizens of Samarkand, from this day forward I will take a new bride every night. *[Applause]* And every morning that bride will be beheaded by the scimitar. *[Gasps]* In this way I will avenge all past and future Sultans. And you, Vizier, must bring these brides to me.

VIZIER. Yes, my Sultan.

ACTOR 2. So one by one the young women of Samarkand were taken to the Sultan . . .

CHORUS. Where they were wedded at dusk and beheaded at dawn.

SHAHRIAR. Take her to the scimitar . . . *[Musical death]* Take her to the scimitar . . . *[Musical death]*

ACTOR 1. And this went on for many years . . .

SHAHRIAR. Take her to the scimitar . . . [*Musical death*]

ACTOR 2. Until one day . . .

ACTOR 3. The Sultan said . . .

SHAHRIAR. Vizier! Bring me one of your daughters next.

VIZIER. Which one, my Sultan? Dunyazad . . .

DUNYAZAD. The one who likes to sew and sing and dance around?

VIZIER. Or Scheherazade . . .

SCHEHERAZADE. The one who reads many books and likes to tell tales about the wonders of Arabia?

SHAHRIAR. The choice is yours.

VIZIER. Girls! Girls!

DUNYAZAD & SCHEHERAZADE. Yes, father?

VIZIER. The day I feared would come has come.

DUNYAZAD. You mean?

SCHEHERAZADE. One of us must marry the Sultan?

DUNYAZAD. And then lose one of our heads?

VIZIER. Yes.

DUNYAZAD & SCHEHERAZADE. How will you choose between us?

VIZIER. I leave that in Allah's hands. Here are two straws, one long and one short. Whoever selects the shorter straw must marry Shahriar. Dunyazad, go with Allah's guidance.

DUNYAZAD. Eeny, meeny, miney, mo. Catch a genie by the . . . this one! Which is it, the short or the long?

VIZIER. Scheherazade?

SCHEHERAZADE. Whichever one of us is chosen, dear father, you are not to blame. [*SCHEHERAZADE selects her straw, and then facing away from him and toward the audience breaks it in two*]

DUNYAZAD. Let's compare!

SCHEHERAZADE. Here's my straw.

DUNYAZAD. You got the short one, see?!?! Oh, Scheherazade, I'm sorry.

SCHEHERAZADE. Don't despair, Dunyazad. Father, I am ready. [*Wedding processional, Arabian style*]

ACTOR 1. That night Shahriar and Scheherazade took their wedding vows . . .

SCHEHERAZADE & SHAHRIAR. We do.

ACTOR 2. You may remove your veil. I now pronounce you man and wife, Sultan and Sultana . . .

SHAHRIAR. For one night . . . [*Crowd disperses. Music ends*] . . . And one night only.

SCHEHERAZADE. How shall we spend these final hours until dawn? Shall I send for food and drink?

SHAHRIAR. I do not dine with my Sultanas. They might poison me.

SCHEHERAZADE. Shall I sit next to you then . . .

SHAHRIAR. No! You keep away . . . out of striking distance. [*After a reflective pause, SCHEHERAZADE begins laughing*] Why are you laughing? [*SCHEHERAZADE laughs uncontrollably*] Stop that! Don't you know what's planned for you at sunrise?

SCHEHERAZADE. Of course, but I can't help thinking of a story that is very much like my predicament. [*Laughs*]

SHAHRIAR. How can you laugh at it?

SCHEHERAZADE. It's a funny story, but you probably don't want to hear it . . .

SHAHRIAR. And why not?! I appreciate a story as much as the next Sultan. Spin your tale. There's still time before daybreak.

SCHEHERAZADE. As you wish, my Sultan. The story is called, *The Fisherman and the Bottle* . . .



The Fisherman, his wife, and three babies

Scene 2

[This plays continuously from Scene 1, with no break in the action]

SCHEHERAZADE. It is told . . .

SHAHRIAR. But Allah alone is all-honoured and all-mighty . . .

SCHEHERAZADE. That there was once a certain fisherman. Picture in your mind . . . *[The LIGHTS change to depict a separate reality on-stage. The audience sees the tale through the eyes of Shahriar and Scheherazade. This story takes place on a beach in Cairo]*

KHALIFAH. A proud and honest man named Khalifah . . .

FATIMAH. *[Holding three dolls]* Who had a wife and three children to support . . .

BABIES (CHORUS). Waaaaa!

SCHEHERAZADE. And though this fisherman was very poor, he made it his practice to cast his fishing line only three times in one day . . .

FATIMAH. That's a foolish custom. Why don't you cast it more?

KHALIFAH. The better the fisherman, the less he must fish. Allah sees to that.

FATIMAH. If you're such a great fisherman, why aren't we rich?

KHALIFAH. If that's what you want, all right! I'll prove how good I am. I'll catch a fortune in fish and I'll do it with only three casts.

BABIES. Waaaaaa!

FATIMAH. Now you've upset the triplets.

SCHEHERAZADE. So Khalifah marched down to the sea and looked out over the glistening waves . . . *[Glistening sounds and sights]* Then he rolled up his sleeves and baited his hook . . .

KHALIFAH. And cast the line far out to sea. *[He casts]* Ooff! *[The fishing is, perhaps, mimed and the action is accompanied by music]*

SCHEHERAZADE. And while he waited for the hook to sink, Khalifah prayed for a bountiful catch . . .

KHALIFAH. Allah, thou knowest I am but a humble fisherman who needs to catch many fish . . .

FATIMAH. In order to support his wife and lovely children . . .

BABIES. Goo-goo. Gurgle. Coochey-coo.

KHALIFAH. So please share your great wealth with me . . .

SCHEHERAZADE. Then he reeled in the line and saw . . .

KHALIFAH. Nothing . . .

BABIES. Waaa!

SCHEHERAZADE. So he tried his luck again, and with a mighty heave . . .

KHALIFAH. HO! *[Musical line spins out again]*

SCHEHERAZADE. Khalifah lofted the fishing line even further from the shore . . .

KHALIFAH. Please hear my prayers, Allah, and place a gigantic fish upon my humble hook . . .

SCHEHERAZADE. Suddenly he felt a tug . . . *[It pulls KHALIFAH off his feet]*

KHALIFAH. I got one, Allah, thank you!

SCHEHERAZADE. And he reeled in the line as fast as he could . . . *[Turban appears from somewhere]*

KHALIFAH. What in Allah's name is this?

SHAHRIAR. It's an old turban!?!

SCHEHERAZADE. Shhhhhh!

KHALIFAH. And it fits!

FATIMAH. But it won't feed our babies!

BABIES. Waaaa!

KHALIFAH. Yet it is a sign from Allah, surely. And on my next cast I'll be rewarded.

SCHEHERAZADE. So Khalifah cocked his arm once more and . . . *[Musical line spins out]*

KHALIFAH. Now, Allah, whatever you've been holding back, I pray you'll let me have it now.

SCHEHERAZADE. Then he felt a nibble and the nibble became a drag which became a jerk which became a yank, a pull, and finally a tug-of-war!

SCHEHERAZADE & CHORUS. And he fought and wrestled and struggled and tugged, and he strained and lifted and yanked and lugged. Until at last the line was all reeled in . . . *[Bottle appears]*

SHAHRIAR. Look! Some sort of bottle!

KHALIFAH. Made of copper and inscribed with the seal of the great prophet Solomon. I can sell this at the marketplace for a fortune's worth of fish, and my wife will be very pleased . . .

SCHEHERAZADE. So the fisherman hoisted the bottle and heard . . . *[A percussion rattle]*

KHALIFAH. I'd better pop the top and see what's making all the noise. Who knows? It might be valuable.

SCHEHERAZADE. No sooner had Khalifah removed the stopper from the bottle . . . *[Big BANG, smoke, and BLACKOUT]* then it exploded and out swirled a dark column of smoke that blackened the air

and blocked out the sun until an enormous genie emerged . . . [*LIGHTS up on an enormous GENIE constructed of light and silk*]

GENIE. [*An amplified voice*] Solomon, I have escaped at last.

KHALIFAH. You're mistaking me for someone else. My name is Khalifah.

GENIE. You can't fool me. That is the turban of the prophet Solomon.

KHALIFAH. But it isn't mine. I caught it. I'm a simple fisherman and there's almost no profit in that.

GENIE. It doesn't matter who you are. I'll kill you anyway!

KHALIFAH. Aren't I supposed to get three wishes?

GENIE. [*Sarcastic*] You may wish how you want to die.

SCHEHERAZADE. Not knowing what to do, the fisherman stalled for time.

KHALIFAH. Drowning? No. Burning? Uh-uh. Strangulation? No way! Sorry, but I can't think of a way I'd like to die, so you'll just have to leave—

GENIE. Don't waste my time. I will decide. Prepare to die!

KHALIFAH. But why? What have I done to offend you?

GENIE. Know that I am one of the rebel Jinn, imprisoned five hundred years ago by the prophet Solomon. As I waited in this bottle on the bottom of the sea, I swore to kill the one who dared release me!

KHALIFAH. That's how you reward good deeds? The head genie's going to be very disappointed when he finds out what you've done.

GENIE. There is no head genie. Say your prayers.

SCHEHERAZADE. And the fisherman was about to give up when he had one more idea.

KHALIFAH. In the name of the Most High engraved on Solomon's seal, I beg you to answer one last question truthfully.

GENIE. Oh, all right, proceed.

KHALIFAH. How could this tiny bottle possibly hold your entire body?

GENIE. I am a genie, capable of any and all things!!!!

KHALIFAH. It's hard for me to believe unless I see it for myself.

GENIE. Then watch. It will be the last thing you'll ever see . . . [*Smoke and BLACKOUT. MUSIC, too*]

SCHEHERAZADE. Again smoke covered the sun and blanketed the land with darkness until the clouds at last were cleared. The genie was nowhere to be seen . . .

KHALIFAH. Are you inside the bottle now?

GENIE'S VOICE. Yes.

KHALIFAH. Then stay in there forever. [*KHALIFAH rams the stopper home*]

GENIE'S VOICE. [*Muted, as if from inside bottle*] Who turned out the lights?

KHALIFAH. Now I'll throw you back in the sea and let the tides wash you away . . .

GENIE'S VOICE. Fisherman, please, show me kindness.

KHALIFAH. Too late, evil genie. You're taking a bath.

GENIE'S VOICE. Wait! If you return my evil with kindness, I'll reward you with fabulous riches.

FATIMAH. Pay attention, Khalifah. This could be Allah's way.

GENIE'S VOICE. Release me and I'll bring you more treasure than Ali Baba found.

SHAHRIAR. Who in the world is Ali Baba?

SCHEHERAZADE. That's what Khalifah wanted to know.

GENIE'S VOICE. If you promise not to sink me, I'll tell you the most amazing tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.

KHALIFAH. Well, no harm in listening, I suppose, especially when it might make me rich. Go ahead.

GENIE'S VOICE. It is told . . .



Ali Baba hiding from the Captain and the rest of the 40 thieves