

THE NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS

[33]

[continues]

“Finale”

Now during this time Scheherazade had borne the King three male children, so when she had made an end of the story, she rose to her feet and kissing ground before him, said, “O King of the Time and unique one of the Age and the Tide, I am thine handmaid, and these thousand nights and a night have I entertained thee with stories of folk gone before and admonitory instances of the men of yore. May I then make bold to crave a boon of thy Highness?” He replied, “Ask, O Scheherazade, and it shall be granted to thee.” Whereupon she cried out to the nurses and the eunuchs, saying, “Bring me my children.” So they brought them to her in haste, and they were three boy children, one walking, one crawling, and one suckling. She took them, and setting them before the King, again kissed the ground and said: “O King of the Age, these are thy children, and I crave that thou release me from the doom of death, as a dole to these infants. For an thou kill me, they will become motherless and will find none among women to rear them as they should be reared.” When the King heard this, he wept, and straining the boys to his bosom, said: “By the Lord, O Scheherazade, I pardoned thee before the coming of these children, for that I found thee chaste, pure, ingenuous, and pious! the Lord bless thee and thy father

and thy mother and thy root and thy branch! I take the Almighty to witness against me that I exempt thee from aught that can harm thee." So she kissed his hands and feet and rejoiced with exceeding joy, saying, "The Lord make thy life long and increase thee in dignity and majesty!" presently adding: "Thou marveledst at that which befell thee on the part of women; yet there betided the Kings of the Chosroes before thee greater mishaps and more grievous than that which hath befallen thee; and indeed I have set forth unto thee that which happened to Kings and kings and others with their women, but the relation is longsome and hearkening groweth tedious, and in this is all-sufficient warning for the man of wits and admonishment for the wise." Then she ceased to speak, and when King Shahryar heard her speech and profited by that which she said, he summoned up his reasoning powers and cleansed his heart and caused his understanding revert and turned to the Lord Almighty and said to himself: "Since there befell the Kings of the Chosroes more than that which hath befallen me, never whilst I live shall I cease to blame myself for the past. As for this Scheherazade, her like is not found in the lands, so praise be to Him who appointed her a means for delivering His creatures from oppression and slaughter!" Then he arose from his seance and kissed her head, whereat she rejoiced, she and her sister Dunyazade, with exceeding joy. When the morning morrowed, the king went forth and sitting down on the throne of the kingship, summoned the lords of his land, whereupon the chamberlains and nabobs and captains of the host went in to him and kissed ground before him. He distinguished the Vizier, Scheherazade's sire, with special favor and bestowed on him a costly and splendid robe of honor and entreated him with the utmost kindness, and said to him: "the Lord protect thee for that thou gavest me to wife thy noble daughter, who hath been the means of my repentance from slaying the daughters of folk. Indeed I

have found her pure and pious, chaste and ingenuous, and the Lord hath vouchsafed me by her three boy children, wherefore praised be He for his passing favor." Then he bestowed robes of honor upon his Viziers and emirs and chief officers, and he set forth to them briefly that which had betided him with Scheherazade and how he had turned from his former ways and repented him of what he had done and purposed to take the Vizier's daughter, Scheherazade, to wife and let draw up the marriage contract with her. When those who were present heard this, they kissed the ground before him and blessed him and his betrothed Scheherazade, and the Vizier thanked her. Then Shahryar made an end of his sitting in all weal, whereupon the folk dispersed to their dwelling places and the news was bruited abroad that the King purposed to marry the Vizier's daughter, Scheherazade. Then he proceeded to make ready the wedding gear, and presently he sent after his brother, King Shah Zaman, who came, and King Shahryar went forth to meet him with the troops. Furthermore, they decorated the city after the goodliest fashion, and diffused scents from censers and burnt aloes wood and other perfumes in all the markets and thoroughfares, and rubbed themselves with saffron, what while the drums beat and the flutes and pipes sounded and mimes and mountebanks played and plied their arts and the King lavished on them gifts and largess. And in very deed it was a notable day. When they came to the palace, King Shahryar commanded to spread the tables with beasts roasted whole and sweetmeats and all manner of viands, and bade the crier cry to the folk that they should come up to the Divan and eat and drink, and that this should be a means of reconciliation between him and them. So high and low, great and small, came up unto him, and they abode on that wise, eating and drinking seven days with their nights. Then the King shut himself up with his brother and related to him that which had betided him with the Vizier's

daughter, Scheherazade, during the past three years, and told him what he had heard from her of proverbs and parables, chronicles and pleasantries, quips and jests, stories and anecdotes, dialogues and histories and elegies and other verses. Whereat King Shah Zaman marveled with the uttermost marvel and said: "Fain would I take her younger sister to wife, so we may be two brothers german to two sisters german, and they on like wise be sisters to us; for that the calamity which befell me was the cause of our discovering that which befell thee, and all this time of three years past I have taken no delight in woman, save that I lie each night with a damsel of my kingdom, and every morning I do her to death. But now I desire to marry thy wife's sister, Dunyazade." When King Shahryar heard his brother's words, he rejoiced with joy exceeding and arising forthright, went in to his wife, Scheherazade, and acquainted her with that which his brother purposed, namely that he sought her sister, Dunyazade in wedlock, whereupon she answered: "O King of the Age, we seek of him one condition; to wit, that he take up his abode with us, for that I cannot brook to be parted from my sister an hour, because we were brought up together and may not endure separation each from other. If he accept this pact, she is his handmaid." King Shahryar returned to his brother and acquainted him with that which Scheherazade had said, and he replied: "Indeed, this is what was in my mind, for that I desire nevermore to be parted from thee one hour. As for the kingdom, the Lord the Most High shall send to it whomso He chooseth, for that I have no longer a desire for the kinship." When King Shahryar heard his brother's words, he rejoiced exceedingly and said: "Verily, this is what I wished, O my brother. So Alhamdolillah—praised be the Lord—who hath brought about union between us." Then he sent after the kazis and ulema, captains and notables, and they married the two brothers to the two sisters. The contracts were written out and the two Kings

bestowed robes of honor of silk and satin on those who were present, whilst the city was decorated and the rejoicings were renewed. The King commanded each emir and Vizier and chamberlain and nabob to decorate his palace, and the folk of the city were gladdened by the presage of happiness and contentment. King Shahryar also bade slaughter sheep and set up kitchens and made bride feasts and fed all comers, high and low; and he gave alms to the poor and needy and extended his bounty to great and small. Then the eunuchs went forth, that they might perfume the hammam for the brides, so they scented it with rose-water and willow-flower water and pods of musk and fumigated it with Kakili eagle wood and ambergris. Then Scheherazade entered, she and her sister Dunyazade, and they cleansed their heads and clipped their hair. When they came forth of the hammam bath, they donned raiment and ornaments such as men were wont prepare for the Kings of the Chosroes; and among Scheherazade's apparel was a dress purpled with red gold and wrought with counterfeit presentments of birds and beasts. And the two sisters encircled their necks with necklaces of jewels of price, in the like whereof Iskandar rejoiced not, for therein were great jewels such as amazed the wit and dazzled the eye. And the imagination was bewildered at their charms, for indeed each of them was brighter than the sun and the moon. Before them they lighted brilliant flambeaux of wax in candelabra of gold, but their faces outshone the flambeaux, for that they had eyes sharper than unsheathed swords and the lashes of their eyelids bewitched all hearts. Their cheeks were rosy red and their necks and shapes gracefully swayed and their eyes wantoned like the gazelle's. And the slave girls came to meet them with instruments of music. Then the two Kings entered the hammam bath, and when they came forth, they sat down on a couch set with pearls and gems, whereupon the two sisters came up to them and stood between their hands, as

they were moons, bending and leaning from side to side in their beauty and loveliness. Presently they brought forward Scheherazade and displayed her, for the first dress, in a red suit, whereupon King Shahryar rose to look upon her and the wits of all present, men and women, were bewitched for that she was even as saith of her one of her describers: A sun on wand in knoll of sand she showed, Clad in her cramoisy-hued chemisette. Of her lips' honeydew she gave me drink And with her rosy cheeks quencht fire she set. Then they attired Dunyazade in a dress of blue brocade and she became as she were the full moon when it shineth forth. So they displayed her in this, for the first dress, before King Shah Zaman, who rejoiced in her and well-nigh swooned away for love longing and amorous desire. Yea, he was distraught with passion for her whenas he saw her, because she was as saith of her one of her describers in these couplets: She comes appareled in an azure vest, Ultramarine as skies are deckt and dight. I view'd th' unparalleled sight, which showed my eyes A summer moon upon a winter night. Then they returned to Scheherazade and displayed her in the second dress, a suit of surpassing goodness, and veiled her face with her hair like a chin veil. Moreover, they let down her side locks, and she was even as saith of her one of her describers in these couplets: O hail to him whose locks his cheeks o'ershade, Who slew my life by cruel hard despite. Said I, "Hast veiled the morn in night?" He said, "Nay I but veil moon in hue of night." Then they displayed Dunyazade in a second and a third and a fourth dress, and she paced forward like the rising sun, and swayed to and fro in the insolence of beauty, and she was even as saith the poet of her in these couplets: The sun of beauty she to all appears And, lovely coy, she mocks all loveliness. And when he fronts her favor and her smile A-morn, the sun of day in clouds must dress. Then they displayed Scheherazade in the third dress and the fourth and the fifth, and she became as she were a ban branch

snell or a thirsting gazelle, lovely of face and perfect in attributes of grace, even as saith of her one in these couplets: She comes like fullest moon on happy night, Taper of waist with shape of magic might. She hath an eye whose glances quell mankind, And ruby on her cheeks reflects his light. Enveils her hips the blackness of her hair- Beware of curls that bite with viper bite! Her sides are silken-soft, that while the heart Mere rock behind that surface 'scapes our sight. From the fringed curtains of her eyne she shoots Shafts that at furthest range on mark alight. Then they returned to Dunyazade and displayed her in the fifth dress and in the sixth, which was green, when she surpassed with her loveliness the fair of the four quarters of the world, and outvied with the brightness of her countenance the full moon at rising tide, for she was even as saith of her the poet in these couplets: A damsel 'twas the tiring's art had decked with snare and sleight, And robed with rays as though the sun from her had borrowed light. She came before us wondrous clad in chemisette of green, As veiled by his leafy screen Pomegranate hides from sight. And when he said, "How callest thou the fashion of thy dress?" She answered us in pleasant way with double meaning dight: "We call this garment crevecoeur, and rightly is it called, For many a heart wi' this we brake and harried many a sprite." Then they displayed Scheherazade in the sixth and seventh dresses and clad her in youth's clothing, whereupon she came forward swaying from side to side and coquettishly moving, and indeed she ravished wits and hearts and ensorcelled all eyes with her glances. She shook her sides and swayed her haunches, then put her hair on sword hilt and went up to King Shahryar, who embraced her as hospitable host embraceth guest, and threatened her in her ear with the taking of the sword, and she was even as saith of her the poet in these words: Were not the murk of gender male, Than feminines surpassing fair, Tirewomen they had grudged the bride, Who made her

beard and whiskers wear! Thus also they did with her sister Dunyazade, and when they had made an end of the display, the King bestowed robes of honor on all who were present and sent the brides to their own apartments. Then Scheherazade went in to King Shahryar and Dunyazade to King, Shah Zaman, and each of them solaced himself with the company of his beloved consort and the hearts of the folk were comforted. When morning morrowed, the Vizier came in to the two Kings and kissed ground before them, wherefore they thanked him and were large of bounty to him. Presently they went forth and sat down upon couches of kingship, whilst all the Viziers and emirs and grandees and lords of the land presented themselves and kissed ground. King Shahryar ordered them dresses of honor and largess, and they prayed for the permanence and prosperity of the King and his brother. Then the two sovereigns appointed their sire-in-law, the Vizier, to be Viceroy in Samarkand, and assigned him five of the chief emirs to accompany him, charging them attend him and do him service. The Minister kissed the ground and prayed that they might be vouchsafed length of life. Then he went in to his daughters, whilst the eunuchs and ushers walked before him, and saluted them and farewelled them. They kissed his hands and gave him joy of the kingship and bestowed on him immense treasures, after which he took leave of them and setting out, fared days and nights till he came near Samarkand, where the townspeople met him at a distance of three marches and rejoiced in him with exceeding joy. So he entered the city and they decorated the houses, and it was a notable day. He sat down on the throne of his kingship and the Viziers did him homage and the grandees and emirs of Samarkand, and all prayed that he might be vouchsafed justice and victory and length of continuance. So he bestowed on them robes of honor and entreated them with distinction, and they made him Sultan over them. As soon as his father-in-law had departed for

Samarkand, King Shahryar summoned the grandees of his realm and made them a stupendous banquet of all manner of delicious meats and exquisite sweetmeats. He also bestowed on them robes of honor and guerdoned them, and divided the kingdoms between himself and his brother in their presence, whereat the folk rejoiced. Then the two Kings abode, each ruling a day in turn, and they were ever in harmony each with other, while on similar wise their wives continued in the love of the Lord Almighty and in thanksgiving to Him. And the peoples and the provinces were at peace and the preachers prayed for them from the pulpits, and their report was bruited abroad and the travelers bore tidings of them to all lands. In due time King Shahryar summoned chroniclers and copyists and bade them write all that had betided him with his wife, first and last. So they wrote this and named it The Stories of the Thousand Nights and a Night. The book came to thirty volumes, and these the King laid up in his treasury. And the two brothers abode with their wives in all pleasaunce and solace of life and its delights, for that indeed the Lord the Most High had chanced their annoy into joy, and on this wise they continued till there took them the Destroyer of delights and the Severer of societies, the Desolator of dwelling places and Gamerer of graveyards, and they were translated to the ruth of Almighty the Lord. Their houses fell waste and their palaces lay in ruins and the kings inherited their riches. Then there reigned after them a wise ruler, who was just, keen-witted, and accomplished, and loved tales and legends, especially those which chronicle the doings of sovereigns and sultans, and he found in the treasury these marvelous stories and wondrous histories, contained in the thirty volumes aforesaid. So he read in them a first book and a second and a third and so on to the last of them, and each book astounded and delighted him more than that which preceded it, till he came to the end of them. Then he admired whatso he had read therein of

description and discourse and rare traits and anecdotes and moral instances and reminiscences, and bade the folk copy them and dispread them over all lands and climes, wherefore their report was bruited abroad and the people named them The Marvels and Wonders of the Thousand Nights and a Night. This is all that hath come down to us of the origin of this book, and the Lord is All-knowing. So Glory be to Him Whom the shifts of Time waste not away, nor doth aught of chance or change affect His sway, Whom one case diverteth not from other case and Who is sole in the attributes of perfect grace. And prayer and peace be upon the Lord's Pontiff and Chosen One among His creatures, our lord Praiseworthy, the Prince of mankind, through whom we supplicate Him for a goodly and a godly end.

