

Las Mil y Una Noches / A Thousand and One Nights **Scene Synopsis**

The Gathering of the Refugees

A man attempts to make order in a chaotic room and lights a fire for warmth. The voice of a minister is heard praying far away and a member of the group kneels in prayer. The men and women grow comfortable until they hear a noise. Cautiously approaching a conspicuous box, they open it and find a young Mediterranean woman, Salima, holding tightly onto a book.

Salima's Appearance

The refugees, Alma, Queralt, Ivan, Roger, Isaac, Mia and Jose, question Salima, "Who are you? What are you doing here? What is that book?" Salima, also a refugee, holds the famed book *One Thousand and One Nights*. The book awes the group; they presumed it was burned along with the rest of the library. Finding hope in her appearance with the book, they gather around as Salima begins to read...

The Story of Two Brother Kings

Two brothers, Shahzaman and Shahriyar, shared the kingdom of Banu Sasan. Shahzaman left to rule a distant corner of the kingdom. After 15 years of not hearing from his brother, Shahriyar sent a messenger. Shahzaman was delighted to hear from his brother and decided to go see him. He bid his wife farewell and departed. Shahzaman had not gone far when he remembered the gift for his brother was left behind. He returned to his home to find his wife making love to a slave. Outraged, he killed them both and sped to the land of his brother where he arrived saddened by the betrayal of his wife. Shahriyar could do nothing to cheer him. One day, while Shahriyar was out hunting, Shahzaman witnessed his brother's wife in a wild orgy with slaves. Shahzaman tried to tell his brother of this betrayal, but Shahriyar refused to believe his wife would do such a thing. To settle this affair, the brothers pretended to go on a hunting trip and succeeded in catching the queen in the act. Shahriyar killed his queen and the slaves, and vowed to deflower and kill one virgin each day as a punishment to all females for his wife's offense.

The Story of Shahrazad

Shahriyar kept his vow, inciting terror across Banu Sasan. As the kingdom's virgins were killed one-by-one, parents, including the messenger originally sent by Shahriyar to Shahzaman, grew fearful that their daughters would be next. The messenger's daughter, Shahrazad, insisted her father offer her to the king. Despite his protests against this mad request, the messenger went to the king and explained that his daughter wished to be sacrificed. This request triggered the King's curiosity and he agreed. Shahrazad came to the king dancing but soon began to cry, asking to see her sister, Dinarsad, one last time. The King permitted her request and Dinarsad came to the palace begging Shahrazad to tell one of her famous stories. The king agreed to this request but told Shahrazad that she must not be offended if he falls asleep during her tale.

The Story of Ibrahim the Calligrapher

Shahrazad began to tell him the story of Ibrahim, a young man so well learned in politics, mathematics, astronomy and calligraphy that the King of India requested a meeting with him. On his way to India, bandits ransacked Ibrahim's caravan, but Ibrahim managed to escape. Eventually Ibrahim reached a town and met a tailor who advised him to go cut wood in the forest. In the forest, Ibrahim found a trapdoor that led to a beautiful princess' lair. The two immediately became enamored with each other and made love, even though the princess was married to a Wizard. The princess had a bell that magically summoned the Wizard that Ibrahim foolishly rang, saying he would kill the Wizard. When the Wizard arrived, he beat his wife for her infidelity and Ibrahim found himself paralyzed, unable to defend her. The princess swore to her husband that she didn't know Ibrahim and the Wizard demanded she prove it by killing Ibrahim with his axe. As the princess lifted the axe, the sun rose in Shahrazad's world.

Dawn in the World of Shahrazad

Shahrazad halted her story as the sun rose. Dinasard and Shahriyar begged her to continue; Shahrazad said she would finish the story in the evening, if she was still alive. Shahriyar agreed to keep her alive until he learned the ending of the tale.

The moon rose and it was night once again. Dinasard begged her sister to finish telling the story. Shahrazad continued...

Continuation of Ibrahim the Calligrapher

Axe in hand, the princess said she could not kill an innocent man and therefore could not kill Ibrahim. Infuriated, the Wizard ordered Ibrahim to kill the princess, but Ibrahim refused by the same reasoning. The Wizard killed his wife himself and asked Ibrahim how he would like to die. Ibrahim offered to entertain the Wizard in lieu of his death. The Wizard told Ibrahim that if his tale was good enough, his life would be spared. Ibrahim began his tale...

The Story of the Hunchback

Once, a hunchback was wandering through a small town in China when he came upon a tailor and his wife. The couple gave the hunchback food and wine in exchange for entertainment. In the midst of their revelry, the couple crammed a whole fish into the hunchback's mouth to see if he could swallow it, but the hunchback choked and appeared to die. The tailor and his wife panicked, calling out, "Somebody get a doctor, our son is dying!" A Jewish doctor came and when he opened the door to the house, the hunchback's body tumbled from atop the stairs where the couple had placed it; the doctor thought he had killed the hunchback. The doctor proceeded to pass off the blame to a Muslim, the Muslim to a Christian. Each was equally convinced to be the cause of his death. The Christian was arrested for the murder. At the hanging, the Muslim, the Jew, and the tailor all admitted to killing the man, but when the tailor stepped forward to be hanged, the Hunchback coughed up the fish. Having no one else to hang, the executioner hung himself.

Continuation of Ibrahim the Calligrapher

Ibrahim thought the Wizard was sufficiently entertained by the story, so he bid him farewell and began to leave. The Wizard, however, still felt that Ibrahim needed to be punished so he turned him into a monkey saying, "I told you I'd spare your life. I didn't tell you what kind of life!"

Entrance of the Military

As Salima finishes Ibrahim's story, noises are heard outside; everyone hides. Salima and Roger hurry to protect the book. Heavily armed soldiers ransack the library, destroying everything except a model of the city of Baghdad, which they take with them. When they

leave, the group comes out of hiding to find their makeshift library destroyed. They implore Salima to keep reading.

Return to the World of Shahrazad

Gathering the damaged books, Shahrazad sings a sad song about injustice and the ruinous destiny the abuse of power deserves. The song calms Shahriyar's soul and he commands her to tell more stories of love, deceit and adventure.

The Story of the Magnetic Mountain

Shahrazad/Salima begins/began a new story. In the city of Basora, the King's son, Aguib, decided to go to sea. Thrown off course by a tempest, Aguib saw a huge black mountain, which the captain warned would destroy them because it was a magnetic mountain that could pull every nail from the ship. Aguib did not heed the warning and the captain's prediction came true; the ship came apart at the seams sending the crew into the sea. All the sailors drowned except Aguib, who managed to swim to the shore of the magnetic mountain. He climbed to the summit of the mountain and there he found a bronze statue of a man on horseback. A spirit gave him a bow and three arrows and told him he must use them to destroy the statue so that the mountain would sink into the ocean. Aguib succeeded in this task and, as the mountain sank into the sea, the spirit gave him a boat rowed by a man of tin, warning him never to use the name of God when in the boat. After many days at sea, Aguib sighted land and shouted, "God is great!" At that, the tin-man threw him overboard and rowed away.

Fatal Destiny

Aguib swam to shore. After some time, Aguib sighted a ship in the distance, so he climbed up a palm tree to hide. The ship landed, and a young man was left on the shore with food and water. After the ship left, the young man told Aguib of the prophecy that foretold his death 40 days after the destruction of the magnetic mountain at the hands of the man responsible for the mountain's destruction. Knowing that he would never harm the young man, Aguib assured the youth of his safety and the youth agreed to share his food. On the 40th and final day of the prophecy the youth asked Aguib to climb up a tree to cut some fruit down for him. As he was doing so, Aguib dropped the knife killing the young man by accident.

Shahrazad's World

Melancholically Shahriyar lamented that no one can be free from destiny. Shahrazad told him that if one confronts destiny it may be possible to change it. Smiling, Shahriyar told Shahrazad that she was the best example of that.

Return to Reality

The scene returns to the library as Ivan tells his companions that he has begun to believe in destiny; they agree, but insist that people have control over some of it. Isaac urges the story telling to continue because they only have this one night. All agree, but break to eat. Jose confesses that he has forgotten the bag of food and Salima invites them all to the fabulous banquet in the next story...

The Story of the Mocked Mocker

A beggar wandered into the courtyard of a wealthy home and asked an old man for a bit of food. The old man, Alí Sar, had his servants serve an imaginary banquet and the beggar willingly played along, even to the point of feigning drunkenness. The old man so appreciated the beggar's sense of humor that he ordered him a real feast. While a slave girl sang a melancholy song about lost love, the old man told the beggar of a beautiful slave girl he

once loved. He told of his father, a rich merchant, who cautioned him to live modestly and to beware of those that only wanted the money he would inherit...

Alí Sar and Zumurrud the Slave Girl

But Alí did not listen and within a year he squandered his inheritance. One day at a slave auction a beautiful slave girl, Zumurrud, gave him gold to buy her because she would only be sold to one she loved. That night, jealous would-be buyers kidnapped Zumurrud and beat Alí. Zumurrud escaped and wandered into a town whose custom was, when a governor died, to make the first stranger to enter town their new leader. As the new governor, Zumurrud declared the first day of each month to be a feast for strangers. One day, the two men who kidnapped her came to the feast. Questioned by Zumurrud one at a time, they were caught lying and taken away. Then, Alí came and took the same seat. When questioned by Zumurrud he confessed that he was only looking for his lost love. Zumurrud took him to her room and tried to seduce him; when he protested, she finally revealed herself to him and they embraced.

Goodbye Shahrazad's World

The light of dawn revealed Shahriyar and Shahrazad in each others' arms. King Shahriyar, seeing that her story has ended with the sunrise asked her how many stories she's told. Shahrazad replied that it's been a thousand and one nights that she's been telling stories to save her life and those of other women. She told him that beautiful stories can push fear and anguish away because imagination, fantasy and dreams are the antidote to fright and destruction. King Shahriyar proclaimed that he would have her stories written down so that her children's children and generations yet to come would never forget her name because there would come a time when her stories would serve as a balm for suffering.

Dawn and Real Goodbye

Back in the library, dawn breaks. Everyone begins to gather their belongings in silence to leave. Several refugees thank Salima for the stories that sustained them through the night. Salima tells them she would not exist without someone to tell her stories to. Before leaving, she reads a final verse from the book of *A Thousand and One Nights*:

Saw the destruction of my country:
Only the ruins were left of what was my home.
The tranquil life that once I cherished
Has given way to shame and disgrace.

Destiny that governs everything
Has separated me from the ones I love.
I hope that God drives the sadness away
And returns me to the side of my loved ones.

She closes the book and leaves.

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