

The Storyteller's Daughter Study Guide

The Storyteller's Daughter by Cameron Dokey

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Plot Summary

A long time ago, a good and just king has two sons, Shahrayar and Shazaman. Upon his death, the two sons divide his kingdom equally and hold each other in high esteem. The vizier of the father becomes the vizier of the son, Shahrayar. He too is also a good and just man. While on an expedition in a far off land, the vizier falls in love with a storyteller named Maju, whom he brings back to his native land. Both she and the daughter she bears, Shahrazad, are considered outsiders in their home, though future king Shahrayar maintains a curiosity about Shahrazad from childhood. Maju teaches Shahrazad to have faith in herself and not worry about being different.

After the other children are cruel to her, Shahrazad renounces society and chooses to live a solitary life, especially after Maju dies and Shahrazad magically inherits her blindness. There is a prophecy that Shahrazad may be the greatest storyteller of all time. Maju tells her that it is her fate to save the heart of a nation. The king (still Shahrayar's father) forces the vizier to marry a new woman, who bears a daughter and immediately dies of shame, leaving Shahrazad to raise her sister Dinarzad.

After Shahrayar ascends to the throne, both he and Shazaman discover their wives in plots to betray and overthrow them. They kill their wives in the name of justice, but not before Shahrayar's wife curses him to a life without love. Shahrayar reacts badly to this dishonor, and turns his heart to stone. He puts forth a decree that he will henceforth marry once a month for one night only, executing his brides in the morning so they cannot betray him. If a maiden volunteers for the role of first wife, all those who come after her will merely be imprisoned.

Shahrazad volunteers to marry Shahrayar, despite the protests of her father and sister. She believes that this is the fate she was born for and is determined to guide Shahrayar back to his heart. She devises a plan, using her sister as a catalyst, to get Shahrayar involved in an endless nightly story, buying herself time to learn his heart and teach him of her own. Unsuspecting, Shahrayar finds himself happily entranced by the story and his new wife, and surprises himself and his people by now declaring that until the story ends, Shahrazad may live.

Meanwhile, the five brothers of Shahrayar's first wife decide to seek revenge against Shahrayar for dishonoring their family. Once a royal family themselves, they intend to put the eldest brother back on the throne. They send the youngest, 'Ajib, to live as a serving boy in the castle to help find a weakness they can exploit. 'Ajib, a clever teen, quickly inserts himself directly into the king's family life, befriending Dinarzad, and discovering Shahrayar's weakness for Shahrazad.

Shahrayar and Shahrazad also develop feelings for the other, but neither is willing to speak them aloud for fear that the other does not reciprocate. They spend more time with each and Dinarzad, still fearing her sister's life is in jeopardy, but also jealous of their growing closeness, insinuates that Shahrazad manipulated Shahrayar with her story to keep herself alive. Shahrazad protests she acted as she did to give herself a

chance to get to know Shahrayar's heart but he feels betrayed again, but before he can fully react, the brothers, on 'Ajib's word, infiltrate and overthrow the king. They lock the king and queen away separately to stew.

Ajib regrets his involvement with his brothers' plot, recognizing that his brother is a heartless, selfish leader. He sets out to assist Shazaman in mounting a resistance. Deciding to kill two birds with one stone, the brothers condemn Shahrazad to death for sorcery, but offer her the chance to keep Shahrayar alive if she can recognize him without speaking or touching. Shahrazad realizes that in order to save him she must reveal her true feelings for him even if he rejects her. Before all the court, Shahrazad picks her husband out from all the prisoners and tells him she loves him. Shahrayar looks into his own heart and discovers he feels the same way. Their reunion is interrupted by Shazaman and an army to defeat the usurper. Without any bloodshed, Shahrayar and Shahrazad convince the people to pledge their allegiance to Shahrayar, who was a much better leader and who cared for them. Ajib renounces his brothers and is accepted as a member of the family of Shahrayar. Having fulfilled her fate, Shahrazad recovers her sight. Everyone lives happily ever after.



Prologue - Chapter 2: If You Would Know, How the Story Begins, The Tale of the Girl Who Wished to Be What She Is Not

Prologue - Chapter 2: If You Would Know, How the Story Begins, The Tale of the Girl Who Wished to Be What She Is Not Summary

In the Prologue, Shahrazad speaks directly to the readers, enticing them with a new perspective on an ancient tale: she offers to tell her story herself. Rather than focusing on the stories the storyteller (Shahrazad) told in "One Thousand and One Nights," Shahrazad will describe how she came to be in the position to tell them and how her relationship with Shahrayar developed. She speaks from old age, from the end of the story, seeing its full arc.

Shahrazad's father, a vizier, travels to a distant land in India where he meets and falls in love with Shahrazad's mother, Maju. Maju comes from a nomadic people. She is highly respected among her people as a drabardi, or storyteller. It has been prophesied that she will give birth to the greatest drabardi of all time. Maju is also blind. Though sad to leave her people, Maju loves the vizier and knows it is her destiny to marry him. The vizier's countrymen never quite accept Maju because of her foreignness. When Shahrazad is born she suffers the same fate: she is treated as an outsider even though her father is one of the highest-ranking men in the land.

One day when Shahrazad is eight years old, the other children tease her and violently throw her into a fountain that she likes to play near. Frustrated, she vents to Maju, wishing she were just like everyone else so she wouldn't stand out. Maju encourages her to be herself. She tells Shahrazad to bring her the cloth in Maju's ebony chest so Maju can tell her a story. Maju tells the story of a young princess who feels unappreciated by her father because she was neither a son nor beautiful. She sits by a fountain pool just like the one Shahrazad favors, and wishes to be a goldfish in the pond, as they have a specific place in the world and are admired. A djinn hears her wish and offers to make it come true, giving her a magic word that will turn her into a fish and change her back when she wants to be human again.

No one even notices that the princess has disappeared as she enjoys her time as a goldfish. But after several days she overhears two of the king's subjects, a princely nephew and a courtier, planning to lure the king to the pond to kill him and ascend to the throne. The princess wants to save her father but decides the only way he will believe her is if she returns to human form right at the moment of his betrayal. On the day of the



treachery, one conspirator hides in the pomegranate tree until the nephew arrives with the king. The princess realizes she cannot speak because she is a fish and doesn't know how to warn her father. She swims frantically which gets his attention, and in the pool's reflection he sees his betrayer hiding in the tree. The nephew panics and pulls a knife but the king overpowers him and kills him. The conspirator leaps from the tree to stab the king in the back, but the princess fish leaps from the water and takes the hit instead. The king drowns the conspirator as the princess turns back to her human form.

The king is shocked as the princess lays dying and the djinn appears to explain to the king that though the princess thought she wanted to be a fish, she really wanted to prove herself valuable in the king's eyes, which she has finally done. Shahrazad recognizes the moral of this story: "That I should know my own value and never seek to be what I am not" (Page 200). Shahrazad decides that rather than trying to win the approval of those who do not like her she will try to learn to live a solitary life.

Eavesdropping from the pomegranate tree above the fountain is Shahrayar, the king's eldest son. He watches as Maju drops her cloth into the pool where it dissolves and he searches for it after the women leave. Shahrayar has a brother Shazaman, and the king has raised them to be strong and respectful rather than jealous. When the king dies, Shahrayar, his heir as eldest, seeks a balanced relationship with his brother, so he gives Shazaman the city of Samarkand and the main trade routes and their environs to rule while Shahrayar keeps the lands of India and Indochina to rule himself. Thus each brother has a kingdom and they can exist as equals rather than as envious usurpers.

Prologue - Chapter 2: If You Would Know, How the Story Begins, The Tale of the Girl Who Wished to Be What She Is Not Analysis

The prologue introduces Shahrazad in the first person as she encourages the reader to stick with the novel even though it may be a story the reader already knows. She speaks directly to the reader, even describing the reader's relationship to the book held in their hands. Shahrazad works hard to create a personal relationship between storyteller and reader, as it would exist if she were declaring the story out loud to her audience, as was her traditional role.

In Chapter One, the point of view changes to third person omniscient: Shahrazad tells her own story as if it were the story of someone else. The author may choose this narrative style rather than continuing in the first person in order to create continuity with the norms of oral storytelling: traditionally, storytellers never spoke about themselves. In addition, since Shahrazad seemingly knows the hearts and thoughts of her characters, the reader can more readily accept her omniscience if she does not present herself as a character in the narrative: How could an "I" presume to know the thoughts of others?

The reader immediately gets the sense that the novel takes place in the distant past through the language: the elderly are referred to as "graybeards." Rather than stating

simply that, "She cried two tears" the narrator describes the tears of Maju in this way: "And from her eyes there fell two tears, one each from the left eye and the right" (p. 11). The author is tying the story to its roots as an ancient text by using formalized language and unusual syntax. Though Shahrazad is telling the story of "One Thousand and One Nights" from a new angle, she is not attempting to tell it in a different, or modern way. Similarly, there is no difference between the narrative voice in the main arc of Shahrazad's story and that of the stories within the story Maju and Shahrazad tell. After the first person prologue, the tone and style remain the same throughout.

Maju's story to Shahrazad reveals a great deal about the society in which they live: the princess has no "value" because she is not male, nor is she beautiful. Without beauty she cannot demand a desirable suitor, and thus she is worthless to her father even in creating useful alliances. This is a society in which women are treated as second-class citizens. The moral of Maju's story is therefore interesting: rather than trying to teach Shahrazad the glory of self-sacrifice for the sake of a man, Maju points out that by setting her value according to the estimation of others rather than knowing it internally, the princess dies needlessly. She advocates for the value of being different rather than seeking to blend in.

Maju is blind yet she knows Shahrazad has a head injury when she is thrown in the pool, and she wraps up her daughter's wound. She reads the story in the cloth with her hands rather than her eyes, and though it shows no words. The author is sowing the seeds in these early chapters about the idea of true vision and what it means to see. Eyes are not necessary to access truth.

Shahrayar's unknown presence for this story between mother and daughter foreshadows his interest in Shahrazad and stories. He seems baffled by the magic he has witnessed, but the fact that he sits and contemplates it rather than revealing his presence and ordering Maju to reveal the magic, demonstrates that he is thoughtful rather than arrogant or demanding.

Chapter 3: Sorrow

Chapter 3: Sorrow Summary

Soon after Maju tells the story of the princess-fish story to Shahrazad, she falls ill. After a long, private talk with her daughter, Maju dies. Though devastated, Shahrazad eventually rouses herself from her mourning and realizes she has turned as blind as her mother was. She acts on her words and keeps herself sequestered in her father's home, and people wonder about the prophecy that Maju would give birth to the greatest storyteller of all time.

After a year of mourning, the king forces the vizier to marry again to a woman of the king's choosing. Though beautiful, the woman is cold, and neither the vizier nor Shahrazad like her. She does not care for Shahrazad either, and she looks forward to the day she will give birth to a son, believing this will make the vizier forget all about his daughter. Instead, she gives birth to a daughter and immediately dies, leaving Shahrazad to raise her younger sister, whom she names Dinarzad.

The vizier and his two daughters live happily and quietly together, while rumors of Shahrazad's beauty grow. No one longs to see the sequestered blind girl more than Shahrayar, though he won't admit it to anyone. When Shahrazad is sixteen, Shahrayar ascends to the throne and gives a kingdom to his brother. On the one-year anniversary of their father's death, Shahrayar sends the vizier to Samarkand to bring Shazaman back home to visit, as they have never been apart for so long. Shazaman is happy to go, though sorry to leave his wife, who gives him wine as a departing gift and asks him to think of her when he drinks it. Before they leave the city, Shazaman seeks his wife for one final goodbye and finds her in the arms of another man, plotting to overtake the throne: the wine she gave him was poisoned. Enraged, Shazaman kills them both and finds himself more than happy to leave the city where the woman he loved betrayed him.

Though happy to see his brother, Shazaman cannot shake his gloomy attitude and Shahrayar notices, but Shazaman does not want to share his pain until he also overhears Shahrayar's wife conspiring to kill him to put her lover on the throne. Shazaman finally tells Shahrayar about his own wife and reveals what he has discovered about his brother's. Though Shahrayar believes his brother, in the spirit of justice he decides to wait until he hears it from his wife's own mouth before condemning her. Shahrayar is horrified to learn that his wife betrays him in the space he had given her where she alone had the power to allow or deny access, a courtyard he had built "as proof of the great trust he had in his wife" (p. 35).

Shahrayar is further disgusted to see that his wife's co-conspirator is his childhood friend, whom he planned to promote to the vizier's position when the vizier died. Their plan is to frame Shazaman for Shahrayar's murder, turning the people against him as well, so that they can rule the entire kingdom. Even when Shahrayar reveals himself, his

wife shows no remorse, preferring to die at her own hand than his. She curses him before killing herself: "Until you have found a woman whose heart you can see truly and therefore know it - one who can do the same with yours - you will find no peace by day or by night" (p. 38).

Chapter 3: Sorrow Analysis

Shahrazad goes blind upon Maju's death, just as Maju herself was blind. This blindness acts as a passing of the torch. Shahrazad has now become the storyteller. This lack of external sight seems to facilitate the storytelling process: Shahrazad can no longer be distracted by the outside world, but instead must focus on her inner life. She can let her heart guide her to the appropriate stories to uncover the truth.

The vizier's second wife gives birth to a daughter and when she hears she has delivered a girl instead of a boy "she flew into a rage so great her heart burst, and she died" (Page 27). This highlights the hyper-dramatic storytelling device traditional in a world where people can literally die of a broken heart. Symbolically, her death reinforces the worthlessness of girls in society. A mother cannot take pride in her own child if it is the "wrong" gender. The author also offers an instance of the disparity between looks and character: the king chooses the second wife for the vizier because she is beautiful and high-ranking within the court, but her ambition and pride make her mean-spirited. She is cruel to Shahrazad and cruel to her own daughter, being so disgusted by her gender that she inadvertently kills herself. Readers note that the author is teaching a moral tale in which "beauty is only skin deep."

Readers may also note how infrequently women have names throughout the novel. The wives of the vizier, Shahrayar, and Shazaman all go unnamed. This may be a reflection on the desire to keep the stories universal: the characters are archetypes and plot devices rather than fully drawn, three-dimensional characters. The vizier's wife only exists to give birth to Dinarzad, and she acts like a typical fairytale character: she is the prototypical evil stepmother, antecedent to characters in Cinderella and Snow White. The two kings' wives only appear in the story long enough to betray their husbands. They are minor characters, but heartlessly cruel, and their namelessness further reduces their status. The novel makes a negative statement about women and their significance: women are interchangeable and easily replaced. They seem to exist, like Eve in the Bible, only to bring about the fall of men (even Shahrayar's wife's lover begs for Shahrayar's mercy by claiming to be "bewitched").

Shazaman's reaction to overhearing Shahrayar's wife's betrayal of his brother may be surprising: "For now he understood that it was not he, alone, who could be deceived. All men could be blinded by their faith in the women they loved" (p. 33). Besides subtly reinforcing the idea that women are inherently treacherous, this reaction introduces another important theme to the novel: the place of honor. Readers may wonder if Shazaman is truly devastated by the loss of the woman he loves or if he is simply devastated that a woman duped him. He takes great pride in himself as a just leader of his people, and this woman reduces him to a cuckold. Shazaman is "strangely filled with

joy" (p. 33) when he discovers Shahrayar's similar plight. He's not hurt or angry on his brother's behalf, he's relieved he's not the only one open to humiliation. It is an odd reaction and speaks to his misplaced sense of pride. Due to this over-inflated personal honor, the brothers respond by killing their wives without benefit of trial or other witnesses. Though the wives are represented as remorseless and evil, this knee-jerk reaction has more to do with ego than justice. Readers may expect lessons on the proper place of honor and humility as the novel progresses.

Chapters 4-6: How Shahrazad is Bold, In Which the Vizier Takes a Chance, The King Takes a Wife But Receives a Surprise

Chapters 4-6: How Shahrazad is Bold, In Which the Vizier Takes a Chance, The King Takes a Wife But Receives a Surprise Summary

Shahrayar behaves as if nothing is bothering him until the end of Shazaman's visit, at which point he locks himself in a high tower where he believes "treachery could hide where it was least expected, even in the heart of the one he loved and trusted most" (p. 40). After going through the agonizing pain of cutting love and trust from his heart, Shahrayar emerges with a heart made of stone, and he orders the vizier to make a decree throughout the land: each month on the night of the full moon, Shahrayar will take a new wife who will be killed the next morning so that she has no time to betray him. If one maiden volunteers for the first marriage and execution, all those who come after will be imprisoned instead of killed. Shahrayar has always been a just leader beloved by his people, but with this proclamation he loses their trust. His subjects immediately turn against him and the prosperity of the land declines without a strong, respected leader.

Shahrazad, now seventeen, goes to her father and requests his promise to grant her a wish before he even knows what it is. He readily agrees, but is shocked when Shahrazad asks that he offer her to Shahrayar the next night as his wife. The vizier immediately tries to renege on his word, but Shahrazad explains that it is her fate to marry Shahrayar: the prophecy foretold she would be the greatest storyteller of all time. She is determined to see Shahrayar's heart, as per the first queen's curse, in order to save the kingdom from collapsing: "By my skill as a storyteller, the heart of a great nation will be lost or won" (p. 47). The vizier tries to take back his word and deny her request, offering to take her and Dinarzad away from the kingdom. But Shahrazad's will is set and the vizier knows he cannot change her mind, so he gives in. Shahrazad seeks to speak with Dinarzad, who will help put her marriage in motion by following Shahrazad's instructions.

Shahrayar is anxious as the day of the full moon arrives. The vizier brings him news that a maiden has come forward to marry him, though he artfully does not reveal Shahrazad's identity. When Shahrayar seems ready to balk at the idea of martyring the woman, the vizier plays on his pride to ensure Shahrayar will adhere to his plan and meet Shahrazad.

Dinarzad frets that she will ruin her part in the plan and begs the vizier to rescind his permission to Shahrazad to sacrifice herself. The vizier himself makes a last pitch to Shahrazad to change her mind, but guided by Fate, Shahrazad knows she must go forward with her plan.

Arriving at the king's audience hall, the king's chamberlain demands to know if Shahrazad comes of her own free will. She assures him she has, and she and the vizier enter the hall filled with all of Shahrayar's court, excited and afraid to see who has stepped forward to martyr herself. Shahrazad's confidence stumbles at the cold emotionlessness of Shahrayar's voice. She fears his heart is not stone, but simply gone, in which case she will die. Veiled, Shahrazad's identity is a secret until the last possible minute. Shahrayar and the rest of the court are shocked when she finally reveals herself. Shahrayar assumes the vizier and his daughter are trying to trick him. The vizier assures him there is no trick and further proclaims that when Shahrazad dies he will no longer serve the king but will leave the kingdom instead. He threatens to kill the king for his cruelty but Shahrazad calms him before things escalate, and she and Shahrayar are married in a brief and cold ceremony.

Chapters 4-6: How Shahrazad is Bold, In Which the Vizier Takes a Chance, The King Takes a Wife But Receives a Surprise Analysis

Beginning with the earlier proclamation that Maju would give birth to the greatest storyteller of all time, fate plays an important role in the novel. With the challenge of turning Shahrayar's heart back from his plan to marry and murder a succession of women, Shahrazad believes her destiny has manifested: "It had been too late to change her mind in this from the moment she was born" (p. 56). She was born to save Shahrayar from himself, and to save the nation from implosion. Yet there is an interesting paradox: Shahrazad repeatedly proclaims that she marries Shahrayar of her own free will. She is choosing to go into this marriage rather than being forced; in fact, everyone around her tries to dissuade her from the action. She does it because she believes it is her fate, but she does choose to do it. Where does the line between destiny and free will lie?

As the narrator points out in the beginning of Chapter Four, Shahrazad has disappeared from the novel for a chapter, despite the story being ostensibly hers. When she re-emerges, fully matured at seventeen and ready to sacrifice herself into marriage, readers see that those missing years aren't important to Shahrazad's growth and development: she is an archetypal character in the vein of Christ. Shahrazad is pure and good like Christ, and willing to cede herself for the good of all: she will literally save the kingdom by giving herself to Shahrayar, just as Jesus saved all mankind through the crucifixion according to Christian tradition. Like the Biblical Jesus, Shahrazad only briefly doubts her ability to accomplish what she believes a higher power has set down for her to do, and she goes willingly to her theoretical death. Though this is Shahrazad's personal story, readers don't truly see much of her inner life beyond her single-minded

belief in her mission. This makes her a fairly one-dimensional character, and harder to relate to for modern readers who generally lead more complex, less black-and-white lives.

Shahrayar's first wife destroys his ability to trust others, particularly women. He desires to cut emotion out of his heart, yet his proclamation seems more like an emotional reaction to his circumstances than a decision based in logic: if not for love, marriage theoretically should result in offspring, and particularly for a royal, an heir. Killing his wives after one night each means Shahrayar will never have a son to take over his kingdom. Perhaps he intends an outlet for his sexual gratification in a socially acceptable outlet (rather than turning to the immoral option of prostitution), but the chaste, moralistic nature of the novel never alludes to sexuality, making the reader wonder what the purpose of these one-night marriages is beyond a plot device to make the kingdom hate Shahrayar and give Shahrazad something to save everyone from. As an attempt to deny emotions, this knee-jerk, vengeful proclamation rests on precarious ground.

Shahrayar's restlessness and unease on the day of the first full moon underlies the lack of resolve in his plan. Though he wants his heart to be made of stone, his actions prove otherwise; he cannot even look himself in the eye in the reflective surface of the pool. He knows his murderous plan is wrong though his pride pushes him to stubbornly adhere to it. Readers may even note that the author explicitly states that, "Until his queen's betrayal, Shahrayar had always been as true in his dealings with women as he was with men. Never viewing them as interchangeable, but seeking always to see each for herself alone" (Page 53). In this Shahrayar seemingly goes against the norms of his society. Similarly, though Shahrayar tries to project a cold heartlessness, his actions speak louder than words: when the vizier threatens his life to his face and mocks him for being merciless, Shahrayar does not rush to quash such an act of potential treachery.

For all these reasons, readers may feel a decided lack of tension regarding Shahrazad's impending death. Everything from the illogic of the initial decree to his dealing with a direct threat of murder indicate that Shahrayar will be easily swayed from his plan of merciless murder.



Chapter 7-8: In Which Hidden Things Begin to Reveal Themselves, Dinarzad Sets the Future in Motion

Chapter 7-8: In Which Hidden Things Begin to Reveal Themselves, Dinarzad Sets the Future in Motion Summary

Once married, Shahrayar brings Shahrazad to their shared quarters, trying to make her feel at home, if only for a night. Though Shahrayar adamantly believed that his plan was good, now that he faces his new wife, he finds himself confused. He realizes he wants to please her. Though Shahrazad puts on a placid exterior, she has some internal doubts when she hears the opaque coldness of Shahrayar's voice, wondering if she can penetrate his stone heart. She notices his restless movements but cannot be sure what they mean. Meanwhile Shahrayar gets angry that Shahrazad seems so cool and unattached rather than irate or fearful about her fate.

Shahrayar demands to know why she volunteered for the marriage. Shahrazad claims she wants the opportunity to truly see his heart. Shahrayar scorns her wish, callously pointing out her blindness, but Shahrazad retorts that he cannot yet see her heart even though his eyes work. He further pushes her to admit that she believes he is lost, too self-absorbed to remember his duties to his people. Shahrayar is shocked that she criticizes him, something his sycophantic first wife never did while she secretly plotted behind his back.

Shahrayar starts to have warm feelings for Shahrazad despite himself, and she takes advantage of the moment to request that Dinarzad be allowed to say goodnight to her as they have every night for Dinarzad's ten years of life. Shahrayar happily assents to a request he knows will please his wife, while simultaneously feeling the painful knowledge that he will separate the sisters forever. Dinarzad asks Shahrayar's permission to hear one final story from her sister, and he quickly agrees to that as well. When she brings the ebony trunk to Shahrazad, Dinarzad asks Shahrayar if he would like to take out the cloth, so that the story will be for him. Impressed by her selflessness, Shahrayar agrees, though he has some trouble finding the cloth in the recesses of the otherwise empty trunk. As he pulls it out, he wonders how Shahrazad can "read" such a simple, rough piece of material. Shahrazad's hands work over the material and she claims the story will be long, asking if Shahrayar has the will and patience to hear it all, and he vows he does. So she begins.

Chapter 7-8: In Which Hidden Things Begin to Reveal Themselves, Dinarzad Sets the Future in Motion Analysis

Understandably, in the first moments of this awkward and unanticipated marriage, Shahrayar and Shahrazad are not entirely comfortable speaking their hearts. Neither can recognize the inner turmoil of the other. Yet when Shahrazad speaks candidly about her feelings on the king's petulant behavior, Shahrayar finds it shocking yet refreshing. His first wife presented herself as obedient and agreeable but clearly held back her true feelings toward her husband. He wonders if their relationship would have been different if they had had more open conversations. Here readers find the groundwork for another major theme of the novel: the importance of honest communication, both with one's self and with others. Within the first moments of their strange marriage, Shahrazad speaks her mind, no matter how disagreeable the truth might be. She tries to build a strong foundation for their relationship.

On the other hand, readers see in these chapters the role Shahrazad has instructed Dinarzad to play on this first night of marriage. As each step of Shahrazad's plan falls into place, Dinarzad shows outward signs of relief that wink at the reader that events are occurring according to Shahrazad's outline, though Shahrayar obviously only interprets the relief as Dinarzad's gratitude to spend one final night with her sister. Shahrayar considers Dinarzad "selfless" when she offers the story to him instead of taking the cloth out for herself, yet readers realize Dinarzad is merely saying her lines in a script of Shahrazad's devising. Readers can assume that if and when Shahrayar discovers that this "organic" night in which he desired to please his new wife was actually orchestrated and manipulated by Shahrazad, he will not react well.

Shahrazad takes comfort in the simple, homespun fabric from which the divan she sits on in Shahrayar's private chambers is made. He furnishes his personal space with homey things rather than things to "compel and impress" (Page 69). His decorating tastes reflect his true character: he has in the past been a king not interested merely in the appearance of being a king. Expensive furnishings might look royal but do not make one actually royal. As a king, Shahrayar was more interested in the act and practice of good leadership rather than simply the appearance of it. His current proclamation is not in keeping with his basic character, and this gives Shahrazad hope that she can lead him back to himself.

In addition, it is hardly tenable that Shahrayar continues to believe he has turned his heart to stone: readers see him run the emotional gamut from pain to compassion to self-loathing. A truly hard-hearted man would not feel so much empathy for Shahrazad's plight, a situation he himself created. He doubts and self-recriminates and further proves that his character and heart are not at all in alignment with his outward gestures and words.

When Shahrayar does not immediately find the cloth in the trunk, he has a childishly petulant moment wondering, "What if his true destiny was this: always to be unable to obtain what others seemed to come by without thought" (Page 80). When he does not get what he wants instantly, he wonders if Fate is out to get him: just like love and trust, he cannot have his own story. Yet he fights this feeling; he vows that he will get what he wants this time, and immediately he finds the cloth. Once again readers may note the push-pull relationship between fate and will. As soon as Shahrayar decides not to be a victim of destiny, he achieves his goal. Of course, some may ask if it was his destiny to find the cloth all along because his fate is tied so closely to Shahrazad's, but there is an interesting tension between these two sides of the single coin and readers should focus on who or what is controlling the novel's unfolding events.



Chapters 9-10: The Tale of the Knight Who Thought He Could Outshine the Stars, Shahrayar Surprises Many, But Himself Most of All

Chapters 9-10: The Tale of the Knight Who Thought He Could Outshine the Stars, Shahrayar Surprises Many, But Himself Most of All Summary

Shahrazad begins her tale: a king in a far off land covets a son above all else. His first wife gives him only daughters and his second is barren, so he seeks out an oracle to discover if Fate is working against him and why. He reaches the foot of the oracle's mountain but cannot find a way across the icy cold stream that surrounds it. When an ugly old woman approaches him, the king offers to help her, knowing the oracle must be watching his actions. The woman demands that the king carry her across the stream, and despite his feelings of revulsion, he agrees. Despite the arduousness of the journey, the king wills himself to complete it and suddenly they arrive at the top of the mountain. The old woman morphs into a beautiful young woman, the oracle, ready to grant the king's request.

The king asks why he has no son. The oracle wonders why the king, having many daughters, is not satisfied, why he continues to want what he doesn't have instead of appreciating what is already his. She prophesies that if the king sees what he wants without claiming it, he is destined for a long, sorrowful journey. The king sees this response as a simple yes and is sure he will return home to a bouncing baby boy. The oracle asks him, "So you think the light of your will can outshine what is written in the stars" (p. 88) and the king pridefully thinks that because he is king, he can always get what he wants. As he hurries home, his thoughts reinforce his misplaced sense of honor, as he assures himself that he will have a son when he arrives at his palace. As his righteous indignation at the oracle abates, the king realizes that no matter how far he walks, he is not any closer to home. He suddenly fears that the magic of the mountain has trapped him. Before Shahrazad can go on, a rooster crows announcing the arrival of morning. Shahrayar is shocked that an entire night passed without reaching the conclusion of the story. Shahrayar is also surprised to realize that he does not want to complete the final part of his decree. He suddenly views Shahrazad as truly his wife. He tries to figure a way to change what he has willed.

Shahrazad feels remorse at the way she has entrapped Shahrayar in her story. She knows her intentions are good since she is trying to save the entire kingdom, but Shahrayar might certainly view her actions as manipulative if he learns of them. She realizes it is a dangerous game, given his anguish over his first wife's deception. She



apologizes to Shahrayar for allowing Dinarzad to initiate the storytelling and then not finishing her tale, though he does not realize she is apologizing for much more than that. When she points out she has not finished the story, Shahrayar sees a way to keep her alive: as he has vowed to hear the story to its end, she will stay alive until she completes it. Shahrazad wonders if he will hold to this new proclamation when he now casts aside the other so easily. Shahrayar gets angry, exhausted that people expect him to be perfect just because he is king, but Shahrazad allays his confusion. Even though Shahrayar is a king, he is also just a man doing the best he can. Shahrayar is relieved that Shahrazad does not expect him to be perfect, and suddenly finds himself wanting to kiss her. Instead he sends her to her father to reveal the news that she will tell the story each night until it is finished.

Chapters 9-10: The Tale of the Knight Who Thought He Could Outshine the Stars, Shahrayar Surprises Many, But Himself Most of All Analysis

The beginning of this parable reinforces many of the novel's main themes. When the king seeks the oracle, he goes alone, dressed simply, for "those who see what no one else can care nothing for trappings that make others so proud" (Page 83-4). True sight does not care for physical appearances, which can be extrapolated to underline the idea that one shouldn't judge a book by its cover. Similarly, the king must force himself to help the repellent old woman cross the stream because he knows that the oracle will consider the ugly old lady to be his equal, and will judge him based on how he treats her. Of course the filthy old lady turns into a stunningly beautiful young woman - undermining the message regarding the unimportance of physical beauty.

The king divorces his first wife, whom he loves, because she cannot give him a son, although she has born many daughters. As in Maju's story to the young Shahrazad, daughters have no value to him. He further believes that because his second wife is "beautiful and virtuous" she will bear a son. He is judging a book by its cover and coming to very strange conclusions about its interior life. As is often the case in archetypal morality stories, the king conflates beauty with virtue and assumes all good things must exist in one who is physically attractive. Unfortunately for him, he is wrong. Readers continue to see that when viewed merely as commodities, women's worth is calculated by completely incorrect standards of value.

When Shahrazad first has twinges of guilt about how she has tricked Shahrayar, she recognizes that if he now allows her to live, "surely he would believe it was the result of his own will" (p. 93). He would not have the insight to see that Shahrazad may have manipulated him with her story. Once again readers note the fine line between fate and free will. Shahrayar has had a genuine reaction to Shahrazad and genuinely conflicted feelings about his stubborn decree. Shahrazad's machinations to make him listen to a story are only the final nail in the coffin: Shahrayar is looking for an excuse to change his mind. So, has Shahrazad set the wheels of her fate as the greatest storyteller ever

in motion with her story, or has she simply facilitated a way for Shahrayar to make a different choice for himself? Is there a distinction?

Another theme is introduced as Shahrayar works out a way to keep Shahrazad alive: the importance of changing one's mind when one has locked into a bad idea. Shahrayar's proclamation of monthly one-night marriages is a bad plan; his subjects know it, the vizier told him so to his face, and deep down Shahrayar knows it too. As king, he thinks it appears weak to go back on his word, as if he were not strong enough to manifest his own will. His vacillating resolve even gives Shahrazad pause, knowing if he can change his mind so easily one day to keep her alive, he can just as easily change it back and order her execution the next day. Yet her ultimate response, that she understands he can't possibly have all the answers and that he is simply doing the best he can, subtly advocates for changing one's mind in the face of new information. Rather than being weak, it takes great strength of character to admit when you are wrong. It also underscores that one does in fact have free will, when one changes one's mind rather than stubbornly clinging to one idea as if it were destiny. Readers should stay alert for other examples of how this theme manifests throughout the novel.



Chapters 11-12: A Plot, Shahrazad Is Joyful, and the Conspirators Make a Discovery

Chapters 11-12: A Plot, Shahrazad Is Joyful, and the Conspirators Make a Discovery Summary

In Chapter 11, the narrator breaks away from the main story to introduce a subplot: the five brothers of Shahrayar's first wife are plotting revenge for her murder. They used to rule their own kingdom before Shahrayar's father conquered them and won their people's allegiance for himself. The brothers rewrite the history of their sister, taking the blame for the betrayal from their sister and instead dumping the responsibility for her actions on Shahrayar, whom they believed gave their sister too much freedom (so what else could she do but betray him?). The brothers rarely all agree on anything. Unlike Shahrayar and Shazaman, they are jealous and argumentative - but they are now determined to kill Shahrayar and place their eldest brother on the throne. They offer up different strategies for the coup, but know it will not be achieved simply. They finally decide that while they quietly try to raise an army against Shahrayar, they will send the youngest brother, a fourteen-year-old, into the house as a serving boy. Working in the castle unnoticed, he can spy on Shahrayar and find any weaknesses the brothers can use against him. No one will recognize him because he was too young when Shahrayar married their sister.

The boy is already in place when Shahrayar and Shahrazad marry and spend their first night together. The story reverts back to the joyful reunion of Shahrazad and her father after that first night, interrupted by the king's chamberlain who commands them to the king's presence. Shahrayar is concerned by the large crowd that has assembled outside the castle, fearing a revolt, but Shahrazad realizes they have come to see an execution and pay respects to the girl who is saving the lives of so many others by her death. Shahrazad further believes that because the proclamation has yet to be enacted, the people don't know if that is good or bad news, and they are afraid. Unless Shahrayar addresses them directly and explains his actions, he risks losing control of them. Though Shahrayar chafes at explaining himself to his subjects, he takes the advice of Shahrazad and the vizier, and fills his people with relief by this act of mercy. But additionally he reveals a weakness to the five brothers: his feelings for Shahrazad make her a liability.



Chapters 11-12: A Plot, Shahrazad Is Joyful, and the Conspirators Make a Discovery Analysis

Readers should note a key insight into the relationship between Shahrayar and his first wife: Shahrayar's father had conquered the wife's kingdom, and as a show of good faith and loyalty to his new subjects, he marries off his own son to their princess, giving her a place of honor in the land. Of course, the princess was beautiful, so the king has no problem giving her to his son. However, this means Shahrayar did not choose his wife for love and her betrayal was certainly not one against his heart but against his honor. Bruised honor also plays a role in the plan of the wife's brothers to avenge her death. At first they are glad she is dead because they believe her actions had stained their honor. But slowly their position on honor changes, though their views on her place as a woman remain the same. They blame Shahrayar for giving his wife too much freedom, because "women are weak creatures. They require great guidance and careful watching" (p. 99). He has shamed them by failing to do his duty as a husband and keep his wife in line. Using this circuitous logic, they use their battered honor as a rallying point to revenge rather than as a mark of shame.

The brothers' attitudes towards women are harsh. They believe that the only vocabulary a woman should know are, "Husband. Obedience. Duty. Hearth. Home" (p. 100). The author does little to counter this mindset throughout the novel. Though the story belongs to Shahrazad, and she is the savior of the kingdom, she seems to adhere to the same ideas of a woman's place: she does not leave her home, she is loyal to her father and husband, she has a strong sense of duty. Unlike a sacrificial virgin at the mouth of a volcano, she willingly gives herself to Shahrayar, putting herself in line to die if things don't go as she planned. Shahrazad is a paradox of a woman: she takes on the typically masculine burden of a hero but she does it by playing into all the stereotypes of being a woman.

Though the youngest brother desires revenge as much as his elders, readers should note that he is a bit different from them: they argue amongst themselves, with the first and third brother taking sides against the second and fourth. The brothers disregard him because he is the youngest and quiet. He tends to think things through rather than advocating immediately for violence or malicious cunning as his brothers do. Given that the brothers already generally overlook and disrespect the youngest, readers may wonder how long his loyalty will remain with them.

Chapter 13: Shahrazad Resumes Her Tale

Chapter 13: Shahrazad Resumes Her Tale Summary

The novel returns to Shahrazad on the second evening of her marriage, as she is about to resume her story. Both Shahrayar and Dinarzad are eager to hear the narrative continue, and Shahrayar is surprised to discover he can envision a future of happiness and love, something he never thought he would consider again.

In the story within the story, the king is lost. He momentarily fears the oracle's warning but then scoffs at it again, renewing his rage at the unfairness of destiny, which binds one's actions with inexplicable rules. He wishes he were no longer on the mountain, and is startled when a voice offers to help him in this enchanted place. He stumbles and rolls down the mountain until colliding with a young man who accidentally pulls the king's (suddenly much longer) beard. The king gets irritated instead of being grateful that the man kept him from rolling off the mountain. He wonders how the young man doesn't know who he, the king, is, but the young man haughtily claims to be on a quest to find his long-lost father. They get into a petty argument about manners and the king cruelly points out that it's no wonder the son's father ran away.

The king, in a fit of unnecessary rage, picks up a rock to bash in the man's head, but the rock speaks to him: it vows to fulfill his request to get off the mountain and takes him soaring into the air. The king is obviously shocked and has no destination request for the rock, ultimately releasing the stone amidst a flock of birds. Just as he's falling to the earth, presumably to his death, Shahrazad is once again interrupted by the sounds of morning. Shahrazad's story is not yet finished, and so she will live. Relieved, Dinarzad heads back to her father's quarters, only to be startled at Shahrayar's door by a serving boy, who earlier brought them water and then hovered out of sight in order to hear the story and discover if there was magic in it. He believes only magic could make the king go back on his word, declaring, "What a king proclaims is right to begin with, or the he is no true king at all" (p. 126). The boy thinks there is dishonor in changing one's mind. The king's chamberlain wants to treat the boy harshly for eavesdropping, but Dinarzad protects him from harm. Shahrayar, impressed by the boy's sharp intellect, decides to treat him with leniency. He promotes him from the kitchen to the household of the vizier to learn more and round out his political acumen.

The boy, who reveals his name is 'Ajib, is the youngest brother, futilely close to his sworn enemy without any means to cut him down. Despite the kindness of Dinarzad and Shahrazad in keeping him from trouble, and despite Shahrayar's compassion and willingness to advance him, 'Ajib remains on the lookout for a way to destroy Shahrayar's kingdom.

Chapter 13: Shahrazad Resumes Her Tale Analysis

Shahrazad interrupts her story to reveal a lesson from her own mother, which is, "you should always think at least twice before you speak your innermost thoughts aloud" (p. 118). This idea recurs throughout the story, that words have power and resolute thinking is manifested in reality. Thus, when Shahrayar determines he will find the cloth in the ebony trunk, it immediately appears at his fingertips, and when the king in Shahrazad's story resolves that he will finish what he has started as he endlessly crosses the stream to the oracle's mountain, he abruptly arrives at the stream's bank. The implication here underscores the entire reason for the novel: retelling the story gives it power. Words can change the course of events, and they are not to be trifled with.

The king in Shahrazad's story mirrors Shahrayar: they both seek one who can see what no one else can, they are both concerned that Fate will keep them from ever having what they want most, the king in the story dresses simply for his journey just as Shahrayar keeps his chambers simply adorned, and both allow their sense of wronged honor to make their journey to their goal all the more difficult. Shahrayar continuously wonders at the foolishness of the king, who refuses to see what is directly in front of his eyes, yet Shahrayar does the same thing by failing to admit to himself his true feelings for Shahrazad and the comforting life they could have together.

Shahrayar proves himself a further fool by accepting 'Ajib openly into his court. His first wife supposedly instilled in him a sense of distrust and constant awareness of potential conspiracies around him, yet he does not hesitate to allow the boy - who openly disparages his dithering decision on Shahrazad's fate - to join the vizier's household and better himself. Once again, Shahrayar proves how wide the gap is between his desired heart of stone and the reality of his compassionate, just nature. He allows a conspirator to waltz directly into his chambers and never even thinks to suspect him. Paradoxically, when 'Ajib has evidence that his king is kind and just, he still adheres to the hard line that Shahrayar is his enemy whom he must destroy. 'Ajib does what he criticizes the king for not doing: he sticks with his decision, even though it may be wrong. Readers should watch out for how this criticism subtly poisons the thoughts of Shahrayar, and if he fears he is losing the respect of his subjects by flip-flopping on his proclamation. 'Ajib, though young, is incredibly intelligent to plant these seeds of doubt in Shahrayar's mind.

Chapters 14-15: The Calm Before a Storm, A Sunlight Story

Chapters 14-15: The Calm Before a Storm, A Sunlight Story Summary

Times passes and Shahrazad continues to tell her endless tale nightly, and 'Ajib joins them for the telling. Both Shahrayar and Sharazad feel contentment they were not expecting, though neither is willing to admit their feelings out loud. The subjects of the king begin to assume Shahrazad will live. 'Ajib's brothers start a rumor that Shahrayar spares Shahrazad's life not by his own free will but because she has bewitched him with her stories. The king's chamberlain takes up the rumors, embittered that the vizier has a higher ranking and significance in court than he does; the brothers' plan has taken better hold of the public imagination than they could have hoped. They pushed the story further, subtly insinuating that if Shahrayar does not kill Shahrazad, it indicates his mind has been ruined by magic and he is no longer fit to be king.

Both Shahrazad and Shahrayar hear these rumors, but cannot bring themselves to discuss it with the other, but both now feel doubts about their relationship. Shahrazad fears how the rumors could destroy her husband and her father rather than herself, but Shahrayar could only consider his own feelings and reactions to the impending crisis. They forget the first queen's curse and therefore fail to examine their own hearts to discover how they truly feel about each other, instead succumbing to public rumor. They each remain a mystery to the other. Yet their inherent bond is so intense they cannot help but be drawn to each other, and they impulsively embark on an outing into the wide, sunlit world.

Shahrayar desires anonymity for their adventure, and tells no one they are leaving the palace, even going so far as to send the vizier away on a long errand so he will not notice they are gone. They enjoy a close horseback ride out into the desert, and Shahrayar takes his wife to an oasis. They are happy, yet Shahrayar desires to know if the feelings of Shahrazad's heart match his own, for he recognizes his love for her. Fearing rejection, he can neither admit his feelings nor ask Shahrazad hers, and so he asks for a story instead. Without her ebony trunk, Shahrayar wonders if she can find a story in any piece of cloth, and requests she try to decipher a scrap of fabric he has noticed she keeps wrapped around her wrist. He is shocked to see it is bloody, and to discover it is the cloth Maju used to staunch the flow of blood from Shahrazad's head when she was thrown into the pool as a child. Shahrayar remembers witnessing the event. Shahrazad has kept the cloth as a reminder of the promises she made to herself that day, to learn to live alone. Touching the cloth, Shahrazad does indeed find a story in it.

Chapters 14-15: The Calm Before a Storm, A Sunlight Story Analysis

The chamberlain feels his honor has been tainted; he cannot fathom why the vizier is more respected than he is. He lacks the humility to recognize he does not truly measure up to the vizier. His bruised honor leads him to make up wild stories about conspiracies planned by the vizier and Shahrazad without any proof to back up his suspicions. In this way, honor defeats humility and overreaction and hardship ensue.

Chapter 14 contains the crux of conflict that pervades storytelling and literature throughout the ages: if Shahrayar and Shahrazad would simply open their mouths and communicate with each other rather than merely wondering what the other is thinking, much of the conflict could be resolved instantaneously. The novel espouses the importance of honest communication yet its protagonists cannot engage in it themselves. If they did, the novel would be much shorter, so miscommunication becomes an important device for heightening dramatic tension and drawing out a conflict to a more histrionic climax and resolution.

There is a paradox in the fact that none of Shahrayar's subjects liked his initial proclamation that his new bride would die the morning after their wedding, but now everyone is uneasy that he has failed to follow through on his word. Rather than being happy that the king recognized his mistake just as they have, the subjects worry that he lacks the strength to enact his will. Such a mindset is fertile ground for the brothers and the chamberlain's rumors about Shahrazad's sorcery. This sets up a lose-lose situation: the subjects will be horrified by the king's mercilessness if he does execute Shahrazad but will be disgusted by his mercy if he doesn't and assume that he lacks willpower. This creates the best possible environment for the brothers to enact their coup.

Yet again, Shahrazad reflects the martyr archetype made most famous by Christ. The king's subjects raised her up for bringing the king back to himself, they praised her but since they don't understand how she did it, they also fear her, and they are quick to call for her death for dealing in magic or power they don't understand. Shahrazad, like Christ, appears to be without sin. Her flaw seems to be that she is too selfless, thinking only of the needs of others. If she examined her own heart, discovered what she herself wanted and needed, and shared those needs with Shahrayar, she could perhaps avert the impending national crisis that is fed by their doubts about one another. Her humility in putting the needs of others before her own contrasts with Shahrayar's honor and pride: he allows the rumors of Shahrazad's sorcery to penetrate what he knows of her because he still fears betrayal and being duped.

There is a surprising lack of sexuality in the novel given that Shahrayar intends to essentially have a series of one night stands in lieu of a true marriage. But the relationship between Shahrayar and Shahrazad is barely even physical. Yet when Shahrayar mulls his doubts about Shahrazad, he wonders if she is "pure" as she seems to him or "tainted" as the rumors would have him believe. These two words are loaded with sexual connotations regarding a woman's virginity, and again reduce the status of

women to one or another of a dichotomy, either Madonna or whore, good or bad. Shahrayar struggles to place a value on Shahrazad by his own standards or by the standards of others.



Chapters 16-17: The Tale of the Fisherman, the Prince, and the Water Bearer's Daughter, How the Water Bearer's Daughter Finds the Fisherman, the Treasure, and Her Heart. And How the Story Finds its End. In That Order.

Chapters 16-17: The Tale of the Fisherman, the Prince, and the Water Bearer's Daughter, How the Water Bearer's Daughter Finds the Fisherman, the Treasure, and Her Heart. And How the Story Finds its End. In That Order. Summary

Shahrazad tells her story. In a land not unlike their own, a man, a water bearer lives alone with his daughter, and though they are poor, they are happy. The daughter is renowned for having a kind heart, beauty, bravery and honesty. The prince of their land, a lazy and arrogant young man, sets off from his palace to have an adventure but finds himself lost. A gang of thieves attacks him but the water bearer and his daughter appear. The water bearer has a great reputation for strength, and the daughter for bravery, so the thieves immediately flee and the water bearer and his daughter take the prince home to recover.

The prince tries to flirt with the water bearer's daughter, but she recognizes the lack of substance behind his flattery. He resorts to announcing that he is Prince Khasib in order to impress her, but instead he instills fear in the water bearer and his daughter. As a departing gift, Prince Khasib gives the daughter a ring, telling her if she ever needs his help, she should bring it to the palace.

She is surprised to soon find need of it: her father is suddenly and without charge thrown into jail. She makes the great journey to the palace, only to have the guards assume she stole the ring and they try to imprison her. A passing court lady recognizes the ring and the girl's truthfulness, and intervenes on her behalf, taking her to the prince. She asks only that the daughter remember her good deed and return the favor some day.

The prince is disturbed to see the two women together: the ring he gave to the girl was a gift from the court lady, who loves him dearly. Besides this inelegant gesture, the prince is secretly responsible for the water bearer's imprisonment, as he wanted the

chance to see the daughter again and to make it clear that he had the power to make her happy, though she did not know the real reason why. The water bearer's daughter begs for mercy for herself and her father, asking the prince to command his immediate release, for she cannot live without him. This disturbs the prince, who is further chagrined when the same court lady intervenes, suggesting the water bearer's daughter be sent on a great test, which everyone before her has failed, in order to determine if her cause is just. Though the prince knows the court lady can only have bad intentions toward the girl, he is intrigued by her idea that the girl retrieve a great treasure from the bottom of the ocean that no one has yet been able to bring to the surface. It can only be discovered by someone with "strength of body and purity of heart" (p. 152).

Prince Khasib also proclaims if she succeeds he will marry her, but the water bearer's daughter is too worried about finding the ocean, which she has never seen, to notice his added "bonus." Though it seems an impossible mission, she returns home to prepare for her journey. Suddenly the court lady arrives at her door, apologizing for setting her up on such a mission. The lady seems surprised by the genuine love and determination the girl has. She offers her a map and a pair of iron shoes, which make the girl's feet heavy, but she reasons they will not wear out.

After traveling so long her hair turns white and her iron shoes get holes, the daughter arrives at the ocean. But she despairs that she does not know what the treasure is, where to look, or that she cannot swim. A sailboat approaches and she intends to ask the fisherman for information on the treasure but instead finds herself in the ocean trying to save him when his boat is struck by lightning. She swims because she has to, and she finally manages to bring him to shore.

Her efforts send her into unconsciousness and she rouses herself in the fisherman's hut, where he has cared for her. His small cottage reminds her of her own comfortable home. Though she finds him physically ugly, he is gentle and kind in caring for her, and these traits are soon all she can see of him. He knows where the treasure she seeks is and promises to take her to it, though he reminds her many have tried and failed to retrieve it. On her first dive, the girl sees the skeletons of those who sought the treasure before her. She sees vast treasures on the ocean floor and tries to discern which has the most value to save her father. She chooses a large ruby but the fisherman tosses it away as not good enough.

They repeat this ritual day after day and the water bearer's daughter grows desperate, for everything she sees is "valuable but not precious" (Page 163). She pushes her lung capacity to its limit but never emerges with the right treasure. She realizes the bones are from those who could not settle on an item and thus drowned. The fisherman advises her to stop seeking the treasure with her eyes but rather with the eyes of her heart, but she doesn't understand what he means. She fears she will fail and her father will die, but the fisherman encourages her to trust herself more. He compares it to her ability to see that he was ugly yet kind.

When she reaches the ocean floor, she closes her eyes and sees the fisherman's face. She suddenly realizes what the treasure is: an ordinary looking shell, sharp around the



edges, that contains something precious and wonderful inside. The fisherman approves and promises they will ransom her father the next day, despite the distance. Using a magical net he has woven nightly, the fisherman tosses it across the land and gathers it in, moving them quickly from horizon to horizon until they are at Prince Khasib's palace. Only a month has passed since she left.

The prince is elated to see the water bearer's daughter again, and barely notices the treasure as he commands the preparation for their wedding. The girl had forgotten this stipulation and realizes she does not want it. However, once again the court lady intervenes, pointing out the ordinariness of the so-called treasure and suggesting the prince release the girl's father but not marry her as she seems tricky. The prince finally notices he is holding only a shell, and the water bearer's daughter cannot understand why he doesn't see what it contains as she can. Suddenly she can see what is inside everyone: Khasib's heart contains only love for himself, the court lady has only a desire for the prince and a desire to destroy anyone who tries to take him from her, and the fisherman's heart contains only her. She wonders how she ever found him ugly.

The girl tells the prince that in order to discover the treasure he must find the way to its heart. He threatens to marry someone else if she doesn't reveal the secret, and the girl finds a way to repay the court lady's kindness: she suggests the prince marry the lady, who is ultimately responsible for bringing the treasure to his hands. The prince agrees and sends the girl away, disgusted by her ingratitude at his attentions. Outside the palace, the girl is reunited with her father.

She introduces the fisherman as the man she loves, and the water bearer takes him into his own heart as well. The fisherman then makes a surprising admission: he was once an attractive young prince like Khasib but was cursed with a lonely, ugly life when he wronged a sorceress. Only when he found the true love of a woman who loved him for his heart and not his appearance could the curse be broken, and now the water bearer's daughter has done that. He proposes marriage, and gives her the choice to live as the wife of a fisherman or a prince. She easily chooses the cottage by the sea, and they live happily ever after. Meanwhile Prince Khasib spends his life consumed by unlocking the puzzle of the treasure and the court lady realizes he does not love her and dies of a broken heart.

Shahrayar realizes this is the first complete story Shahrazad has told him. He suddenly kisses her, finally giving in to the feelings he has had since they married. But before they can seal the moment and actually declare their love for each other, Shahrayar realizes it is almost dark and they must hurry back to the palace.



Chapters 16-17: The Tale of the Fisherman, the Prince, and the Water Bearer's Daughter, How the Water Bearer's Daughter Finds the Fisherman, the Treasure, and Her Heart. And How the Story Finds its End. In That Order. Analysis

The moral of Shahrazad's entire story revolves around the adage, "don't judge a book by its cover." The prince in Shahrazad's story is wrapped up in appearances: he cares more about looking like a prince, decked out in fine clothes and jewels, than behaving like one. He is self-absorbed and cruel, though handsome. When he sees the water bearer's tiny one-room home, he doesn't understand how "people of such goodness live in such surroundings" (Page 145). He conflates virtue with status, though this is hypocritical, given his own stature compared to his personal behavior.

Readers may note the echoes of a familiar fairy tale in Shahrazad's story: "Beauty and the Beast." A beautiful and desirable girl lacks interest in her suitor, so he conspires to imprison her father, the person she loves most in the world, in order to trap her into marriage. The fisherman, like the Beast, was a handsome and arrogant young prince who infuriated an enchantress and ended up ugly and alone, with the task of convincing someone of his inner virtue despite his appearance. In the end, they live happily ever after. These similarities show readers that across cultures older civilizations used fiction, fables, and parables to teach lessons of morality. Rather than creating complex characters in worlds where nothing is black and white, clearly right or wrong, these stories boil virtue down to its essence in order to guide the audience on a path of righteousness.

Just as Shahrazad and Shahrayar must come to "know each other's hearts" the water bearer's daughter discovers this skill by closing her eyes and looking beyond physical appearance. She penetrates to the fisherman's heart and finds that he loves her (it is interesting to consider whether her love for him is predicated on the idea that she already knows he worships her and would do anything for her, an appealing quality in a partner). The shell treasure is an unsubtle metaphor for the fisherman himself, and when she sees the kindness in his heart his exterior simply does not matter. But the water bearer's daughter is so virtuous that this hardly comes as a lesson to her, for she is immediately drawn to the fisherman despite his looks because she immediately sees how gently and generously he treats her. And just as she does not truly need this lesson, the story is undermined by the fact that the water bearer's daughter is good and beautiful, and in reality, the fisherman is also good and handsome. Virtuous people are never unattractive in these stories, which does not help to emphasize that it does not matter what a person looks like but how they act.

There is a small victory for women at the end of the story, when Shahrayar points out that "the kings and princes in the stories you tell are such great idiots while the women are so wise" (p. 175). Finally there is an acknowledgement that women can have some

value beyond their appearance and ability to bear sons. Though Shahrazad rates self-sacrifice as her first duty, and weaves her magic within the traditional confines allowed to a woman at the time (as a wife, within the home), within her stories there might be a subtle strand of feminism at work.

On the other hand, the water bearer's daughter has no name. In fact, the only person in this story within a story who is named is the prince. Readers might assume the author merely remains faithful to her source material, keeping nameless those characters that have no names in the span of the oral and written tradition. Yet given that she is re-telling the story with her own spin, she has the power to name characters. Beyond simply adding clarity to the story (keeping track of all the "she's" and "he's" can be confusing, a name gives a character a concrete identity, a specificity and a power that is lacking when they remain anonymous. Readers can ponder why the author made this choice.

Chapters 18: Dinarzad Pulls a Thread

Chapters 18: Dinarzad Pulls a Thread Summary

When night falls and Dinarzad cannot find her sister, she panics that Shahrayar has given in to the rumors and executed her. She relays her fears to 'Ajib, whom she trusts as family since he has come to live with her and her father. They find the king's chambers empty and the chamberlain raises the alarm for the missing monarch. 'Ajib sends a message to his brothers: "Now." Shahrayar and Shahrazad arrive home and when Shahrazad will not divulge where they've been, Dinarzad breaks down, accusing Shahrazad of loving the king more than her, lambasting the king for keeping her sister's life always in jeopardy, and admitting that her initial request for a story on their first night of marriage was all part of a master plan.

Shahrayar is horrified as he begins to put the pieces of the puzzle together, accusing Shahrazad of using her storytelling skill to buy time to plot a betrayal. Shahrazad's only defense is that she acted as she did to instead buy time for them to get to know each other's hearts. Shahrayar is further disgusted to realize how close he had come to telling her he loved her earlier in the day. All he can see is her deceit and the hopelessness of his future without her.

Before he can decide how to punish her, 'Ajib's brothers and their followers break into the palace and come right for Shahrayar. He instinctively moves to protect Shahrazad, but he in turn is saved from a mortal blow by the intervention of 'Ajib. The brothers argue over how to deal with 'Ajib's unexpected behavior, and Shahrayar finally recognizes him as his first wife's brother. Powerless to the forces of the coup, Shahrayar has no choice but to surrender. The elder brother becomes king and Shahrayar and Shahrazad are imprisoned, in the dungeons and tower respectively.

Chapters 18: Dinarzad Pulls a Thread Analysis

Dinarzad gets caught up more in words and appearances than action: she distrusts Shahrayar because he has proclaimed that Shahrazad will ultimately die; he has not fully rescinded his decree. Though Shahrayar treats Shahrazad all but lovingly and keeps her alive night after night, Dinarzad cannot get beyond the appearance of an all-powerful king who can instantly act on a whim. Ironically, she does trust 'Ajib, who is quiet, well-behaved, and has never given an indication of treachery, even though she has no idea where he came from. She falls for his outward appearance without questioning his heart.

Shahrayar once again allows his honor to guide him rather than his humility. When he hears of Shahrazad's "betrayal" he lashes out at her rather than examining the content of her actions: she has been kind, generous, and in effect, loving toward him, understanding his inner struggles as a king who seeks to do what is right but is not

perfect. In order to fulfill the prophecy of finding someone who could know his heart, she needed more than a night, and she devised a way to ensure she had that. While not the most honest path, Shahrayar refuses to see the necessity of it, only allowing himself to feel the pain of betrayal. He is embarrassed because he feels tricked. So he lets his bruised honor win over his logic and cannot humbly admit that he created an impossible situation for his wife.

Upon recognizing 'Ajib, Shahrayar calls him a "snake," creating a quick and specific image and reference point for the reader: the cunningly treacherous snake has its roots in the first book of the Bible, as the serpent conspires to get Adam and Eve tossed out of Eden.

In this chapter the dramatic climax is reached, which would have been avoided if Shahrazad and Shahrayar had simply been honest with each other about their feelings from the beginning. Their reticence created an unstable environment of doubt and fear, setting the stage for the brothers' hostile takeover.



Chapters 19-21: In Which 'Ajib Learns to See His Heart, The Eyes of the Heart, All the Threads Are Woven Up

Chapters 19-21: In Which 'Ajib Learns to See His Heart, The Eyes of the Heart, All the Threads Are Woven Up Summary

Unlike the reign of Shahrayar and his father, the brothers set out to instill fear and distrust in their subjects in order to control them. The kingdom falls into chaos and poverty. The brothers are relieved when Shazaman fails to come to his brother's rescue, though he does cut off supplies from Samarkand. Shazaman and the vizier, who was on an errand at the time of the coup, have developed a long-term strategy to return Shahrayar to the throne. 'Ajib is appalled by his brothers' actions while Shahrazad weeps in her tower for the people. Buried in a dungeon, Shahrayar does not know what is happening, but his will to win back his kingdom remains strong, though his heart is still stony at the thought of Shahrazad.

Having given the people time to see what kind of a leader their new king is, Shazaman starts smuggling food into the city for the citizens and he subtly rallies them to Shahrayar's cause. 'Ajib, wandering the streets, sees this and struggles over whether to reveal it to his brothers. He has loyalty to them but despises how they reign. His decision is made easy when he finds them conferring on the execution of Shahrayar without him. They no longer trust him because he saved Shahrayar's life. He struggled with betraying them, but they betrayed him without thought. He immediately takes a horse and sets out for Samarkand.

The brothers now blame Shahrazad's sorcery for the chaos of the land and announce she will undergo a trial before she is summarily executed. If she can perform one good deed, they will spare Shahrayar's life. The second oldest brother tries to provoke Shahrazad's fear and despair, but Shahrazad refuses to cry for herself, worrying only about the fate of those she loves. Not wanting to die feeling like a coward, she discerns in her heart that she loves Shahrayar, and she will tell him even if it means he rejects her. She will let her own heart be known in order to break the first queen's curse. Her calm frightens the second brother, who worries the brothers' plan is not as ironclad as they thought.

The king commands that the trial happen in front of many subjects so that he might be exonerated from Shahrayar and Shahrazad's fate, who will condemn themselves. All the king's prisoners are lead to the audience chamber, and the king announces that if Shahrazad can recognize Shahrayar without touching or speaking to him, the ex-king can live in exile. Shahrazad knows this is a lie, as she can now see the true hearts of



others as she can see her own. She realizes the story of the water bearer's daughter was for herself: set with an impossible task, she must use her ability to see inside people to overcome the odds and win the day. Shahrazad walks the line of prisoners, finally stopping in front of her husband. She declares that though she knows he does not love her, she will break his first wife's curse by being unafraid to reveal her heart to him. If he looks inside her, he will see that she truly loves him. He admits he is afraid, and she responds that she is also, but they must bravely seek the truth, just as the water bearer's daughter did. Shahrayar closes his eyes and is forced to look for Shahrazad inside himself, and he finds her in his heart. He then finds himself in Shahrazad's heart. He tells her to look again into his heart, where she finally sees his love. Suddenly sunlight fills the room and Shahrazad covers her eyes: her sight has returned.

Having broken the rules of speaking and touching, the king demands they be seized but suddenly the prisoners cast off their rags and reveal they are an army lead by Shazaman. Before violence can break out, Shahrayar and Shahrazad demand that those supposedly loyal to the usurper look into their hearts and discover where their true loyalties lie: and it is with Shahrayar. Held by Shazaman's men, the usurper's brothers cannot come to his aid, except 'Ajib, who steps forward and declares his allegiance to Shahrayar, the true king. Though his brothers have not treated him with any true sense of fraternity, Shazaman and Shahrayar offer to be his brothers. 'Ajib asks for forgiveness, but Shahrayar claims it is unnecessary. They send the brothers into exile to be driven mad by their own jealousy and greed.

The newly restored king and kingdom celebrate for a week and Shahrayar proclaims Shahrazad is no longer in danger of execution for he wants her at his side for the rest of his life. 'Ajib insinuates himself at the side of Dinarzad, foreshadowing another future pairing. He returns the ebony chest to Shahrazad, which he saved from the pillaging of his brothers. Shahrayar is ready to hear the end of the story of the king who desires a son, and Shahrazad shows him that he now has the ability to decipher the cloth himself, so he finishes the story for everyone: The king has gotten so old he no longer recognizes his own reflection in a pool of water, and despairs that he could ever recognize his son. But he is immediately thrown in a dungeon for drinking from a sacred pool, where he is soon joined by another man in despair. His companion describes how his father went on a mission before he was even born - before his wife even knew she was pregnant - and when he never returned, the boy set out to find his father, rather than staying to guide his people, for his father was a king and he a prince. In his selfishness he has never achieved his goal. The king then relates his similar tale, and they realize they met once before on the mountain, both now regretful for their rudeness to each other. They discover the oracle gave them the same prophecy and they soon realize they are father and son. At this recognition, they find themselves back on the oracle's mountain where she admonishes them for their foolishness and sends them home. They return to their kingdom and there is great rejoicing. They lead their people wisely in succession and never leave home again.

Having fulfilled her destiny, the cloth is no longer necessary, and by magic it turns to gold and depicts the story of Shahrazad and all her family, and she and the king hang it

in their chambers. 'Ajib goes to Samarkand with Shazaman, and eventually succeeds him on the throne, with Dinarzad as his wife. Many decades later, when Shahrayar dies, Shahrazad buries him wrapped in the cloth, and the art of the storyteller is lost, along with Shahrazad's own story.

Chapters 19-21: In Which 'Ajib Learns to See His Heart, The Eyes of the Heart, All the Threads Are Woven Up Analysis

Like the king in the story of the water bearer's daughter, the new king cares only for the appearance and power of being king, rather than actually leading like a king. He doesn't care if his subjects starve as long as he has food. Though he has military might, his lack of understanding about what it means to govern people keeps his kingdom unstable. Without the loyalty of his people he will constantly have to fight with them. Once again the over reliance on appearance rather than heart's intention leads to a character's downfall.

Readers will note an interesting twist in 'Ajib's behavior. Though he once stubbornly and insidiously disparaged Shahrayar for failing to stay the course of his will in executing Shahrazad, 'Ajib now finds himself in the same exact situation. He is forced to recognize that his brother is a bad king, and he made a bad choice in helping him ascend to the throne. Despite all the evidence at his disposal in the palace that Shahrayar was generous and just, 'Ajib clings to the notion of his wronged honor, and brings about Shahrayar's downfall despite the loyalty the king and his court have shown to him, though just a boy. Now he finally shifts his position, an action he formerly saw as a sign of weakness. The moral finally lands, that it is a sign of strength, humility, and wisdom to change one's mind when one has reached an incorrect or unjust conclusion.

Shahrayar, locked in a dungeon with no way of getting out, still maintains his will and determination to regain his throne. In this moment of extreme trial, he does not resign himself to an unjust fate, as he had previously been willing to do throughout the novel. The tension between fate and will extends throughout the novel, and which has more power is always in question. However, time and again when characters set their will to something, it becomes a reality. At the same time, Shahrazad regains her sight at fulfilling her destiny: but how much of an act of will was her adherence to her fate? Her open and honest communication of her feelings, even in the face of rejection, is a choice she makes on her own, yet it is the only choice to complete her destiny and save the kingdom. If she had done anything else, the kingdom would have been lost. But it took a strong act of will to muster the courage to do it. The ultimate lesson appears to be that hard work and determination will bring about the desired results, rather than relying on or blaming fate for the course of one's life.

In these final chapters, the parable of the water bearer's daughter manifests in reality, and the metaphor of seeing with one's heart is put to the test. Though a rather heavy-handed metaphor, the author merely espouses trusting one's instincts, maintaining a

self-awareness regarding one's own feelings, and being unafraid to speak the truth. The lesson of the novel is hammered home in the final chapter.

Characters

Shahrazad

Shahrazad is the storyteller's daughter, a beautiful and blind seventeen-year-old girl who follows her fate to save a kingdom where she is not entirely included. Shahrazad is an archetypal character in the tradition of Christ: pure and selfless, putting the needs of an entire people ahead of her own even to the point of potential death. She appears without fault or sin, always doing the right thing. Her capacity for compassion is so great she does this despite the fact that the people of the kingdom consider her an eccentric foreigner. Even when she subtly manipulates Shahrayar with her storytelling she only does so to give them time to find love and to save him from himself. She has no malicious intentions or ambitions of her own. Shahrazad believes strongly that Fate has laid out her path in life, and whether she acts based on what she believes is a pre-determined plan or of her own free will is questionable (also rather like Christ.) Shahrazad acts within the sphere allowed her as a woman (a wife and daughter who stays confined within the home), yet she remains steadfast in her determination and ultimately becomes a hero in a circuitous way: though Shazaman arrives with the army to return Shahrayar to the throne, he would still be a heartless king as bad as his usurper if she did not help him find his heart again. Her heroism relies heavily on traditionally (or stereotypically) feminine means: words instead of action, the realm of the heart and love, behaving as a "perfect" model of wife and daughter. It is debatable whether her heroics make her a feminist role model or if the means she uses to get to her end undermine the feminist call for powerful women.

Shahrayer

Shahrayar is the king of the lands including India and Indochina. He is a well-loved leader because he puts the needs of his people ahead of his own. He is a genuinely good and just man until unforeseen treachery damages his sense of honor: his humiliation at being duped causes him to overreact and renounce love forever. He begins to act selfishly and turns his back on his people. Shahrayar experiences more of an arc and change in the novel than Shahrazad. He must learn to see with his heart instead of his eyes, a shift one sees from how he relates to his first wife to how he relates to Shahrazad. He must recognize that beauty if not even to build love and trust on. It is a hard lesson for Shahrayar to learn. His defensiveness makes him quick to judge and distrust others, and time and again leads him to suffer just as the king is Shahrazad's story suffers. More than learning to love or look beyond appearances, Shahrayar must learn to trust himself. In Shahrayar's greatest moment of doubt about Shahrazad upon discovering her minor manipulation, he loses his kingdom to a band of usurping brothers. But when he looks with his heart at her, and recognizes her inherent goodness and purity of intention, he can finally articulate his love for her. In this moment, he regains his kingdom as well. There is a direct correlation here between his humility and self-awareness and his success in life.

Nur al-Din Hasan

Nur al-Din Hasan is the vizier, a high ranking military officer and counselor to both Shahrayar and his father when they are each king. He marries Maju, a foreigner and brings her back to his home kingdom: he accepts and loves her in a way the rest of his people do not. Nur al-Din Hasan is a good, loyal man, but he's not afraid to speak truth to power, as when he tells Shahrayar he will denounce him as merciless wherever he goes if he executes Shahrazad the day after their wedding. He has a deep respect and appreciation for women, unlike many of the men in the novel, and he does not allow Shahrazad to marry Shahrayar easily, instinctively wanting to protect his family. But he also respects her and trusts her enough to make the decision.

Shazaman

Shazaman is Shahrayar's brother, raised with him to be a fair and compassionate leader. He gladly accepts the land Shahrayar gives him to rule without jealousy or seeking more power, and supports his brother when he needs it. His initial reaction to being cheated on and betrayed by his wife is as black as Shahrayar's but once he discovers Shahrayar's wife behaves in the same exact way, it throws life into a new perspective for him: he's not the only one who can be duped. This cheers him up immensely and allows him to let go of his anger and shame. Basically, his reaction is a counterpoint to the extreme dark place that Shahrayar goes to. He proves his loyalty by fighting to reinstate Shahrayar to his usurped throne, and demonstrates his open, generous heart when he takes in Ajib despite the boy's recent treachery.

Dinarzad

Dinarzad is Shahrazad's half-sister, younger by about a decade. Shahrazad basically raises her and the sisters are very close. When Shahrazad includes Dinarzad in her plan to use her storytelling to win over Shahrayar, Dinarzad is very anxious; she is too young to fully understand the nuances of her sister's plan, or have the patience required to see it through, and thus she accidentally reveals the secret. Besides her impatience, her youth manifests in her jealousy of the growing closeness between Shahrazad and Shahrayar; she has had Shahrazad all to herself for her entire life and can't abide sharing her. But the quickness with which she protects 'Ajib from harm and her willingness to adopt him into her family proves that though young, she has a kind and good heart.

Maju

Maju is Shahrazad's mother, a woman from a faraway land who has the mystical powers of the storyteller of her people. She accepts her uniqueness and tries to instill the same sense of serenity in her daughter, though she dies while Shahrazad is very young and leaves a hefty weight on the girls' shoulders in the guise of the prophecy that



Shahrazad will use her storytelling gift to save the heart of a nation, making her the greatest storyteller of all. Maju is blind, but has an amazing capacity to see and react to the world around her. She is the first example of a character who can see with the eyes of the heart.

'Ajib

'Ajib is the youngest of the five brothers of Shahrayar's first wife at fourteen years old. His older, quarrelsome brothers don't understand his quiet, thoughtful ways and have a tendency to overlook him, but he quickly proves he is smarter than all of them when he suggests he infiltrate the palace as a serving boy to keep a better eye on Shahrayar. 'Ajib is steadfastly in favor of overthrowing Shahrayar; in his youth he sees the world in black and white and thinks the king shows weakness by changing his mind regarding Shahrazad's execution. He burns with the dishonor done to his sister as his brothers have imbued him with the belief in their familial disgrace. Not even the kindness the king shows him can dissuade him from his mission until it is too late. Only when his brother is installed as a uncaring, cruel king does he recognize his mistake. But then, like Shahrayar he changes his mind and does the right thing, helping to bring Shahrayar back to power and working to earn the forgiveness of Dinarzad, who was especially kind to him.

The Chamberlain

The Chamberlain is Shahrayar's main bodyguard. He has a misguided sense of dishonor since he is not esteemed as highly as the vizier, though he never considers that he actually does not do as much as the vizier to deserve a place of honor. In his bitterness he propagates rumors of Shahrazad's sorcery and Shahrayar's weakness that create down throughout the kingdom in Shahrayar's abilities, destabilizing the country and helping create the conditions of Shahrayar's overthrow.

Shahrayar's First Wife

Shahrayar's First Wife is the princess of a conquered people, given to Shahrayar in marriage as a symbol of the unity and mutual respect between the two citizenries. But as their marriage was not truly based in love, the queen merely acted as the king's sycophant, while plotting to overthrow him and committing adultery with Shahrayar's childhood friend. Contemptuous to the last, she would rather kill herself than give Shahrayar the satisfaction, and she curses Shahrayar to a life without love and trust, powerful words that seem to affect him far more than her actions. At the end of the novel, Shahrazad is determined to erase the power of this curse at the very least, even if she cannot have Shahrayar's love herself, just to give him hope for his future.

The Eldest Brother

The Eldest Brother of Shahrayar's first wife and 'Ajib is a man prone to violence first and thought after. He leads his brothers in rewriting history to blame the treachery of their sister on Shahrayar rather than the woman herself. A prince himself before Shahrayar's father conquered his kingdom, he uses his misplaced sense of dishonor as an excuse to take what he thinks he has a right to: the throne. The eldest brother quickly proves he has no leadership skills watching his subjects starve rather than share his ample supply of food with them. His needs come before anyone else's, and he cares more about looking like a king than acting like one.

The Second Brother

The Second Brother is the second oldest brother to Shahrayar's first wife and 'Ajib. His belligerent strategies tend toward intellectual cunning rather than violence, setting him constantly at odds with his eldest brother. But his cleverness also makes him the brother 'Ajib is closest to. The second brother takes a sadistic pleasure in the suffering of others, but is disturbed when he cannot get a rise out of Shahrazad on the night before her execution. He starts to sense the path of evil will not have a happy ending for himself and his brothers but it is too late to change their course.

The Water Bearer's Daughter

The Water Bearer's Daughter is a character in a story Shahrazad relates to Shahrayar. She is characterized by bravery, kindness, beauty and honesty. She is a direct corollary for Shahrazad though the storyteller does not recognize as she tells the tale. Though the story goes through the motions of teaching her which treasure is most precious at the bottom of the sea as a metaphor for looking within people to see their value, the water bearer's daughter knows from the start that the fisherman is a kind and gentle man even if he's ugly. It's a lesson she already knows deep down, just as Shahrazad knows the right thing to do from the beginning of her story, she just needs the finality of facing death to fully at on it and trust that everything will work out.

The Fisherman

The Fisherman is a character in a story Shahrazad relates to Shahrayar. Ugly on the outside, he is a kind and intelligent man beneath the surface. Like Shahrayar, he has been cursed to a life without love until someone recognizes what's inside him. He is the ultimate metaphor in the novel in several ways: when he lacks humility and lives his life only according to his honor as a prince, an enchantress literally makes his appearance match the blackness of his heart. Having learned the lesson she intended, his heart becomes pure and good, and he comes to physically embody the adage "Don't judge a book by its cover."

Prince Khasib

Prince Khasib is a character in a story Shahrazad relates to Shahrayar. He acts as a metaphor for many of the main themes and storylines: he is a prince who cares more about the appearance of royalty than its behavior (like the usurping brother). He similarly cares only about appearances in general, being attracted to the water bearer's daughter because of her beauty but not particularly liking her honesty or strength of character (as Shahrayar acts with his first wife). He is the ultimate symbol of misplaced priorities, not even appreciating the obsessive love of the court lady and instead wasting time trying to reach a treasure (in the shell) that he doesn't truly need.

Objects/Places

The Ebony Trunk

The Ebony Trunk is the only possession that Maju takes away from her homeland when she marries the vizier. It contains the cloth she uses for storytelling.

The Cloth

The Cloth is the device through which Maju and Shahrazad tell their stories. Despite the fact that they are blind and the cloth is blank, by feeling the texture of the fabric they are able to "read" a story that is specifically for the person who brought them the cloth in the first place. It is a magical device for revealing fables that help clarify reality and expose some basic truth.

Samarkand

Samarkand is the seat of the kingdom that Shahrayar gives to his brother Shazaman, an important center along the region's main trade route.

The Pool and Pomegranate Tree

The Pool and Pomegranate Tree are the young Shahrazad's favorite location in the king's grounds. Here she finds solace and learns a valuable lesson about being herself from her mother. It is a meaningful place for Shahrayar too, as he eavesdrops on this conversation.

The Divan

The Divan is where Shahrazad sits in Shahrayar's chambers and determines what kind of man he is. The divan is made of a simple, comfortable fabric and through that Shahrayar cares less about looking like a rich and imperious king and more about creating a safe home for himself and his people.

A Goldfish

A Goldfish is what the princess is Maju's story to Shahrazad turns into, when the princess despairs her worth in the eyes of her father and wishes to be something else. By making this wish rather than valuing herself, the princess ends up losing her life in order to save her father and have him finally appreciate her.



The Mountain

The Mountain is the main home of the oracle that the king visits in Shahrazad's main nightly story. The mountain is an enchanted place and the king discovers he cannot find a way off it after leaving the oracle and smugly believing he does not need to heed her warning to stay humble and watchful.

The Ring

The Ring is the token given by Prince Khasib to the water bearer's daughter in Shahrazad's story to Shahrayar. The ring will grant her admittance to the palace if she ever needs Khasib's help. However, the ring was a gift to the prince from a court lady who loves him, and when she sees the water bearer's daughter with it, she becomes very jealous.

The Iron Shoes

The Iron Shoes are a gift from the court lady to the water bearer's daughter to help her in the journey to seek the treasure buried at sea. But in reality the lady intends to slow the girl down, in hopes she will never return to marry Prince Khasib, whom the court lady wants for herself.

The Shell

The Shell is the real treasure discovered by the water bearer's daughter at the bottom of the sea. Though it does not look impressive, she knows by looking beneath the surface that a great treasure is hidden inside. It helps her to also see the kindness and love beneath the rough exterior of the fisherman.

The Net

The Net that the fisherman weaves nightly while the water bearer's daughter sleeps is a magical device by which he catches the horizon and brings it to him, allowing him to move across land at a rapid rate.

Themes

True Sight

Throughout the novel the same message is repeated: the ability to see the truth is not a function of the eyes but of the heart. Both Maju and Shahrazad are literally blind to emphasize the idea that one does not need vision to see reality: through their fictitious parables these women reveal more truths about the world around them than if they simply observed and recapped the events they witnessed. Both the water bearer's daughter in Shahrazad's tale and Shahrayar close their eyes at key moments in order to see what lies beneath the surface of the thing they think they desire. In this way the novel advocates intuition over logic and emotion over reason.

Another way of phrasing this theme, or a corollary theme, might be "Don't judge a book by its cover." Characters incorrectly attribute virtue to physical appearance: both Shahrayar and Shazaman marry their wives because of looks rather than character with treacherous results; the king in Shahrazad's main nightly story has to remind himself not to spurn the old woman who seeks his help crossing the stream at the oracle just because she is physically repellent; his instinct is to reject the ugly; and in Shahrazad's tale of the water bearer's daughter, she falls for the fisherman very explicitly despite his unattractiveness.

Yet the author, perhaps unintentionally, sets up a paradox where all the virtuous characters are beautiful. Even in Shahrazad's stories, the oracle was only disguising herself as an ugly old woman and soon reveals herself to be young and attractive and the fisherman was punished for his bad behavior with his physical ugliness. In reality, he is a handsome prince, and now that his behavior has turned back to good he can easily return to his true physical form. So while the author tries to project a message that appearance doesn't matter - that it's more important to look into someone's heart and discern their character than to look at their face to know if they're attractive - she undermines her point by explicitly pointing out how attractive all the "good" characters are.

Honor vs. Humility

Personal honor is a major component of the society of the novel. Both Shahrayar and Shazaman murder their treacherous wives not because of a broken, lovesick heart, but because of a damaged ego. The five brothers who plot to overthrow Shahrayar talk themselves into an impugned sense of honor over the murder of their sister, Shahrayar's first wife. They rewrite the history of her betrayal to lay the blame at the feet of Shahrayar, giving themselves a self-righteous excuse to take his throne.

Yet there comes a moment when a person must defer their sense of honor and importance in favor of humility and a willingness to allow others to teach one something.



For example, the king in Shahrazad's long narrative to Shahrayar thinks his will to have a son is greater than the power of the stars. The oracle warns him to be vigilant about what he wants, for he will only create pain for himself if he sees it without claiming it. The king believes it is impossible that he would not recognize his son. Upon leaving the oracle, he forgets her warning and only thinks about how she assailed his honor: "And so, by degrees, instead of allowing his fear to make him humble and careful, the king worked himself up to a fit of righteous indignation. And because of this, he lost his caution as thoroughly as he had lost his way" (Page 118). Because he does not retain his humility, he makes his journey much longer than it has to be. Indeed, he rails against the unfairness of the stars, decrying the power of fate to make the rules for humans without at least sharing them. His utter lack of humility, and his damaged sense of honor that he, a king, is subject to the same rules of fate that ordinary men must submit to only serve to prolong and complicate his journey.

Similarly, Shahrayar's initial reaction to his wife's betrayal may seem a justifiable revenge for his damaged honor. But when he takes it to the next level - refusing to ever love or trust a woman again, determining to use women and kill them because of a single woman's evil deeds - he too allows his ego and inflated sense of honor to cloud his sense of humility. Like the king in Shahrazad's story, he sets himself on a long and sorrowful path by making a decree solely intended to protect his honor. As he gets to know and care for Shahrazad, he is forced to let down his guard and his honor shield. Changing his mind about her execution smacks of a renewed sense of humility; though king, he is not always right.

Though there is a valid place for honor in this world, its inhabitants must remain vigilant to maintain a balance between honor and humility. Getting too prideful will only result in sorrow.

A Woman's Place

The Storyteller's Daughter re-tells a familiar tale, The Arabian Nights, from the perspective of the storyteller herself. Readers see the inner life of Shahrazad rather than just hearing the stories she told. Yet given that the author wrote this novel in the twenty-first century, eight hundred years after the first known written version, she does not recontextualize it in modern terms. Dokey remains faithful to the traditions of the time about which she writes. In other words, though writing in 2002 with the intention of giving Shahrazad a voice of her own for the first time, Dokey does not give the book a feminist spin.

Like the heroine of any fairy tale, Shahrazad is beautiful and good. She has no perceivable flaws. Though she slightly manipulates Shahrayar into agreeing to the nightly storytelling, her motives are pure: she does it for the greater good, to unfreeze the king's heart and make him once again a strong, just leader for his people. In Christ-like fashion, she willingly takes up her burden, volunteering to marry Shahrayar in order to save the kingdom, like a virgin martyred to the god of a volcano. Shahrazad is not a

real representation of a woman. She is an archetype, a "Madonna" figure in the often used dichotomy of Madonna and whore.

On the other hand, most of the other women in the novel come across more like Cinderella's evil stepsisters. Both Shahrayar and Shazaman's wives are manipulative traitors, not even worthy of a name. So too, Prince Khasib's obsessive lover in the water bearer's daughter's story does not have a name, nor any virtue as she sabotages the water bearer's daughter's mission to save her father just to ensure she (the daughter) cannot marry Prince Khasib. It is strange to note that Prince Khasib, a royal male, is the only character in this story worthy of a name.

A woman's value in this world is solely based on her physical attractiveness and her ability to bear sons. In the recurring narrative of the king who obsessively desires a son, the king divorces his first wife and marries a second who is beautiful and virtuous, because he thinks, "Surely a wife such as this will give me the son I have desired for so long" (Page 83). When she fails to produce that male heir, the oracle calls him out on having many daughters but still only wanting a son, only seeing what he doesn't have. Readers might expect the moral of this story about seeing what is right in front of your eyes to focus on the king finally appreciating the women in his life. Instead, after much hardship, the king discovers he does have a son after all. The worthlessness of women remains the status quo.

The author stays faithful to the attitudes and traditions of her source material, yet readers may wonder why she felt the need to retell this story just to flesh out Shahrazad's backstory with a two-dimensional depiction of a woman. Readers should consider whether an author writing about a female protagonist in the twenty-first century have an obligation to consider how she is presenting those women, no matter what time and place the heroine lives in.

Style

Point of View

The prologue of the novel announces, in first-person narration, that Shahrazad will now tell her own story rather than someone else's. Yet the rest of the novel is then narrated from a third person omniscient perspective. Readers may wonder about this shift in perspective, but it is perhaps simply a means of tying the story to its roots in oral storytelling: traditionally such narrations were about someone else, a character in a fable or morality lesson, and were told in the third person.

Telling the story as an old woman means the novel is written in the past tense. This adds to the gravity of the story as being weighted in the distant past. Additionally, Shahrazad has all the benefit of hindsight, knowing the end of the story and its aftermath before she begins to tell it, and being able to craft the narrative arc accordingly. Though an older narrator might generally give readers' pause as to the reliability of their memory, Shahrazad is presented as reliable and readers are given no reason to doubt her, even when she speaks omnisciently for the thoughts and feelings of others. This may underline the reason Dokey chose to write the novel in the third person in order to erase doubts about the trustworthiness of an elderly first-person narrator. The novel contains a fair amount of dialogue throughout the exposition and storytelling, allowing the characters to affirm what the narrator presumes to claim happens in their heads.

Setting

The novel is set in a traditional fairy tale setting of "Once upon a time in a land far away." Shahrayar's kingdom has no specific name, but he rules the lands of India and Indochina, and he gives Samarkand and the main trade routes (i.e., the Silk Route) to his brother Shazaman. The world is exotic to a modern reader, set mainly in a desert terrain, a land metaphorically rife with imagery related to emptiness and despair, but also a land that can be flooded with light. However, the author does not concern herself much with setting the physical scene, focusing more on the landscape of the mind, the internal struggles of Shahrazad and Shahrayar. The details she emphasizes are related to attire and decorating: it is important for her to note when a character is dressed simply or regally in order to convey his or her state of mind and true values. She points out that Shahrayar decorates his personal space simply, and this alludes to the humility inherent in his character, despite the fact that he is a powerful king. Readers can understand his true nature even when he lashes out for the sake of his damaged honor: they know beneath that he is a good man who wants to do the right thing. They know this all from the detail of how he decorates his room.

As the kingdom has no name, so there is no specific year alluded to in the novel. The author creates the sense of an ancient world through her use of formal language and



unfamiliar syntax, and by describing a world where the main means of transport is horseback, and the structure of royal rule is very old-fashioned, as is the class system described. She creates a strong idea of another time without having to explicitly state what that time is.

Language and Meaning

The language in *The Storyteller's Daughter* is quite formal. Though written in 2002, the author chooses language that makes the novel feel much older in an attempt to tie the story to its ancient roots: the novel is a re-telling of "The Arabian Nights." The author is not attempting to contemporize the story nor set it in modern times. She leaves it in its historical context, in the near east of medieval times. Thus the language is formal, stiffer and more stylized than readers may be used to. There is a frequent use of the passive voice, which also tends to indicate a more formal written and declamatory style. Though the narrator is seventeen, she speaks from the depths of the past. This is the author's objective: rather than re-telling the story in a modern context, she tells the tale from a new perspective, that of the storytelling young bride.

Because "The Arabian Nights" has its roots in oral storytelling, readers will note some conventions that play on that context: the language and descriptions are often repeated. The repetition is a device of oral communication, to embed the story in memory. Though of course this is a written narrative the author is attempting to recreate the sound of the story as it would be if declaimed out loud in a more formal and ritualized time and place. It would not be out of place to read it aloud.

Readers may also note that the voice and tone are the same throughout: from the first-person prologue to the story of Shahrazad herself to the stories within the stories that she narrates, the language is the same. In the dialogue, the author does not distinguish between age or class, everyone speaks in the same formal manner. Though this convention is ostensibly because no matter what angle (first person or narrated fictional story) Shahrazad is the narrator, and so of course she would always only speak as she does speak, it also underlines that this is a story not about individual characters but about an intricately built plot that teaches a lesson. The characters are mainly archetypes from the annals of storytelling rather than carefully crafted individuals. For this reason there is no need to recreate unique voices and specific dialogue. These characters are universal and despite the formality, so is the way they speak.

The author relies heavily on metaphors and similes to create visual images for her readers, a technique particularly suited to an oral storyteller trying to succinctly create a mental picture while maintaining her audience's attention.

Structure

The novel is divided into a prologue and 18 chapters. Most chapters are between six and ten pages but can be as few as four or as many as twenty-three. Some chapters encompass one of the "stories within the story," and these chapters follow directly from

a set up in the preceding chapter. For example, Chapter 15 ends with the line, "A story may be found anywhere, if one is willing to search for it. The one that I have found here is called..." (Page 142). Then the title of Chapter 16 is the title of that story: "The Tale of the Fisherman, the Prince, and the Water Bearer's Daughter." This structure entices the reader to keep turning the page as the chapters flow smoothly into each other.

Again, the story is narrated in the past tense as a way to draw the reader into the ancient roots of the novel. These are not events currently unfolding but events that occurred a long time ago, giving them an added air of wisdom for withstanding the test of time and being passed down through the generations.

The novel is heavily plot driven, and events build in a cause-and-effect way: Shahrayar has a curiosity about Shahrazad from childhood, Shahrayar's wife betrays him, he makes a decree to keep women at arm's length, Shahrazad is the only woman who could make him go back on his proclamation. Despite the thematic insistence on the role of fate in these lives, most readers will find a progression of human choices that lead from one event to the next, even when that choice is a lack of action; for example, if Shahrayar and Shahrazad has the courage to speak of their feelings as soon as they recognize them, and Shahrazad admits her manipulation directly to Shahrayar, the dramatic events in the last section of the novel would not come to fruition. But lack of action often has greater consequences than action, and thus the arc of the plot remains human-driven, despite the nagging sensation that the characters are more pawns of an author (though not fate) who arranges their reactions to suit the lessons she wants to teach.

Quotes

"A story is alive, as you and I are" (p. 1).

"Nothing is all you need to do, Shahrazad, my daughter. Being yourself is enough. For you are not the same as they are, and they can neither forgive or forget it" (p. 10).

"I should know my own value and never seek to be what I am not" (p. 20).

"For now he understood that it was not he, alone, who could be deceived. All men could be blinded by their faith in the women they loved" (p. 33).

"Though they are blind, my eyes see things no other eyes can, for that is the true skill of the drabardi" (p. 46).

"How can you travel so far from yourself and not even perceive that you are lost" (p. 72)

"Though you are a king, I see that you are still as many men are. You do not see what you have, but long to see what you have not" (p. 87).

"But what if in changing his mind, he rights a great wrong" (p. 126)

"Only by knowing what was in their hearts and being unafraid to have it known could all be made right once more" (p. 134).

"I have grown as I am exactly where I was planted. Is it not then the case that I am so because of my surroundings?" (p. 145)

"You should trust yourself more. You already have the gift to see as you need to, you just don't recognize it" (p. 165).

"The treasure I have brought does not reveal itself in outward form. To discover its worth you must find the way into its heart. You must see what is inside" (p. 172).

Topics for Discussion

While the prologue announces that Shahrazad will be telling her own story for the first time, why do you think the author chose to narrate the rest of the novel in the third person? Do you think this point of view is effective in getting to know Shahrazad? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast the positive and negative ways women are portrayed throughout the novel. Do you think the author has a feminist agenda? Why or why not?

Describe how Shahrazad manipulates Shahrayar when they are married. Do you think her actions are right or wrong? Why? What is Shahrayar's reaction? Is he justified? Why or why not?

Discuss three characters that believe their honor has been slighted. Describe the perceived wrongs and each character's reaction to it. Do you believe their reactions were just? Why or why not?

Name two characters whose outward appearance matches the content of their heart by describing their actions. Name two characters whose outward appearance does not match the content of their heart by describing their actions. Do you think the book does or does not make a strong case for the adage "don't judge a book by its cover"? Be sure to back up your argument with examples from the text.

Give three examples of how Shahrazad and Shahrayar believe Fate guides their lives. Do you agree that Fate has laid out their future, or do you think they are acting by their own free will? Be sure to back up your argument with examples from the text.

Though Shahrazad narrates, who do you think is the protagonist of the novel, Shahrazad or Shahrayar? Support your choice with at least three reasons, citing examples from the text.

Do you think there is actually a treasure inside the shell the water bearer's daughter retrieves from the ocean floor? Why or why not? How important do you think it is to prove there is a treasure there within the context of the novel's themes?