

This story takes place in a country not that far away and not that long ago.

Scheherazade's Mirror

You may have heard about Jason and the Argonauts searching for the Golden Fleece or about the Knights Templar and the quest for the Holy Grail, but few people are aware of the hunt for **Scheherazade's Mirror**.

It has been a well-kept secret for more than a 1000 years that Scheherazade had some help in coming up with all those wonderful stories which she told the Sultan that so mesmerised him that he didn't murder her like the way he did all his other wives. And the help she had came from her special mirror. Scheherazade did not stand in front of her mirror and call out "Mirror mirror on the wall who's the fairest of them all". What Scheherazade said was

"With grace and wit, my life you hold, Unfurl a tale, both brave and bold. The Sultan's heart, it must be won, Before my time has run".

After a few minutes a thrilling story would develop in Scheherazade's mind, and she was able to bewitch the Sultan again and again.

The mirror was the best kept secret in the palace and Scheherazade would only hang it on the wall when she needed its help and would immediately thereafter put it into hiding in her special dressing room where it was hidden out of sight from everyone.

After she tamed the Sultan and became his number one Sultana, she had no need of it and more or less forgot about the mirror's existence. But shortly before she died, she decided she had to pass on the mirror and its secret to her son and heir and had a message of good wishes engraved on the silver backing of the mirror's frame. Scheherazade's son Abdul Abdullah was sworn by her to keep the secret of the mirror and never conveyed it to anyone other than his son and heir. This magical mirror was passed on from one generation to the next with each owner of the mirror using it to create stories to entertain their spouses or their children or even sometimes their subjects. And each owner of the mirror was in turn sworn to secrecy.

Unfortunately, about 200 years ago the sultanate was invaded, and the palaces were plundered, and the treasures of the Sultan were scattered around the country or indeed the world, and amongst these was Scheherazade's secret mirror.

Secrets are a funny thing. They seem to have a life of their own. They refuse to be caged and at the slightest opportunity they tend to escape. Aspects of the story of Scheherazade's mirror had been seeping out, like smoke from a small chimney, for some centuries before the mirror disappeared. Secrets don't often escape unchanged and as the secret

Dan Remenyi

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of Scheherazade mirror escaped it was wrapped in a number of different fantasies which people had just added to increase the mystery around it. Eventually the stories around this precious object's history overtook the essence of the mirror itself and it became established as a minor myth of the culture which nearly everyone had heard something about.

-Jamal, you are about to go broke. You are so rotten at business. Your father should never have left the family business in your hands. What are you going to do when you are ruined and turned out on the street?

-Don't worry mother. Father's business wasn't up to much anyway. We have been working far too hard for very little. I have a plan to make us rich beyond your most extravagant dreams.

-And what's that. May I ask?

-I bought a map. No. I didn't buy a map ... No I bought *The Map* of how to find Scheherazade's Mirror.

-What! You moran. You imbecile, You idiot. Who sold that to you?

-A man, I met in the market. A very authentic man. Well dressed and well spoken. He made me swear to keep it secret. And his price was very reasonable.

Six long and arduous weeks later Jamal sit in the corner of an inn or tavern halfway up the Snowy Mountains counting the last few coins he had in his purse. He had been run out of the family home by his furious mother who rejected him as a stupid profligate who if not gotten rid of would ruin the family. He had bought a couple of donkeys and had set out with his map to find Scheherazade's Mirror. But. The map, when examined carefully, was not clear and he, like anyone else, who he had asked for help, could not make out the right route shown on the map from the slim details on the hard-to-read sketch. What a mess he had made. He could work out from his lightweight purse that if he was very careful, he only had enough money to last maybe a week. And then what would become of him.

The inn keeper could see Jamal's obvious physical stress and asked if he could help.

-I have searched this entire region for Scheherazade's Mirror using this rotten map for which I paid a fortune and I have found nothing at all. I am exhausted and near broke. I am so angry. I just don't know what I can do.

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- I never thought that there was a grain of truth in the Scheherazade myth. The whole thing was just a great yarn made up for children, and my kids loved it. Have you not been on a fool's errand?

-I am beginning to wonder myself but you know before Schliemann everyone thought that Troy was just a myth. I think that there is some truth in many of the stories we call myths. And I wanted to be a second Schliemann. Fame and especially fortune.

-Well, if I was you, I wouldn't use that bit of rubbish you bought which you call a map. Rather think about what you are trying to do and see who or what might help you.

- What do you mean? I have done nothing but think about this for the past six weeks, watching my money evaporate and my hair grow grey or just fall out.

- Forget about what you have been doing and think positively. Not far from here, mind you, you will have to cross the Snowdown Mountains, there is a village called Christaton and people from that area are known in these parts as superb story tellers. Go and talk to them and ask them for help. Maybe they can be useful to you but be careful they are also known for being a sharp lot when it comes to money.

Within the hour Jamal was ready to go. He sold one of his donkeys to have a bit more money and then got straight on the road and the following night he was in Christaton being given a room at the inn. The inn keeper who was a jolly old lady of some 70 years was more welcoming than he had expected.

- We do not have many visitors to our humble village. Do you have a special reason for visiting us?

Jamal who was physically and emotionally exhausted from the failure in his relentless searching of the past six weeks broke down and losing almost complete control released a tirade of frustration with a loud whaling noise.

- I really don't know what to do anymore. I am completely lost. I am so tired and so miserable. I don't think I know what I am doing anymore. What will become of me.

For the next hour Jamal poured out all this massive frustrations and the elderly innkeeper sat watching him intently.

Eventually Jamal had released all the bile which had been building up in him over six weeks of fruitless effort.

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- So here I am nearly flat broke and only one last hope left. If I can't find the mirror here, I am
- Of course, we will help you. You have come to the right place. We know all about Scheherazade's mirror!
- Good grief. Really. Ah. I am
- You have to understand a few things. Scheherazade was not a witch or a magician. Yes, she did have help from her mirror. The mirror story is essentially true. Scheherazade used the mirror to look deeply into herself, soul searching we now say, to come up with the wonderful stories and it really worked for her. And we have her mirror here. We are keepers of the mirror and tradition says that we are obliged to pass the mirror on to anyone who wants it. All you have to do is ask.
- Really. Really. Really. That's fantastic.
- But you have to pay.
- How much?
- The price is the weight of the mirror in gold.
- Good grief.
- But listen, the mirror is made of the lightest material in the world, and it is really quite small so the cost is not that much. Look, you have been through a lot of grief and I will do you a deal. I will break with tradition, and I will give you the mirror for half the money in your purse.
- Really, would you do that?
- Yes. Certainly. To give a bit a charity more and then does no one harm.

The following day Jamal is handed the mirror by the inn keeper. It is wrapped in paper and is inserted into the saddle bag on the back of the donkey. The wrapping tears but Jamal folds the paper to cover the corners. He profusely thanks the inn keeper and set out on his long journey home. He is thoroughly delighted. He will now be the keeper of Scheherazade's mirror and that will bring fame and fortune. He will make up with his mother and be back in the hearth of the family.

Jamal doesn't notice the wind blowing increasingly strongly. As it blows stronger the paper in which the mirror is wrapped begins to tear. A little at first, and then a substantial amount of paper come away exposing part of the mirror.

On the back of the mirror some words can be read if one looks carefully. The words are *Made in China*.