

## 4. The Shah Weaves a Rug

The Shah of Persia was a clever and kind ruler. His people loved him. Often he would dress in rags as a beggar and slip out of his palace. He would walk on the city streets and along the country roads. This way, he could see for himself what was going on in the land.



One day as he walked along, he heard some people wailing. He walked closer to hear them.

My husband did not return home after work yesterday. We have looked for him everywhere. What shall I do? Cried a young woman.

Oh, where is my son? He hasn't returned from play. Where could he have gone?' sobbed another woman.

My Wife went to the market yesterday with my children to buy groceries, they never returned, wailed a man.

The Shah was puzzled. I must look into this mystery myself/ he decided. He dressed like a farmer and went to the marketplace. People were busy buying and selling. Above the noise of many voices was heard the sound of sweet singing. The clear tones of the song rang out like bells of a temple.



Under the shade of a tree, men and women had gathered around a singer dressed as a holy man.

What can this be?' The Shah stopped to listen at the edge of the crowd. Who is this singer? Why he was not brought to my palace? The Shah wondered.

The singer began to move backwards. He backed little by little into a street that led out of the city. He kept singing. His listeners followed him mesmerized. It seemed as if his listeners were under a spell.



He slowly led them on. Soon they were far from the city. That is strange!’ The Shah could not explain what was happening. The Shah looked at the fixed eyes of his people. ‘They are enthralled by the music, he said as he stuffed cotton in his ears and followed the crowd.

At last the singer came to the courtyard of an ancient fort that was no longer used. Still singing loud and clear, the holy man walked backwards in through the gates with the listeners following him.

The Shah followed them.

Clang! The gates swung shut. The singer stopped singing. A gang of strong men captured the shocked men and women and tied their hands and feet, including the Shah’s.

What will you do with us?’ the Shah asked those who were dragging him into the fort.



'Sell you in the slave market in a neighbouring land/ said one of the men. You are strong and well fed. You will bring a good price. On the full-moon night, our caravan\* will move.

Ah! So this is where my people are disappearing. It will be full-moon night in seven days. I must save my people, thought the Shah.

Actually I am worth much more. I can bring you a lot of money.

Take me to your chief, said the Shah.

The chief of the bandits\* was a very greedy man. 'Tell us how you can bring us more money he barked.



I am a skilled weaver, although I am dressed like a farmer, said the Shah. This was true. When the Shah was a little boy, he had learnt from the palace weavers how to make carpets. He loved the bright colours of the silk and the wool threads. No one could weave a more beautiful rug than he.

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My fingers can weave magic. My carpets will fetch you a lot of money. Go bring a loom. The leader's greedy eyes were shining. 'Let the weaver show his magic. If he has lied, we will sell him in the slave market' The Shah began work on the loom. He worked day and night. The chief of the bandits was very pleased to see the bright colours woven into beautiful flowers and birds.

How much should I ask for this rug?' he asked the Shah.

Five thousand gold

Five thousand! Who can pay so much?"

'The Shah himself. The Queen loves beautiful rugs. Take it to her' you are intelligent. All right, I will take it to the Queen when you finish'

The Shah's fingers flew faster and faster. He seemed to take special care with the pattern on the rug's end. The flowers and birds matched those in the rug's centre but there were also letters in an Old Persian script



The bandits had never seen letters like these before. This writing was known only to the royal families.

At last the Shah finished the rug. 'This is very beautiful. I will go to the palace with the porter and give it to the Queen myself. I will ask her for five thousand gold coins, said the bandit chief.

Only one condition, said the Shah. 'Unroll the rug only in front of the Queen. Do not show it

to anybody else

All right,' the chief agreed easily.

When the chief of bandits reached the palace he was not allowed inside. But when the Queen heard that somebody had come to sell rugs she said to her maid, 'Ask him to come in; I will look at his rugs. It will take my heart away from the worry I feel because of my husband's absence'



So the curtains were put aside and the bandit chief was let in. He bowed respectfully and unrolled the rug.

The Queen gave out a cry of joy. This was one of the best rugs she had seen. When she looked at the rug closely she gave out a cry of surprise. She bent over down to examine the end of the rug and read it like a book. Then she said, 'This is exquisite work. How much do you want for it?

Five thousand gold coins for you, my Queen: The bandit bowed low. 'For someone else it would be more than twice that amount'

"Ten thousand gold coins. I shall give you that sun because the rug pleases me very much. She added, 'I myself will get you the reward money. The Queen went in and gave some

secret orders to the palace guards. Into the pattern of the rug, our Shah has woven a message for me. He calls for help. This man who has brought me the rug holds him prisoner in an old fort outside the city. Give orders to fifty of our best warriors to follow him secretly'

The bandit knew nothing about the message woven into the border of the rug. Because he was so happy about the gold coins, he did not notice that Shah's soldiers were following him.

When the chief returned to the fort, he saw the singer with the magical voice enter with another set of innocent men and women. The bandit waited for them to pass and then began to enter. But soon the fifty soldiers captured him and the fort.

The people captured by the bandits were freed and the Shah returned to the palace. The bandit and his gang, including the singer, were punished.

When all was set right and life in the city was back to normal, the people went to the palace and fell to their knees to thank the good Shah. 'Blessed be weavers!' they said. That is why Persian carpets are famous all over the world even today.

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