



Source: Scott Wilson, 'Gaza's Palestinians poised for life with fewer limits', *Washington Post online*, 10/08/05.

Tags: death, literature, streets, water, animals

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Scheherazade sat before the Sultan as the night paled into daylight. Her eyes were so heavy with the need for sleep that it was only the fear of strangulation at the hands of the Sultan that kept her from curling up into a catball and allowing herself to be swallowed into the blissful void. Even fear itself paled with the night as the desire for sleep deepened but the penetrating eyes of the Sultan, falling upon her like those of a demon, kept her mercifully if barely conscious. She marvelled at the Sultan's capacity for concentration and she realised within her soul that she now needed to weave a tale that would keep the wolf at bay for one more night. And so she began.

Once there was a man with a dog, sire. The dog was the most faithful creature the world had known, its faith surpassed only by that of its owner a man renowned for his artistry in the making of objects in glass. Everyday as the man worked diligently and patiently in his workshop the dog would be there at his side, sometimes sleeping (oh sleep!), sometimes alert to some movement in the garden outside, sometimes resting its paws on the man's lap and allowing him to tenderly stroke her ears as he spoke to her in his gentle way. The dog had golden eyes and a short, shiny red coat and was indeed a beautiful and intelligent creature if a little scatty being quite a young animal.

Each morning, when the sun's first light stretched across the river at the foot of the hill the man would walk with the dog along the banks and the dog would chase the rabbits feeding on the dewy grass or chase a stick thrown by her loving master. Everyday, weather permitting, they would take this walk along the same paths and across the main road leading to the town and rarely would they meet a soul along the banks of the river.

The Sultan relaxed his gaze as Scheherazade spoke and she, in turn, began to revive as her story unfolded with a spontaneity borne of sheer desperation. 'And what was the matter of faith between this man and his dog?' he asked. 'If sire listens to this beautiful tale it will all become clear', she replied.

One morning, as the sun stretched across the brown waters of the river the man and the dog set out from the workshop where the man had been working until the

small hours of the night until so weary from his labour that he had fallen asleep in his chair by the fire. He had been working on a glass object as fine as any ever made. A heart, fashioned in ruby glass and hand etched with the name of his wife lay on the work bench protected by a silken cloth. The man was happy with the progress of the work and glanced at the tidy bundle as he closed the door behind him. Once outside the dog ran free, sniffing its way along the paths, constantly mindful of the presence of her guardian. A wind sprang up, strangely brisk for the time of day, as the two walked on approaching a bend in the main road before it straightened and ran to the centre of the town.

As they crossed, the man walked ahead without noticing that the dog had paused behind him and stood still in the middle of the road. 'I hear the earth moving', said the dog. But the man did not hear because the wind blew the dog's bark away from him. 'I hear the earth move', said the dog again and suddenly the man turned even though he had not heard. He turned on the natural instinct to look for his companion who stood as still as a statue on the roadway. The man gestured to the dog with a flick of his head and a tiny whistle but the dog could only reply, 'I feel the earth move'. And as the man moved toward the dog to take her from the road a strange noise rose up around them. A swelling, heaving sound of movement and around the turn in the road came a procession the sound of which was muted by the wind blowing in the opposite direction. It was a cavalcade of carts and horses, asses and camels, of swarms of people, men, women and children, the elderly and the infant jostling together as a mass of twisted flesh forming one huge sorrowful beast, for at the head of the procession was a black casket opened to the morning sun and around it the people wailed and moaned so loud that the man and his dog were struck dumb by the force of fate rolling toward them along the dusty road.

Scheherazade paused to take some water and in doing so noticed that the Sultan's eyes were closed tight and his head had fallen onto his chest just as hers were bright and filled with the morning dew of tears.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Boris Kelly.*