

THE STORY OF PRINCE AHMED AND THE FAIRY PARIBANOU, PART I

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There was a sultan, who had three sons and a niece. The eldest of the Princes was called Houssain, the second Ali, the youngest Ahmed, and the Princess, his niece, Nouronnihar.

The Princess Nouronnihar was the daughter of the younger brother of the Sultan, who died, and left the Princess very young. The Sultan took upon himself the care of his daughter's education, and brought her up in his palace with the three Princes, proposing to marry her when she arrived at a proper age, and to contract an alliance with some neighboring prince by that means. But when he perceived that the three Princes, his sons, loved her passionately, he thought more seriously on that affair. He was very much concerned; the difficulty he foresaw was to make them agree, and that the two youngest should consent to yield her up to their elder brother. As he found them positively obstinate, he sent for them all together, and said to them: "Children, since for your good and quiet I have not been able to persuade you no longer to aspire to the Princess, your cousin, I think it would not be amiss if every one traveled separately into different countries, so that you might not meet each other. And, as you know I am very curious, and delight in everything that's singular, I promise my



niece in marriage to him that shall bring me the most extraordinary rarity; and for the purchase of the rarity you shall go in search after, and the expense of traveling, I will give you every one a sum of money."

As the three Princes were always submissive and obedient to the Sultan's will, and each flattered himself fortune might prove favorable to him, they all consented to it. The Sultan paid them the money he promised them; and that very day they gave orders for the preparations for their travels, and took their leave of the Sultan, that they might be the more ready to go the next morning. Accordingly they all set out at the same gate of the city, each dressed like a merchant, attended by an officer of confidence dressed like a slave, and all well mounted and equipped. They went the first day's journey together, and lay all at an inn, where the road was divided into three different tracts. At night, when they were at supper together, they all agreed to travel for a year, and to meet at that inn; and that the first that came should wait for the rest; that, as they had all three taken their leave together of the Sultan, they might all return together. The next morning by break of day, after they had embraced and wished each other good success, they mounted their horses and took each a different road.

Prince Houssain, the eldest brother, arrived at Bisnagar, the capital of the kingdom of that name, and the residence of its king. He went and lodged at a khan appointed for foreign merchants; and, having learned that there were four principal divisions where merchants of all sorts sold their commodities, and kept shops, and in the midst of which stood the castle, or rather the King's palace, he went to one of these divisions the next day.

Prince Houssain could not view this division without admiration. It was large, and divided into several streets, all vaulted and shaded from the sun, and yet very light too. The shops were all of a size, and all that dealt in the same sort of goods lived in one street; as also the handicrafts-men, who kept their shops in the smaller streets.

The multitude of shops, stocked with all sorts of merchandise, as the finest linens from several parts of India, some painted in the most lively colors, and representing beasts, trees, and flowers; silks and brocades from Persia, China, and other places, porcelain both from Japan and China, and tapestries, surprised him so much that he knew not how to believe his own eyes; but when he came to the goldsmiths and jewelers he was in a kind of ecstasy to behold such prodigious quantities of wrought gold and silver, and was dazzled by the lustre of the pearls, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and other jewels exposed to sale.

Another thing Prince Houssain particularly admired was the great number of rose-sellers who crowded the streets; for the Indians are so

great lovers of that flower that no one will stir without a nosegay in his hand or a garland on his head; and the merchants keep them in pots in their shops, that the air is perfectly perfumed.

After Prince Houssain had run through that division, street by street, his thoughts fully employed on the riches he had seen, he was very much tired, which a merchant perceiving, civilly invited him to sit down in his shop, and he accepted; but had not been sat down long before he saw a crier pass by with a piece of tapestry on his arm, about six feet square, and cried at thirty purses. The Prince called to the crier, and asked to see the tapestry, which seemed to him to be valued at an exorbitant price, not only for the size of it, but the meanness of the stuff; when he had examined it well, he told the crier that he could not comprehend how so small a piece of tapestry, and of so indifferent appearance, could be set at so high a price.

The crier, who took him for a merchant, replied: "If this price seems so extravagant to you, your amazement will be greater when I tell you I have orders to raise it to forty purses, and not to part with it under."

"Certainly," answered Prince Houssain, "it must have something very extraordinary in it, which I know nothing of."

"You have guessed it, sir," replied the crier, "and will own it when you come to know that whoever sits on this piece of tapestry may be transported in an instant wherever he desires to be, without being stopped by any obstacle."

At this discourse of the crier the Prince of the Indies, considering that the principal

motive of his travel was to carry the Sultan, his father, home some singular rarity, thought that he could not meet with any which could give him more satisfaction. "If the tapestry," said he to the crier, "has the virtue you assign it, I shall not think forty purses too much, but shall make you a present besides."

"Sir," replied the crier, "I have told you the truth; and it is an easy matter to convince you of it, as soon as you have made the bargain for forty purses, on condition I show you the experiment. But, as I suppose you have not so much about you, and to receive them I must go with you to your khan, where you lodge, with the leave of the master of the shop, we will go into the back shop, and I will spread the tapestry; and when we have both sat down, and you have formed the wish to be transported into your apartment of the khan, if we are not transported thither it shall be no bargain, and you shall be at your liberty. As to your present, though I am paid for my trouble by the seller, I shall receive it as a favor, and be very much obliged to you, and thankful."

On the credit of the crier, the Prince accepted the conditions, and concluded the bargain; and, having got the master's leave, they went into his back shop; they both sat down on it, and as soon as the Prince formed his wish to be transported into his apartment at the khan he presently found himself and the crier there; and, as he wanted not a more sufficient proof of the virtue of the tapestry, he counted the crier out forty pieces of gold, and gave him twenty pieces for himself.

In this manner Prince Houssain became the possessor of the tapestry, and was overjoyed that at his arrival at Bisnagar he had found so rare a piece, which he never disputed would gain him the hand of Nouronihar. In short, he looked upon it as an impossible thing for the Princes his younger brothers to meet with anything to be compared with it. It was in his power, by sitting on his tapestry, to be at the place of meeting that very day; but, as he was obliged to stay there for his brothers, as they had agreed, and as he was curious to see the King of Bisnagar and his Court, and to inform himself of the strength, laws, customs, and religion of the kingdom, he chose to make a longer abode there, and to spend some months in satisfying his curiosity.

Prince Houssain might have made a longer abode in the kingdom and Court of Bisnagar, but he was so eager to be nearer the Princess that, spreading the tapestry, he and the officer he had brought with him sat down, and as soon as he had formed his wish were transported to the inn at which he and his brothers were to meet, and where he passed for a merchant till they came.

Prince Ali, Prince Houssain's second brother, who designed to travel into Persia, took the road, having three days after he parted with his brothers joined a caravan, and after four days' travel arrived at Schiraz, which was the capital of the kingdom of Persia. Here he passed for a jeweler.

The next morning Prince Ali, who traveled only for his pleasure, and had brought nothing

but just necessaries along with him, after he had dressed himself, took a walk into that part of the town which they at Schiraz called the bezestein.

Among all the criers who passed backward and forward with several sorts of goods, offering to sell them, he was not a little surprised to see one who held an ivory telescope in his hand of about a foot in length and the thickness of a man's thumb, and cried it at thirty purses. At first he thought the crier mad, and to inform himself went to a shop, and said to the merchant, who stood at the door: "Pray, sir, is not that man" (pointing to the crier who cried the ivory perspective glass at thirty purses) "mad? If he is not, I am very much deceived."

"Indeed, sir," answered the merchant, "he was in his right senses yesterday; I can assure you he is one of the ablest criers we have, and the most employed of any when anything valuable is to be sold. And if he cries the ivory perspective glass at thirty purses it must be worth as much or more, on some account or other. He will come by presently, and we will call him, and you shall be satisfied; in the meantime sit down on my sofa, and rest yourself."

Prince Ali accepted the merchant's obliging offer, and presently afterward the crier passed by. The merchant called him by his name, and, pointing to the Prince, said to him: "Tell that gentleman, who asked me if you were in your right senses, what you mean by crying that ivory perspective glass, which seems not to be worth much, at thirty purses.

I should be very much amazed myself if I did not know you."

The crier, addressing himself to Prince Ali, said: "Sir, you are not the only person that takes me for a madman on account of this perspective glass. You shall judge yourself whether I am or no, when I have told you its property and I hope you will value it at as high a price as those I have showed it to already, who had as bad an opinion of me as you.

"First, sir," pursued the crier, presenting the ivory pipe to the Prince, "observe that this pipe is furnished with a glass at both ends; and consider that by looking through one of them you see whatever object you wish to behold." "I am," said the Prince, "ready to make you all imaginable reparation for the scandal I have thrown on you if you will make the truth of what you advance appear," and as he had the ivory pipe in his hand, after he had looked at the two glasses he said: "Show me at which of these ends I must look that I may be satisfied." The crier presently showed him, and he looked through, wishing at the same time to see the Sultan his father, whom he immediately beheld in perfect health, set on his throne, in the midst of his council. Afterward, as there was nothing in the world so dear to him, after the Sultan, as the Princess Nouronihar, he wished to see her; and saw her at her toilet laughing, and in a pleasant humor, with her women about her.

Prince Ali wanted no other proof to be persuaded that this perspective glass was the most valuable thing in the world, and believed

that if he should neglect to purchase it he should never meet again with such another rarity. He therefore took the crier with him to the khan where he lodged, and counted him out the money, and received the perspective glass.

Prince Ali was overjoyed at his bargain, and persuaded himself that, as his brothers would not be able to meet with anything so rare and admirable, the Princess Nouronihar would be the recompense of his fatigue and trouble; that he thought of nothing but visiting the Court of Persia incognito, and seeing whatever was curious in Schiraz and thereabouts, till the caravan with which he came returned back to the Indies. As soon as the caravan was ready to set out, the Prince joined them, and arrived happily without any accident or trouble, otherwise than the length of the journey and fatigue of traveling, at the place of rendezvous, where he found Prince Houssain, and both waited for Prince Ahmed.

Prince Ahmed, who took the road of Samarcand, the next day after his arrival there went, as his brothers had done, into the bezestein, where he had not walked long but heard a crier, who had an artificial apple in his hand, cry it at five and thirty purses; upon which he stopped the crier, and said to him: "Let me see that apple, and tell me what virtue and extraordinary properties it has, to be valued at so high a rate."

"Sir," said the crier, giving it into his hand, "if you look at the outside of this apple, it is very worthless, but if you consider its properties,

virtues, and the great use and benefit it is to mankind, you will say it is no price for it, and that he who possesses it is master of a great treasure. In short, it cures all sick persons of the most mortal diseases; and if the patient is dying it will recover him immediately and restore him to perfect health; and this is done after the easiest manner in the world, which is by the patient's smelling the apple."

"If I may believe you," replied Prince Ahmed, "the virtues of this apple are wonderful, and it is invaluable; but what ground have I, for all you tell me, to be persuaded of the truth of this matter?"

"Sir," replied the crier, "the thing is known and averred by the whole city of Samarcand; but, without going any further, ask all these merchants you see here, and hear what they say. You will find several of them will tell you they had not been alive this day if they had not made use of this excellent remedy. And, that you may better comprehend what it is, I must tell you it is the fruit of the study and experiments of a celebrated philosopher of this city, who applied himself all his lifetime to the study and knowledge of the virtues of plants and minerals, and at last attained to this composition, by which he performed such surprising cures in this town as will never be forgot, but died suddenly himself, before he could apply his sovereign remedy, and left his wife and a great many young children behind him, in very indifferent circumstances, who, to support her family and provide for her children, is resolved to sell it."

While the crier informed Prince Ahmed of the virtues of the artificial apple, a great many persons came about them and confirmed what he said; and one among the rest said he had a friend dangerously ill, whose life was despaired of; and that was a favorable opportunity to show Prince Ahmed the experiment. Upon which Prince Ahmed told the crier he would give him forty purses if he cured the sick person.

The crier, who had orders to sell it at that price, said to Prince Ahmed: "Come, sir, let us go and make the experiment, and the apple shall be yours; and I can assure you that it will always have the desired effect." In short, the experiment succeeded, and the Prince, after he had counted out to the crier forty purses, and he had delivered the apple to him, waited patiently for the first caravan that should return to the Indies, and arrived in perfect health at the inn where the Princes Houssain and Ali waited for him.

When the Princes met they showed each other their treasures, and immediately saw through the glass that the Princess was dying. They then sat down on the carpet, wished themselves with her, and were there in a moment.

Prince Ahmed no sooner perceived himself in Nouronihar's chamber than he rose off the tapestry, as did also the other two Princes, and went to the bedside, and put the apple under her nose; some moments after the Princess opened her eyes, and turned her head from one side to another, looking at the persons

who stood about her; and then rose up in the bed, and asked to be dressed, just as if she had waked out of a sound sleep. Her women having presently informed her, in a manner that showed their joy, that she was obliged to the three Princes for the sudden recovery of her health, and particularly to Prince Ahmed, she immediately expressed her joy to see them, and thanked them all together, and afterward Prince Ahmed in particular.

While the Princess was dressing the Princes went to throw themselves at the Sultan their father's feet, and pay their respects to him. But when they came before him they found he had been informed of their arrival by the chief of the Princess's eunuchs, and by what means the Princess had been perfectly cured. The Sultan received and embraced them with the greatest joy, both for their return and the recovery of the Princess his niece, whom he loved as well as if she had been his own daughter, and who had been given over by the physicians. After the usual ceremonies and compliments the Princes presented each his rarity: Prince Houssain his tapestry, which he had taken care not to leave behind him in the Princess's chamber; Prince Ali his ivory perspective glass, and Prince Ahmed his artificial apple; and after each had commended their present, when they put it into the Sultan's hands, they begged of him to pronounce their fate, and declare to which of them he would give the Princess Nouronihar for a wife, according to his promise.

The Sultan of the Indies, having heard, without interrupting them, all that the Princes could represent further about their rarities, and being well informed of what had happened in relation to the Princess Nouronihar's cure, remained some time silent, as if he were thinking on what answer he should make. At last he broke the silence, and said to them: "I would declare for one of you children with a great deal of pleasure if I could do it with justice; but consider whether I can do it or no. 'Tis true, Prince Ahmed, the Princess my niece is obliged to your artificial apple for her cure; but I must ask you whether or no you could have been so serviceable to her if you had not known by Prince Ali's perspective glass the danger she was in, and if Prince Houssain's tapestry had not brought you so soon. Your perspective glass, Prince Ali, informed you and your brothers that you were like to lose the Princess your cousin, and there you must own a great obligation.

"You must also grant that that knowledge would have been of no service without the artificial apple and the tapestry. And lastly, Prince Houssain, the Princess would be very ungrateful if she should not show her acknowledgment of the service of your tapestry, which was so necessary a means toward her cure. But consider, it would have been of little use if you had not been acquainted with the Princess's illness by Prince Ali's glass, and Prince Ahmed had not applied his artificial apple. Therefore, as neither tapestry, ivory perspective glass, nor artificial apple have the

least preference one before the other, but, on the contrary, there's a perfect equality, I cannot grant the Princess to ally one of you; and the only fruit you have reaped from your travels is the glory of having equally contributed to restore her health.

"If all this be true," added the Sultan, "you see that I must have recourse to other means to determine certainly in the choice I ought to make among you; and that, as there is time enough between this and night, I'll do it today. Go and get each of you a bow and arrow, and repair to the great plain, where they exercise horses. I'll soon come to you, and declare I will give the Princess Nouronihar to him that shoots the farthest."

The three Princes had nothing to say against the decision of the Sultan. When they were out of his presence they each provided themselves with a bow and arrow, which they delivered to one of their officers, and went to the plain appointed, followed by a great concourse of people.

The Sultan did not make them wait long for him, and as soon as he arrived Prince Houssain, as the eldest, took his bow and arrow and shot first; Prince Ali shot next, and much beyond him; and Prince Ahmed last of all, but it so happened that nobody could see where his arrow fell; and, notwithstanding all the diligence that was used by himself and everybody else, it was not to be found far or near. And though it was believed that he shot the farthest, and that he therefore deserved the Princess Nouronihar, it was, however,

necessary that his arrow should be found to make the matter more evident and certain; and, notwithstanding his remonstrance, the Sultan judged in favor of Prince Ali, and gave orders for preparations to be made for the wedding, which was celebrated a few days after with great magnificence.

Prince Houssain would not honor the feast with his presence. In short, his grief was so violent and insupportable that he left the Court, and renounced all right of succession to the crown, to turn hermit.

Prince Ahmed, too, did not come to Prince Ali's and the Princess Nouronihar's wedding any more than his brother Houssain, but did not renounce the world as he had done. But, as he could not imagine what had become of his arrow, he stole away from his attendants and resolved to search after it, that he might not have anything to reproach himself with. With this intent he went to the place where the Princes Houssain's and Ali's were gathered up, and, going straight forward from there, looking carefully on both sides of him, he went so far that at last he began to think his labor was all in vain; but yet he could not help going forward till he came to some steep craggy rocks, which were bounds to his journey, and were situated in a barren country, about four leagues distant from where he set out.