



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Enchanted Horse (The Ebony Horse)

Hanna Diyab

There was once, of old time, a great and puissant King, of the Kings of the Persians, Sabour by name, who was the richest of all the Kings in store of wealth and dominion and surpassed them all in wit and wisdom. Generous, open-handed and beneficent, he gave to those who sought and repelled not those who resorted to him, comforted the broken-hearted and honourably entreated those who fled to him for refuge. Moreover, he loved the poor and was hospitable to strangers and did the oppressed justice upon those who oppressed them. He had three daughters, like shining full moons or flowered gardens, and a son as he were the moon; and it was his wont to keep two festivals in the year, those of the New Year and the Autumnal Equinox, on which occasions he threw open his palaces and gave gifts and made proclamation of safety and security and advanced his chamberlains and officers; and the people of his realm came in to him and saluted him and gave him joy of the festival, bringing him gifts and servants.

Now he loved science and geometry, and one day, as he sat on his throne of kingship, during one of these festivals, there came in to him three sages, cunning artificers and past masters in all manner of crafts and inventions, skilled in making rarities, such as confound the wit, and versed in the knowledge of [occult] truths and subtleties; and they were of three different tongues and countries, the first an Indian, the second a Greek and the third a Persian. The Indian came forward and prostrating himself before the King, gave him joy of the festival and laid before him a present befitting [his dignity]; that is to say, a figure of gold, set with precious stones and jewels of price and holding in its hand a golden trumpet. When Sabour saw this, he said, 'O sage, what is the virtue of this figure?' And the Indian answered, 'O my lord; if this figure be set at the gate of thy city, it will be a guardian over it; for, if an enemy enter the place, it will blow this trumpet against him, and so he will be known and laid hands on.' The King marvelled at this and said, 'By Allah, O sage, an this thy word be true, I will grant thee thy wish and thy desire.'

Then came forward the Greek and prostrating himself before the King, presented him with a basin of silver, in whose midst was a peacock of gold, surrounded by four-and-twenty young ones of the same metal. Sabour looked at them and turning to the Greek, said to him, 'O sage, what is the virtue of this peacock?' 'O my lord,' answered he, 'as often as an hour of the day or night passes, it pecks

one of its young [and cries out and flaps its wings,] till the four-and-twenty hours are accomplished; and when the month comes to an end, it will open its mouth and thou shalt see the new moon therein.' And the King said, 'An thou speak sooth, I will bring thee to thy wish and thy desire.'

Then came forward the Persian sage and prostrating himself before the King, presented him with a horse of ebony wood, inlaid with gold and jewels, ready harnessed with saddle and bridle and stirrups such as befit kings; which when Sabour saw, he marvelled exceedingly and was confounded at the perfection of its form and the ingenuity of its fashion. So he said, 'What is the use of this horse of wood, and what is its virtue and the secret of its movement?' 'O my lord,' answered the Persian, 'the virtue of this horse is that, if one mount him, it will carry him whither he will and fare with its rider through the air for the space of a year and a day.' The King marvelled and was amazed at these three wonders, following thus hard upon each other in one day, and turning to the sage, said to him, 'By the Great God and the Bountiful Lord, who created all creatures and feedeth them with water and victual, an thy speech be true and the virtue of thy handiwork appear, I will give thee whatsoever thou seekest and will bring thee to thy wish and thy desire!'

Then he entertained the three sages three days, that he might make trial of their gifts, after which they brought them before him and each took the creature he had wrought and showed him the secret of its movement. The trumpeter blew the trumpet, the peacock pecked its young and the Persian sage mounted the horse of ebony, whereupon it soared with him into the air and descended again. When the King saw all this, he was amazed and perplexed and was like to fly for joy and said to the three sages, 'Now am I certified of the truth of your words and it behoves me to quit me of my promise. Seek ye, therefore, what ye will, and I will give it you.' Now the report of the [beauty of the] King's daughters had reached the sages, so they answered, 'If the King be content with us and accept of our gifts and give us leave to ask a boon of him, we ask of him that he give us his three daughters in marriage, that we may be his sons-in-law; for that the stability of kings may not be gainsaid.' Quoth the King, 'I grant you that which you desire,' and bade summon the Cadi forthright, that he might marry each of the sages to one of his daughters.

Now these latter were behind a curtain, looking on; and when they heard this, the youngest considered [him that was to be] her husband and saw him to be an old man, a hundred years of age, with frosted hair, drooping forehead, mangy eyebrows, slitten ears, clipped beard and moustaches, red, protruding eyes, bleached, hollow, flabby cheeks, nose like an egg-plant and face like a cobbler's apron, teeth overlapping one another, lips like camel's kidneys, loose and pendulous; brief, a monstrous favour; for he was the frightfullest of the folk of his time; his grinders had been knocked out and his teeth were like the tusks of the

Jinn that fright the fowls in the hen-house. Now the princess was the fairest and most graceful woman of her time, more elegant than the tender gazelle, blander than the gentle zephyr and brighter than the moon at her full, confounding the branch and outdoing the gazelle in the flexile grace of her shape and movements; and she was fairer and sweeter than her sisters. So, when she saw her suitor, she went to her chamber and strewed dust on her head and tore her clothes and fell to buffeting her face and lamenting and weeping.

Now the prince her brother, who loved her with an exceeding love, more than her sisters, was then newly returned from a journey and hearing her weeping and crying, came in to her and said, 'What ails thee? Tell me and conceal nought from me.' 'O my brother and my dear one,' answered she, 'if the palace be straitened upon thy father, I will go out; and if he be resolved upon a foul thing, I will separate myself from him, though he consent not to provide for me.' Quoth he, 'Tell me what means this talk and what has straitened thy breast and troubled thy humour.' 'O my brother and my dear one,' answered the princess, 'know that my father hath given me in marriage to a sorcerer, who brought him, as a gift, a horse of black wood, and hath stricken him with his craft and his sorcery; but, as for me, I will none of him, and would, because of him, I had never come into this world!' Her brother soothed her and comforted her, then betook himself to his father and said to him, 'What is this sorcerer to whom thou hast given my youngest sister in marriage, and what is this present that he hath brought thee, so that thou hast caused my sister to [almost] die of chagrin? It is not right that this should be.'

Now the Persian was standing by and when he heard the prince's words, he was mortified thereby and filled with rage, and the King said, 'O my son, an thou sawest this horse, thy wit would be confounded and thou wouldst be filled with amazement.' Then he bade the slaves bring the horse before him and they did so; and when the prince, who was an accomplished cavalier, saw it, it pleased him. So he mounted it forthright and struck its belly with the stirrup-irons; but it stirred not and the King said to the sage, 'Go and show him its movement, that he also may help thee to thy wish.' Now the Persian bore the prince malice for that he willed not he should have his sister; so he showed him the peg of ascent on the right side [of the horse's neck] and saying to him, 'Turn this pin,' left him. So the prince turned the pin and forthwith the horse soared with him into the air, as it were a bird, and gave not over flying with him, till it disappeared from sight, whereat the King was troubled and perplexed about his affair and said to the Persian, 'O sage, look how thou mayst make him descend.' But he answered, 'O my lord, I can do nothing, and thou wilt never see him again till the Day of Resurrection, for that he, of his ignorance and conceit, asked me not of the peg of descent and I forgot to acquaint him therewith.' When the King heard this, he was sore enraged and bade beat the sorcerer and clap him in prison, whilst he

himself cast the crown from his head and buffeted his face and beat upon his breast. Moreover, he shut the doors of his palaces and gave himself up to weeping and lamentation, he and his wife and daughters and all the folk of the city; and [thus] their joy was turned to mourning and their gladness changed into chagrin and sore affliction.

Meanwhile, the horse gave not over soaring with the prince, till he drew near the sun, whereat he gave himself up for lost and was confounded at his case, repenting him of having mounted the horse and saying in himself, 'Verily, this was a plot of the sage to destroy me; but there is no power and no virtue but in God the Most High, the Supreme! I am lost without recourse; but, I wonder, did not he who made the peg of ascent make a peg of descent also?' Now he was a man of wit and intelligence; so he fell to examining all the parts of the horse, but saw nothing save a peg, like a cock's head, on its right shoulder and the like on the left, and turned the right-hand peg, whereupon the horse flew upward with increased speed. So he left it and turned the left-hand peg, and immediately the steed's upward motion ceased and he began to descend, little by little, towards the earth. When the prince saw this and knew the uses of the horse, he was filled with joy and gladness and thanked God the Most High for that He had vouchsafed to deliver him from destruction. Then he began to turn the horse's head whither he would, making him rise and fall at pleasure, till he had gotten complete command of his movement.

He ceased not to descend the whole of that day, for that the steed's upward flight had borne him afar from the earth; and as he descended, he diverted himself with viewing the various towns and countries over which he passed and which he knew not, having never seen them in his life. Amongst the rest, he saw a city of the goodliest ordinance, in the midst of a green and smiling country, abounding in trees and streams; whereat he fell a-musing and said in himself, 'Would I knew the name of yonder city and in what country it is!' And he began to circle about it and observe it right and left. By this time, the day began to wane and the sun drew near to its setting; and he said, 'I see no goodlier place to pass the night in than this city; so I will lodge here this night and on the morrow I will return to my people and my kingdom and tell my father and family what has passed and what I have seen with my eyes.' Then he addressed himself to look for a place, where he might safely bestow himself and his horse and where none should see him, and presently espied a palace, surrounded by a great wall with lofty battlements, rising high into the air from the midst of the city and guarded by forty black slaves, clad in complete mail and armed with spears and swords and bows and arrows. Quoth he, 'This is a goodly place,' and turned the peg of descent, whereupon the horse sank down with him and alighted gently on the roof of the palace. So the prince dismounted and began to go round about the horse and examine it, saying, 'By Allah, he who fashioned

thee was a cunning craftsman, and if God extend the term of my life and restore me to my country and family in safety and reunite me with my father, I will assuredly bestow upon him all manner of bounties and entreat him with the utmost favour.'

By this time the night had overtaken him and he sat on the roof, till he was assured that all in the palace slept; and indeed hunger and thirst were sore upon him, for that he had not tasted food since he parted from his father. So he said in himself, 'Surely, the like of this palace will not lack of victual,' and leaving the horse there, went in quest of somewhat to eat. Presently, he came to a stair and descending it, found himself in a court paved with white marble and alabaster, that shone in the light of the moon. He marvelled at the place and the goodliness of its fashion, but heard no sound and saw no living soul and stood in perplexity, looking right and left and knowing not whither he should go. Then said he to himself, 'I cannot do better than return to where I left my horse and pass the night by it; and as soon as it is day, I will mount and depart.' However, as he stood talking to himself, he espied a light within the palace, and making towards it, found that it came from a candle that stood before a door of the palace, at the head of an eunuch, as he were one of the Afrits of Solomon or a tribesman of the Jinn, longer than a plank and wider than a bench. He lay asleep before the door, with the pommel of his sword gleaming in the flame of the candle, and at his head was a budget of leather hanging from a column of granite.

When the prince saw this, he was affrighted and said, 'I crave help from God the Supreme! O my God, even as Thou hast [already] delivered me from destruction, vouchsafe me strength to quit myself of the adventure of this palace!' So saying, he put out his hand to the budget and taking it, carried it to a place apart and opened it and found in it food of the best. So he ate his fill and refreshed himself and drank water, after which he hung the budget up in its place and drawing the eunuch's sword from its sheath, took it, whilst the latter slept on, knowing not whence destiny should come to him. Then the prince fared on into the palace, till he came to another door, with a curtain drawn before it; so he raised the curtain and entering, saw a couch of ivory, inlaid with pearls and jacinths and jewels, and four slave-girls sleeping about it. He went up to the couch, to see what was therein, and found a young lady lying asleep, veiled with her hair, as she were the full moon at its rising, with flower-white forehead and shining parting and cheeks like blood-red anemones and dainty moles thereon.

When he saw this, he was amazed at her beauty and grace and symmetry and recked no more of death. So he went up to her, trembling in every nerve, and kissed her on the right cheek; whereupon she awoke forthright and seeing the prince standing at her head, said to him, 'Who art thou and whence comest thou?' Quoth he, 'I am thy slave and thy lover.' 'And who brought thee hither?'

asked she. 'My Lord and my fortune,' answered he; and she said, 'Belike thou art he who demanded me yesterday of my father in marriage and he rejected thee, pretending that thou wast foul of favour. By Allah he lied, when he spoke this thing, for thou art not other than handsome.'

Now the son of the King of Hind had sought her in marriage, but her father had rejected him, for that he was ill-favoured, and she thought the prince was he. So, when she saw his beauty and grace, for indeed he was like the radiant moon, her heart was taken in the snare of his love, as it were a flaming fire, and they fell to talk and converse. Presently, her waiting-women awoke from their sleep and seeing the prince sitting with their mistress, said to her, 'O my lady, who is this with thee?' Quoth she, 'I know not; I found him sitting by me, when I awoke. Belike it is he who seeks me in marriage of my father.' 'O my lady,' answered they, 'by the Most Great God, this is not he who seeks thee in marriage, for he is foul and this man is fair and of high condition. Indeed, the other is not fit to be his servant.'

Then they went out to the eunuch and finding him asleep, awoke him, and he started up in alarm. Quoth they, 'How comes it that thou art guardian of the palace and yet men come in to us, whilst we are asleep?' When the eunuch heard this, he sprang in haste to his sword, but found it not, and fear took him and trembling. Then he went in, confounded, to his mistress and seeing the prince sitting talking with her, said to the former, 'O my lord, art thou a man or a genie?' 'O it on thee, O unluckiest of slaves!' replied the prince. 'How darest thou even a prince of the sons of the Chosroës with one of the unbelieving Satans?' Then he took the sword in his hand and said, 'I am the King's son-in-law, and he hath married me to his daughter and bidden me go in to her.' 'O my lord,' replied the eunuch, 'if thou be indeed a man, as thou avouchest, she is fit for none but thee, and thou art worthier of her than any other.'

Then he ran to the King, shrieking out and rending his clothes and casting dust upon his head; and when the King heard his outcry, he said to him, 'What has befallen thee? Speak quickly and be brief; for thou troublest my heart.' 'O King,' answered the eunuch, 'come to thy daughter's succour; for a devil of the Jinn, in the likeness of a king's son, hath gotten possession of her; so up and at him!' When the King heard this, he thought to kill him and said, 'How camest thou to be careless of my daughter and let this demon come at her?' Then he betook himself to the princess's palace, where he found her women standing, [awaiting him] and said to them, 'What is come to my daughter?' 'O King,' answered they, 'sleep overcame us and when we awoke, we found a young man sitting talking with her, as he were the full moon, never saw we a fairer of favour than he. So we questioned him of his case and he avouched that thou hadst given him thy daughter in marriage. More than this we know not, nor do we know if he be a man or a genie; but he is modest and well bred, and doth nothing unseemly.'

When the King heard this, his wrath cooled and he raised the curtain stealthily and looking in, saw a prince of the goodliest fashion, with a face like the shining full moon, sitting talking with his daughter. At this sight he could not contain himself, of his jealousy for his daughter, and putting the curtain aside, rushed in upon them, like a Ghoul, with his drawn sword in his hand. When the prince saw him, he said to the princess, 'Is this thy father?' 'Yes,' answered she; whereupon he sprang to his feet and taking his sword in his hand, cried out at the King with such a terrible cry, that he was confounded. Then he would have fallen on him with the sword; but the King, seeing that the prince was doughtier than he, sheathed his blade and stood till the latter came up to him, when he accosted him courteously and said to him, 'O youth, art thou a man or a genie?' Quoth the prince, 'Did I not respect thy right and thy daughter's honour, I would spill thy blood! How darest thou even me with devils, me that am a prince of the sons of the Chosroës, who, had they a mind to take thy kingdom, could shake thee from thy power and thy dominion and despoil thee of all thy possessions?' When the King heard his words, he was smitten with awe and fear of him and rejoined, 'If thou indeed be of the sons of the kings, as thou pretendest, how comes it that thou enterest my palace, without my leave, and soilest my honour, making thy way to my daughter and feigning that thou art her husband and that I have given her to thee to wife, I that have slain kings and kings' sons, who sought her of me in marriage? And now who shall save thee from my mischief, when, if I cried out to my slaves and servants and bade them put thee to death, they would slay thee forthright? Who then shall deliver thee out of my hand?'

When the prince heard this speech of the King, he answered, 'Verily, I wonder at thee and at the poverty of thy wit! Canst thou covet for thy daughter a goodlier mate than myself and hast ever seen a stouter of heart or a more sufficient or a more glorious in rank and dominion than I?' 'Nay, by Allah,' rejoined the King. 'But, O youth, I would have had thee make suit to me for her hand before witnesses, that I might marry her to thee publicly; and now, were I to marry her to thee privily, yet hast thou dishonoured me in her person.' 'Thou sayst well, O King,' replied the prince; 'but, if thy servants and soldiers should fall upon me and slay me, as thou pretendest, thou wouldst but publish thine own dishonour, and the folk would be divided between belief and disbelief with regard to thee. Wherefore, meseems thou wilt do well to turn from this thought to that which I shall counsel thee.' Quoth the King, 'Let me hear what thou hast to propose.' And the prince said, 'What I have to propose to thee is this: either do thou meet me in single combat and he who slays the other shall be held the worthier and having a better title to the kingdom; or else, let me be this night and on the morrow draw out against me thy horsemen and footmen and servants; but [first] tell me their number.' Quoth the King, 'They are forty thousand horse, besides my own slaves and their followers, who are the like of them in number.' 'When the day breaks then,' continued the prince, 'do thou array them against me and

say to them, "This fellow is a suitor to me for my daughter's hand, on condition that he shall do battle single-handed against you all; for he pretends that he will overcome you and put you to the rout and that ye cannot prevail against him." Then leave me to do battle with them. If they kill me, then is thy secret the safer hidden and thine honour the better guarded; and if I overcome them, then is the like of me one whose alliance a King should covet.'

The King approved of his counsel and accepted his proposition, despite his awe and amaze at the exorbitant pretension of the prince to do battle against his whole army, such as he had described it to him, being at heart assured that he would perish in the mellay and so he be quit of him and freed from the fear of dishonour. So he called the eunuch and bade him go forthright to his Vizier and bid him assemble the whole of the troops and cause them don their arms and mount their horses. The eunuch carried the King's order to the Vizier, who straightway summoned the captains of the army and the grandees of the realm and bade them don their harness of war and mount their horses and sally forth in battle array.

Meanwhile, the King sat conversing with the prince, being pleased with his wit and good breeding, till daybreak, when he returned to his palace and seating himself on his throne, commanded the troops to mount and bade saddle one of the best of the royal horses with handsome housings and trappings and bring it to the prince. But the latter said, 'O King, I will not mount, till I come in sight of the troops and see them.' 'Be it as thou wilt,' answered the King. Then they repaired to the tilting ground, where the troops were drawn up, and the prince looked upon them and noted their great number; after which the King cried out to them, saying, 'Ho, all ye men, there is come to me a youth who seeks my daughter in marriage,—never have I seen a goodlier than he, no, nor a stouter of heart nor a doughtier, for he pretends that he can overcome you, single-handed, and put you to the rout and that, were ye a hundred thousand in number, yet would ye be for him but little. But, when he charges upon you, do ye receive him upon the points of your lances and the edges of your sabres; for, indeed, he hath undertaken a grave matter.'

Then said he to the prince, 'Up, O my son, and do thy will on them.' 'O King,' answered he, 'thou dealest not fairly with me. How shall I go forth against them, seeing that I am afoot and they are mounted?' 'I bade thee mount, and thou refusedst,' rejoined the King; 'but take which of my horses thou wilt.' But he said, 'None of thy horses pleases me, and I will ride none but that on which I came.' 'And where is thy horse?' asked the King. 'Atop of thy palace,' answered the prince, and the King said, 'In what part of my palace?' 'On the roof,' replied the prince. 'Out on thee!' quoth the King. 'This is the first sign thou hast given of madness. How can the horse be on the roof? But we shall soon see if thou speak truth or falsehood.' Then he turned to one of his chief officers and said to him,

‘Go to my palace and bring me what thou findest on the roof.’ And all the people marvelled at the prince’s words, saying, ‘How can a horse come down the steps from the roof? Verily this is a thing whose like we never heard.’

Meanwhile, the King’s messenger repaired to the palace, accompanied by other of the royal officers, and mounting to the roof, found the horse standing there,—never had they looked on a handsomer; but when they drew near and examined it, they saw that it was made of ebony and ivory; whereat they laughed to each other, saying, ‘Was it of the like of this horse that the youth spoke? Surely, he must be mad; but we shall soon see the truth of his case. Belike, there hangs some great mystery by him.’ Then they lifted up the horse and carrying it to the King, set it down before him, and all the people flocked round it, staring at it and marvelling at the beauty of its fashion and the richness of its saddle and bridle. The King also admired it and wondered at it extremely; and he said to the prince, ‘O youth, is this thy horse?’ ‘Yes, O King,’ answered the prince; ‘this is my horse, and thou shalt soon see wonders of it.’ ‘Then take and mount it,’ rejoined the King, and the prince said, ‘I will not mount till the troops withdraw afar from it.’ So the King bade them withdraw a bowshot from the horse; whereupon quoth the prince, ‘O King, I am about to mount my horse and charge upon thy troops and scatter them right and left and cleave their hearts in sunder.’ ‘Do as thou wilt,’ answered the King; ‘and spare them not, for they will not spare thee.’ Then the prince mounted, whilst the troops ranged themselves in ranks before him, and one said to another, ‘When the youth comes between the ranks, we will take him on the points of our pikes and the edges of our swords.’ ‘By Allah,’ quoth another, ‘it were pity to kill so handsome and well-shaped a youth!’ ‘By Allah,’ rejoined a third, ‘ye will have hard work to get the better of him; for he had not done this, but for what he knew of his own prowess and valiantise.’

Meanwhile, the prince, having settled himself in his saddle, whilst all eyes were strained to see what he would do, turned the peg of ascent; whereupon the horse began to sway to and fro and make the strangest of movements, after the manner of horses, till its belly was filled with air and it took flight with him and soared into the sky. When the King saw this, he cried out to his men, saying, ‘Out on you! Take him, ere he escape you!’ But his Viziers and officers said to him, ‘O King, how shall we overtake the flying bird? This is surely none but some mighty enchanter, and God hath saved thee from him. So praise thou the Most High for thy deliverance from his hand.’ Then the King returned to his palace and going in to his daughter, acquainted her with what had befallen. He found her sore afflicted for the prince and bewailing her separation from him; wherefore she fell grievously sick and took to her pillow. When her father saw her thus, he pressed her to his bosom and kissing her between the eyes, said to her, ‘O my daughter, praise God and thank Him for that He hath delivered thee from this

crafty enchanter!’ And he repeated to her the story of the prince’s disappearance; but she paid no heed to his word and did but redouble in her tears and lamentations, saying to herself, ‘By Allah, I will neither eat nor drink, till God reunite me with him!’ Her father was greatly concerned for her plight and mourned sore over her; but, for all he could do to comfort her, passion and love-longing still grew on her for the prince.

Meanwhile, the King’s son, whenas he had risen into the air, turned his horse’s head towards his native land, musing upon the beauty and grace of the princess. Now he had enquired of the King’s people the name of the princess and of the King her father and of the city, which was the city of Senaa of Yemen. So he journeyed homeward with all speed, till he drew near his father’s capital and making a circuit about the city, alighted on the roof of the King’s palace, where he left his horse, whilst he descended into the palace and finding its threshold strewn with ashes, bethought him that one of his family was dead. Then he entered, as of wont, and found his father and mother and sisters clad in mourning raiment of black, pale-faced and lean of body. When his father saw him and was assured that it was indeed his son, he gave a great cry and fell down in a swoon, but presently coming to himself, threw himself upon him and embraced him, straining him to his bosom and rejoicing in him exceedingly. His mother and sisters heard this; so they came in and seeing the prince, fell upon him, kissing him and weeping and rejoicing with an exceeding joy. Then they questioned him of his case; so he told them all that had befallen him from first to last and his father said to him, ‘Praised be God for thy safety, O solace of my eyes and life-blood of my heart!’

Then the King bade hold high festival, and the glad news flew through the city. So they beat the drums and the cymbals and putting off the raiment of mourning, donned that of joy and decorated the streets and markets; whilst the folk vied with one another who should be the first to give the King joy, and the latter proclaimed a general pardon and opening the prisons, released those who were therein. Moreover, he made banquets to the people seven days and nights and all creatures were glad; and he took horse with his son and rode out with him, that the folk might see him and rejoice. After awhile the prince enquired for the maker of the horse, saying, ‘O my father, what hath fortune done with him?’ ‘May God not bless him,’ answered the King, ‘nor the hour in which I set eyes on him! For he was the cause of thy separation from us, O my son, and he hath lain in prison since the day of thy disappearance.’ Then he bade release him from prison and sending for him, invested him in a dress of honour and entreated him with the utmost favour and munificence, save that he would not give him his daughter to wife; whereat he was sore enraged and repented of that which he had done, knowing that the prince had learnt the secret of the horse and the manner of its motion. Moreover, the King said to his son, ‘Methinks thou wilt do

well not to mount the horse neither go near it henceforth; for thou knowest not its properties, and it is perilous for thee to meddle with it.' Now the prince had told his father of his adventure with the King's daughter of Senaa, and he said, 'If the King had been minded to kill thee, he had done so; but thine hour was not yet come.'

When the rejoicings were at an end, the people returned to their houses and the King and his son to the palace, where they sat down and fell to eating and drinking and making merry. Now the King had a handsome slave-girl, who was skilled in playing upon the lute; so she took it and began to play upon it and sing thereto of separation of lovers before the King and his son, and she chanted the following verses:

Think not that absence ever shall win me to forget: For what should I remember, if I'd forgotten you?

Time passes, but my passion for you shall never end: In love of you, I swear it, I'll die and rise anew.

When the prince heard this, the fires of longing flamed up in his heart and passion redoubled upon him. Grief and regret were sore upon him and his entrails yearned in him for love of the King's daughter of Senaa; so he rose forthright and eluding his father's notice, went forth the palace to the horse and mounting it, turned the peg of ascent, whereupon it flew up into the air with him and soared towards the confines of the sky. Presently, his father missed him and going up to the summit of the palace, in great concern, saw the prince rising into the air; whereat he was sore afflicted and repented exceedingly that he had not taken the horse and hidden it: and he said in himself, 'By Allah, if but my son return to me, I will destroy the horse, that my heart may be at rest concerning my son.' And he fell again to weeping and bewailing himself for his son.

Meanwhile, the prince flew on through the air till he came to the city of Senaa and alighted on the roof as before. Then he went down stealthily and finding the eunuch asleep, as of wont, raised the curtain and went on, little by little, till he came to the door of the princess's chamber and stopped to listen; when, behold, he heard her weeping plenteous tears and reciting verses, whilst her women slept round her. Presently, they heard her weeping and wailing and said, 'O our mistress, why wilt thou mourn for one who mourns not for thee?' 'O little of wit,' answered she, 'is he for whom I mourn of those who are forgotten?' And she fell again to weeping and wailing, till sleep overcame her.

Now the prince's heart ached for her, so he entered and seeing her lying asleep, without covering, touched her with his hand; whereupon she opened her eyes and saw him standing by her. Quoth he, 'Why this weeping and mourning?' And when she knew him, she threw herself upon him and embraced him and kissed him and answered, 'For thy sake and because of my separation from thee.' 'O

my lady,' said he, 'I have wearied for thee all this time!' But she answered, 'It is I who have wearied for thee, and hadst thou tarried longer, I had surely died!' 'O my lady,' rejoined he, 'what thinkest thou of my case with thy father and how he dealt with me? Were it not for my love of thee, O ravishment of all creatures, I had surely slain him and made him a warning to all beholders; but, even as I love thee, so I love him for thy sake.' Quoth she, 'How couldst thou leave me? Can life be sweet to me after thee?' Quoth he, 'Let what has happened suffice now: I am hungry and thirsty.' So she bade her maidens make ready meat and drink, [and they sat eating and drinking and conversing] till nigh upon daybreak, when he rose to take leave of her and depart, ere the eunuch should awake, and she said, 'Whither goest thou?' 'To my father's house,' answered he; 'and I plight thee my troth that I will come to thee once in every week.' But she wept and said, 'I conjure thee, by God the Supreme, take me with thee whither thou goest and make me not taste anew the bitterness of separation from thee.' Quoth he, 'Wilt thou indeed go with me?' and she answered, 'Yes.' 'Then,' said he, 'arise, that we may depart.' So she rose forthright and going to a chest, arrayed herself in what was richest and dearest to her of her trinkets of gold and jewels of price. Then he carried her up to the roof of the palace and mounting the horse, took her up behind him and bound her fast to himself; after which he turned the peg of ascent, and the horse rose with him into the air. When her women saw this, they shrieked aloud and told her father and mother, who rushed up to the roof of the palace and looking up, saw the ebony horse flying away with the prince and princess. At this the King was sore troubled and cried out, saying, 'O King's son, I conjure thee, by Allah, have compassion on me and my wife and bereave us not of our daughter!' The prince made him no reply, but, thinking that the princess repented of leaving her father and mother, said to her, 'O ravishment of the age, wilt thou that I restore thee to thy father and mother?' 'By Allah, O my lord, that is not my desire,' answered she; 'my only wish is to be with thee wherever thou art; for I am distracted by the love of thee from all else, even to my father and mother.' At this the prince rejoiced greatly and made the horse fare softly with them, so as not to disquiet the princess; nor did they stay their flight till they came in sight of a green meadow, in which was a spring of running water. Here they alighted and ate and drank; after which they took horse again and fared on, till they came in sight of his father's capital. At this, the prince was filled with joy and bethought himself to show her the seat of his dominion and his father's power and dignity and give her to know that it was greater than that of her father. So he set her down in one of his father's pleasance-gardens [without the city] and carrying her into a pavilion there, prepared for the King, left the horse at the door and charged her keep watch over it, saying, 'Sit here, till my messenger come to thee; for I go now to my father, to make ready a palace for thee and show thee my royal estate.' 'Do as thou wilt,' answered she, for she was glad that she should not enter but with due honour and observance, as

became her rank.

Then he left her and betook himself to the palace of the King his father, who rejoiced in his return and welcomed him; and the prince said to him, 'Know that I have brought with me the princess of whom I told thee and have left her without the city in such a garden and come to tell thee, that thou mayest make ready and go forth to meet her in state and show her thy royal dignity and troops and guards.' 'With all my heart,' answered the King and straightway bade decorate the city after the goodliest fashion. Then he took horse and rode out in all state and splendour, he and his troops and household and grandees; whilst the prince made ready for her a litter of green and red and yellow brocade, in which he set Indian and Greek and Abyssinian slave-girls. Moreover, he took forth of his treasuries jewellery and apparel and what else of the things that kings treasure up and made a rare display of wealth and magnificence. Then he left the litter and those who were therein and rode forward to the pavilion, where he had left the princess; but found both her and the horse gone. When he saw this, he buffeted his face and rent his clothes and went round about the garden, as he had lost his wits; after which he came to his senses and said to himself, 'How could she have come at the secret of the horse, seeing I told her nothing of it? Maybe the Persian sage who made the horse has chanced upon her and stolen her away, in revenge for my father's treatment of him.' Then he sought the keepers of the garden and asked them if they had seen any enter the garden. Quoth they, 'We have seen none enter but the Persian sage, who came to gather simples.' So the prince was certified that it was indeed he that had taken away the princess and abode confounded and perplexed concerning his case. And he was abashed before the folk and returning to his father, [told him what had happened and] said to him, 'Take the troops and return to the city. As for me, I will never return till I have cleared up this affair.' When the King heard this, he wept and beat his breast and said to him, 'O my son, calm thyself and master thy chagrin and return with us and look what King's daughter thou wouldst fain have, that I may marry thee to her.' But the prince paid no heed to his words and bidding him farewell, departed, whilst the King returned to the city and their joy was changed into mourning.

Now, as Fate would have it, when the prince left the princess in the pavilion and betook himself to his father's palace, for the ordering of his affair, the Persian entered the garden to pluck simples and scenting the fragrance of musk and essences, that exhaled from the princess's person and perfumed the whole place, followed it till he came to the pavilion and saw the horse, that he had made with his own hands, standing at the door. At this sight, his heart was filled with joy and gladness, for he had mourned sore for it, since it had gone out of his hand. So he went up to it and examining its every part, found it safe and sound; whereupon he was about to mount and ride away, when he bethought himself

and said, 'Needs must I first look what the prince hath brought and left here with the horse.' So he entered the pavilion and seeing the princess sitting there, as she were the sun shining in the cloudless sky, knew her to be some high-born lady and doubted not but the prince had brought her thither on the horse and left her in the pavilion, whilst he went to the city, to make ready for her entry in state.

Then he went up to her and kissed the earth before her, whereupon she raised her eyes to him and finding him exceeding foul of face and favour, said, 'Who art thou?' 'O my lady,' answered he, 'I am sent by the prince, who hath bidden me bring thee to another garden, nearer the city; for that my lady the queen cannot go so far a journey and is unwilling, of her joy in thee, that another should forestall her with thee.' 'Where is the prince?' asked she; and the Persian replied, 'He is in the city, with his father, and will presently come for thee in great state.' 'O fellow,' said she, 'could he find none to send to me but thee?' At this he laughed and answered, 'O my lady, let not the ugliness of my face and the foulness of my favour deceive thee. Hadst thou profited of me as hath the prince, thou wouldst praise my affair. Indeed, he chose me as his messenger to thee, because of my uncomeliness and forbidding aspect, in his jealousy and love of thee: else hath he slaves and pages and servants, white and black, out of number, each goodlier than the other.' When she heard this, it commended itself to her reason and she believed him; so she rose and putting her hand in his, said, 'O my father, what hast thou brought me to ride?' 'O my lady,' answered he, 'thou shalt ride the horse thou camest on.' Quoth she, 'I cannot ride it by myself.' Whereupon he smiled and knew that she was in his power and said, 'I myself will ride with thee.' So he mounted and taking her up behind him, bound her fast to himself, for she knew not what he would with her. Then he turned the peg of ascent, whereupon the belly of the horse became full of wind and it swayed to and fro and rose with them into the air nor slackened in its flight, till it was out of sight of the city.

When the princess saw this, she said to him, 'O fellow, what didst thou tell me of the prince, that he sent thee to me?' 'Foul befall the prince!' answered the Persian. 'He is a scurril knave.' And she said, 'Out on thee! How darest thou disobey thy lord's commandment!' 'He is no lord of mine,' rejoined the Persian. 'Knowst thou who I am?' 'I know nothing of thee,' replied the princess, 'save what thou toldest me.' Quoth he, 'What I told thee was a trick of mine against thee and the prince. I am he who made this horse under us, and I have long regretted its loss; for the prince made himself master of it. But now I have gotten possession of it and of thee too, and I will rack his heart, even as he hath racked mine; nor shall he ever have the horse again. So take comfort and be of good cheer, for I can be of more service to thee than he.' When she heard this, she buffeted her face and cried out, saying, 'Ah, woe is me! I have neither gotten my

beloved nor kept my father and mother!’ And she wept sore over what had befallen her, whilst the Persian fared on with her, without ceasing, till he came to the land of the Greeks and alighted in a verdant meadow, abounding in trees and streams.

Now this meadow was near a city, in which was a king of great puissance, and it befell that he went forth that day to hunt and divert himself. As he passed by the meadow, he saw the Persian standing there, with the princess and the horse by his side, and before he was aware, the King’s followers fell upon him and carried him, the lady and the horse to their master, who noting the foulness of his favour and the beauty and grace of the princess, said to the latter, ‘O my lady, what kin is this old fellow to thee?’ The Persian made haste to reply, ‘She is my wife and the daughter of my father’s brother.’ But she gave him the lie and said, ‘O King, by Allah, I know him not, nor is he my husband, but hath stolen me away by force and fraud.’ Thereupon the King bade beat the Persian, and they beat him, till he was well-nigh dead; after which the King commanded to carry him to the city and cast him into prison, and taking the princess and the horse from him, set the former in his harem and laid up the latter in his treasury, though he knew not its properties nor the secret of its motion.

Meanwhile, the prince donned a travelling-habit and taking what he needed of money, set out, in very sorry plight, in quest of the princess, and journeyed from country to country and city to city, enquiring after the ebony horse, whilst all who heard him marvelled at him and deemed his talk extravagant. Thus did he a long while; but, for all his enquiry and research, he could win at no news of her. At last, he came to the city of Senaa and there enquired for her, but could get no tidings of her and found her father mourning her loss. So he turned back and made for the land of the Greeks, pursuing his enquiries as he went, till, as chance would have it, he alighted at a certain khan and saw a company of merchants sitting talking. He sat down near them and heard one say to the others, ‘O my friends, I happened lately upon a wonder of wonders.’ ‘What was that?’ asked they, and he answered, ‘I was late in such a city,’ naming the city wherein was the princess, ‘and heard its people speak of a strange thing that had lately befallen. It was that their King went out one day a-hunting, with a company of his courtiers and the grandees of his realm, and coming to a green meadow, espied there a man standing, with a horse of ebony, and a lady sitting hard by. The man was ugly and foul of favour, but the lady was a marvel of beauty and grace and symmetry; and as for the ebony horse, it was a wonder, never saw eyes aught goodlier than it nor more perfect than its fashion.’ ‘And what did the King with them?’ asked the others. ‘As for the man,’ said the merchant, ‘he questioned him of the lady and he pretended that she was his wife and the daughter of his father’s brother; but she gave him the lie. So the King took her from him and bade beat him and cast him into prison. As for the horse, I

know not what became of it.' When the prince heard this, he drew near unto the speaker and questioned him discreetly and courteously, till he told him the name of the city and of its king; which when he knew, he passed the night, full of joy.

On the morrow, he set out and travelled till he reached the city; but, when he would have entered, the gatekeepers laid hands on him, that they might bring him before the King; for that it was his wont to question all strangers respecting their conditions and the crafts in which they were skilled and the reason of their coming thither. Now it was eventide, when he entered the city, and it was then too late to go in to the King or take counsel with him respecting him. So they carried him to the prison, thinking to lay him therein for the night; but, when the warders saw his beauty and grace, they could not find it in their hearts to imprison him, but made him sit with them, without the prison; and when food came to them, he ate his fill with them. When they had made an end of eating, they turned to him and said, 'What countryman art thou?' 'I come from Persia,' answered he, 'the land of the Chosroës.' When they heard this, they laughed and one of them said, 'O Chosroän, I have heard the talk of men and their histories and looked upon their conditions; but never saw or heard I a greater liar than the Chosroän that is with us in the prison.' 'Nor,' quoth another, 'did I ever see fouler than his favour or more repulsive than his aspect.' 'What have ye seen of his lying?' asked the prince, and they answered, 'He pretends that he is a sage. Now the King came upon him, as he went a-hunting, and found with him a most beautiful lady and a horse of ebony, never saw I a handsomer. As for the lady, she is with the King, who is enamoured of her and would fain marry her; but she is mad, and were this man a physician, as he pretends, he would have cured her, for the King doth his utmost endeavour to find a remedy for her disease, and this whole year past hath he spent treasures upon physicians and astrologers, on her account; but none can avail to cure her. As for the horse, it is in the royal treasury, and the man is here with us in the prison; and all night long he weeps and bemoans himself and will not let us sleep.'

When the prince heard this, he bethought himself of a device by which he might compass his desire; and presently the warders, being minded to sleep, clapped him into the prison and locked the door. He heard the Persian weeping and bemoaning himself, in his own tongue, and saying, 'Woe is me for my sin, that I sinned against myself and against the King's son, in that which I did with the damsel; for I neither left her nor got my desire of her! All this comes of my want of sense, in that I sought for myself that which I deserved not and which befitted not the like of me; for he, who seeks what befits him not, falleth into the like of my predicament.' When the prince heard this, he accosted him in Persian, saying, 'How long wilt thou keep up this weeping and wailing? Thinkst thou that there hath befallen thee what never befell other than thou?' When the Persian heard this, he made friends with him and began to complain to him of his case

and misfortunes.

As soon as it was day, the warders took the prince and carried him before the King, informing him that he had entered the city on the previous night, at a time when no audience could be had of him. Quoth the King to the prince, 'Whence comest thou and what is thy name and craft and why comest thou hither?' And he answered, 'I am called, in Persian, Herjeh. I come from the land of Fars and I am of the men of art and especially of the art of medicine and cure the sick and the mad. For this, I go round about all countries and cities, adding knowledge to my knowledge, and whenever I see a sick person, I heal him; and this is my craft.' When the King heard this, he rejoiced exceedingly and said, 'O excellent sage, thou hast come to us at a time when we have need of thee.' Then he acquainted him with the case of the princess, adding, 'If thou win to cure her and recover her of her madness, thou shalt have of me whatever thou seekest.' 'May God advance the King!' rejoined the prince. 'Describe to me all thou hast seen of her madness and tell me how long it is since it attacked her; also how thou camest by her.' So the King told him the whole story, from first to last, adding, 'The sage is in prison.' 'O august King,' said the prince, 'and what hast thou done with the horse?' 'It is with me yet, laid up in one of my treasure-chambers,' replied the King; whereupon quoth the prince in himself, 'The first thing to do is to see the horse and assure myself of its condition. If it be whole and unhurt, all will be well; but, if its works be destroyed, I must find some other way of delivering my beloved.'

So he turned to the King and said to him, 'O King, I must see the horse in question: haply I may find in it somewhat that will serve me for the recovery of the damsel.' 'With all my heart,' replied the King and taking him by the hand, led him to the place where the horse was. The prince went round about it, examining its condition, and found it whole and unhurt, whereat he rejoiced greatly and said to the King, 'May God exalt the King! I would fain go in to the damsel, that I may see how it is with her; for I hope, by God's grace, to cure her by means of the horse.' Then he bade take care of the horse and the King carried him to the princess's apartment, where he found her writhing and beating herself against the ground, as was her wont; but there was no madness in her, and she did this but that none might approach her. When the prince saw her thus, he said to her, 'No harm shall betide thee, O ravishment of all creatures;' and went on to soothe her and speak her fair, till he won to make himself known to her; whereupon she gave a loud cry and fell down in a swoon for excess of joy; but the King thought this came of her fear of him.



Then the prince put his mouth to her ear and said to her, 'O seduction of the universe, have a care for thy life and mine and be patient and constant; for we have need of patience and skilful ordinance to make shift for our delivery from this tyrannical King. To begin with, I will now go out to him and tell him that thou art possessed of a genie, and hence thy madness; but, that if he will loose thee from thy bonds, I will engage to heal thee and drive away the evil spirit. So, when he comes in to thee, do thou give him fair words, that he may think I have cured thee, and all will be accomplished as we desire.' Quoth she, 'I hear and obey;' and he went out to the King, full of joy and happiness, and said to him, 'O august King, by thy good fortune I have discovered her disease and its remedy and have cured her for thee. So now do thou go in to her and speak softly to her and entreat her kindly, and promise her what may please her; so shall all thou desirest of her be accomplished to thee.' So he went in to her and when she saw him, she rose and kissing the ground, bade him welcome; whereat he was greatly rejoiced and bade the eunuchs and waiting-women attend her and carry her to the bath and make ready for her dresses and ornaments.

So they went in to her and saluted her, and she returned their greeting, after the goodliest and pleasantest fashion; after which they clad her in royal apparel and clasping a collar of jewels about her neck, carried her to the bath and served her there. Then they brought her forth, as she were the full moon; and when she came into the King's presence, she saluted him and kissed the ground before him, whereupon he rejoiced in her with an exceeding joy and said to the prince, 'All this is of thy blessing, may God increase us of thy good offices!' Quoth the prince, 'O King, it behoves, for the completion of her cure, that thou carry her forth, together with the ebony horse, and attend her with all thy troops to the place where thou foundest her, that there I may expel from her the evil spirit, by whom she is possessed, and bind him and kill him, so he may never more return to her.' 'With all my heart,' answered the King. Then he caused carry out the

horse to the meadow in question and mounting, rode thither with all his troops and the princess, knowing not the prince's purpose.

When they came to the appointed place, the prince bade set the horse and the princess as far as the eye could reach from the King and his troops and said to the former, 'With thy leave, I will now proceed to the needful fumigations and conjurations and imprison the genie here, that he may nevermore return to her. After this, I shall mount the horse and take the damsel up behind me; whereupon it will sway to and fro and fare forward, till it come to thee, when the affair will be at an end; and after this thou mayst do with her as thou wilt.' And when the King heard his words, he rejoiced with an exceeding joy. So the prince mounted the horse and taking the princess up behind him, bound her fast to him, whilst the King and his troops watched him. Then he turned the peg of ascent and the horse took flight and soared with them into the air, till he disappeared from sight.

The King abode half the day, expecting their return; but they returned not. So, when he despaired of them, he returned to the city with his troops, repenting him greatly of that which he had done and grieving sore for the loss of the damsel. He shut himself up in his palace, mourning and afflicted; but his Viziers came in to him and applied themselves to comfort him, saying, 'Verily, he who took the damsel is an enchanter, and praised be God who hath delivered thee from his craft and sorcery!' And they ceased not from him, till he was comforted for her loss.

Meanwhile, the prince bent his course, in joy and cheer, towards his father's capital and stayed not, till he alighted on his own palace, where he set the princess in safety; after which he went in to his father and mother and acquainted them with her coming, whereat they rejoiced exceedingly. Then he made great banquets to the townsfolk and they held high festival a whole month, at the end of which time he went in to the princess and they rejoiced in one another with an exceeding joy. But his father broke the horse in pieces and destroyed its works. Moreover, the prince wrote a letter to the princess's father, advising him of all that had befallen her and how she was now married to him and in all health and happiness, and sent it by a messenger, together with costly presents and rarities. The messenger, in due course, arrived at the city of Senaa and delivered the letter and the presents to the King, who, when he read the former, rejoiced greatly and accepted the presents, rewarding the bearer handsomely. Moreover, he sent rich presents to his son-in-law by the same messenger, who returned to his master and acquainted him with what had passed, whereat he was much cheered. And after this the prince wrote a letter every year to his father-in-law and sent him a present, till, in course of time, his father King Sabour died and he reigned in his stead, ruling justly over his subjects and ordering himself well and righteously towards them, so that they

submitted themselves to him and did him loyal service; and he and his wife abode in the enjoyment of all delight and solace of life, till there came to them the Destroyer of Delights and Sunderer of Companies, He that layeth waste the palaces and peopleth the tombs; and glory be to the Living One who dieth not and in whose hand is the dominion of the Seen and the Unseen!

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