

INTRODUCTION

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THE day I met Rassouli, he shared a childhood memory of afternoons spent with his uncle in a teahouse in Isfahan, a historic city in central Iran, listening spellbound to adventure tales spun by a storyteller in the ancient Persian oral tradition that had produced the *Thousand and One Nights*. The stories that had most enthralled him as a boy, he told me, featured as their main hero an *ayyar* named Samak—a member of a class of warriors in Persia with deep roots going back thousands of years.

I grew up in New York in the 1970s; my exposure to Persian lore had been second- or third-hand, through illustrated children's editions of the *Nights*, Hollywood derivatives like the 1940 Technicolor *Thief of Baghdad* (starring Conrad Veidt as a scheming vizier named Jaffar), *Mad* magazine, and *Ali Baba Bunny*. (Fourth-hand might be more like it.) The power of those ancient tales and archetypes nonetheless came through vividly enough to inspire me to create, in my twenties, a video game called *Prince of Persia*.

Over the next two decades, researching and writing *Prince of Persia* sequels, reboots, and adaptations for increasingly high-resolution platforms (from the 280 x 192 pixel Apple II computer screen to a 4K Disney live-action movie starring Ben Kingsley as

a scheming vizier named Nizam), I'd gained an amateur's familiarity with the thousand-year-old source material, especially the *Nights* and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. But in all my reading, I'd never heard of ayyars. Rassouli made them sound like a kind of Persian Robin Hood or ronin. I was fascinated.

Rassouli explained that although ayyars came from a lower social class, their code of brotherhood was noble, including loyalty, honor, self-sacrifice, and never turning away the hand that reaches out for help. Samak is not just a brute-force warrior but a trickster who foresees dangers and problems before anyone else and prevents them through decisive and surprising action. He embodies a heroic ethic that has resonated in stories for every generation, and one that the world needs now as much as ever.

Rassouli pulled a volume from his shelf and opened to a page at random. As he began to read, translating on the fly from archaic Persian into English, chills ran down my spine. Here was an adventure set in ancient Persia involving a beautiful princess, a treacherous vizier, kings, armies, witches, and an agile hero who scaled walls and snuck into palaces. More than just an entertaining tale, it offered vivid glimpses of the everyday life of the era, with details I hadn't been able to find anywhere else. It was the source material *Prince of Persia* had always wanted but never had.

The friend who introduced me to Rassouli had described him as an Iranian-born painter and writer, passionate about Persian history and culture, who had translated the poetry of Rumi, Hafiz, Attar, Omar Khayyam, and others. I'd come to him hoping to enrich and deepen my understanding of *Prince of Persia's* world and mythology as I worked with a team of designers and artists preparing to pitch a new take on the franchise.

I told Rassouli that I absolutely had to get my hands on an English edition of *Samak-e Ayyar*. He explained that there wasn't one; the original work was unknown outside of Iran and even to

most Iranians. It was a small miracle that it had survived in written form at all. The Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century had burned Persia's libraries and destroyed a vast swath of its literature. The tales of Samak, as part of Persia's oral tradition, were believed lost until the 1960s, when a scholar visiting the Bodleian Library in Oxford, England, made an unexpected discovery. An old Persian manuscript that had been preserved for its color illustrations—the oldest in the museum's collection—was in fact *Samak-e Ayyar*, transcribed in the twelfth century from a still older manuscript by one or more unknown scribes, recording the narration of a master storyteller from Shiraz.

Dr. Parviz Natel Khanlari, Iranian poet and professor of language and literature, reconstituted the archaic Persian text from disparate source materials (including a missing volume that turned up later in a sixteenth-century Turkish translation in the British Museum). Thus *Samak-e Ayyar* was published for the first time in a limited edition in Tehran in 1969. It promptly went out of print.

It seemed—and still seems—incredible to me that popular modern-language editions of *Samak* haven't been published around the world, as have the better-known (but not more deserving) tales of Aladdin, Sinbad, Ali Baba, and the *Thousand and One Nights*. By the time Rassouli and I said goodbye at the end of our first evening together, we had pledged to fill that gap. It felt like destiny had entrusted us with a mission. Rassouli had never played a video game, much less expected to join a team that was creating one; I had never expected to adapt a twelve-hundred-page archaic Persian manuscript. But thanks to Samak the trickster and the unlikely chain of events that led me to Rassouli's studio, it was obvious that this was what we needed to do.

How Rassouli collected all six out-of-print volumes of *Samak-e Ayyar* is an adventure tale in itself. He enlisted his brother to take a road trip from Isfahan to an antiquarian bookstore in

Nishapur, and then a plane flight from Tehran to Dubai to mail the books to Los Angeles (package shipments from Iran to the United States having been suspended due to the political situation at the time).

Ironically, the video game project that had brought us together ended up being cancelled in preproduction. (That's a tale to be told another time. The workings of the game industry can be as arcane as those of Abbasid kings and viziers.) By then, Rassouli was deep into translating the Persian manuscript with no intention of stopping. When an *ayyar* accepts a mission, you can be sure he will complete it, even if the promised reward is withdrawn or circumstances take an unfavorable turn. Video game or no, Samak had inspired our commitment and loyalty, as he does for Sorkhvard, Ruzafzun, Atashak, and other characters in the book.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

Our priority was to create an entertaining, readable, yet faithful and complete modern-language version of *Samak-e Ayyar* to make this great work accessible for the first time to a global audience.

In general, we tried to use plain language and avoid unfamiliar terms. The word *ayyar* is an exception: the concept is so central to the story that we had to keep it. We dare to hope that *ayyar* may one day enter the popular lexicon, like *samurai* and *ronin*, terms that were also once unknown in the West.

For other Persian words with no direct Western equivalent, we wrote around them. Rather than try to define *javanmardi*, for example, we sought to translate its essence using phrases like brotherhood, honor, loyalty, altruism, and noble conduct, all of which the term connotes.

Because I read no Persian, Rassouli's first step was to render a raw literal English translation of Khanlari's work. Eliminating materials extraneous to the story flow—poems inserted later, requests for prayers for the scribes at the beginnings and ends of dictation sessions, ritually repeated rhymes that Persian storytellers used (and still do) while waiting for the audience to gather and to collect money at the ends of their performances—he divided the story roughly into chapters, which he handed on to me.

As *Samak* unspooled before my eyes, I became addicted, eagerly awaiting Rassouli's weekly emails to find out what happened next. The deft interweaving of a large, diverse cast of characters, with parallel action in multiple locations, alternating visceral combat and epic battle scenes with humor and intimate moments, was like an HBO series. Its world felt both archaic and startlingly modern. Female ayyars are brave, deadly, and vulnerable; princes and warriors drink wine in army tents on the eve of battle; nobles and commoners struggle to reconcile their hearts with duty to leaders who unleash a devastating, avoidable civil war. The triangle of friendship, loyalty, sexual attraction, envy, and gender-role frustration that binds Samak, Sorkhvard, and Ruzafzun, to take one example, felt like it could have been written yesterday rather than in the ninth century.

That said, creating a unified narrative from Khanlari's assemblage posed a challenge. *Samak-e Ayyar* was never a literary work by an author like Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* but a folk tale transcribed from a storyteller's live performances. (The storyteller himself may have been illiterate.) Even if the task weren't complicated by gaps, missing pages, inconsistencies among recopied sections from different historical periods, and changes in narrator, the narrative itself is sometimes self-contradictory. A traveler makes a journey in one day that is described elsewhere as taking a month. A person on foot arrives before a rider on horseback. A character

established as being in a particular place disappears from the action for a stretch, as if the storyteller had forgotten he was there. Two characters meet for the first time, unaware that they already shared an escapade several chapters earlier. The pacing is uneven: the death of a minor character is described in detail, while one central to the story is dispatched abruptly with no fanfare.

Such discrepancies are understandable in a complex story recited by a storyteller accustomed to improvising and adapting his memorized material to suit the occasion. We can assume he was never given the opportunity to go back and edit the transcription as a whole. It would be beyond remarkable if the manuscript's thousand-odd pages fit together perfectly.

In a printed book, where the reader can flip back and compare one passage with another fifty pages earlier, inconsistencies are more distracting than in a story heard aloud. An unedited manuscript makes for a bumpy read. As much as Rassouli and I wanted to be faithful to the original, it became clear that a strict literal translation would be a book few readers would have the patience to finish. Some dramatic license was required.

For example, considering the vizier Mehran's importance in part I, the way Samak deals with him and Surkhkafar in chapters 33–37 of part II seemed too desultory, dependent on coincidence and illogical behavior. I tweaked the original action beats to achieve the same end result in a way that felt more plausible to me and consistent with the setup, characters, and world established by the storyteller. Elsewhere, I took smaller liberties of adding dialogue, description, or action to flesh out moments that wanted it, or I streamlined narration that felt tedious or repetitive. Such changes can become a slippery slope. I hope the reader will find ours judicious and in keeping with both the spirit and the detail of the original.

Given *Samak's* large cast of characters and diverse world map, our approach to names deserves a note. We retained Persian

names of most places and characters, occasionally translating them (Stone Alley, Twelve Canyons) or parts of them (Falaki Fortress, Dabur the Demon Slayer). Our guiding intention was to make it as painless as possible for readers to understand the action.

In the story, the prince of Persia journeys from his father's capital city, Halab, across a desert to a remote—but still Persian—mountainous region where the kings of rival city-states Chin and Machin vie for power, drawing tribal leaders from surrounding territories into their ever-expanding war. Rassouli and I interpreted names like Halab, Chin, and Machin (which means “beyond Chin”) as evocative of a timeless storyteller's realm rather than literal history or geography. We felt that to seek modern English equivalents, encouraging the reader to identify them with cities or nations whose coordinates can be found today on Google Maps, would be misleading.

The tale of Samak was already old when it was written down in the twelfth (or ninth?) century. Many character names evoke Persian archetypes and myths that date from pre-Islamic times. *Mahpari* means “moon fairy”; *Khorshid Shab* means “sun king.” These too we left untranslated.

The one indisputably identifiable place is the ancient land in which *Samak's* storytellers and audience lived—Persia, whose culture and proud allure have endured for thousands of years, from long before this tale was put to paper until our present day.

Here is the first of five volumes of *Samak the Ayyar*, translated and adapted by Rassouli and me. We hope you enjoy it . . . and that these pages open a window into an enchanted world of princes and ayyars, intrigue, romance, and adventure, shaped by the collective genius of generations of Persian storytellers.

PART I

SECTION 1

The Princess of Chin

1

THE SUN PRINCE

THROUGH the centuries, storytellers have passed down the tale of a king who once ruled Persia from his capital city of Halab. His name was Marzban Shah. He was a just and generous ruler, beloved by his subjects and all of his servants. He had everything he needed to live a blessed and joyful life—except a son to inherit his kingdom. The king prayed day and night with all his heart to God to grant him a child, but his prayers had not been answered. The lack of a son grieved him deeply.

Marzban Shah had a vizier named Haman who had served him devotedly for many years. One day, he summoned Haman and said: “O wise and kind vizier! You know that I have wealth, many treasures, and devoted subjects. Yet all of this means nothing to me without a son to take my place when I am gone. I want you to explore the astrological predictions and tell me if I will ever be blessed with an heir.”

The vizier replied: “Your wish is my command.” He left the court, went to his palace, and took a seven-sided, four-level astro-labe in hand. Holding it toward the sun, he looked through all 360 degrees of the universe until he saw a newborn in the third house. Haman hurried back to Marzban Shah and said, to the

king's delight: "O my king, it is your destiny to have a most powerful and blessed son." He added: "The stars say that he will be born to a princess from a foreign land who has already married and had a child."

Perplexed, Marzban Shah told Haman to find out which king's daughter matched this description so that he might seek her out. The vizier made inquiries and returned with the news: "The king of Iraq has a daughter named Golnahr who recently gave birth to a son. Her husband was killed, and she is now mourning his death."

On the king's orders, Haman opened the doors to the royal treasury and picked out one hundred bags containing a thousand golden nuggets, a crown covered with precious jewels, and one hundred gold-embroidered robes. The vizier sent these gifts along with fifty slaves to Somaregh, the king of Iraq, to request the princess's hand in marriage.

Somaregh received Marzban Shah's envoy with splendor. The emissary was escorted into the palace, seated on a gold chair near the king, and served wine and delicious food. He then took out the letter from Marzban Shah, kissed it, and placed it on the step of the king's throne. The letter said:

"In the name of the Creator of the World, this letter is from Marzban Shah, king of Persia, to Somaregh, supreme ruler of the land of Iraq. We have been informed that the great king has a daughter whom we wish to marry. We trust that Your Majesty will not turn away our hand so that the child of this marriage may inherit our crowns and unite our two kingdoms. As for the princess's son, we will adopt and raise him as our own."

Somaregh was pleased by Marzban Shah's message and the impressive array of treasures. He ordered the judges, dignitaries, and governors of his kingdom to gather to witness the engagement of his daughter Golnahr to the king of Persia.

The next day, the princess started her journey to Halab, accompanied by one hundred beautiful bond maidens, one hundred servants, and one hundred horses. She carried a jeweled crown and a precious ring as gifts for Marzban Shah.

When the king heard the news that Princess Golnahr was on her way, he ordered the streets of Halab decorated with mirrors and flowers. Minstrels sang and played joyful music on every corner in anticipation of their future queen's arrival.

Golnahr's caravan was met outside the city by forty carriages adorned with flowers, two hundred servants dressed in white, and one hundred beautiful maidens in colorful dresses. They placed the princess on a litter of roses and carried her to the city gates, where Haman and a welcoming committee greeted her with open arms. Crowds lined the streets as Golnahr was carried on her litter through the city to the king's palace. The next evening, the dignitaries of the kingdom gathered for a splendid feast at the royal palace to celebrate the marriage of Golnahr and Marzban Shah.

Soon after the wedding, Queen Golnahr became pregnant and gave birth to a son of extraordinary beauty. When the king saw his son's face shining like the sun, which had risen and broken the horizon at the very moment he was born, he decided to name him Khorshid Shah: the sun king.

All across Persia, the people celebrated the prince's arrival. The doors to the royal kitchens were opened to the king's subjects for an entire month, and the people thrived under Marzban Shah's just and benevolent rule. At Queen Golnahr's request, her son Farokhruz was brought from Iraq to join his mother. The king received Farokhruz with kindness and noticed the two-year-old boy's striking resemblance to his own newborn son.

The two princes grew up together as best friends and received a royal education and training starting at age four. By the time

Khorshid Shah was ten, he could read, write, and discuss literary and artistic matters like an expert. Next he learned the arts of horseback riding, polo, lassoing, wall climbing, spear throwing, archery, wrestling, and chess playing. Finally, he learned to sing and play various musical instruments. By the age of fourteen, the prince was so handsome that people stopped and stared at him with admiration everywhere he went. He and his brother Farokhruz spent most of their time together hunting, singing, and playing music.

One day when the prince was seventeen years old, he asked his father's permission to go on a week-long hunting trip. Knowing that this trip would take his son far from the palace, the king made him promise not to put himself in danger, as he was the heir to the crown of Persia. Khorshid Shah promised to obey his father's command.

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The prince set forth on his hunting trip the next day, accompanied by his brother Farokhruz and two army generals, along with five thousand soldiers, tents and pavilions, royal falcons and hounds.

The hunting party spread throughout the countryside seeking game. In the first six days, they captured and killed many animals and sent them to Marzban Shah's royal court. On the seventh day, they came to a beautiful meadow. While the army set up camp, Khorshid Shah asked his brother to go with him on a short hunt away from the others. He chose a white falcon of a purity one might see once in a century.

The two young brothers were frolicking on horseback and looking for game when a zebra appeared in front of them. The zebra was shining silver with a black stripe stretching down its body from forehead to tail. The prince asked his brother to let him capture this magnificent animal by himself. Farokhruz agreed.

Khorshid Shah threw his lasso around the zebra's neck, but the animal slipped free and escaped.

The prince chased the zebra through meadowed hills and valleys, shooting arrows every time he got close, but all his shots missed. At last, tired and disappointed, he gave up and decided to return to camp. It was getting dark, and he could not find his way back. Too tired to continue, he took the saddle off his horse, lay his head on it, and fell asleep.

Early the next morning, the prince awoke, saddled his horse, and began to look for the way back. Again the zebra appeared. The prince decided to try once more to catch it before returning to camp. He followed the zebra, but it kept eluding him. Finally, it disappeared behind a hill.

The prince rode to the top of the hill and looked down. There was no sign of the zebra. Instead of a rolling meadow, he saw before him a barren desert. In the distance, a column of smoke rose against the sky—the only visible feature in that desert under the hot glare of the burning sun.

Curious, the prince rode toward the smoke. As he approached, he was surprised to see a tent of red satin, held to the ground by twenty-four silk ropes tied down to golden stakes.

The prince called out but heard no answer. He dismounted, approached the pavilion, and lifted the entrance drape.

The pavilion was filled with the scent of ambergris. A silk carpet of delicately woven blues and pinks covered the ground. Atop it lay a leather mat decorated with intricate floral designs, upon which several large cushions had been laid. Someone was asleep on the cushions. Before the prince could speak, the person awoke and sat up.

It was a girl whose beauty was beyond anything Khorshid Shah could have imagined. She had a round face, a wide forehead, and eyebrows that were curved like two Turkmen's bows. Her eyes were almond-shaped, her eyelashes long, her nose small

and thin, her mouth like a newly opened rose. A blush bloomed on her cheeks. Her belly was as white as flour, her breasts like two pomegranates on a silver plate. She wore a pale silk robe that showed every contour of her perfect body. Her soft skin shone like the silver moon. A necklace of pearls peeked out from under the thin scarf that covered her long, lustrous black hair and slender neck. Lightly, like an angel in a breeze, she rose and looked at the prince.

When the girl's eyes met Khorshid Shah's, his heart began to beat as fast as a hummingbird's wings. He was speechless and could see nothing but her loveliness. He felt a strange sensation that he had never experienced before. He wondered what this beautiful girl was doing in the middle of this barren desert.

"Who are you?" the girl asked. "Where did you come from? Why do you look so puzzled?"

Khorshid Shah tried a few times to speak and finally whispered: "O lovely one! What are *you*, such a great beauty, doing in this desert? Are you an angel from heaven, or is this a dream, and are you a fairy? In all my life I have never seen anyone as beautiful as you."

The princess (for she was indeed a princess) seemed as confused as he. She had awakened to find a young man in her room, standing as straight and tall as a cypress tree. His face shone like the sun, shaded by the beginnings of a youthful beard. He was so handsome that he might have been painted by the greatest artists of the world. She asked: "How did you get here?"

It occurred to Khorshid Shah that such a girl must surely have guards who would burst in and attack him at any moment. But he felt that seeing her had given him the strength to defeat an army of a thousand warriors.

Khorshid Shah's mind was racing when he noticed a golden bowl filled with water next to the cushions. Realizing that he was

extremely thirsty, he asked if he could have some water. The princess picked up a golden goblet, filled it, and handed it to Khorshid Shah. No sooner had the prince drunk the water than dizziness overcame him. He fell to the ground unconscious.

Meanwhile, back at the camp, the hunting party was waiting for the prince to return and becoming anxious in his absence. The two generals asked Farokhruz to remain at camp while they rode out to look for Khorshid Shah. For several days they climbed every hill and crossed every meadow. At last they spotted the prince's horse in the distance.

As the generals approached the horse, they saw the prince lying unconscious on the ground. The men lifted his head, poured water into his mouth, and attended to him until he opened his eyes.

The prince sat up and looked around for the pavilion and the girl. There was no sign of either one. With tears in his eyes he told the generals what had happened to him: "I've met a girl who has captured my heart. But I don't know anything about her, not even her name. How can I find her again?"

At first the generals had difficulty believing the prince's story. Then the prince noticed a strange new ring on his finger. He showed it to the generals: "She must have put it on my finger while I slept!" This was proof that he hadn't just imagined the episode.

All three mounted their horses and rode back through the meadows until they reached the hunting camp. The prince, eager to find out the secret of the ring, insisted that they head straight back to the city. The hunting party rushed to gather their belongings and they all rode back to town after Khorshid Shah.

2

THE MYSTERY OF THE RING

IN the past, whenever the prince returned from a hunt, he went first to his father. This time he did not go to the king but went straight to his own palace. When Marzban Shah saw the hunting party return without his son, he became worried and asked about him. The generals told him that Khorshid Shah was not feeling well. This answer did not satisfy Marzban Shah. He demanded the truth, whereupon the generals told him the whole story of what had happened to the prince.

The king went at once to his son's palace, followed by his vizier Haman. The prince was lying in bed, running a high fever. The king sat at his son's bedside and placed his hand on his forehead. Khorshid Shah opened his eyes, sat up, and thanked his father for having come to see him. He said nothing about his encounter with the mysterious girl in the desert.

The king told his son: "O light of my eyes, why don't you open your heart to me? Tell me what is troubling you, and I will find a remedy for your pain."

The prince realized that his father already knew the story. He said: "O great father, we rode and hunted for six days in the mountains and deserts. On the seventh day, my brother and I went hunting together in a meadow, where I saw a magnificent

zebra. I told my brother to let me catch the animal by myself, and I followed the zebra to a barren desert. There I found a pavilion and inside it the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. I fell in love with her. She slipped this ring onto my finger while I slept."

The king looked at the ring but could not read the writing on it, nor did he recognize the images. He gave it to his vizier to examine.

Haman, despite his wisdom, was unable to decipher the cryptic symbols on the seal of the ring. He called on all the learned experts of the kingdom, but not one could identify the symbols.

The vizier said: "O great king! Perhaps we should place the ring in the bazaar and announce throughout the kingdom that anyone who can read it will receive one thousand golden dinars from the royal treasury." The king agreed, and they tied the ring on a cord in the middle of the main bazaar and assigned a guard to watch over it.

The bazaar was a place where merchants and tradesmen came from many different lands. Word spread, and many well-known people came to see the ring, but none could read what was written on it.

Four months passed. The prince's condition grew worse as he pined for the mysterious girl. He lost the strength even to rise from his bed, and his voice grew weak. The greatest physicians and healers of the kingdom tried to cure him, but there was no use. The only remedy for a lover is the beloved.

News of the prince's illness spread through the country. His mother, Queen Golnahr, spent long hours weeping at his bedside. The king began to fear for his son's life and asked the vizier to consult Khorshid Shah's astrological charts. Haman called in expert astrologists who wrote down their findings to share with the king.

Haman returned and said: "O great king, the prince is suffering from the love he has developed for this girl from a foreign

land. The predictions indicate that he will leave his home and family and travel far away. It is his destiny to rule for forty years over a vast territory including seven countries and achieve what no ruler has achieved before." Hearing this, Marzban Shah dearly hoped that these predictions would come true.

One day, an old man in threadbare clothes walking with a cane passed through the bazaar and saw the crowd gathered around the ring. He asked them why they were so interested in it. He was told of the reward of one thousand dinars from the king's royal treasury that awaited whoever could solve its mystery.

The old man examined the ring, then looked up and stated: "I know who this ring belongs to." Hearing this, the people took the old man straight to the royal palace, where he was brought before the king.

Haman the vizier suggested that it might be best if the man shared his secrets in the presence of the prince. The queen and Farokhruz joined them, and they all went to Khorshid Shah's bedroom. The king said: "Sit up, my son, to hear what this man has to say, for it seems that he knows something about the ring and its owner!"

Upon the king's command, the old man revealed: "O wonderful prince! This ring belongs to Princess Mahpari, the daughter of Faghfur Shah, the king of Chin. It is her name that the script on the seal spells out in an enigmatic way."

Eagerly the prince asked: "Is she married?"

The old man replied: "She is not. She is dominated by her nurse, an extremely clever witch named Shervaneh. This witch has set three challenges that must be met by anyone who seeks the princess's hand in marriage. Her witchcraft is so powerful that even the king, with all his army and servants and subjects, does not dare oppose her. Twenty princes have sought to marry the princess. Not one has performed these tasks successfully."

“What tasks?” asked the prince. The old man explained that the first challenge was to tame a wild horse; the second, to wrestle a giant Abyssinian warrior and pin him to the ground; and the third, to find a talking cypress tree.

Hearing these words, Marzban Shah went into deep thought. Finally, he said to the prince: “My son, if this problem could be resolved with gold and jewels, I would do it. If I could solve it by sending an army to conquer Chin, I would do it. But this situation is beyond my reach.”

The old man bowed down and said: “O great king! Your son’s quest to marry the princess Mahpari can end only in disaster.” To the prince he said: “Your present suffering is the result of Shervaneh’s witchcraft. She has used the princess to entrap you in her snare, like many other important and vulnerable princes before you. I am sure that the zebra you followed was none other than her.”

During this conversation, Haman watched the old man with growing suspicion. The king ordered his guards to open the treasury doors and give the stranger one thousand golden dinars along with a gold-embroidered robe. The old man accepted his reward and left.

Once he was gone, Haman shared his feelings with the king and the prince. “Something about that old man seemed not right. I wonder if he might have been Shervaneh herself, disguised by witchcraft.” He urged the prince to forget Mahpari.

Khorshid Shah resisted at first, but he finally followed the vizier’s advice and began to work on his own mind and meditate. After a few days, his health improved and soon he was able to put on his royal robes and resume his regular duties. Within a month he was back to his old self.

One morning, the prince waited until everyone but the king had left the royal court. He approached his father’s throne and asked permission to travel to Chin to seek the hand of Princess Mahpari

in marriage. He explained that although he acted as though he had recovered, his soul was still suffering greatly with love.

The king reminded his son of the old man's warning and the vizier's suspicions: "O my son, if you travel to Chin, I fear we may never see you alive again. Your mother and I could not bear to lose you. Please forget this impossible love."

The prince cried out: "O father! Have mercy on your son. You don't know the pain I am in. First it was passion that made me ill. Now this passion has turned to love, and my soul is filled with sadness. It's destroying my balance. I've lost all perspective. If I cannot go after the princess, I will die of grief. Please let me go!" He entreated his father: "I know I can win Mahpari and take her as my wife. With her at my side, I could be a great king. Without her, I won't be fit for the crown." But still the king refused to let his son leave.

The prince's sorrow increased day by day, to the point that it made life difficult for the king and queen. One day, Haman the vizier kissed the ground in front of the king and said to him: "O greatness! Patience is not the remedy for lovers. Perhaps it would be wise to allow the prince to make this journey despite our misgivings. Remember, we have heard from the astrologers that this will end in a happy result and the prince will realize his heart's desire."

The king finally gave in and agreed to let the prince travel to Chin to seek the princess's hand in marriage.