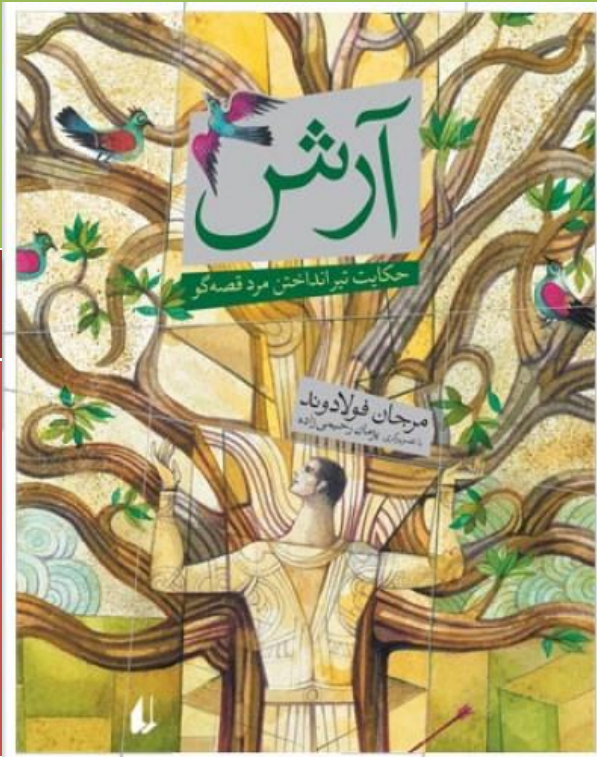


Arash

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He was neither a famous archer, nor a warlord of equestrians. He had stood stricken among the remainders and was watching the field that was covered with murders; and the hillside, which sheltered the casualties; and the women that fenced them, holding sickles that were used to harvest the wheat and the sticks that were just used to flail.

The enemy had won, so the failures' destiny was serving as slaves for years due to their failure cost.

Casualties said: We dwell in the mountains and we will obstruct the enemies' way with rolling rocks.

Women showed their sickles and flails that now are going to be employed in order to decapitate and

smash bones. Children also showed the sharpest mountain stones.

However, the elders of the race said:

“It’s not the appropriate time for children to play or for women and casualties to prosper. How can we survive without any food and water in the mountain?”

They replied:

“The Mountain is a trap and as we are stuck in it, we are devoured by leopards or we are as hyenas’ food supply. We should find another way, for the resolution comes to mind when we are trapped. We must talk to the enemies’ agent.”

The elders talked to the warlord of enemies’ army: “So define as the failure compensation and impose the tax.”

The warlord of enemies’ army was canny and said:

“Paying tax for a limited time? We conquered the whole realm in addition to its people. Then you speak about endowing a part of its wealth!”

-We are a small group as you see, we are the only survivors of our military????, our veins are ready to be ruptured by your swords, our soil is as plunder, release the children.

Warlord laughed and said: “Have you imagined me such a fool? Women will bury you, and every night they will tell tales and poems to children in their mother tongue in cozy rooms. Again, Iranian men will appear in this conquered territory. The only way is being a slave in another country in order to learn another language, and calling your children with other names, or you can choose death.”

The elders of the race said: “so, we are blessed with death.”

However, the cleverest commander, who knew the fact that alive slaves are more useful than the dead enemies, came forward and deceitfully recommended a solution to Iranian with sarcasm. He said: you will have an opportunity; Iranians are known for their archery, so call your best shooter to shot an arrow from a mountaintop; therefor, wherever it descends, it is yours and thenceforward will be ours.

Therefore, your curse won't work and your revenge is improper, because you have determined your country's borders. Otherwise, kiss our swords that are your death lords.

The elders admitted.

The enemies' soldiers were laughing while they pointed out the Iranian shooters' corpses. Men were shouting that this decision is as a death spoiled with derision; and an arrow won't transgress from this vain

rugged ground. However, the elders were looking for the most powerful soldier among the remainders. Men hid behind each other and revealed their wounds lest throwing the scandalous shot was destined to bring misfortune. Every one stared at the elders of the race.

Nevertheless, Arash gazed into an infant who sheltered behind his mother looking at all the wounds with a steady regard trembling with fear.

Therefore, he unfastened the sweaty headband and wiped the dried blood drops on his face in order to be cleaned. He concealed the wound under his hairs, which was stinging because of the salty sweat; he unfolded his sleeves to hide his hands' injuries.

He stood upright and smiled at the frightened child.

The elders of the race noticed him standing unbound without leaning on a sword and without any injury; his sword's blade was shorter than that to touch the

ground. So they stared at him. –What is your name? –
Arash.

And Arash was neither a famous archer, nor a warlord of horsemen. He was like a common soldier among the rout march who were summoned to war from farms, gardens and houses; they fought hard with severe swords and were easily fell.

And Arash knew many stories of wars, love affairs and legendary heroes. His stories even quietened the most restless child.

The elders of the race were goggled pale wounded men once more and fixed their eyes on Arash as the youngest member of the army.

They hesitated:

There is no other choice. Being unscathed is a sign of not confronting with enemy at all. Alas! You are the one who will shoot the arrow.

Everyone looked at Arash- who gazed fearfully into the elders' eyes due to this decision implying to find another way- and the knights to interpose. The enemy was waiting for a given answer.

The casualties said:

Do not go, O' storyteller; do not go. A shot is not even the same size as our fallen soldiers' graves and if you do this, your name will be this country's history scandal.

The elders said:

Is there any alternative? One shot is as a prize for us to protect the name of Iran in the world's book from burying it.

The children said:

Do not go Arash, stay. Your stories lull us to sleep in order to not being afraid of meeting the close face of death.

And Arash trembled.

Arash was sort of a soldier who preferred story and children to lances and warriors more. Arash was trembling fearfully due to the inevitability of decision-making, and he was searching for another solution but there was none. Arash did not shoot an arrow unless for fun or at wooden ridiculous soldiers in feast nights. The soldiers cried the honor of death; and said while they were boiling with anger that the archery of the storyteller will be the most inglorious legend of Iran.

A woman came forward. She was Arash's mistress.

She was tall and pale in light of her forehead's injury. In Arash's point of view, every one became calm.

She told:

Go on Arash, go. A shot is nothing but an opportunity to carry our fallen soldiers respectfully and throwing our dear fellows to the sea; therefore we can claim that slavery was not Iranian's fate at all.

Arash watched her stricken face and kept calm.

He recalled his fables and children that stared at him impatiently and fearfully to finish the story with dragon's death so that they could sleep calm again.

Moreover, he reminisce about the fables and people who listened his stories and he knew that they will listen easier no matter how much inaccessible and far-fetched the heroes are.

In their view, only world champions could deal with monsters, dragons, magic phases and passing the darkness and storm; and Arash himself created these characters.

Arash was looking at warrior's bare wounds and the children's fearful eyes.

So he said loudly:

My name is Arash, the storyteller. You have heard many stories from me, about mighty men, the archer women who slaughtered monsters and intercepted wizardry. I am a storyteller that necessarily should shoot an arrow in reality; this is not narration anymore. I have to shoot farther than what I have told in my stories. Therefore, if it is God's will, I will accept it. I will shoot an arrow neither within the chance of death, nor within the size of a graveyard for the fallen. I will shoot to such an extent of huge

dominion including many abodes, gardens, fields and plains as children's playgrounds and large arenas for running feasts.

Hence, he took paces forward among the fallen soldiers. He walked and stepped until he kneeled beside a dead soldier who had an arrow in his hand. He identified it. It was made from the oldest holy tree that people took their customs such as the youth's celebrations and the elders' mourning there.

Arash bowed and grasped the bow in his hand and took the last arrow from another soldier's quiver, the one that he could not shoot it. Thus, he returned.

He walked forward and kneeled beside a kid gently as his forehead rubbed his velvet brow; he smiled and spoke softly: be brave, this is like another story; my stories have always happy endings.

He rose in front of his mistress and said:

“Recall me, as I was a gardener. Read my stories to gardens and deserts. The soil of this realm is fertilized and flourished verdure by stories’ miracle, not by the rainfall. Its poems rather than its arrows have sealed its borders. Recall me as I was a storyteller.”

He returned and walked in the mountain passage.

Women and men stood still and the elders uttered not a single word.

Everyone was busy making a new fable.

The fable of an arrow with three bowstrings that no man was able to string it. Therewith an arrow as tall as three lances and a tall archer champion, whose head touched the sky with a body like a mountain that overwhelmed the earth owing to his massive feet and tempered steel kind of arms, to sum up a creature that was not alike anyone as humankind.

However, the children followed him to the foothills.

Arash mounted up every bushes and rocks.

The enemies' soldiers mocked and shrieked.

Arash lost among the clouds.

The last trees intercepted him and the bushes twisted around his feet.

Stop Arash; do not continue. From now on, there is no bush to hang from its branches while you are falling.

Arash said:

“I am aware of it. I do it for the sake of the trees. Otherwise, the enemy will use their branches as sanguinary arrows shoving to my people's hearts. So, bless my bow that once has been an offshoot of a tree.”

He passes the bushes.

The wind blew among the cliffs.

“Come back Arash, return. Henceforth nothing blows except storms and blizzards; only a mountain can resist. Scare the storm’s wrath when you step in his domain.”

Arash said:

I scare but there is no evasion. I must be as same as a rock and take root in the soil; otherwise, you (the wind) should dry bloody ponds or blow sweaty foreheads of enemies that are tired of the bloodbath tension instead of blowing sweaty foreheads of grain fields’ farmers. However, I trust you and give you my arrow to carry to the farthest borders you have blew merrily.

He passed the wind and advanced.

The cliffs arose in front of him and said:

Come back, Arash hold off. Henceforward, you enter the heaven, and no human being can stand it. Return, since the upper phases belong to the gods. No one traversed this way except forgotten legendary men. Arash, entering this legendary realm is forbidden for human beings and if you do so, regress is irrevocable.

Arash replied:

I am dreading getting to this irreversible realm too, I much prefer to be alongside of my kind mistress watching my children growing up and simultaneously prefer to feel the home's ardor. I like to tell stories and clear the streams' course every morning in order to water the garden's trees.

I proceed for the sake of rocks lest the enemy provide shelter and ceiling for his vices out of the cliffs. So be kind and caring, let me take root in you lest my leg tremble.

And he ascended.

Finally, he reached the summit of the mountain. It seemed he was standing on the verge of the heaven and there was so much cloud under his feet.

The storm was striking.

He kneeled.

He took his bow and laid it on the ground ahead of himself. And looked at the sky:

Ormazd, O' the creator of the universe, O' god of adolescents and senescent people, O' god of mountains and cliffs, O' god of rain, wheat and Arash! I am standing on the last stone of monotheists' territory that Satan is ready to destroy it; and this wooden arrow is the last shot of your worshippers. Moreover, I am the loneliest, weakest soldier who is standing in front of the moor and the blowing wind.

There is not even a blade to be slayed by its blow or to be killed like other bloody face men easily in the war.

Arash cried with a broken spirit.

I wish I were a champion, the ones who shoot in fables pending to the sun; however, I am a gardener, a simple soldier who prefers stories and children rather than lances and warriors. My stories were quoted in cities. They conquered a novel region every day and made my country's borders expanded. However, now here I am with a dry hewn branch that once children fed its fruits and made circlets out of its leaves and now its skin peels vibrates in my hands.

Thus, O' god, I allot my soul, voice and stories to this arrow to carry wherever you want and take aim your country's borders.

Then, the storm subsided. Arash tightened his headband; took his bow and kneeled. He stared at the remotest parts. After a while, he regretted and stood still. Distant horizon was appeared.

His hands were somewhat shaking. He put an arrow on the bowstring and looked at the farthest distance; he viewed nothing. He watched and reviewed until his eyes were bleared and he could not see anywhere.

He pulled his bow and did it constantly. The noise of its twist denoted its instant breakage.

He pulled his bow and the nice of his bones breakage reflected in the mountain.

He pulled the bow and he heard the rupture of his blood vessels himself.

He was constantly pulling the bow that the rocks softened. His foot were begun to sink and got fixed.

Eventually, when the last bone was broken and the last vessel was ripped; he released the arrow.

The bow disintegrated completely into thousands pieces. Arash fell. The arrow took his life rapidly like a wind.

The arrow passed the mountains. Arash yearned numerous tall mountains with snowcap, waterfalls, eagles and leopards.

The arrow passed the moors. Arash desired seas and gulfs full of fishes and pearls for Iran and a course to the entire universe.

Skeptical experts broke into a gallop with coursers. They galloped and raced. Finally, they located it on an old walnut tree.

Iran's borders bounded to the farthest points. The country was broader than ever containing new lands and so many waters.

No one traced Arash. He step in legendary irreversible realm.

However, people planted the scorched lands again, and constructed their houses. No matter where they were, they celebrated Tir. They climbed to the top of the mountains, housetops and hills, unfastening the colorful chained strings to their wrists and entrusting them to the wind in memory of Arash in order to carry to the farthest areas.

Iranians got rid of being under siege.

In addition, according to Arash's will, they reveled in many feasts and said stories to children at nights near the fireplaces.

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