

PARVANA

I

THE stately Mountains of Aboul and Muttin,
Standing majestically back to back,
Bear upon their shoulders a land
Higher even than that of Djavakhek.

It is said that there, like an eagle,
In the bosom of the smiling, blue sky,
Sat the King of those mountains
In his white castle at Parvana.

The King of Parvana has a daughter:
And no huntsman, in all his living days,
Had ever seen a roe of such great beauty,
As he hunted in the Mountains of Muttin.

With her lively youthfulness she adorned
Her father's old age and his mountains;
And the aged King of Parvana lived
Happily with this, his delicate flower.

But her great day was still to come:
And when that happy time arrived,
The King sent many joyful envoys
To every castle and every palace.

‘Wherever there is a brave man,’ said he,
‘Worthy of my matchless daughter,
Let him show himself here on his horse,
In armour and weapons, to claim his fortune’

II

Clad in armour and bearing weapons,
Mounted upon spirited horses,
There the brave of the Caucasus
Have come and forgathered now.
And there, before the palace
Of the aged King of Parvana,
They are waiting at the ready
For the contest near at hand;
And the whole world that has come
And gathered at Parvana, awaits
Will take possession of the fair maid.

The trumpet has sounded: and in clusters
The courtiers and ladies-in-waiting appear,
As do the beautiful Princess
And the white-haired King:
The father, like a gloomy cloud,
The daughter, like a radiant moon,
Together do they step outside
As a cloud and the moon in embrace:
Thereupon, the whole world sighs;
The brave youths turn into stone,
And, falling into reveries,
Are transported from this world.

'Look at those valiant princes
With broad shoulders, my daughter
They will now engage in contest
And compete before you in turn:
One will display his strength;
Another, the skill of his arm;
A third, his dexterity on horseback;
Yet another, the impetus of his run.
And when the contest ceases,
Revealing the strong from the weak,
When the valorous of the noblemen
Go marching past before us,
Throw the apple in your hand
At the victorious one of your choice,
That the whole world may wonder
At your unparalleled good fortune.'

So saying, the King raised his hand,
Signaling the contest to commence;
Meanwhile his daughter stepped forward,
With a red apple in her hand.
'But, father, a fine yet weak youth may
Be defeated by one arrogant and rough,
Who could never, no never be
The loved one of my heart'
'Oh, beautiful fairy of Parvana,
What does your heart desire most?'
The crowded brave youths
Earnestly asked, again and again.
'Is it treasures of silver and of gold,
Precious stones and priceless gems?

If it is stars from heaven, tell us,
We will bring some down for you'
'Of what use to me are silver and gold,
Of what use, the stars from heaven?
It is not jewels that I seek
From the love-companion of my life;
What I desire from him is fire,
The unquenchable, sacred flame;
And he who will bring me that,
Shall be the bridegroom of my choice'

When the maiden had spoken thus,
The valiant youths, thrown into confusion,
Mounted their horses and flew away hastily
To the four corners of the world,
That they might speedily find and bring back
The unquenchable fire for the maid.
But the years came and the years passed,
Yet the brave youths were not to be seen...

III

'Oh father, why have they not returned,
Those amorous, valiant youths?
Have they, perchance, forgotten me,
And will not bring the unquenchable fire?'

'No, my child, they will come without fail,
And bring it back with them this year.
Oft are the paths of the brave
With sanguinary combats filled.

Who knows, they may have to cross
The Land of Darkness and the Black Waters?
Who knows, they may have to snatch it
Away from the Seven-headed Monster?

And another year went past;
The virgin kept watch every day:
'Where is he, father, when will he come
The horsemen flying from the mountains?

I am constantly seeing in my dreams
The destined hero flying before me,
Bearing the fire for which I yearn:
Then daylight comes...and he is no more!

'He will arrive, my precious child:
The unquenchable fire is not easily gained,
For many a time he who seized it
Is himself devoured by its flames...!'

And yet another year went by;
The virgin kept watch every day:
But nor horsemen appeared
From any of the mountains or the roads.

'Oh tell me, father, is there no
Unquenchable fire upon this earth?
See how my heart is wilting,
This life is cold and sad...'

The white-haired King no longer spoke,
But remained silent in his gloom.

With head bowed down, he pondered upon
The black sorrow within his heart.

IV

Thus very many years went by.
The King's dispirited daughter
Gazed and gazed up at the mountains
And down the deserted roads,
She lost all hope... and wept:
And she wept and sobbed so much
That her tears turned into a lake
Which submerged the town and castle,
And they vanished, together with the maid...!
Now in the melancholy place
There sparkles the deep Lake Parvana,
Limpid even as are tears.
And beneath its crystalline waters
They point out, even to this day,
The aged King's white castle
And the magnificent buildings around.

They say that those moths,
Which in the darkness of night,
Wherever there is a lamp or fire,
Wherever there is a light to be seen,
Gather round it, encircle it,
And fall into it in their frenzy:
They say that they are those youths
Of Parvana, filled with love;
That, in their haste, they had grown wings

And had turned into feathery moths;
And to this day, whenever they see a flame
They fall into it impatiently,
Each one eager in his endeavour
To take it to the maid and possess her...
And thus incessantly burn away
The valiant youths of Parvana...