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Shahnameh
The Persian Book of Kings

Written by

Elizabeth Laird

Illustrated by

Shirin Adl

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Shahnameh

The Persian Book of Kings
by Ferdowsi

Retold by Elizabeth Laird
Illustrated by Shirin Adl





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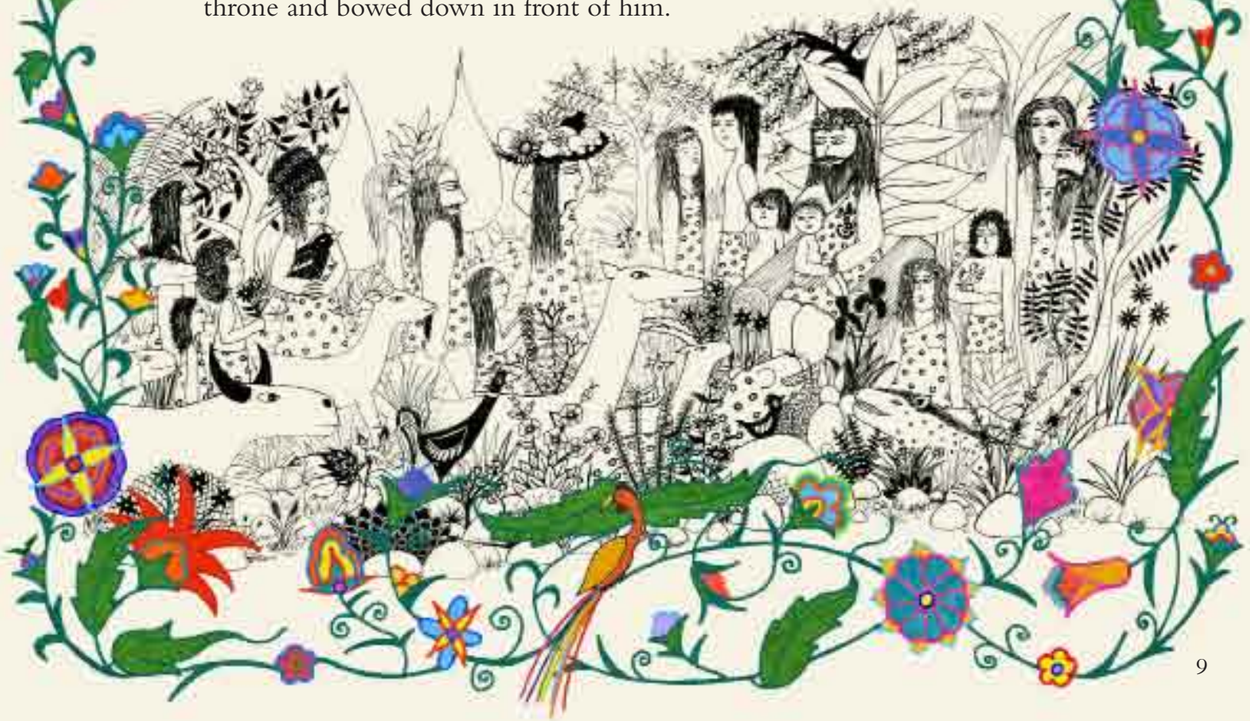
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Kayumars, the First King

At the very beginning of time, the first men and women who walked on the earth were the simplest creatures you can imagine. They had no clothes to wear or houses to live in. They ate their food raw, picking plums from the trees and catching fish in their hands.

There were no towns or cities then, no streets or houses, or any buildings at all. And then, one springtime, when the birds were nesting and the almond blossom was sprouting from the trees, the Great God touched a man of the mountains with divine glory, and he became the first King of Iran. His name was Kayumars, and he taught people how to eat properly and how to dress themselves, using leopard skins.

Kayumars' glory shone so brilliantly that even wild animals, large and small, the hunters and the hunted, crept and crawled and sidled to his throne and bowed down in front of him.



There was one creature, though, who hated Kayumars. He looked at him sideways through glittering eyes, as jealous as a snake. This was the devil Ahriman, and he was the fountain of everything that was cruel and ugly and evil in that beautiful, early world.

King Kayumars had a warrior son, a brave and handsome prince. But Ahriman's son was a demon, with claws like a wolf's, and fangs.

Ahriman and his son plotted and planned. They spread wicked rumours, meeting in corners and on dark nights, whispering.

Sorush the angel, the messenger of the Great God, heard of their schemes. He flew down on glittering wings. "Beware of Ahriman," he told the king. "He's gathering an army of evil followers, and they will come and attack you."

Fire flashed from the eyes of the king's son when he heard this. He prepared a great army of his own. He dressed himself in the skin of a tiger, and led his men out against the forces of Ahriman. The two armies stood and faced each other.

Then rage overcame the king's son. He ran out in front of his men, dressed only in his tiger skin, and challenged Ahriman's wolf-like son to single combat.

The cruel demon was strong and cunning. He ripped the prince to pieces with his claws and laid him dead in the dust.

Who can describe the pain of the king?
Birds hover round him on fluttering wing,
Soldiers groan, and women cry,
Hidden and fearful the animals lie.

King Hushang, the Master of Fire

King Kayumars grew old and made his grandson, Hushang, master of the world.

"You must fight the son of the demon Ahriman, who killed your father," the old king told Hushang.

A war cry rang round the land. Lions, tigers, wolves and leopards came bounding from the hills. Winged angels and fierce birds of prey swooped to answer the call. Close upon Hushang's heels, they rushed upon the trembling demon army and laid it in the dust.

From his imperial throne, Hushang began to civilise the world. He learned to forge metal and make axes and saws. He dug canals to water the land. He taught people to plant crops and harvest them.

One day, King Hushang was walking in the mountains with his men when he saw a huge snake, whose red eyes shone like fountains of blood, while black smoke billowed from its mouth. King Hushang picked up a rock and hurled it at the creature, which slid away unharmed. But the rock had struck another rock, and a shower of sparks shot out, lighting up the world. Hushang had discovered fire.

Hushang said:

"It is God who has sent us this great prize.
Revere it and praise him, all you who are wise."

Hushang tamed the cows, sheep and donkeys for the benefit of mankind, and showed people how to wear the skins of foxes, squirrels and sables to keep themselves warm.

At last Hushang died, and passed to a better life.

