The paladins

Kay Kā‘īn dies and his ruler, through his policies of peace, becomes conscious of his great strength. He makes his kingdom more prosperous and the people more contented. He gives audience to all who seek him, and he is always ready to help those in need. His wealth increases, and he becomes a powerful ruler in his realm.

On the other hand, Rustam, the great hero, is jealous of Kay Kā‘īn. He has heard of Kay Kā‘īn's great success and is determined to become the most powerful ruler in the land. He begins to plot against Kay Kā‘īn and his kingdom.

To prevent Rustam from succeeding, Kay Kā‘īn invites Rustam to a feast. At the feast, Kay Kā‘īn makes a speech in which he praises Rustam's bravery and intelligence. He then asks Rustam to give him a speech in return. Rustam, prideful and arrogant, agrees.

Rustam begins his speech by telling Kay Kā‘īn that he has heard of Kay Kā‘īn's great success. He then goes on to criticize Kay Kā‘īn for his policies of peace, suggesting that he should be more aggressive in his approach to governing.

Kay Kā‘īn listens patiently to Rustam's speech, but he knows that Rustam is plotting against him. He decides to take action and begins to plan a strategy to defeat Rustam.

One day, Kay Kā‘īn and Rustam go on a hunting trip together. They are joined by other nobles and their hunting party. As they ride through the countryside, Kay Kā‘īn sees Rustam plotting against him. He quickly realizes that Rustam is trying to kill him.

Kay Kā‘īn then takes action and orders his men to attack Rustam. Rustam is caught off guard and is defeated in battle. Kay Kā‘īn then orders Rustam to be captured and brought to him.

Kay Kā‘īn then speaks to Rustam, reminding him of all the good that Rustam has done for the kingdom. He then orders Rustam to be released and to continue serving the kingdom.

Rustam is grateful to Kay Kā‘īn and agrees to continue serving the kingdom. Kay Kā‘īn then moves on to more important matters, content in the knowledge that he has strong and capable rulers in his kingdom.
19. The paladins in the snow (243a)

Kay Kā'īs dies in the knowledge that Siyāvush has been avenged. Kay Khusrav succeeds and rules for sixty years. At length Kay Khusrav becomes concerned that, since he has achieved so much, he may succumb to pride and evil—the more so on account of his hereditary. He sequesters himself and prays for seven days that he might die before this happens. The king then gives audience to his great men and, without revealing his secret purpose, offers them reassurance. The heroes are perturbed and call on Zal and Rustam for help. Kay Khusrav prays again, asking for a place in Paradise; he is visited in a dream by the angel Sūrūsh, who tells him that what he desires is granted, and bids him distribute his goods and name Luhrasp his successor. Zal and Rustam arrive at court much disturbed. Kay Khusrav tells the paladins of his dream; Zal remonstrates with him, but at last asks pardon for his ill-considered words. Kay Khusrav orders his warriors to assemble on the plain: he reveals to them what drives his actions, distributes his treasure, and crowns Luhrasp of the line of Hushang. Kay Khusrav bids farewell to his men and commits his women to the care of Luhrasp. On his horse, Bīzīzād, he makes for the mountains, accompanied by Zal, Rustam, Güdarz, Gīr, Bīzīzād, Farīburz and Tās, and preceded by a host of men and women. Kay Khusrav tells his men that they must turn back from the barren hillside. Zal, Rustam and Güdarz obey, but the other paladins remain. Kay Khusrav halts for the night by a stream. He tells his companions that daybreak will be the moment of his leaving. During the night he wishes in the stream and recites the Zend Avesta; then he makes a final farewell and instructs his companions not to linger on the mountain since a terrible snowstorm will hide their way back, in the morning he is gone. The warriors search for him and then, since the sky is clear, they stay by the stream talking of him until they fall asleep. The snowstorm engulfs them:

‘When snow’s white sail was hoisted
on that lea
No trace of those brave men remained
to see’.

They try to hollow out a space beneath the snow, but eventually succumb. Lower down the mountain, Zal, Rustam and Güdarz wait in vain. At length, Zal advises that they should descend to the plain, and they do so weeping.

A measure of the power of this illustration is the fact that it was the first to elicit publication with an extended commentary. In 1931 Binyon saw the figures as ‘looking down into the black waters of the spring, as though it held the secret of life and death’.

The picture is not a precise rendering of the tale. Eight men are shown, though it may be that the five on the rugs are the paladins, and the others are their grooms; they are not shown as sleeping, nor as trying to construct their snow-hole. However, the conception of brave and stubborn, if mistaken, loyalty is admirably portrayed. The clustered bright colours of their robes against the purplish grey of snow seem to represent the life that is in them yet. The folded arms represent stoicism as well as the search for warmth; the variously angled heads suggest resignation. The picture does not make its point at a rhetorical and heroic level, and in consequence there is no fixed composition or stylised gesture, no spectators, and no wide field of space. Instead, we are taken very close to a realistic scene, as though of ordinary travellers caught in the snow. Some men have come provided with carpets of convenient size and modest design; the horses and mule have received their nosebags; one groom prefers to share body-heat with a horse. These are endearing details that live a different life from that of the text. Behind the figures, space has been cut off by the lowering clouds in much the same way as a gaze is used in a theatre to confine action to the front of the stage in a transitional scene or a journey. Some tradition for the depiction of snow-scenes may have survived from the time of the ‘Small’ Shāhnāmas onwards, but the Herat picture seems to transcend any possible models with its brilliantly integrated combination of the educated use of Chinese models, for the clouds and the snow-covered tree-stump by the stream, and its observation of everyday life. Finally, we can only admire the courage and judgement of an artist who, having brought such a fine picture near to completion, was able to apply the white dots of snowflakes.

Opposite, and overleaf:
PL 52. The paladins in the snow.
120 x 127 mm
MS 239, 243a: No. 19