

Detachment

One day King Maḥmúd decided to go on a royal tour of his kingdom. Preparations began immediately and within a few days the magnificent procession was ready to leave. Ministers, ambassadors, and a great many people of prominence, all wearing their finest clothes, set out with the King, together with his guards and attendants. The King's faithful servant Ayáz rode by his side, at the very front of the procession.

Each evening the splendid party made camp and the wonderful imperial tent was set up for the King. This tent was the most beautiful tent that anyone had ever seen. Woven from silk of the highest quality, it was decorated with hundreds of jewels and precious stones, which sparkled so brightly in the lamp-light that the light of the moon and stars paled in comparison. Each night the King and his companions feasted and sang. Each morning when the tent was taken down, the jewels were collected and put in a box in the King's carriage. And so the royal procession went on its way, the King looking contentedly over his peaceful and prosperous kingdom, his companions happily riding and talking during the day, and feasting and singing at night.

One afternoon the King and his entourage were passing through some especially beautiful countryside. So beautiful was it that the King was overcome with a feeling of generosity. He took the jewels from the box and scattered them on the roadside for his companions. As he continued on his way, they all scrambled in great confusion, forgetful of their duties, trying to gather up the precious stones—all that is, except Ayáz. "Look at Ayáz," they muttered to one another. "He is so proud and arrogant. He cannot even be bothered to pick up any of the jewels that the King has tossed on the roadside."

"How is it, Ayáz", the King asked him, "that you do not join the others to gather up my jewels? Are they not precious? Do you not value the things that were mine?"

"Oh, My King," replied Ayáz. "I have always valued the very least thing that is yours. But to be near you and gaze on your face is more than sufficient for me. Why should I leave your side to scramble for that which you have thrown away?"

And the loyal and steadfast Ayáz rode on by the side of his grateful master, ever vigilant in serving his beloved King.