**Rostam and Sohrab**

*Rostam and Sohrab* is a tragedy from the Persian epic [Shahnameh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shahnameh). It tells the tragic story of the heroes [Rostam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rostam) and his son, [Sohrab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sohrab).

**Plot**

Rostam decided to go hunting near [Turan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turan), near the city of [Samangan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samangan) on his horse [Rakhsh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rakhsh). While he was napping, seven knights of Turan discovered Rakhsh and decided to take him for themselves. Rakhsh killed one and trampled another, but in the end was captured.

When Rostam awoke, he discovered that his horse was missing and followed Rakhsh's hoofprints to the city of Samangan. The King and the nobles went out to meet Rostam, asking him why he was on foot. After hearing Rostam's explanation, the King of [Samangan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samangan) asked Rostam to stay with him until Rakhsh could be found. That night, [Tahmina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tahmina), daughter of the King of Turan (Afghanistan) came to Rostam's bedroom and swore her love for him. She told him that she had heard of him, saying "Desire destroys my mind, I long to bear within my woman's womb your son and heir;" (shahnameh, Tale of Sohrab, pg. 189). Rostam slept with her and gave her a "clasp which he wore on his upper arm", (pg. 189) telling her to give it to her child to wear. The next day Rostam found his horse, and after thanking the king he departed.

Nine months later, Tahmina gave birth to a son whom she named Sohrab. When he was one month old, he looked like a one-year-old. At 3, he could play polo and by the time he was five, he had become skilled in archery and the javelin. One day, Sohrab came to his mother, demanding that she tell him who his father was. She showed him a letter that Rostam had sent, then warned him to tell no one of his heritage, for if [Afrasiab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrasiab) - King of Turan and Rostam's greatest enemy - were to learn of it, he would have Sohrab killed, and if Rostam knew how well his son had grown, he would summon Sohrab to his court. Either of these prospects would have left Tahmineh heartbroken.

Sohrab was not content to let his name be left in obscurity and decided to raise an army of Turks and march conquer Iran, dethroning Kai Kawous (whom Rostam grudgingly served) and making Rostam King in his stead. Then, he and Rostam would invade Turan together and seize the throne from Afrasiab. Riding the foal of Rakhsh, Sohrab gathered an army and set forth.

Meanwhile, Afrasiab had learnt of Sohrab's plans to invade Iran. He called two of his followers, Hooman and Barman, and asked them to join Sohrab. He had learned that Sohrab was Rostam's son, and saw the invasion as a perfect opportunity to pit the two against each other. If Sohrab were to kill Rostam, then Afrasiab would be free to conquer Iran, and perhaps the rest of the world. If Rostam were to kill Sohrab, he would surely die of grief when he learned what he had done. So Afrasiab sent Hooman and Barman to Samangan with gifts and a letter pledging his support.

Sohrab lead his army into Iran until they reached the fortress of White Castle. Hujir, guardian of the castle, saw the army coming and went to meet them. Sohrab promptly challenged him to fight, beat him, and took him captive. Gurdafrid, daughter of Gustahem, was trained in warfare, and so she put on armor and went to challenge Sohrab to single combat. They fought and after severing Sohrab's lance, Gurdafid saw that she had gotten the upper hand. She mounted her horse and made to return to the castle, but an angry Sohrab followed her on his own mount. He wanted to see the face of the man who had bested him, and so he seized her and managed to remove her helmet. He was surprised to discover that his opponent was a woman, but lost no time in tying her up. "'Seek not to escape me, O Moon of Beauty," he said, "for never hath prey like thee fallen between my hands.'" (iranchamber.com) In response, Gurdafrid said that it would be unwise for Sohrab to bring her back as a captive, because then all of his men would know that he had been bested by a woman. Insted, she offered to surrender the castle to him if he would tell no one he had captured her. He agreed and followed her to the fortress, but as Gurdafrid entered the castle she locked the door behind her, and so she thwarted Sohrab twice that day. The next morning, Sohrab's force invades the castle only to find that Gurdafrid, Gustahem, and its other inhabitants have escaped through a hidden passageway.

Gustahem, advisor of Hujir and father of Gurdafrid, wrote to Kai Kawous telling him of the mysterious young invader and his army. Kai Kawous, in turn, sent a letter to Rostam asking for his help. Confidant that he would have little trouble dealing with the Turks, Rostam delayed three days before setting off to assist Kai Kawous. He did not suspect that the leader of this invasion could be his own son, who he believed was too young to lead an army. On the fourth day the messenger finally convinced Rostam to gather his army and they went to the king. Angry at the delay, Kai Kawous ordered Rostam killed until an aged nobleman named Goodarz convinced him otherwise. After convincing Rostam to fight for them, the court feasted. Rostam travels to the white castle the next day.

Rostam sneaks into the castle to see Sohrab. Zindeh, brother of Tahmina, whom she had sent to identify Rostam for Sohrab, sees Rostam and asks him who he is. Rostam kills Zindeh. Sohrab takes Hujir to the top of the castle and asks him to whom various tents in the Iranian camp belong. Hujir tells him all except for the tent of Rostam because he is afraid he would seek to kill Rostam. Sohrab asks him where the tent of Rostam is; he tells him that Rostam is not there. Sohrab tells him that he will kill him if he does not tell him where Rostam's tent is. Hujir refuses to tell, because the boy might kill Rostam, and Iran is more important than his life. Sohrab kills him.

Sohrab rides to the camp and challenges the king. The nobles send Rostam to fight. Rostam tells Sohrab not to fight. Sohrab asks him if he is Rostam. Rostam tells Sohrab that he is just a slave, so that Sohrab will be afraid that there are great warriors in the camp, having viewed Rostam as a mere slave. They fight until their swords are broken and their horses are exhausted, and wrestle until they are tired. They rest, and fight some more. Sohrab hits Rostam with a club and hurts him. Rostam tells him he can not fight a youth. They separate and kill many men of their opposing armies. Rostam challenges Sohrab again, and they agree to fight the next day. Hooman tells Sohrab that the man he has been fighting does not look like Rostam, but Sohrab is not convinced.

The next day, Sohrab asks Rostam if he is Rostam. Rostam does not answer. They fight until night. Sohrab throws Rostam to the ground, and is about to decapitate him but Rostam deceives him by asking if he was trained by a woman. Because Sohrab was trained by his mother, his response was, “Yes, my trainer was a woman.” Then Rostam tells him that if his trainer had been a man he would know that the law of war dictates that he should be let go the first time and he must be let go even a second time before he can be killed. To kill him he must be thrown to the ground three times. Sohrab then lets him go. Hooman feigns that Rostam lied. Rostam prays to God, Ormuzd, to give him the strength to defeat Sohrab. The ground would not support his new strength, so he asks that a part be taken away from him. They fight. Rostam picks Sohrab up from the ground and in the middle of the air, breaks his back. Sohrab tells Rostam because he deceived and killed him in the middle of the air, Rostam his father will avenge his death. Rostam asks him for a token, and Sohrab shows him the onyx.

Rostam sends a message to Hooman, asking him to go home, and declaring that he will go to war no more. Rostam asks Goodarz to go to Kai Kawous to ask him for his healing balm. Kai Kawous is angry with Rostam again and refuses to give the balm. Goodarz returns and tells Rostam to go ask himself. He leaves, but is overtaken by a messenger and told that his son is dead.

Rostam burns his armor. He goes home and builds Sohrab a golden tomb. News of Sohrab's death comes to Turan. The King mourns. Tahmina burns Sohrab's house, gives his money to the poor, and dies of grief.