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The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia

Samuel Johnson · *1759 · original English text*

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow, attend to the history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can a prince find happiness by leaving a happy valley, and what does a short philosophical history teach about hope, fancy, and the choice of life?

"Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope;"

Chapter I, Description of a Palace in a Valley, the opening

The hosted text is The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia (1759), the Standard Ebooks transcription of Johnson's original English, complete as this short philosophical tale. The opening is exact, including "credulity," "fancy," and "phantoms of hope." Johnson's Abyssinia and Happy Valley are an invented moral landscape, not a travel book about Ethiopia; teach that clearly. Imlac, Nekayah, and Pekuah share the inquiry into the choice of life. For a wide older band. Quote this typography.

KEY CHARACTERS

Rasselas
The prince of the invented Abyssinia, who leaves a happy valley to seek the choice of life.

Imlac
The poet and counselor who shares the going out.

Nekayah
The prince's sister, who inquires with him into ways of living.

Pekuah
The companion whose own trial is part of the inquiry.

THE PHANTOMS OF HOPE

> *"Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope;"*
>
> Chapter I

Grades 10–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Whispers of Fancy

CHAPTER I, THE OPENING

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope, are told to attend to the history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia. The book begins as a warning, and as an invitation.

- The opening is exact in both witnesses.
- This hosted text is the Standard Ebooks original English, complete.
- Johnson's Abyssinia is an invented moral landscape, not a travel book about Ethiopia.

> *"Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope;"*
>
> Chapter I

02

The Happy Valley

THE PALACE, AND THE WISH TO LEAVE

Rasselas lives in a valley designed for delight, and is not satisfied. The wish to know the choice of life is the spring of the book. Imlac becomes a counselor and a companion of the going out.

- The Happy Valley is a moral invention, not a geography lesson.
- The question of happiness is the plot.
- A wide older band can read this with help.

03

The Choice of Life

THE INQUIRIES OUTSIDE THE VALLEY

In the world beyond the valley, Rasselas, Nekayah, and Pekuah try ways of living. No single way settles the question as they had hoped. The close is a conclusion in which nothing is concluded, as Johnson arranges it.

- Do not pretend the book ends in a simple recipe for happiness.
- Map the inquiries as Johnson wrote them.
- Cite this typography.

04

A Complete 1759 Tale

THE HOSTED FILE

The site text and EPUB are this complete Standard Ebooks Rasselas. Quote stretches that appear in both.

- Complete as Johnson's tale.
- Original English; no translator.
- For a wide older band. The Abyssinia of the title is a fable's landscape.

The Choice of Life | Hope and Fancy | A Happy Valley Left | A Philosophical Tale | An Unsettled Close

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

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2. Johnson's Abyssinia and Happy Valley are an invented moral landscape, not a travel book about Ethiopia; teach that clearly. Imlac, Nekayah, and Pekuah share the inquiry into the choice of life. The close is a conclusion in which nothing is concluded, as Johnson arranges it. For a wide older band.
3. Quote stretches that appear in both the site text and the site EPUB.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Standard Ebooks (English original), the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/rasselas/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.