

# FILLMORE PARKER

CZECHOSLOVAK FAIRY  
TALES

Parker Fillmore

**Czechoslovak Fairy Tales**

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# Parker Fillmore

## Czechoslovak Fairy Tales

### NOTE

This rendering of some of the old Czechoslovak tales is not offered as a literal translation or a scholarly translation. I have retold the stories in a way that I hope will please American children. I have tried hard to keep the flavor of the originals but have taken the liberty of a short cut here and an elaboration there wherever these have seemed to me to make the English version clearer and more interesting.

I have gone to Czech, Slovakian, and Moravian sources. All these stories appear in many versions in the different folklore collections made by such native writers as Erben, Nemcova, Dobsinsky, Rimavsky, Benes-Trebizsky, Kulda. They represent the folk-tale in all stages of its development from the bald narrative of *The Bird with the Golden Gizzard* which Kulda reports with phonographic exactness, to Nemcova's more elaborate tale, *Prince Bayaya*, which is really a mosaic of two or three simpler stories. I have included *Katcha and the Devil* for the sake of its keen humor, which is particularly Czech in character; *The Betrothal Gifts* to show how a story common to other countries is made most charmingly local by giving it a local background; *The Three Golden Hairs* to contrast it with a famous German variant which it seems to me is much inferior to the Slavic version; and several fine stories of the prince gone off on adventures which in common with the folk-tales of all Europe show a strong Oriental influence.

In the transliteration of proper names I have not followed consistently any one method, but for each individual name have made what seemed to be the best selection from the various possible spellings. Until transliteration from the Slavic languages has become standardized this, I am sure, is permissible and even advisable.

In the preparation of this volume I have made heavy draughts upon the scholarship and patience of my Czech friends, Mrs. Jan Matulka and Mr. Vladimir Jelinek. I beg them to accept my thanks. I am also deeply grateful to Mr. A. B. Koukol, who did me the favor of reading the final sheets. Lastly I wish to express my appreciation of the Webster Branch of the New York Public Library, which has gathered together what is probably the most complete collection of Czechoslovak literature in America, and one particularly rich in folklore and children's books.

P. F.

August, 1919

# **LONGSHANKS, GIRTH, AND KEEN**

## **THE STORY OF THREE WONDERFUL SERVING MEN**

### **LONGSHANKS, GIRTH, AND KEEN**

THERE was once an aged king who had an only son. One day he called the prince to him and said: "My dear son, you know that ripe fruit falls in order to make room for other fruit. This my old head is like ripe fruit and soon the sun will no longer shine upon it. Now before I die I should like to see you happily married. Get you a wife, my son."

"I would, my father, that I could please you in this," the prince answered, "but I know of no one who would make you a worthy daughter-in-law."

The old king reached into his pocket, drew out a golden key, and handed it to the prince. He said:

"Go up into the tower to the very top. There look about you and when you have decided what you like best of all you see, come back and tell me."

The prince took the key and at once mounted the tower. He had never before gone to the very top and he had never heard what was there. He went up and up until at last he saw a small iron door in the ceiling. He opened this with the golden key, pushed it back, and entered a large circular hall. The ceiling was blue and silver like the heavens on a bright night when the stars shine, and the floor was covered with a green silken carpet. There were twelve tall windows set in gold frames, and on the crystal glass of each window a beautiful young girl was pictured in glowing colors. Every one of them was a princess with a royal crown upon her head. As the prince looked at them it seemed to him that each was more lovely than the last, and for the life of him he knew not which was the loveliest. Then they began to move as if alive, and they smiled at the prince and nodded, and looked as if they were about to speak.

Suddenly the prince noticed that one of the twelve windows was covered with a white curtain. He pulled the curtain aside and there without any question was the most beautiful princess of them all, clothed in pure white, with a silver girdle and a crown of pearls. Her face was deathly pale and sad as the grave.

For a long time the prince stood before this picture in utter amazement and as he looked at it a pain seemed to enter his heart.

"This one I want for my bride," he said aloud, "this one and no other."

At these words the maiden bowed, flushed like a rose, and then instantly all the pictures disappeared.

When the prince told his father what he had seen and which maiden he had chosen, the old king was greatly troubled.

"My son," he said, "you did ill to uncover what was covered and in declaring this, your choice, you have exposed yourself to a great danger. This maiden is in the power of a black magician who holds her captive in an iron castle. Of all who have gone to rescue her not one has ever returned. However, what's done is done and you have given your word. Go, then, try what fortune has in store for you, and may Heaven bring you back safe and sound."

So the prince bade his father farewell, mounted his horse, and rode forth to find his bride. His first adventure was to lose his way in a deep forest. He wandered about some time not knowing where to turn when suddenly he was hailed from behind with these words:

"Hey, there, master, wait a minute!"

He looked around and saw a tall man running toward him.

"Take me into your service, master," the tall man said. "If you do you won't regret it."

"What is your name," the prince asked, "and what can you do?"

"People call me Longshanks because I can stretch myself out. I'll show you. Do you see a bird's nest in the top of that tall fir? I'll get it down for you and not by climbing the tree either."

So saying he began to stretch out and his body shot up and up until he was as tall as the fir tree. He reached over and got the nest and then, in a shorter time than it had taken him to stretch out, he reduced himself to his natural size.

"You do your trick very well," the prince said, "but just now a bird's nest isn't of much use to me. What I need is some one to show me the way out of this forest."

"H'm," Longshanks said, "that's an easy enough matter."

Again he began to stretch himself up and up and up until he was three times as tall as the highest pine in the forest. He looked around and said: "Over there, in that direction, is the nearest way out."

Then he made himself small again, took the horse by the bridle, walked ahead, and in a short time they emerged from the forest.

A broad plain stretched out before them and beyond it they could see tall gray rocks that looked like the walls of a great city and mountains overgrown with forests.

Longshanks pointed off across the plain and said: "There, master, goes a comrade of mine who would be very useful to you. You ought to take him into your service too."

"Very well," said the prince, "call him here that I may find out what sort of a fellow he is."

"He is too far away to call," Longshanks said. "He wouldn't hear my voice and if he did he would be a long time in reaching us, for he has much to carry. I had better step over and get him myself."

As he said this, Longshanks stretched out and out until his head was lost in the clouds. He took two or three strides, reached his comrade, set him on his shoulder, and brought him to the prince.

The new man was heavily built and round as a barrel.

"Who are you?" the prince asked. "And what can you do?"

"I am called Girth," the man said. "I can widen myself."

"Let me see you do it," the prince said.

"Very well, master," said Girth, beginning to puff out, "I will. But take care! Ride off into the forest as fast as you can!"

The prince did not understand the warning, but he saw that Longshanks was in full flight, so he spurred his horse and galloped after him.

It was just as well he did, for in another moment Girth would have crushed both him and his horse, so fast did he spread out, so huge did he become. In a short time he filled the whole plain until it looked as though a mountain had fallen upon it.

When the plain was entirely covered, he stopped expanding, heaved a deep breath that shook the forest trees, and returned to his natural size.

"You made me run for my life!" the prince said. "I tell you I don't meet a fellow like you every day! By all means join me."

They went across the plain and as they neared the rocks they met a man whose eyes were bandaged with a handkerchief.

"Master," said Longshanks, "there is my other comrade. Take him into your service, too, and I can tell you you won't regret the bread he eats."

"Who are you?" the prince asked. "And why do you keep your eyes bandaged? You can't see where you're going."

"On the contrary, master, it is just because I see too well that I have to bandage my eyes. With bandaged eyes I see as well as other people whose eyes are uncovered. When I take the handkerchief off, my sight is so keen it goes straight through everything. When I look at anything intently it catches fire, and if it can't burn, it crumbles to pieces. On account of my sight I'm called Keen."

He untied the handkerchief, turned to one of the rocks opposite, and gazed at it with glowing eyes. Soon the rock began to crumble and fall to pieces. In a few moments it was reduced to a heap of sand. In the sand something gleamed like fire. Keen picked it up and handed it to the prince. It was a lump of pure gold.

“Ha, ha!” said the prince. “You are a fine fellow and worth more than wages! I should be a fool not to take you into my service. Since you have such keen eyes, look and tell me how much farther it is to the Iron Castle and what is happening there now.”

“If you rode there alone,” Keen answered, “you might get there within a year, but with us to help you, you will arrive this very day. Our coming is not unexpected, either, for at this very moment they are preparing supper for us.”

“What is the captive princess doing?”

“She is sitting in a high tower behind an iron grating. The magician stands on guard.”

“If you are real men,” the prince cried, “you will all help me to free her.”

The three comrades promised they would.

They led the prince straight through the gray rocks by a defile which Keen made with his eyes, and on and on through high mountains and deep forests. Whatever obstacle was in the way one or another of the three comrades was able to remove it.

By late afternoon they had crossed the last mountain, had left behind them the last stretch of dark forest, and they saw looming up ahead of them the Iron Castle.

Just as the sun sank the prince and his followers crossed the drawbridge and entered the courtyard gate. Instantly the drawbridge lifted and the gate clanged shut.

They went through the courtyard and the prince put his horse in the stable, where he found a place all in readiness. Then the four of them marched boldly into the castle.

Everywhere – in the courtyard, in the stables, and now in the various rooms of the castle – they saw great numbers of richly clad men all of whom, masters and servants alike, had been turned to stone.

They went on from one room to another until they reached the banquet hall. This was brilliantly lighted and the table, with food and drink in abundance, was set for four persons. They waited, expecting some one to appear, but no one came. At last, overpowered by hunger, they sat down and ate and drank most heartily.

After supper they began to look about for a place to sleep. It was then without warning that the doors burst open and the magician appeared. He was a bent old man with a bald head and a gray beard that reached to his knees. He was dressed in a long black robe and he had, instead of a belt, three iron bands about his waist.

He led in a beautiful lady dressed in white with a silver girdle and a crown of pearls. Her face was deathly pale and as sad as the grave. The prince recognized her instantly and sprang forward to meet her. Before he could speak, the magician raised his hand and said:

“I know why you have come. It is to carry off this princess. Very well, take her. If you can guard her for three nights so that she won’t escape you, she is yours. But if she escapes you, then you and your men will suffer the fate of all those who have come before you and be turned into stone.”

Then when he had motioned the princess to a seat, he turned and left the hall.

The prince could not take his eyes from the princess, she was so beautiful. He tried to talk to her, asking her many questions, but she made him no answer. She might have been marble the way she never smiled and never looked at any of them.

He seated himself beside her, determined to stay all night on guard in order to prevent her escape. For greater security Longshanks stretched himself out on the floor like a strap and wound himself around the room the whole length of the wall. Girth sat in the doorway and puffed himself out until he filled that space so completely that not even a mouse could slip through. Keen took his place by a pillar in the middle of the hall.



But, alas, in a few moments they all grew heavy with drowsiness and in the end slept soundly all night long.

In the morning in the early dawn the prince awoke and with a pain in his heart that was like a blow from a dagger, he saw that the princess was gone. Instantly he aroused his men and asked them what was to be done.

"It's all right, master, don't worry," said Keen as he took a long look through the window. "I see her now. A hundred miles from here is a forest, in the midst of the forest an ancient oak, on the top of the oak an acorn. The princess is that acorn. Let Longshanks take me on his shoulders and we'll go get her."

Longshanks picked Keen up, stretched himself out, and set forth. He took ten miles at a stride and in the time it would take you or me to run around a cottage, here he was back again with the acorn in his hand. He gave it to the prince.

"Drop it, master, on the floor."

The prince dropped the acorn and instantly the princess appeared.

As the sun came over the mountain tops the doors slammed open and the magician entered. A crafty smile was on his face. But when he saw the princess the smile changed to a scowl, he growled in rage, and bang! one of the iron bands about his waist burst asunder. Then he took the princess by the hand and dragged her off.

That whole day the prince had nothing to do but wander about the castle and look at all the strange and curious things it contained. It seemed as if at some one instant all life had been arrested. In one hall he saw a prince who had been turned into stone while he was brandishing his sword. The sword was still uplifted. In another room there was a stone knight who was taken in the act of flight. He had stumbled on the threshold but he had not yet fallen. A serving man sat under the chimney eating his supper. With one hand he was reaching a piece of roast meat to his mouth. Days, months, perhaps years had gone by, but the meat had not yet touched his lips. There were many others, all of them still in whatever position they happened to be when the magician had cried: "Be ye turned into stone!"

In the courtyard and the stables the prince found many fine horses overtaken by the same fate.

Outside the castle everything was equally dead and silent. There were trees but they had no leaves, there was a river but it didn't flow, and no fish could live in its waters. There wasn't a singing bird anywhere, and there wasn't even one tiny flower.

In the morning, at noon, and at supper-time the prince and his companions found a rich feast prepared for them. Unseen hands served them food and poured them wine.

Then after supper, as on the preceding night, the doors burst open and the magician led in the princess, whom he handed over to the prince to guard for the second night.

Of course the prince and his men determined to fight off drowsiness this time with all their strength. But in spite of this determination again they fell asleep. At dawn the prince awoke and saw that the princess was gone.

He jumped up and shook Keen by the shoulder.

"Wake up, Keen, wake up! Where is the princess?"

Keen rubbed his eyes, took one look out of the window, and said:

"There, I see her. Two hundred miles from here is a mountain, in the mountain is a rock, in the rock a precious stone. That stone is the princess. If Longshanks will carry me over there we'll get her."

Longshanks put Keen on his shoulder, stretched himself out until he was able to go twenty miles at a stride, and off he went. Keen fixed his glowing eyes on the mountain and the mountain crumbled. Then the rock that was inside the mountain broke into a thousand pieces and there was the precious stone glittering among the pieces.

They picked it up and carried it back to the prince. As soon as he dropped it on the floor the princess reappeared.

When the magician came in and found her there, his eyes sparkled with anger, and bang! the second of his iron bands cracked and burst asunder. Rumbling and growling he led the princess away.

That day passed as the day before. After supper the magician brought back the princess and, looking fiercely at the prince, he sneered and said: "Now we'll see who wins, you or I."

This night the prince and his men tried harder than ever to stay awake. They didn't even allow themselves to sit down but kept walking. All in vain. One after another they fell asleep on their feet and again the princess escaped.

In the morning the prince, as usual, was the first to awake. When he saw the princess was gone, he aroused Keen.

"Wake up, Keen!" he cried. "Look out and tell me where the princess is."

This time Keen had to look long before he saw her.

"Master, she is far away. Three hundred miles from here there is a black sea. At the bottom of that sea is a shell. In that shell is a golden ring. That ring is the princess. But don't be worried, master, we'll get her. This time let Longshanks take Girth as well as me, for we may need him."

So Longshanks put Keen on one shoulder and Girth on the other. Then he stretched himself out until he was able to cover thirty miles at a stride. When they reached the black sea Keen showed Longshanks where to reach down in the water for the shell. Longshanks reached down as far as he could but not far enough to touch bottom.

"Wait, comrades, wait a bit," said Girth. "Now it's my turn to help."

With that he puffed himself out and out as far as he could. Then he lay down on the beach and began drinking up the sea. He drank it in such great gulps that soon Longshanks was able to reach bottom and to get the shell. Longshanks took out the ring and then, putting his comrades on his shoulders, started back for the castle. He was not able to go fast, for Girth, with half the sea in his stomach, was very heavy. At last in desperation Longshanks turned Girth upside down and shook him and instantly the great plain upon which he emptied him turned into a huge lake. It was all poor Girth could do to scramble out of the water and back to Longshanks' shoulder.

Meanwhile at the castle the prince was awaiting his men in great anxiety. Morning was breaking and still they did not come. As the first rays of the sun shot over the mountain tops the doors slammed open and the magician stood on the threshold. He glanced around and when he saw that the princess was not there he gave a mocking laugh and entered.

But at that very instant there was the crash of a breaking window, a golden ring struck the floor, and lo! the princess! Keen had seen in time the danger that was threatening the prince and Longshanks had hurled the ring through the window.

The magician bellowed with rage until the castle shook and then, bang! the third iron band burst asunder and from what had once been the magician a black crow arose and flew out of the broken window and was never seen again.

Instantly the beautiful princess blushed like a rose and was able to speak and to thank the prince for delivering her.

Everything in the castle came to life. The prince with the uplifted sword finished his stroke and put the sword into its scabbard. The knight who was stumbling fell and jumped up holding his nose to see whether he still had it. The serving man under the chimney put the meat into his mouth and kept on eating. And so every one finished what he had been doing at the moment of enchantment. The horses, too, came to life and stamped and neighed.

Around the castle the trees burst into leaf. Flowers covered the meadows. High in the heavens the lark sang, and in the flowing river there were shoals of tiny fish. Everything was alive again, everything happy.

The knights who had been restored to life gathered in the hall to thank the prince for their deliverance. But the prince said to them:

“You have nothing to thank me for. If it had not been for these, my three trusty servants, Longshanks, Girth, and Keen, I should have met the same fate as you.”

The prince set out at once on his journey home with his bride and his three serving men. When he reached home the old king, who had given him up for lost, wept for joy at his unexpected return.

All the knights whom the prince had rescued were invited to the wedding which took place at once and lasted for three weeks.

When it was over, Longshanks, Girth, and Keen presented themselves to the young king and told him that they were again going out into the world to look for work. The young king urged them to stay.

“I will give you everything you need as long as you live,” he promised them, “and you won’t have to exert yourselves at all.”

But such an idle life was not to their liking. So they took their leave and started out again and to this day they are still knocking around somewhere.

## **THE THREE GOLDEN HAIRS**

### **THE STORY OF A CHARCOAL-BURNER'S SON WHO MARRIED A PRINCESS**

#### **THE THREE GOLDEN HAIRS**

THERE was once a king who took great delight in hunting. One day he followed a stag a great distance into the forest. He went on and on until he lost his way. Night fell and the king by happy chance came upon a clearing where a charcoal-burner had a cottage. The king asked the charcoal-burner to lead him out of the forest and offered to pay him handsomely.

"I'd be glad to go with you," the charcoal-burner said, "but my wife is expecting the birth of a child and I cannot leave her. It is too late for you to start out alone. Won't you spend the night here? Lie down on some hay in the garret and tomorrow I'll be your guide."

The king had to accept this arrangement. He climbed into the garret and lay down on the floor. Soon afterwards a son was born to the charcoal-burner.

At midnight the king noticed a strange light in the room below him. He peeped through a chink in the boards and saw the charcoal-burner asleep, his wife lying in a dead faint, and three old women, all in white, standing over the baby, each holding a lighted taper in her hand.

The first old woman said: "My gift to this boy is that he shall encounter great dangers."

The second said: "My gift to him is that he shall go safely through them all, and live long."

The third one said: "And I give him for wife the baby daughter born this night to the king who lies upstairs on the straw."

The three old women blew out their tapers and all was quiet. They were the Fates.

The king felt as though a sword had been thrust into his heart. He lay awake till morning trying to think out some plan by which he could thwart the will of the three old Fates.

When day broke the child began to cry and the charcoal-burner woke up. Then he saw that his wife had died during the night.

"Ah, my poor motherless child," he cried, "what shall I do with you now?"

"Give me the baby," the king said. "I'll see that he's looked after properly and I'll give you enough money to keep you the rest of your life."

The charcoal-burner was delighted with this offer and the king went away promising to send at once for the baby.

A few days later when he reached his palace he was met with the joyful news that a beautiful little baby daughter had been born to him. He asked the time of her birth, and of course it was on the very night when he saw the Fates. Instead of being pleased at the safe arrival of the baby princess, the king frowned.

Then he called one of his stewards and said to him: "Go into the forest in a direction that I shall tell you. You will find there a cottage where a charcoal-burner lives. Give him this money and get from him a little child. Take the child and on your way back drown it. Do as I say or I shall have you drowned."

The steward went, found the charcoal-burner, and took the child. He put it into a basket and carried it away. As he was crossing a broad river he dropped the basket into the water.

"Goodnight to you, little son-in-law that nobody wanted!" the king said when he heard what the steward had done.

He supposed of course that the baby was drowned. But it wasn't. Its little basket floated in the water like a cradle, and the baby slept as if the river were singing it a lullaby. It floated down with the current past a fisherman's cottage. The fisherman saw it, got into his boat, and went after it. When he found what the basket contained he was overjoyed. At once he carried the baby to his wife and said:

"You have always wanted a little son and here you have one. The river has given him to us."

The fisherman's wife was delighted and brought up the child as her own. They named him Plavachek, which means a little boy who has come floating on the water.

The river flowed on and the days went by and Plavachek grew from a baby to a boy and then into a handsome youth, the handsomest by far in the whole countryside.

One day the king happened to ride that way unattended. It was hot and he was thirsty. He beckoned to the fisherman to get him a drink of fresh water. Plavachek brought it to him. The king looked at the handsome youth in astonishment.

"You have a fine lad," he said to the fisherman. "Is he your own son?"

"He is, yet he isn't," the fisherman answered. "Just twenty years ago a little baby in a basket floated down the river. We took him in and he has been ours ever since."

A mist rose before the king's eyes and he went deathly pale, for he knew at once that Plavachek was the child that he had ordered drowned.

Soon he recovered himself and jumping from his horse he said: "I need a messenger to send to my palace and I have no one with me. Could this youth go for me?"

"Your majesty has but to command," the fisherman said, "and Plavachek will go."

The king sat down and wrote a letter to the queen. This is what he said:

"Have the young man who delivers this letter run through with a sword at once. He is a dangerous enemy. Let him be dispatched before I return. Such is my will."

He folded the letter, made it secure, and sealed it with his own signet.

Plavachek took the letter and started out with it at once. He had to go through a deep forest where he missed the path and lost his way. He struggled on through underbrush and thicket until it began to grow dark. Then he met an old woman who said to him:

"Where are you going, Plavachek?"

"I'm carrying this letter to the king's palace and I've lost my way. Can you put me on the right road, mother?"

"You can't get there today," the old woman said. "It's dark now. Spend the night with me. You won't be with a stranger, for I'm your old godmother."

Plavachek allowed himself to be persuaded and presently he saw before him a pretty little house that seemed at that moment to have sprung out of the ground.

During the night while Plavachek was asleep, the old woman took the letter out of his pocket and put in another that read as follows:

"Have the young man who delivers this letter married to our daughter at once. He is my destined son-in-law. Let the wedding take place before I return. Such is my will."

The next day Plavachek delivered the letter and as soon as the queen read it, she gave orders at once for the wedding. Both she and her daughter were much taken with the handsome youth and gazed at him with tender eyes. As for Plavachek he fell instantly in love with the princess and was delighted to marry her.

Some days after the wedding the king returned and when he heard what had happened he flew into a violent rage at the queen.

"But," protested the queen, "you yourself ordered me to have him married to our daughter before you came back. Here is your letter."

The king took the letter and examined it carefully. The handwriting, the seal, the paper – all were his own.

He called his son-in-law and questioned him.

Plavachek related how he had lost his way in the forest and spent the night with his godmother. "What does your godmother look like?" the king asked.

Plavachek described her.

From the description the king recognized her as the same old woman who had promised the princess to the charcoal-burner's son twenty years before.

He looked at Plavachek thoughtfully and at last he said:

"What's done can't be undone. However, young man, you can't expect to be my son-in-law for nothing. If you want my daughter you must bring me for dowry three of the golden hairs of old Grandfather Knowitall."

He thought to himself that this would be an impossible task and so would be a good way to get rid of an undesirable son-in-law.

Plavachek took leave of his bride and started off. He didn't know which way to go. Who would know? Everybody talked about old Grandfather Knowitall, but nobody seemed to know where to find him. Yet Plavachek had a Fate for a godmother, so it wasn't likely that he would miss the right road.

He traveled long and far, going over wooded hills and desert plains and crossing deep rivers. He came at last to a black sea.

There he saw a boat and an old ferryman.

"God bless you, old ferryman!" he said.

"May God grant that prayer, young traveler! Where are you going?"

"I'm going to old Grandfather Knowitall to get three of his golden hairs."

"Oho! I have long been hunting for just such a messenger as you! For twenty years I have been ferrying people across this black sea and nobody has come to relieve me. If you promise to ask Grandfather Knowitall when my work will end, I'll ferry you over."

Plavachek promised and the boatman took him across.

Plavachek traveled on until he came to a great city that was in a state of decay. Before the city he met an old man who had a staff in his hand, but even with the staff he could scarcely crawl along.

"God bless you, old grandfather!" Plavachek said.

"May God grant that prayer, handsome youth! Where are you going?"

"I am going to old Grandfather Knowitall to get three of his golden hairs."

"Indeed! We have been waiting a long time for just such a messenger as you! I must lead you at once to the king."

So he took him to the king and the king said: "Ah, so you are going on an errand to Grandfather Knowitall! We have an apple-tree here that used to bear apples of youth. If any one ate one of those apples, no matter how aged he was, he'd become young again. But, alas, for twenty years now our tree has borne no fruit. If you promise to ask Grandfather Knowitall if there is any help for us, I will reward you handsomely."

Plavachek gave the king his promise and the king bid him godspeed.

Plavachek traveled on until he reached another great city that was half in ruins. Not far from the city a man was burying his father, and tears as big as peas were rolling down his cheek.

"God bless you, mournful grave-digger!" Plavachek said.

"May God grant that prayer, kind traveler! Where are you going?"

"I'm going to old Grandfather Knowitall to get three of his golden hairs."

"To Grandfather Knowitall! What a pity you didn't come sooner! Our king has long been waiting for just such a messenger as you! I must lead you to him."

So he took Plavachek to the king and the king said to him: "So you're going on an errand to Grandfather Knowitall. We have a well here that used to flow with the water of life. If any one drank of it, no matter how sick he was, he would get well. Nay, if he were already dead, this water, sprinkled upon him, would bring him back to life. But, alas, for twenty years now the well has gone dry. If you promise to ask Grandfather Knowitall if there is help for us, I will reward you handsomely."

Plavachek gave the king his promise and the king bid him godspeed.

After that Plavachek traveled long and far into a black forest. Deep in the forest he came upon a broad green meadow full of beautiful flowers and in its midst a golden palace glittering as though it were on fire. This was the palace of Grandfather Knowitall.

Plavachek entered and found nobody there but an old woman who sat spinning in a corner.

“Welcome, Plavachek,” she said. “I am delighted to see you again.”

He looked at the old woman and saw that she was his godmother with whom he had spent the night when he was carrying the letter to the palace.

“What has brought you here, Plavachek?” she asked.

“The king, godmother. He says I can’t be his son-in-law for nothing. I have to give a dowry. So he has sent me to old Grandfather Knowitall to get three of his golden hairs.”

The old woman smiled and said: “Do you know who Grandfather Knowitall is? Why, he’s the bright Sun who goes everywhere and sees everything. I am his mother. In the morning he’s a little lad, at noon he’s a grown man, and in the evening an old grandfather. I will get you three of the golden hairs from his golden head, for I must not be a godmother for nothing! But, my lad, you mustn’t remain where you are. My son is kind, but if he comes home hungry he might want to roast you and eat you for his supper. There’s an empty tub over there and I’ll just cover you with it.”

Plavachek begged his godmother to get from Grandfather Knowitall the answers for the three questions he had promised to ask.

“I will,” said the old woman, “and do you listen carefully to what he says.”

Suddenly there was the rushing sound of a mighty wind outside and the Sun, an old grandfather with a golden head, flew in by the western window. He sniffed the air suspiciously.

“Phew! Phew!” he cried. “I smell human flesh! Have you any one here, mother?”

“Star of the day, whom could I have here without your seeing him? The truth is you’ve been flying all day long over God’s world and your nose is filled with the smell of human flesh. That’s why you still smell it when you come home in the evening.”

The old man said nothing more and sat down to his supper.

After supper he laid his head on the old woman’s lap and fell sound asleep. The old woman pulled out a golden hair and threw it on the floor. It twanged like the string of a violin.

“What is it, mother?” the old man said. “What is it?”

“Nothing, my boy, nothing. I was asleep and had a wonderful dream.”

“What did you dream about, mother?”

“I dreamt about a city where they had a well of living water. If any one drank of it, no matter how sick he was, he would get well. Nay, if he were already dead, this water, sprinkled on him, would bring him back to life. For the last twenty years the well has gone dry. Is there anything to be done to make it flow again?”

“Yes. There’s a frog sitting on the spring that feeds the well. Let them kill the frog and clean out the well and the water will flow as before.”

When he fell asleep again the old woman pulled out another golden hair and threw it on the floor.

“What is it, mother?”

“Nothing, my boy, nothing. I was asleep again and I had a wonderful dream. I dreamt of a city where they had an apple-tree that bore apples of youth. If any one ate one of those apples, no matter how aged he was, he’d become young again. But for twenty years the tree has borne no fruit. Can anything be done about it?”

“Yes. In the roots of the tree there is a snake that takes its strength. Let them kill the snake and transplant the tree. Then it will bear fruit as before.”

He fell asleep again and the old woman pulled out a third golden hair.

“Why won’t you let me sleep, mother?” he complained, and started to sit up.

“Lie still, my boy, lie still. I didn’t intend to wake you, but a heavy sleep fell upon me and I had another wonderful dream. I dreamt of a boatman on the black sea. For twenty years he has been ferrying that boat and no one has offered to relieve him. When will he be relieved?”

“Ah, but that boatman is the son of a stupid mother! Why doesn’t he thrust the oar into the hand of some one else and jump ashore himself? Then the other man would have to be ferryman in his place. But now let me be quiet. I must get up early tomorrow morning and go and dry the tears which the king’s daughter sheds every night for her husband, the charcoal-burner’s son, whom the king has sent to get three of my golden hairs.”

In the morning there was again the rushing sound of a mighty wind outside and a beautiful golden child – no longer an old man – awoke on his mother’s lap. It was the glorious Sun. He bade his mother farewell and flew out by an eastern window.

The old woman turned over the tub and said to Plavachek: “Here are the three golden hairs for you. You also have Grandfather Knowitall’s answers to your three questions. Now good-by. As you will need me no more, you will never see me again.”

Plavachek thanked his godmother most gratefully and departed.

When he reached the first city the king asked him what news he brought.

“Good news!” Plavachek said. “Have the well cleaned out and kill the frog that sits on its spring. If you do this the water will flow again as it used to.”

The king ordered this to be done at once and when he saw the water beginning to bubble up and flow again, he made Plavachek a present of twelve horses, white as swans, laden with as much gold and silver as they could carry.

When Plavachek came to the second city and the king of that city asked him what news he brought, he said:

“Good news! Have the apple tree dug up. At its roots you will find a snake. Kill the snake and replant the tree. Then it will bear fruit as it used to.”

The king had this done at once and during the night the tree burst into bloom and bore great quantities of fruit. The king was delighted and made Plavachek a present of twelve horses, black as ravens, laden with as much riches as they could carry.

Plavachek traveled on and when he came to the black sea, the boatman asked him had he the answer to his question.

“Yes, I have,” said Plavachek, “but you must ferry me over before I tell you.”

The boatman wanted to hear the answer at once, but Plavachek was firm. So the old man ferried him across with his twelve white horses and his twelve black horses.

When Plavachek was safely landed, he said: “The next person who comes to be ferried over, thrust the oar into his hand and do you jump ashore. Then the other man will have to be boatman in your place.”

Plavachek traveled home to the palace. The king could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw the three golden hairs of Grandfather Knowitall. The princess wept again, not for sorrow this time but for joy at her bridegroom’s return.

“But, Plavachek,” the king gasped, “where did you get these beautiful horses and all these riches?”

“I earned them,” said Plavachek proudly. Then he related how he helped one king who had a tree of the apples of youth and another king who had a well of the water of life.

“Apples of youth! Water of life!” the king kept repeating softly to himself. “If I ate one of those apples I should become young again! If I were dead the water of life would restore me!”

He lost no time in starting out in quest of the apples of youth and the water of life. And do you know, he hasn’t come back yet!

So Plavachek, the charcoal-burner’s son, became the king’s son-in-law as the old Fate foretold. As for the king, well, I fear he’s still ferrying that boat across the black sea!



## THE FLAMING HORSE

### THE STORY OF A COUNTRY WHERE THE SUN NEVER SHINES

#### THE FLAMING HORSE

THERE was once a land that was dreary and dark as the grave, for the sun of heaven never shone upon it. The king of the country had a wonderful horse that had, growing right on his forehead, a flaming sun. In order that his subjects might have the light that is necessary for life, the king had this horse led back and forth from one end of his dark kingdom to the other. Wherever he went his flaming head shone out and it seemed like beautiful day.

Suddenly this wonderful horse disappeared. Heavy darkness that nothing could dispel settled down on the country. Fear spread among the people and soon they were suffering terrible poverty, for they were unable to cultivate the fields or do anything else that would earn them a livelihood. Confusion increased until the king saw that the whole country was likely to perish. In order then, if possible, to save his people, he gathered his army together and set out in search of the missing horse.

Through heavy darkness they groped their way slowly and with difficulty to the far boundaries of the kingdom. At last they reached the ancient forests that bordered the neighboring state and they saw gleaming through the trees faint rays of the sunshine with which that kingdom was blessed.

Here they came upon a small lonely cottage which the king entered in order to find out where he was and to ask directions for moving forward.

A man was sitting at the table reading diligently from a large open book. When the king bowed to him, he raised his eyes, returned the greeting, and stood up. His whole appearance showed that he was no ordinary man but a seer.

"I was just reading about you," he said to the king, "that you were gone in search of the flaming horse. Exert yourself no further, for you will never find him. But trust the enterprise to me and I will get him for you."

"If you do that, my man," the king said, "I will pay you royally."

"I seek no reward. Return home at once with your army, for your people need you. Only leave here with me one of your serving men."

The king did exactly as the seer advised and went home at once.

The next day the seer and his man set forth. They journeyed far and long until they had crossed six different countries. Then they went on into the seventh country which was ruled over by three brothers who had married three sisters, the daughters of a witch.

They made their way to the front of the royal palace, where the seer said to his man: "Do you stay here while I go in and find out whether the kings are at home. It is they who stole the flaming horse and the youngest brother rides him."

Then the seer transformed himself into a green bird and flew up to the window of the eldest queen and flitted about and pecked until she opened the window and let him into her chamber. When she let him in, he alighted on her white hand and the queen was as happy as a child.

"You pretty thing!" she said, playing with him. "If my husband were home how pleased he would be! But he's off visiting a third of his kingdom and he won't be home until evening."

Suddenly the old witch came into the room and as soon as she saw the bird she shrieked to her daughter: "Wring the neck of that cursed bird, or it will stain you with blood!"

"Why should it stain me with blood, the dear innocent thing?"

“Dear innocent mischief!” shrieked the witch. “Here, give it to me and I’ll wring its neck!”

She tried to catch the bird, but the bird changed itself into a man and was already out of the door before they knew what had become of him.

After that he changed himself again into a green bird and flew up to the window of the second sister. He pecked at it until she opened it and let him in. Then he flitted about her, settling first on one of her white hands, then on the other.

“What a dear bird you are!” cried the queen. “How you would please my husband if he were at home. But he’s off visiting two-thirds of his kingdom and he won’t be back until tomorrow evening.”

At that moment the witch ran into the room and as soon as she saw the bird she shrieked out: “Wring the neck of that wretched bird, or it will stain you with blood!”

“Why should it stain me with blood?” the daughter answered. “The dear innocent thing!”

“Dear innocent mischief!” shrieked the witch. “Here, give it to me and I’ll wring its neck!”

She reached out to catch the bird, but in less time than it takes to clap a hand, the bird had changed itself into a man who ran through the door and was gone before they knew where he was.

A moment later he again changed himself into a green bird and flew up to the window of the youngest queen. He flitted about and pecked until she opened the window and let him in. Then he alighted at once on her white hand and this pleased her so much that she laughed like a child and played with him.

“Oh, what a dear bird you are!” she cried. “How you would delight my husband if he were home. But he’s off visiting all three parts of his kingdom and he won’t be back until the day after tomorrow in the evening.”

At that moment the old witch rushed into the room. “Wring the neck of that cursed bird!” she shrieked, “or it will stain you with blood.”

“My dear mother,” the queen answered, “why should it stain me with blood – beautiful innocent creature that it is?”

“Beautiful innocent mischief!” shrieked the witch. “Here, give it to me and I’ll wring its neck!”

But at that moment the bird changed itself into a man, disappeared through the door, and they never saw him again.

The seer knew now where the kings were and when they would come home. So he made his plans accordingly. He ordered his servant to follow him and they set out from the city at a quick pace. They went on until they came to a bridge which the three kings as they came back would have to cross.

The seer and his man hid themselves under the bridge and lay there in wait until evening. As the sun sank behind the mountains, they heard the clatter of hoofs approaching the bridge. It was the eldest king returning home. At the bridge his horse stumbled on a log which the seer had rolled there.

“What scoundrel has thrown a log here?” cried the king angrily.

Instantly the seer leaped out from under the bridge and demanded of the king how he dared to call him a scoundrel. Clamoring for satisfaction he drew his sword and attacked the king. The king, too, drew sword and defended himself, but after a short struggle he fell from his horse dead. The seer bound the dead king to his horse and then with a cut of the whip started the horse homewards.

The seer hid himself again and he and his man lay in wait until the next evening.

On that evening near sunset the second king came riding up to the bridge. When he saw the ground sprinkled with blood, he cried out: “Surely there has been a murder here! Who has dared to commit such a crime in my kingdom!”

At these words the seer leaped out from under the bridge, drew his sword, and shouted: “How dare you insult me? Defend yourself as best you can!”

The king drew, but after a short struggle he, too, yielded up his life to the sword of the seer.

The seer bound the dead king to his horse and with a cut of the whip started the horse homewards.

Then the seer hid himself again under the bridge and he and his man lay there in wait until the third evening.

On the third evening just at sunset the youngest king came galloping home on the flaming steed. He was hurrying fast because he had been delayed. But when he saw red blood at the bridge he stopped short and looked around.

“What audacious villain,” he cried, “has dared to kill a man in my kingdom!”

Hardly had he spoken when the seer stood before him with drawn sword demanding satisfaction for the insult of his words.

“I don’t know how I’ve insulted you,” the king said, “unless you’re the murderer.”

When the seer refused to parley, the king, too, drew his sword and defended himself.

To overcome the first two kings had been mere play for the seer, but it was no play this time. They both fought until their swords were broken and still victory was doubtful.

“We shall accomplish nothing with swords,” the seer said. “That is plain. I tell you what: let us turn ourselves into wheels and start rolling down the hill and the wheel that gets broken let him yield.”

“Good!” said the king. “I’ll be a cartwheel and you be a lighter wheel.”

“No, no,” the seer answered quickly. “You be the light wheel and I’ll be the cartwheel.”

To this the king agreed. So they went up the hill, turned themselves into wheels and started rolling down. The cartwheel went whizzing into the lighter wheel and broke its spokes.

“There!” cried the seer, rising up from the cartwheel. “I am victor!”

“Not so, brother, not so!” said the king, standing before the seer. “You only broke my fingers! Now I tell you what: let us change ourselves into two flames and let the flame that burns up the other be victor. I’ll be a red flame and do you be a white one.”

“Oh, no,” the seer interrupted. “You be the white flame and I’ll be the red one.”

The king agreed to this. So they went back to the road that led to the bridge, turned themselves into flames, and began burning each other mercilessly. But neither was able to burn up the other.

Suddenly a beggar came down the road, an old man with a long gray beard and a bald head, with a scrip at his side and a heavy staff in his hand.

“Father,” the white flame said, “get some water and pour it on the red flame and I’ll give you a penny.”

But the red flame called out quickly: “Not so, father! Get some water and pour it on the white flame and I’ll give you a shilling!”

Now of course the shilling appealed to the beggar more than the penny. So he got some water, poured it on the white flame and that was the end of the king.

The red flame turned into a man who seized the flaming horse by the bridle, mounted him and, after he had rewarded the beggar, called his servant and rode off.

Meanwhile at the royal palace there was deep sorrow for the murdered kings. The halls were draped in black and people came from miles around to gaze at the mutilated bodies of the two elder brothers which the horses had carried home.

The old witch was beside herself with rage. As soon as she had devised a plan whereby she could avenge the murder of her sons-in-law, she took her three daughters under her arm, mounted an iron rake, and sailed off through the air.

The seer and his man had already covered a good part of their journey and were hurrying on over rough mountains and across desert plains, when the servant was taken with a terrible hunger. There wasn’t anything in sight that he could eat, not even a wild berry. Then suddenly they came upon an apple tree that was bending beneath a load of ripe fruit. The apples were red and pleasant to the sight and sent out a fragrance that was most inviting.

The servant was delighted. “Glory to God!” he cried. “Now I can feast to my heart’s content on these apples!”

He was already running to the tree when the seer called him back.

“Wait! Don’t touch them! I will pick them for you myself!”

But instead of picking an apple, the seer drew his sword and struck a mighty blow into the apple tree. Red blood gushed forth.

“Just see, my man! You would have perished if you had eaten one apple. This apple tree is the eldest queen, whom her mother, the witch, placed here for our destruction.”

Presently they came to a spring. Its water bubbled up clear as crystal and most tempting to the tired traveler.

“Ah,” said the servant, “since we can get nothing better, at least we can take a drink of this good water.”

“Wait!” cried the seer. “I will draw some for you.”

But instead of drawing water he plunged his naked sword into the middle of the spring. Instantly it was covered with blood and blood began to spurt from the spring in thick streams.

“This is the second queen, whom her mother, the witch, placed here to work our doom.”

Presently they came to a rosebush covered with beautiful red roses that scented all the air with their fragrance.

“What beautiful roses!” said the servant. “I have never seen any such in all my life. I’ll go pluck a few. As I can’t eat or drink, I’ll comfort myself with roses.”

“Don’t dare to pluck them!” cried the seer. “I’ll pluck them for you.”

With that he cut into the bush with his sword and red blood spurted out as though he had cut a human vein.

“This is the youngest queen,” said the seer, “whom her mother, the witch, placed here in the hope of revenging herself on us for the death of her sons-in-law.”

After that they proceeded without further adventures.

When they crossed the boundaries of the dark kingdom, the sun in the horse’s forehead sent out its blessed rays in all directions. Everything came to life. The earth rejoiced and covered itself with flowers.

The king felt he could never thank the seer enough and he offered him the half of his kingdom.

But the seer replied: “You are the king. Keep on ruling over the whole of your kingdom and let me return to my cottage in peace.”

He bade the king farewell and departed.

## **THE THREE CITRONS**

### **THE STORY OF A PRINCE WHO CLIMBED THE GLASS HILL**

#### **THE THREE CITRONS**

ONCE upon a time there was an aged king who had an only son. One day he called the prince to him and said: "My son, you see that my head is white. Soon I shall be closing my eyes and you are not yet settled in life. Marry, my son, marry at once so that I can bless you before I die."

The prince made no answer but he took the king's words to heart and pondered them. He would gladly have done as his father wished but there was no young girl upon whom his affections were set.

One day when he was sitting in the garden, wondering what to do, an old woman suddenly appeared before him.

"Go," she said, "to the top of the Glass Hill, pluck the Three Citrons, and you will get a wife in whom your heart will delight." With that she disappeared as mysteriously as she had come.

Her words went through the prince's soul like a bright dart. Instantly he determined, come what might, to find the Glass Hill and to pluck the Three Citrons. He told his father his intention and the old king fitted him out for the journey and gave him his blessing.

For a long time the prince wandered over wooded mountains and desert plains without seeing or even hearing anything of the Glass Hill and the Three Citrons. One day, worn out with his long journey, he threw himself down in the shade of a wide-spreading linden tree. As his father's sword, which he wore at his side, clanked on the ground, twelve ravens began cawing from the top of the tree. Frightened by the clanking of the sword, they raised their wings and flew off.

The prince jumped to his feet. "Those are the first living creatures I have seen for many a day. I'll go in the direction they have taken," he said to himself, "and perhaps I'll have better luck."

So he traveled on and after three days and three nights a high castle came in view.

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