

*THE MAGICIAN'S HORSE*

ONCE upon a time, there was a king who had three sons. Now it happened that one day the three princes went out hunting in a large forest at some distance from their father's palace, and the youngest prince lost his way, so his brothers had to return home without him.

For four days the prince wandered through the glades of the forest, sleeping on moss beneath the stars at night, and by day living on roots and wild berries. At last, on the morning of the fifth day, he came to a large open space in the middle of the forest, and here stood a stately palace; but neither within nor without was there a trace of human life. The prince entered the open door and wandered through the deserted rooms without seeing a living soul. At last he came on a great hall, and in the centre of the hall was a table spread with dainty dishes and choice wines. The prince sat down, and satisfied his hunger and thirst, and immediately afterwards the table disappeared from his sight. This struck the prince as very strange; but though he continued his search through all the rooms, upstairs and down, he could find no one to speak to. At last, just as it was beginning to get dark, he heard steps in the distance and he saw an old man coming towards him up the stairs.

'What are you doing wandering about my castle?' asked the old man.

To whom the prince replied: 'I lost my way hunting in the forest. If you will take me into your

service, I should like to stay with you, and will serve you faithfully.'

'Very well,' said the old man. 'You may enter my service. You will have to keep the stove always lit, you will have to fetch the wood for it from the forest, and you will have the charge of the black horse in the stables. I will pay you a florin a day, and at meal times you will always find the table in the hall spread with food and wine, and you can eat and drink as much as you require.'

The prince was satisfied, and he entered the old man's service, and promised to see that there was always wood on the stove, so that the fire should never die out. Now, though he did not know it, his new master was a magician, and the flame of the stove was a magic fire, and if it had gone out the magician would have lost a great part of his power.

One day the prince forgot, and let the fire burn so low that it very nearly burnt out. Just as the flame was flickering the old man stormed into the room.

'What do you mean by letting the fire burn so low?' he growled. 'I have only arrived in the nick of time.' And while the prince hastily threw a log on the stove and blew on the ashes to kindle a glow, his master gave him a severe box on the ear, and warned him that if ever it happened again it would fare badly with him.

One day the prince was sitting disconsolate in the stables when, to his surprise, the black horse spoke to him.

'Come into my stall,' it said, 'I have something to say to you. Fetch my bridle and saddle from that cupboard and put them on me. Take the bottle that is beside them; it contains an ointment which will make your hair shine like pure gold; then put all the wood you can gather together on to the stove, till it is piled quite high up.'

So the prince did what the horse told him; he saddled and bridled the horse, he put the ointment on his hair till it shone like gold, and he made such a big fire in the

stove that the flames sprang up and set fire to the roof, and in a few minutes the palace was burning like a huge bonfire.

Then he hurried back to the stables, and the horse said to him: 'There is one thing more you must do. In the cupboard you will find a looking-glass, a brush and a riding-whip. Bring them with you, mount on my back, and ride as hard as you can, for now the house is burning merrily.'

The prince did as the horse bade him. Scarcely had he got into the saddle than the horse was off and away, galloping at such a pace that, in a short time, the forest and all the country belonging to the magician lay far behind them.

In the meantime the magician returned to his palace, which he found in smouldering ruins. In vain he called for his servant. At last he went to look for him in the stables, and when he discovered that the black horse had disappeared too, he at once suspected that they had gone together; so he mounted a roan horse that was in the next stall, and set out in pursuit.

As the prince rode, the quick ears of his horse heard the sound of pursuing feet.

'Look behind you,' he said, 'and see if the old man is following.' And the prince turned in his saddle and saw a cloud like smoke or dust in the distance.

'We must hurry,' said the horse.

After they had galloped for some time, the horse said again: 'Look behind, and see if he is still at some distance.'

'He is quite close,' answered the prince.

'Then throw the looking-glass on the ground,' said the horse. So the prince threw it; and when the magician came up, the roan horse stepped on the mirror, and crash! his foot went through the glass, and he stumbled and fell, cutting his feet so badly that there was nothing for the old man to do but to go slowly back with him to the

stables, and put new shoes on his feet. Then they started once more in pursuit of the prince, for the magician set great value on the horse, and was determined not to lose it.



In the meanwhile the prince had gone a great distance ; but the quick ears of the black horse detected the sound of following feet from afar.

'Dismount,' he said to the prince ; 'put your ear to the ground, and tell me if you do not hear a sound.'

So the prince dismounted and listened. 'I seem to hear the earth tremble,' he said ; 'I think he cannot be very far off.'



'Mount me at once,' answered the horse, 'and I will gallop as fast as I can.' And he set off so fast that the earth seemed to fly from under his hoofs.

'Look back once more,' he said, after a short time, 'and see if he is in sight.'

'I see a cloud and a flame,' answered the prince; 'but a long way off.'

'We must make haste,' said the horse. And shortly after he said: 'Look back again; he can't be far off now.'

The prince turned in his saddle, and exclaimed: 'He is close behind us, in a minute the flame from his horse's nostrils will reach us.'

'Then throw the brush on the ground,' said the horse.

And the prince threw it, and in an instant the brush was changed into such a thick wood that even a bird could not have got through it, and when the old man got up to it the roan horse came suddenly to a stand-still, not able to advance a step into the thick tangle. So there was nothing for the magician to do but to retrace his steps, to fetch an axe, with which he cut himself a way through the wood. But it took him some time, during which the prince and the black horse got on well ahead.

But once more they heard the sound of pursuing feet. 'Look back,' said the black horse, 'and see if he is following.'

'Yes,' answered the prince, 'this time I hear him distinctly.'

'Let us hurry on,' said the horse. And a little later he said: 'Look back now, and see if he is in sight.'

'Yes,' said the prince, turning round, 'I see the flame; he is close behind us.'

'Then you must throw down the whip,' answered the horse.' And in the twinkling of an eye the whip was changed into a broad river. When the old man got up to it he urged the roan horse into the water, but as the water

mounted higher and higher, the magic flame which gave the magician all his power grew smaller and smaller, till, with a fizz, it went out, and the old man and the roan horse sank in the river and disappeared. When the prince looked round they were no longer to be seen.

'Now,' said the horse, 'you may dismount; there is nothing more to fear, for the magician is dead. Beside that brook you will find a willow wand. Gather it, and strike the earth with it, and it will open and you will see a door at your feet.'

When the prince had struck the earth with the wand a door appeared, and opened into a large vaulted stone hall.

'Lead me into that hall,' said the horse, 'I will stay there; but you must go through the fields till you reach a garden, in the midst of which is a king's palace. When you get there you must ask to be taken into the king's service. Good-bye, and don't forget me.'

So they parted; but first the horse made the prince promise not to let anyone in the palace see his golden hair. So he bound a scarf round it, like a turban, and the prince set out through the fields, till he reached a beautiful garden, and beyond the garden he saw the walls and towers of a stately palace. At the garden gate he met the gardener, who asked him what he wanted.

'I want to take service with the king,' replied the prince.

'Well, you may stay and work under me in the garden,' said the man; for as the prince was dressed like a poor man, he could not tell that he was a king's son. 'I need someone to weed the ground and to sweep the dead leaves from the paths. You shall have a florin a day, a horse to help you to cart the leaves away, and food and drink.'

So the prince consented, and set about his work. But when his food was given to him he only ate half of it; the rest he carried to the vaulted hall beside the brook,

and gave to the black horse. And this he did every day, and the horse thanked him for his faithful friendship.

One evening, as they were together, after his work in the garden was over, the horse said to him: 'To-morrow a large company of princes and great lords are coming to your king's palace. They are coming from far and near, as wooers for the three princesses. They will all stand in a row in the courtyard of the palace, and the three princesses will come out, and each will carry a diamond apple in her hand, which she will throw into the air. At whosoever feet the apple falls he will be the bridegroom of that princess. You must be close by in the garden at your work. The apple of the youngest princess, who is much the most beautiful of the sisters, will roll past the wooers and stop in front of you. Pick it up at once and put it in your pocket.'

The next day, when the wooers were all assembled in the courtyard of the castle, everything happened just as the horse had said. The princesses threw the apples into the air, and the diamond apple of the youngest princess rolled past all the wooers, out on to the garden, and stopped at the feet of the young gardener, who was busy sweeping the leaves away. In a moment he had stooped down, picked up the apple and put it in his pocket. As he stooped the scarf round his head slipped a little to one side, and the princess caught sight of his golden hair, and loved him from that moment.

But the king was very sad, for his youngest daughter was the one he loved best. But there was no help for it; and the next day a threefold wedding was celebrated at the palace, and after the wedding the youngest princess returned with her husband to the small hut in the garden where he lived.

Some time after this the people of a neighbouring country went to war with the king, and he set out to battle, accompanied by the husbands of his two eldest daughters mounted on stately steeds. But the husband of the



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youngest daughter had nothing but the old broken-down horse which helped him in his garden work ; and the king, who was ashamed of this son-in-law, refused to give him any other.

So as he was determined not to be left behind, he went into the garden, mounted the sorry nag, and set out. But scarcely had he ridden a few yards before the horse stumbled and fell. So he dismounted and went down to the brook, to where the black horse lived in the vaulted hall. And the horse said to him : 'Saddle and bridle me, and then go into the next room and you will find a suit of armour and a sword. Put them on, and we will ride forth together to battle.'

And the prince did as he was told ; and when he had mounted the horse his armour glittered in the sun, and he looked so brave and handsome, that no one would have recognised him as the gardener who swept away the dead leaves from the paths. The horse bore him away at a great pace, and when they reached the battle-field they saw that the king was losing the day, so many of his warriors had been slain. But when the warrior on his black charger and in glittering armour appeared on the scene, hewing right and left with his sword, the enemy were dismayed and fled in all directions, leaving the king master of the field. Then the king and his two sons-in-law, when they saw their deliverer, shouted, and all that was left of the army joined in the cry : 'A god has come to our rescue !' And they would have surrounded him, but his black horse rose in the air and bore him out of their sight.

Soon after this, part of the country rose in rebellion against the king, and once more he and his two sons-in-law had to fare forth to battle. And the son-in-law who was disguised as a gardener wanted to fight too. So he came to the king and said : 'Dear father, let me ride with you to fight your enemies.'

'I don't want a blockhead like you to fight for me,

answered the king. 'Besides, I haven't got a horse fit for you. But see, there is a carter on the road carting hay, you may take his horse.'

So the prince took the carter's horse, but the poor beast was old and tired, and after it had gone a few yards it stumbled and fell. So the prince returned sadly to the garden and watched the king ride forth at the head of the army accompanied by his two sons-in-law. When they were out of sight the prince betook himself to the vaulted chamber by the brook-side, and having taken counsel of the faithful black horse, he put on the glittering suit of armour, and was borne on the back of the horse through the air, to where the battle was being fought. And once more he routed the king's enemies, hacking to right and left with his sword. And again they all cried: 'A god has come to our rescue!' But when they tried to detain him the black horse rose in the air and bore him out of their sight.

When the king and his sons-in-law returned home they could talk of nothing but the hero who had fought for them, and all wondered who he could be.

Shortly afterwards the king of a neighbouring country declared war, and once more the king and his sons-in-law and his subjects had to prepare themselves for battle, and once more the prince begged to ride with them, but the king said he had no horse to spare for him. 'But,' he added, 'you may take the horse of the woodman who brings the wood from the forest, it is good enough for you.'

So the prince took the woodman's horse, but it was so old and useless that it could not carry him beyond the castle gates. So he betook himself once more to the vaulted hall, where the black horse had prepared a still more magnificent suit of armour for him than the one he had worn on the previous occasions, and when he had put it on, and mounted on the back of the horse, he bore him straight to the battle-field, and once more he scattered the king's enemies, fighting single-handed in their



ranks, and they fled in all directions. But it happened that one of the enemy struck with his sword and wounded the prince in the leg. And the king took his own pocket-handkerchief, with his name and crown embroidered on it,



and bound it round the wounded leg. And the king would fain have compelled him to mount in a litter and be carried straight to the palace, and two of his knights were to lead the black charger to the royal stables. But the prince put his hand on the mane of his faithful

horse, and managed to pull himself up into the saddle, and the horse mounted into the air with him. Then they all shouted and cried: 'The warrior who has fought for us is a god! He must be a god.'

And throughout all the kingdom nothing else was spoken about, and all the people said: 'Who can the hero be who has fought for us in so many battles? He cannot be a man, he must be a god.'

And the king said: 'If only I could see him once more, and if it turned out that after all he was a man and not a god, I would reward him with half my kingdom.'

Now when the prince reached his home—the gardener's hut where he lived with his wife—he was weary, and he lay down on his bed and slept. And his wife noticed the handkerchief bound round his wounded leg, and she wondered what it could be. Then she looked at it more closely and saw in the corner that it was embroidered with her father's name and the royal crown. So she ran straight to the palace and told her father. And he and his two sons-in-law followed her back to her house, and there the gardener lay asleep on his bed. And the scarf that he always wore bound round his head had slipped off, and his golden hair gleamed on the pillow. And they all recognised that this was the hero who had fought and won so many battles for them.

Then there was great rejoicing throughout the land, and the king rewarded his son-in-law with half of his kingdom, and he and his wife reigned happily over it.