

# THE PRINCESS SORCHA

## An Irish Folk-Tale

By SEUMAS MACMANUS ("Mac")

ONCE upon a time when there was many's a King and Queen (it's often we have heard of them, but few of them ever we've seen—except in dhrawin's and pictures), there was one King, and he had a daughter named Sorcha, famed far and wide for her beauty. Princes and lords came from far and near to court her, and ax her hand in marriage. But behold ye! she was so particular, and so hard to please, that not wan of them would she have, good, bad or indifferent, for with the nicest of them she had always and ever some fault to find.

In this way many things went on for some years, and as the fame of her had thraveled far her father's house was pretty well tramped and throdden down by all that come to woo and went home again with their heart in their boots. Till, at long and at last, her father, tired out of all patience with her, up and says: "I'm now going to give ye your one last and final chance. I'll bid to a feast the seven bravest, handsomest and richest Princes to be found, and I'll give you your pick and choice of them. Suit yourself from among them; for if you don't you'll rue it."

The Princess listened to this, and she sayed she would surely do her best to suit herself, seeing this was going to be her last chance. And well and good, her father the King got up the feast, and sent the word round, and bid to it the seven bravest, handsomest and richest Kings in all the land, who were looking for wives; and a right jolly feast they had, with no end of eating and drinking, and fun fast and furious.

And in the middle of it the King said: "Now my laughter will choose her husband from among ye." The seven Kings then were stood up in a row, and a handsome show they made without doubt. Seven braver or finer-looking men couldn't be met with in the whole world again. Every one of them now, too, tried all he could to look his best and his tallest; for there wasn't one of them but would give all he was worth in the world again to win the Princess for his wife.

The Princess then came in and passed along the row, taking a good eyeful of everyone of them; and then she passed back again and she sayed to one: "I wouldn't have you, for you're too short;" and to another: "I wouldn't have you, for you're too tall;" and to the next: "Nor you, for your hair's too light;" and to the others: "Nor you, for your hair's too dark;" "You don't turn out your toes enough;" "You turn yours out too much;" and to the last (before him she had to wait a good while to think what fault she could find): "Nor I wouldn't have you at all, at all," says she, "for you have too much whiskers"—and that was all seven of them rejected.

The father, as you may suppose, was pretty mad at this. There was no holding or tying of him. "By this, and by that," says he, "as I sayed I'd make you rue this, I will." "Now," says he, "you can go to your bed, and be up early in the morning, and ready for the road, because the very first man comes to the door the morrow morning I'll marry ye to him, and send ye off with him." The seven Kings everyone, sayed it was the price of her, and her rich deserving; and the Princess crying for all she was worth went off to bed, and the seven Kings called for their horses and started for home. Her father was particularly sorry that King Whiskers hadn't won her; for a better, or braver or handsomer Prince couldn't easily be

found; and besides he was his own neighbor. And, indeed, it's not but King Whiskers himself was every bit as sorry at losing such a beautiful Princess.

But to make a long story short, the morning come, and the Princess and the King and every sinner in the castle was up early and dressed and at the windows watching to see who'd be the first to come. They hadn't long to wait, either, till they saw coming up to

great and beautiful castle, far surpassin' anything she had ever seen, "Oh," says she, "who owns that magnificent castle?" "That castle," says he, "belongs to King Whiskers." "Och, och!" says she, "but I'm the miserable woman I didn't marry King Whiskers!"

Then, when they went a bit farther, they come to a very small, black, dirty, little hut of a house, and, "Who," says she, "owns that thing?" "That," says the beggar, "belongs to me and to you. Walk in, and make yourself at home for life."

Broken-hearted, indeed, she was when she walked into this hut, and saw the miserable place it was, and thought how she'd now have to live her lifetime there—her, that might have had the most beautiful castle, and most beautiful man in all the world, only for her own fault.

"As this is our wedding supper," says he, "we'll have a grand spread for once in our lives." And out onto the table he emptied the whole contents of one bag—pieces of bread and bits of bacon and cold potatoes and tails of herrings and a couple of half-picked bones and a whole pile of other things. "A grand spread entirely," says he; "as much as would do five turf-cutters. If, as is likely, ye'll often go to bed supperless by-and-by, ye'll at least always have the comfort of mindin' that ye got yer fill for your weddin' supper, anyhow."

But it was a soory supper the poor girl made; only the fair dint of the hunger made her put a tooth in a crust at all. And in the morning, when she got up, says her man: "I have always to be off begging every day, and you must do something, too, to help the house. There's a fair this day in the next town—take that basket of delf to it, and set up your standing and see what money you'll be able to bring home against night."

Off then he went with his bags to his begging, and off she, poor girl, had to trudge, with the delf to the fair, and there set up her standing, and spread out her ware on it. An ashamed woman she was; but it wasn't long till her

face began to burn with the very shame, for who should she see coming riding down through the fair, on a great black prancing steed, and with all his grand courtiers on prancing steeds after him, but King Whiskers himself, and he dressed, oh! ever so gorgeous, and his head tossing to the sky. And down, down, the street he came prancing, his horse plunging about, and scattering the crowds east and west, and he plunged through her standing, upsetting all, and breaking every bit of delf, into smithereens, she herself only just escaping with the life; and away on the King went without giving the second look to see whether she was killed or not.

It was with a low heart she went home to her poor, wee hut that night, not knowing how to face her husband, and tell him that she had neither money nor delf back to him. And when he heard that she had let all the delf be smashed he got into a terribly mad passion, and was going to smash all, and threatened to kill her into the bargain; but only sent her to bed supperless.

"Och, och!" says she to herself, in her own heart, in bed that night: "Och, och! but it's me is the sorry woman that didn't marry King Whiskers!"

Next morning, as her man had no money to buy more delf for her, he bought her a creel of apples, and hoistin' them on her back sent her off to the



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the door a dirty, big beggarman, with his clothes all in tatters hanging around him and a dozen bags hanging about him for getting his charities in. When they saw this, some of them laughed aloud (for they couldn't help it), and more of them cried. The Princess herself cried the bitterest of them all, as ye may well suppose; but her father brought in the beggar, and called the priest, and had the pair of them married, and giving the beggar a good charity turned them out upon the road.

When they had wandered away a good bit, they come into a strange country that looked very rich and beautiful, and they met with a great drove of splendid horses, more than a hundred, and everyone of them finer looking than any horse she had seen in her father's country. "Who owns them horses?" says she. "Them's King Whiskers'," says the beggar. "Och, och!" says she, "but it's me's the sorry woman that I didn't marry King Whiskers!"

When they went a piece farther, she saw seven hills covered with cattle and sheep, the best cattle and sheep she had ever seen. "Who," says she, "owns all them cattle and sheep?" "King Whiskers owns them all," says her man. "Och, och!" says she, "but it's going to my heart that I didn't marry King Whiskers!"

And then, when they come, a little farther on, to a