

The GREEN BEARDED KING

Retold from the Hungarian.
By Louise Souvan

WHERE was it, where was it not? Still seven times seven kingdoms from here and even beyond them, where the little short tailed pig is digging, there was a green bearded king. This green bearded king once set out to wander through the world. He had been walking for a long time, in fact already 100 needle lengths had he been wandering, when it suddenly struck him that it must have been 17 years at least since he had left the house. He was tired from stirring this way and that way, and as he was thirsty, too, he sat down on the edge of a brook; the water looked cool and inviting, and he bent down for a hearty drink. Hardly had he begun to drink when somebody took hold of his beard. He tried to pull backward, but could not. Then he shouted into the water: "Listen! I don't know who you are, but let go my beard before something happens to you."

But he was only pulled the harder. Indeed, he was pulled so awfully that he took to begging, for nothing else was left for him to do. At last a voice from out the depths of the water said: "If you give me something in your realm that you don't know about I'll let your beard go."

"What shouldn't I know about in my realm, when I am aware of the least little needle?" replied the green bearded king.

"Just give me that promise, and nothing else," said the king of all the sorcerers, for it was he who was hidden under the water and nobody else.

"All right, be it yours!" said the green bearded king at last.

He felt quite miserable from kneeling and lying upon his stomach for such a long time, when at last the sorcerers' king let his beard go. On his way home he thought and thought what thing there could be in his realm which he knew nothing about.

At home a handsome lad ran to welcome him and embraced and kissed him over and over again.

"Oh, dear father, how long you have been away! How good to have you home again!" said the lad.

The king stared at him in utmost astonishment. He thrust the boy from him and said:

"Whose father am I? Whose son are you? I don't know you!"

In the house his wife, the queen, told him that the lad was really his son, who had been born after he left home many years ago.

Now the king understood. This handsome lad then he had promised the sorcerer king, for surely he had known nothing of the lad. He almost died from worry.

Then he called in the youth and told him all. But the boy, not scared in the least, consoled his father, assured him that all would end well and that he was to leave the house as soon as possible. Next day he got ready and went away.

He wandered and wandered through seven times seven kingdoms and also reached the brook where his father's beard was kept fast. Upon the water seven wild ducks swam about, and on the shore a shirt was hanging which the wind moved gently hither and thither. He took the shirt and was just about to put it into his knapsack when suddenly one of the seven wild ducks turned into a wonderfully beautiful girl and said to the lad:

"Handsome prince, I know who you are and where you are going. You are the green bearded king's son and on the way to my father, for he has won you from your parent. Give me my shirt. For your good deed expect good."

The king's son gave it to her. The girl put it on, took a golden ring from her finger and gave it to the lad.

"Take good care of this ring! With it you can go now through 12 castle doors without anybody noticing you. Just turn the ring and every door will open by itself. Arrived inside, my father will want you to do things which you would not be able to accomplish, not even if you were an angel, but I'll be



The Youth Took Leave of the Girl

your helper. Toward 6 o'clock in the evening I'll hum as a little fly at your window. Let me in and fear nothing."

The youth put the ring upon his finger, took leave of the girl and went to the sorcerer king's castle. Twelve doors barred his way but on turning the ring each one opened by itself. Finally the last door sprang open and he was right before the sorcerer king himself.

"Great king, here I am; have mercy upon me!" said the youth. "Since you are here it is good," said the king, "but methinks you are inclined to be somewhat bold. Perhaps you don't quite know who I am."

"I do know it," said the prince. "Yet you are not more than my father—he is king and you are king—that's how it is!"

The king got very angry.

"Three problems you have to solve," he said. "If you can master them, all right, but if you can not you are lost. Here is a cabbage leaf—take it! I am going to lock you up in a room at once, and if by tomorrow you can not make a crane's feather hat out of this cabbage leaf you may pray for mercy but I will have none."

They went into the room. Food and drink in plenty were left for him. Then they locked up the room from all sides and went away. Left thus alone the royal prince became quite downhearted. How on earth was he to make a thing such as was never heard of as long as the world had stood?

At that moment a loud humming was heard at the window. He went to see what was the matter, and there was a tiny little fly, which sang—

"Let me in—it's I, your helper."

Quickly he opened the window. The fly came in and instantly turned into the beautiful young girl he had seen before.

"Now tell me how I can help you?" she said.

The prince told her of how he had been told to make a crane's feather hat out of a cabbage leaf.

"If it's nothing else," said the girl, then it's not so bad. Where is the cabbage leaf?"

"Here it is."

"Now, see here!" said the girl, and

helper," the little fly sang outside the window.

Hurriedly he opened the window, and again the little fly changed into the beautiful girl he had seen at the edge of the brook. He told her what her father had asked him to do. Now, if you believe me or not, out of the horrid cabbage soup she made a spur such as anybody might have looked at with envy. My! Wasn't the king's son happy to be helped like that! He thanked the girl. She said goodby, and again as the tiny little fly she flew away.

Next day the sorcerer king almost fell upon his back on seeing the beautiful spur. But he did not let up. He was determined to get the best of the boy in the end. He brought a jug with pure, clear water and said:

"This is now your last chance. If you can not make a copper hatchet out of this clear, pure water you may write your last will beforehand!"

The king's son said nothing. He just waited for evening to come. He thought since the other tasks had gone so well, why should this end badly? But when the little fly had again turned into the beautiful girl that evening and when she learned her father's command, she sadly shook her head, for that she could not do either!

"Do you know what?" she said to the king's son. "Let us flee at once, for here we can not stay. I shall strike you with my cane and then you'll turn into a gold ring, my beautiful little grown pony into a gold apple and I shall become a bird. Thus we shall leave the place as quickly as we can."

The king's son turned into a gold ring, the beautiful little brown horse changed into a golden apple and the girl became a bird. The bird took the ring into its beak, the apple it held with its claws and off they went quick as a thought.

As she said, so it happened.

The next day the father noticed that neither the daughter nor the king's son was to be seen and immediately knew what had happened. He said to his valet:

"Up and after them at once! Bring them back alive or dead."

Mercy, you ought to have seen the race that now began. The valet ran like lightning. Suddenly the bird said to the ring:

"I feel a speedy wind blowing behind my back! They are coming right behind us."

Luckily there was a thick bush just there and in the middle of it the bird sat quietly down, as though nothing had happened. Soon the valet got there also. He searched every corner and looked over the whole bush, but found nothing. So he returned home to the king and said:

"Your majesty, I have not seen of the fugitives as much as their shadows. There was only a bush upon the plain, and in the middle of it sat a little bird."

"That was she, you donkey!" cried the king. "I see I will have to go myself, for I can rely on nobody else."

Now, it matters not what kind of a race you may have seen in your life already, such a one as the sorcerer king performed was never yet heard of.

The little bird flew and flew as hard as it could until it came to the other side of the brook, where the king's beard had been pulled, but all the hurry would not have been worth a penny had not just there ended the sorcerer king's empire; his power went only that far and not a step farther.

When he saw that he was cheated and that they really had reached the opposite shore safely he became so angry that he burst on the spot.

Then the little bird turned into the beautiful girl, the ring changed into the king's son and the golden apple became the beautiful brown little horse again. Both mounted the horse and rode into the green bearded king's realm. At home they were married and had a grand wedding. I was there, too, as bass violinist. I ate so many sausages that I needed no food for a year. My name shall be Michael if it isn't true.

IN DAYS OF OLD AND NOW

"Youngsters who find going to school the most fearful task of their lives ought to read something about the troubles of the small boys who went to school a century ago," says an old teacher.

"A few days ago I chanced to open an old volume on the shelf of a second hand bookstore, and the first lines I read interested me so much that I bought the book. It was the autobiography of an old clergyman, a famous biblical scholar of the nineteenth century. He was born in Ireland. In the story of his boyhood he gave an account of the first school he attended, and this was the passage which attracted my attention when I opened the book:

"There were no vacations; school kept all the year round. It opened at 7 o'clock in the morning and continued until 6 in the evening, with an intermission at noon of uncertain length, generally the time required for the schoolmaster to eat the lunch he had in his pocket, and which usually consisted of a dried herring, a cold boiled potato and a slice of bread. After his lunch the master smoked a pipe, and when it was finished called in the boys to their books. Sometimes, however, the old gentleman fell asleep over his pipe and the days when he did so were red letter days for the boys, though they didn't dare to go far from the schoolhouse, knowing that the old man might wake up at any moment and that a thrashing waited for the boy

last in. But everybody then believed in thrashing. There was an idea that boys wouldn't grow without it, and the old man's rattan was always in evidence. The writer was a good boy, or at least he thought he was, but he remembers being thrashed four times in one day, while others fared much worse. Reading, writing and figuring constituted the sum total of the curriculum at this academy, as the old teacher was fond of calling it, and the master mended all the goosequill pens and wrote all the copies. One reader for two boys was about the average, and one spelling book for each four or five, and the readers and spellers were passed from one to another, for two boys usually put their heads together and studied their lesson at the same time. When the water bucket was empty two boys were dispatched to a nearby well for another supply. The tuition fee was a sod of turf for the master's fire, and when the boys could not bring one a day, two a week were accepted. There was, in addition, some small provision made by the district for the schoolmaster, so that, while the schoolboys supplied the turf for his fire and he was not too proud to carry it home on his back, the district kept him from starvation. But the school was about as good as any of that time, and the scholars probably learned as much in the old stone cabin where the autobiographer took his first lessons as in any country school in England or Scotland."