JOSEF BAUDIŠ

CZECH FOLK TALES

Josef Baudiš

Czech Folk Tales

Baudiš J.

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Содержание

PREFACE 5
INTRODUCTION 6
THE TWELVE MONTHS 8
VÍŤAZKO 12
BOOTS, CLOAK, AND RING 18
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 19

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PREFACE

The present collection has been selected from the following sources: —

Josef Kubín, Povídky kladské, i., ii. (in "Národopisný věstník československý").

V. Vondrák, Několik pohádek z Dubu u Vodňan (S. Bohemia), in "Český Lid," xiii.

V. Tille, Povídky sebrané na Valašsku (S. Moravia). "Národopisný sborník československý," Svazek vii. Prague, 1901.

Elpl, Řada pohádek a pověstí nasbíraných v Líšni u Brna (Moravia).

B. M. Kulda, Moravské národní pohádky a pověsti, i. (Prague, 1874). From Moravia.

The first two stories ("Twelve Months," "Víťazko") have been retold by the novelist Božena Němcová (from the Slovak).

My translation could not be, of course, a literal one, because many phrases in the original might seem strange to the English reader's ear.

Finally, I wish to express my thanks to Miss Eleanor Hull and Mr. Robin Flower for revising my English.

JOSEF BAUDIŠ.
London, October 1917.

INTRODUCTION

The present collection is intended to exemplify the spirit of the Czech race. It may perhaps be objected that folk-tale themes are part of a common stock belonging to all European races, and even to many primitive peoples: but though this is perfectly true, it is also no less certain that the spirit of the nation manifests itself in the manner of their telling. The selection has been made from all sorts of folk tales, artistic and primitive alike; and yet two things are common to all of them: the moral tendency and a sense of humour. By this I do not mean morality in the vulgar sense of retribution for evil, or of filial devotion, or the sentimental insistence upon "every one living happily ever afterwards," and above all upon Jack marrying his Molly. I mean that higher sort of morality which was the mainspring of Protestantism. It is often supposed that Protestantism is very unfavourable to the development and preservation of folk tales; but those of Bohemia are certainly an exception to this rule. The Czech nation was the first to adopt the Protestant faith, and even to-day is still Protestant at heart, though the Habsburgs forced it back into the Catholic fold.

The Czechs, then, have preserved their love for folk tales, adapting them to the higher morality and to the national sentiment, and discarding many of their supernatural features, or where the supernatural was allowed to remain for a moment, reverting very soon to the strict limits of probability. It is the very same method which, for example, Mr. Wells employs in some of his novels. That the Slav nations have a certain tendency to lay stress upon the ethical side in their folk tales has already been pointed out by the Czech poet Erben, whose tales have been translated into English in Wratislaw's Collection.

As for their humour, the Czechs have a natural tendency to satire. The best works in Old Czech literature are satires, and in modern times one of the most brilliant of Czech politicians, Karel Havliček, was also the greatest Czech satirist. This spirit may also be seen in the present collection; but in every case the story-teller, instead of assuming the attitude of the morality preacher or of indulging in theatrical invective against the wickedness of the times, rests content with a good-humoured gibe at the folly of the world, at the frailty of his fellow-men, and, it may be, at his own.

These two traits are inherent in the nature of the Czech people; and those who know their love of such tales and of the literature which has grown out of them, can realize their search for a haven of refuge from the cruel present and their fond dream-pictures of a land where all was good, where at last everything was bound to end well, where truth and justice at last had conquered. Alas! to the victims of Habsburg rule and Austrian bayonets the bare possibility seemed utterly excluded. And yet why should they not dream of such a land? *Amo quia absurdum!* But at the very moment their humorous *ego* could not suppress a sneer. Yes, even in that wonderland which their fancy painted are foolish kings, ever prone to break their word: even there people are bad and stupid! But our tale says that the bad were vanquished and the foolish put to shame: let, then, the tale be told! And even as he tells it, his heart nurses the inward hope that the foreign tyrants who oppress him may one day be vanquished and annihilated.

That such were the wishes of the Czech people, the Great War has shown. They have proved by their deeds their love of freedom; and to-day Czechs are fighting bravely in every Allied army and in their own national units formed in

Russia. May their Austrian oppressors be brought to the ground, and may Bohemia regain the freedom for which she has longed for three centuries!

THE TWELVE MONTHS

Once upon a time there lived a mother who had two daughters. One was her own child, the other her stepdaughter. She was very fond of her own daughter, but she would not so much as look at her stepdaughter. The only reason was that Maruša, the stepdaughter, was prettier than her own daughter, Holena. The gentle-hearted Maruša did not know how beautiful she was, and so she could never make out why her mother was so cross with her whenever she looked at her. She had to do all the housework, tidying up the cottage, cooking, washing, and sewing, and then she had to take the hay to the cow and look after her. She did all this work alone, while Holena spent the time adorning herself and lazing about. But Maruša liked work, for she was a patient girl, and when her mother scolded and rated her, she bore it like a lamb. It was no good, however, for they grew crueller and crueller every day, only because Maruša was growing prettier and Holena uglier every day.

At last the mother thought: "Why should I keep a pretty stepdaughter in my house? When the lads come courting here, they will fall in love with Maruša and they won't look at Holena."

From that moment the stepmother and her daughter were constantly scheming how to get rid of poor Maruša. They starved her and they beat her. But she bore it all, and in spite of all she kept on growing prettier every day. They invented torments that the cruellest of men would never have thought of.

One day – it was in the middle of January – Holena felt a longing for the scent of violets.

"Go, Maruša, and get me some violets from the forest; I want to wear them at my waist and to smell them," she said to her sister.

"Great heavens! sister. What a strange notion! Who ever heard of violets growing under the snow?" said poor Maruša.

"You wretched tatterdemalion! how dare you argue when I tell you to do something? Off you go at once, and if you don't bring me violets from the forest I'll kill you!" said Holena threateningly.

The stepmother caught hold of Maruša, turned her out of the door, and slammed it to after her. She went into the forest weeping bitterly. The snow lay deep, and there wasn't a human footprint to be seen. Maruša wandered about for a long time, tortured by hunger and trembling with cold. She begged God to take her from the world.

At last she saw a light in the distance. She went towards the glow, and came at last to the top of a mountain. A big fire was burning there, and round the fire were twelve stones with twelve men sitting on them. Three of them had snow-white beards, three were not so old, and three were still younger. The three youngest were the handsomest of them all. They were not speaking, but all sitting silent. These twelve men were the twelve months. Great January sat highest of all; his hair and beard were as white as snow, and in his hand he held a club.

Maruša was frightened. She stood still for a time in terror, but, growing bolder, she went up to them and said: "Please, kind sirs, let me warm my hands at your fire. I am trembling with the cold."

Great January nodded, and asked her: "Why have you come here, my dear little girl? What are you looking for?"

"I am looking for violets," answered Maruša.

"This is no time to be looking for violets, for everything is covered with snow," answered Great January.

"Yes, I know; but my sister Holena and my stepmother said that I must bring them some violets from the forest. If I don't bring them, they'll kill me. Tell me, fathers, please tell me where I can find them."

Great January stood up and went to one of the younger months – it was March – and, giving him the club, he said: "Brother, take the high seat."

March took the high seat upon the stone and waved the club over the fire. The fire blazed up, the snow began to melt, the trees began to bud, and the ground under the young beech-trees was at once covered with grass and the crimson daisy buds began to peep through the grass. It was springtime. Under the bushes the violets were blooming among their little leaves, and before Maruša had time to think, so many of them had sprung up that they looked like a blue cloth spread out on the ground.

"Pick them quickly, Maruša!" commanded March.

Maruša picked them joyfully till she had a big bunch. Then she thanked the months with all her heart and scampered merrily home.

Holena and the stepmother wondered when they saw Maruša bringing the violets. They opened the door to her, and the scent of violets filled all the cottage.

"Where did you get them?" asked Holena sulkily.

"They are growing under the bushes in a forest on the high mountains."

Holena put them in her waistband. She let her mother smell them, but she did not say to her sister: "Smell them."

Another day she was lolling near the stove, and now she longed for some strawberries. So she called to her sister and said: "Go, Maruša, and get me some strawberries from the forest."

"Alas! dear sister, where could I find any strawberries? Who ever heard of strawberries growing under the snow?" said Maruša.

"You wretched little tatterdemalion, how dare you argue when I tell you to do a thing? Go at once and get me the strawberries, or I'll kill you!"

The stepmother caught hold of Maruša and pushed her out of the door and shut it after her. Maruša went to the forest weeping bitterly. The snow was lying deep, and there wasn't a human footprint to be seen anywhere. She wandered about for a long time, tortured by hunger and trembling with cold. At last she saw the light she had seen the other day. Overjoyed, she went towards it. She came to the great fire with the twelve months sitting round it.

"Please, kind sirs, let me warm my hands at the fire. I am trembling with cold."

Great January nodded, and asked her: "Why have you come again, and what are you looking for here?"

"I am looking for strawberries."

"But it is winter now, and strawberries don't grow on the snow," said January.

"Yes, I know," said Maruša sadly; "but my sister Holena and my stepmother bade me bring them some strawberries, and if I don't bring them, they will kill me. Tell me, fathers, tell me, please, where I can find them."

Great January arose. He went over to the month sitting opposite to him – it was June – and handed the club to him, saying: "Brother, take the high seat."

June took the high seat upon the stone and swung the club over the fire. The fire shot up, and its heat melted the snow in a moment. The ground was all green, the trees were covered with leaves, the birds began to sing, and the forest was filled with all kinds of flowers. It was summer. The ground under the bushes was covered with white starlets, the starry blossoms were turning into strawberries every minute. They ripened at once, and before Maruša had time to think, there were so many of them that it looked as though blood had been sprinkled on the ground.

"Pick them at once, Maruša!" commanded June.

Maruša picked them joyfully till she had filled her apron full. Then she thanked the months with all her heart and scampered merrily home. Holena and the stepmother wondered when they saw Maruša bringing the strawberries. Her apron was full of them. They ran to open the door for her, and the scent of the strawberries filled the whole cottage.

"Where did you pick them?" asked Holena sulkily.

"There are plenty of them growing under the young beech-trees in the forest on the high mountains."

Holena took the strawberries, and went on eating them till she could eat no more. So did the stepmother too, but they didn't say to Maruša: "Here is one for you."

When Holena had enjoyed the strawberries, she grew greedy for other dainties, and so on the third day she longed for some red apples.

"Maruša, go into the forest and get me some red apples," she said to her sister.

"Alas! sister dear, how am I to get apples for you in winter?" protested Maruša.

"You wretched little tatterdemalion, how dare you argue when I tell you to do a thing? Go to the forest at once, and if you don't bring me the apples I will kill you!" threatened Holena.

The stepmother caught hold of Maruša and pushed her out of the door and shut it after her. Maruša went to the forest weeping bitterly. The snow was lying deep; there wasn't a human footprint to be seen anywhere. But she didn't wander about this time. She ran straight to the top of the mountain where the big fire was burning. The twelve months were sitting round the fire; yes, there they certainly were, and Great January was sitting on the high seat.

"Please, kind sirs, let me warm my hands at the fire. I am trembling with cold."

Great January nodded, and asked her: "Why have you come here, and what are you looking for?"

"I am looking for red apples."

"It is winter now, and red apples don't grow in winter," answered January.

"Yes, I know," said Maruša sadly; "but my sister and my stepmother, too, bade me bring them some red apples from the forest. If I don't bring them, they will kill me. Tell me, father, tell me, please, where I could find them."

Great January rose up. He went over to one of the older months – it was September. He handed the club to him and said: "Brother, take the high seat."

Month September took the high seat upon the stone and swung the club over the fire. The fire began to burn with a red flame, the snow began to melt. But the trees were not covered with leaves; the leaves were wavering down one after the other, and the cold wind was driving them to and fro over the yellowing ground. This time Maruša did not see so many flowers. Only red pinks were blooming on the hillside, and meadow saffrons were flowering in the valley. High fern and thick ivy were growing under the young beech-trees. But Maruša was only looking for red apples, and at last she saw an apple-tree with red apples hanging high among its branches.

"Shake the tree at once, Maruša!" commanded the month.

Right gladly Maruša shook the tree, and one apple fell down. She shook it a second time, and another apple fell down.

"Now, Maruša, run home quickly!" shouted the month.

Maruša obeyed at once. She picked up the apples, thanked the months with all her heart, and ran merrily home.

Holena and the stepmother wondered when they saw Maruša bringing the apples. They ran to open the door for her, and she gave them two apples.

"Where did you get them?" asked Holena.

"There are plenty of them in the forest on the high mountain."

"And why didn't you bring more? Or did you eat them on the way home?" said Holena harshly.

"Alas! sister dear, I didn't eat a single one. But when I had shaken the tree once, one apple fell down, and when I shook it a second time, another apple fell down, and they wouldn't let me shake it again. They shouted to me to go straight home," protested Maruša.

Holena began to curse her: "May you be struck to death by lightning!" and she was going to beat her.

Maruša began to cry bitterly, and she prayed to God to take her to Himself, or she would be killed by her wicked sister and her stepmother. She ran away into the kitchen.

Greedy Holena stopped cursing and began to eat the apple. It tasted so delicious that she told her mother she had never tasted anything so nice in all her life. The stepmother liked it too. When they had finished, they wanted some more.

"Mother, give me my fur coat. I'll go to the forest myself. That ragged little wretch would eat them all up again on her way home. I'll find the place all right, and I'll shake them all down, however they shout at me."

Her mother tried to dissuade her, but it was no good. She took her fur coat, wrapped a cloth round her head, and off she went to the forest. Her mother stood on the threshold, watching to see how Holena would manage to walk in the wintry weather.

The snow lay deep, and there wasn't a human footprint to be seen anywhere. Holena wandered about for a long time, but the desire of the sweet apple kept driving her on. At last she saw a light in the distance. She went towards it, and climbed to the top of the mountain where the big fire was burning, and round the fire on twelve stones the twelve months were sitting. She was terrified at first, but she soon recovered. She stepped up to the fire and stretched out her hands to warm them, but she didn't say as much as "By your leave" to the twelve months; no, she didn't say a single word to them.

"Why have you come here, and what are you looking for?" asked Great January crossly.

"Why do you want to know, you old fool? It's no business of yours," replied Holena angrily, and she turned away from the fire and went into the forest.

Great January frowned and swung the club over his head. The sky grew dark in a moment, the fire burned low, the snow began to fall as thick as if the feathers had been shaken out of a down quilt, and an icy wind began to blow through the forest. Holena couldn't see one step in front of her; she lost her way altogether, and several times she fell into snowdrifts. Then her limbs grew weak and began slowly to stiffen. The snow kept on falling and the icy wind blew more icily than ever. Holena began to curse Maruša and the Lord God. Her limbs began to freeze, despite her fur coat.

Her mother was waiting for Holena; she kept on looking out for her, first at the window, then outside the door, but all in vain.

"Does she like the apples so much that she can't leave them, or what is the matter? I must see for myself where she is," decided the stepmother at last. So she put on her fur coat, she wrapped a shawl round her head, and went out to look for Holena. The snow was lying deep; there wasn't a human footprint to be seen; the snow fell fast, and the icy wind was blowing through the forest.

Maruša had cooked the dinner, she had seen to the cow, and yet Holena and her mother did not come back. "Where are they staying so long?" thought Maruša, as she sat down to work at the distaff. The spindle was full already and it was quite dark in the room, and yet Holena and the stepmother had not come back.

"Alas, Lord! what has come to them?" cried Maruša, peering anxiously through the window. The sky was bright and the earth was all glittering, but there wasn't a human soul to be seen… Sadly she shut the window; she crossed herself, and prayed for her sister and her mother… In the morning she waited with breakfast, she waited with dinner; but however much she waited, it was no good. Neither her mother nor her sister ever came back. Both of them were frozen to death in the forest.

So good Maruša inherited the cottage, a piece of ploughland and the cow. She married a kind husband, and they both lived happily ever after.

VÍŤAZKO

Once there was a mother, and, being a mother, she had a son. She suckled him for twice seven years. After that she took him into a forest and told him to pull up a fir-tree, roots and all. But the lad could not pull up the fir-tree.

"You are not strong enough yet," said the mother. So she suckled him for another seven years. When she had suckled him for thrice seven years, she took him to the forest again and told him to pull up a beech-tree, roots and all. He seized hold of the beech and pulled it up.

"Now you are strong enough. So you are Victor (Víťazko). Now you can provide for me."

"Yes, I will. Only tell me what I can do for you."

"You must get me a good house first, and then you can take me there," said the mother, and she went home.

Víťazko took the beech-tree which he had pulled up, and, carrying it in his hand like a club, he started in search of a house for his mother. Following the wind, he walked by old roads and paths until he came to a castle. This castle was inhabited by griffins.

When Víťazko reached the castle, the griffins would not let him in. But he did not wait long for their permission: he smashed the gate and went into the castle and killed the griffins; their bodies he flung over the wall, and then he went for a walk through the castle. He was pleased with everything he saw. The rooms were nice, nine in number, but the tenth was closed. When he had gone through the nine he went into the tenth, and there he saw a griffin chained to the wall by three iron bands.

"What are you doing here?" asked Víťazko.

"I am sitting here, as you see. My brothers have chained me here. Untie my bonds and I will give you a splendid reward."

"You must be a wicked old rascal if your own brothers tied you there. I won't unfasten your bonds either," said Víťazko.

So he slammed the door, and went off to fetch his mother to the castle. When he had brought her there, he showed her everything, but he did not open the tenth room, and he forbade her to enter that room, for otherwise there would be trouble. As soon as Víťazko left the house, the mother could not rest, and she kept on walking near the door of that tenth room, till at last she went in, and, of course, she found the griffin there.

"What are you doing here, and who are you?"

"I am a griffin. My own brothers chained me here. They would have unfastened my bonds again, but your son has killed them all. Untie my bonds and I will reward you, and, if you like, I will marry you," said the griffin.

"And what would Víťazko say?" answered the mother.

"What could he say? We will put him out of the world, and you will be your own mistress."

The mother hesitated long enough, but at last she consented, and then she asked the griffin how she could untie his bonds.

"Go into the cellar and fetch me a cup of wine from the last cask."

The mother went into the cellar and brought him a glass of wine from the last cask. As soon as he had drained the first cup, crash! the first chain fell down. The mother brought him another cup and – well! the second chain snapped. So he begged her to bring him a third cup, and when she brought him the third cup the third chain broke too and the griffin was free again.

"But what am I to tell my son when he comes back?" said the mother anxiously.

"Oh! you must feign illness, and when he asks you what will save you, say that nothing can save you but a suckling of the earth sow. When he goes to get it, the sow will tear him in pieces."

Well (but not particularly well!), when Víťazko returned from the chase, bringing a buck for his mother, she groaned and complained: “Alas! my dear son, your toil has been in vain. It is no use your bringing me this good food; I cannot eat it, for I am deadly sick.”

“Alas! mother, you must not die. Only tell me what would cure you, and I will bring it for you, even though it were from hell,” cried the good Víťazko, for he loved his mother well.

“I can only be cured if I get the suckling of the earth sow.”

Víťazko did not wait; he took his beech-tree and set off in quest of the earth sow. He wandered through the country, poor soul! for he did not know where to go, till at last he came to a tower, and there he found Holy Sunday.

“Where are you going?” asked Holy Sunday.

“I am going to the earth sow to get one of her sucklings. My mother is ill, but this will cure her.”

“My dear boy, it will be a hard task for you to get that piglet. However, I will help you. Only you must follow my advice exactly.”

Víťazko promised that he would follow it exactly. So first she gave him a long, sharp spit, and then she said:

“Go to the stable and take my horse. He will bring you to the place where the earth sow lies buried in the earth. When you have come there you must prick one of her pigs. The pig will squeak, and the sow, hearing it, will start up and run round the earth in a moment. But she won’t see you or anybody else, and so she will tell the pigs that if they squeak again she will tear them to pieces. Then she will lie down to sleep, and then you must spit the pig and run quickly away. The pig will be afraid to squeak, the sow won’t stir, and my horse will carry you away.”

Víťazko promised to carry out her directions exactly. He took the spit, mounted the magic horse, and it brought him swiftly to the place – far, very far it was – where the earth sow lay buried in the earth. Víťazko pricked one of the pigs, and it squeaked terribly. The sow started wildly up and ran round the earth in one moment. But the magic horse did not move, so the sow did not see him or anybody else, and she said angrily to the pigs:

“If one of you squeaks, I will tear you all to pieces at once.”

Having said this, she buried herself again.

At once Víťazko spitted the pig. It kept quiet and didn’t squeak at all, and the magic horse began to fly, and it wasn’t long till they were home again.

“Well, Víťazko, how did it go?” asked Holy Sunday.

“Well, it went just as you said, and here is the pig.”

“Very well. Take it to your mother.”

Víťazko gave her back the spit; he led the magic horse back to its stall, thanked Holy Sunday, and, hanging the pig from the beech-tree, made haste to go home to his mother.

The mother and the griffin were feasting; they did not expect Víťazko, and here he was. They ran away and discussed what they should do with him.

“When he has given you the pig, you must still pretend to be ill,” said the griffin; “and when he asks you what will save you, tell him that only the Water of Life and the Water of Death can cure you. If he goes in quest of that, he is bound to perish.”

Víťazko came running to the castle full of joy. He gave the pig to his mother, but she still went on groaning and complaining that she was going to die, and that the pig would not cure her.

“Alas! mother, don’t die, but tell me what will cure you, so that I may bring it for you at once,” said Víťazko anxiously.

“Ah! my dear son, I can only be cured by the Water of Life and the Water of Death, and where would you get that?” sighed the mother.

Víťazko did not waste time thinking about it. He grasped his beech, and off he went to Holy Sunday.

“Where are you going, Víťazko?” asked Holy Sunday.

"I am coming to you to ask where I could find the Water of Life and the Water of Death, for my mother is still ill, and only those will cure her."

"It will be a hard task for you to get them, but I will help you as well as I can. Here are two jugs; mount my magic horse, and he will bring you to two banks. Beneath those two banks spring forth the Water of Life and the Water of Death. The right bank opens at noon, and from beneath it gushes the Water of Life. The left bank opens at midnight, and beneath it is the Water of Death. As soon as the bank opens, run up to it and fill your jug with water, and so you must do in the other case too. When you have the water, come back. Follow my instructions carefully."

Saying this, she gave him two jugs. He took them and mounted the magic horse, and in a moment they were gone like the wind. The two banks were in a far distant land, and thither the magic horse brought Víťazko. At noon he raised the right bank and the Water of Life gushed forth, then, crash! the bank fell down again, and it was a wonder that it did not take Víťazko's heels off. Quickly Víťazko mounted the magic horse and made haste for the left bank. There they waited till midnight. When the bank lifted, beneath it was the Water of Death. He hurried to it and filled the jug, and, crash! down fell the bank again; and it was a marvel it didn't take Víťazko's hand off. Quickly he mounted the magic horse, the horse flew off, and soon they were home again.

"Well, Víťazko, how have you fared?" asked Holy Sunday.

"Oh! everything went all right, Holy Sunday; and here is the water," said Víťazko, giving her the water.

Holy Sunday kept the water, and gave him two jugs full of spring water and told him to take them to his mother. Víťazko thanked her and went home.

The mother and the griffin were carousing as before, for they did not expect that he would ever return – and there he was just outside. They were terribly frightened, and considered how they could get rid of him.

"You must pretend to be sick still, and tell him you won't recover unless you get the Pelican bird, and he will perish on the quest," said the griffin.

Víťazko brought the water joyfully, but the mother was still groaning and complaining; even that was no good, she was sure she was going to die.

"Ah! don't die, sweet mother. Tell me what will cure you, and I shall be glad to get it all for you," said the good lad.

"There is no help for me unless I can see the Pelican bird. Where could you get it for me?" groaned the mother.

Víťazko took his beech again, and it was no trouble to him to go to Holy Sunday once more.

"Where are you going?" asked Holy Sunday.

"Well, I am coming to you to ask for advice. Mother is still sick; the water did not cure her either, and she says she must see the Pelican bird. And where is the Pelican bird?"

"My dear child, it would be very hard for you to get the Pelican bird. But I will help you all I can. The Pelican bird is a gigantic bird. His neck is very long, and, whenever he shakes his wings, he raises such a wind that the trees begin to shake. Here is a gun; mount my magic horse, and he will bring you to the place where the Pelican bird lives. But be careful. Point the gun against the wind from whatever quarter it blows, and when the hammer falls, ram the gun with the ramrod and come quickly back. You must not look into the gun."

Víťazko took the gun and mounted the magic horse, and the horse spread his wings, and they were flying through the air a long way until they came to a vast desert, where dwelt the Pelican bird. There the magic horse stopped. Now Víťazko perceived that the wind was blowing strongly on his left cheek, so he pointed the gun in that direction, and, clap! the hammer fell. Víťazko rammed the gun quickly with the ramrod and flung it over his shoulder, and the horse started flying, and very soon they were home again.

"Well, how did things go?"

"I don't know whether they went well or ill, but I did what you commanded," answered Víťazko, handing down the gun to Holy Sunday.

"All right. You did quite right. Here he is!" she said. And then she took out the Pelican bird. Then she gave Víťazko another gun to shoot an eagle with. He went out into the forest, and returned before long with an eagle. She gave him this eagle for his mother, in place of the Pelican bird.

The griffin and the mother were making merry again, hoping that Víťazko would never come back, but he was already near. They were terrified, and began to consider what new task they were to set him.

"You must pretend to be sick still, and tell him nothing can do you any good but the golden apples from the garden of the Griffin. If he goes there the Griffin will tear him in pieces, for he is enraged because Víťazko has killed his brothers."

Joyfully Víťazko gave the bird to his mother, but she still kept on groaning; nothing was any good, only the golden apples from the garden of the Griffin could save her.

"You shall have them," said Víťazko, and without resting, he started again and came to Holy Sunday.

"Where are you going, Víťazko?"

"Well," he replied, "not even that did her any good. Mother is still sick, for only the golden apples from the garden of the Griffin will cure her."

"Well, you'll have to fight, my boy," said Holy Sunday; "but, even though you were stronger than you are, it would be a bad look-out for you. Still, I will help you all I can. Here is a ring for you; put it on your finger, and, when you are in need, think of me, turn the ring round on your finger, and you will have the strength of a hundred men. Now mount the magic horse; he will take you there."

Víťazko thanked her heartily, mounted the magic horse, and was carried by him a far journey, till they came to a garden hedged about by a high rampart. Had it not been for the magic horse Víťazko could never have got into the garden, but the horse flew like a bird over the rampart. Víťazko leapt down from the horse, and instantly began to look for a tree with golden apples. A beautiful girl met him and asked him what he was looking for. Víťazko said that he was looking for golden apples to cure his sick mother, and begged her to tell him where to look for them.

"The apple-tree is under my charge, and I must not give the apples to anybody, or the Griffin would tear me to pieces. I am a king's daughter, and the Griffin carried me off and brought me to this garden and put me in charge of the apples. Go back, good youth, go back, for the Griffin is very strong, and, if he sees you, he will kill you like a fly," said the girl.

But Víťazko was not to be turned back, and he hastened on into the garden. So the princess pulled off a priceless ring and handed it to Víťazko, saying: "Take this ring, and when you think of me and turn this ring round on your finger, you will have the strength of a hundred men, otherwise you could not gain the victory over the Griffin."

Víťazko took the ring and put it on his finger. He thanked her and went off to the centre of the garden. In the middle of the garden stood an apple-tree full of golden apples, and underneath it a horrible Griffin was lying.

"What do you want here, murderer of my brothers?" shouted the Griffin.

"I have come to get some apples from this tree," answered Víťazko undauntedly.

"You shall not have any of the apples unless you wrestle with me," exclaimed the Griffin angrily.

"I will if you like. Come on!" said Víťazko, and he turned the ring on his right hand and thought of Holy Sunday. He set his legs wide apart and they began to wrestle. In the first round the Griffin moved Víťazko a little, but Víťazko drove him into the ground above his ankles. Just at this moment they heard a swirl of wings above them, and a black raven shouted to them:

"Which am I to help, the Griffin or Víťazko?"

"Help me," said the Griffin.

"And what will you give me?"

"I will give you gold and silver as much as you like."

"Help me," cried Víťazko, "and I will give you all those horses grazing on yonder meadow."

"I will help you, then," said the raven. "But how am I to help you?"

"Cool me when I grow hot," said Víťazko. He felt hot indeed, for the Griffin was breathing out fire against him. So they went on wrestling. The Griffin seized Víťazko and drove him into the ground up to his ankles. Víťazko turned the ring, and again he thought of Holy Sunday. He put his arms round the Griffin's waist and drove him down into the ground above his knees. The black raven dipped his wings in a spring, and then he alighted on Víťazko's head and sprinkled cool drops over Víťazko's hot cheeks, and thus he cooled him. Then Víťazko turned the other ring and thought of the beautiful maiden, and they began wrestling again. So the Griffin drove Víťazko into the ground up to his ankles, but Víťazko took hold of him and drove him into the ground up to his shoulders, and quickly he seized his sword, the gift of Holy Sunday, and cut the Griffin's head off.

The princess came to him at once and plucked the golden apples for him. She thanked him too for delivering her, and said that she liked him well and she would marry him.

"I like you well too," confessed Víťazko, "and, if I could, I would go with you at once. But if you really love me, and if you will consent to wait a year for me, I will come to you then."

The princess pledged herself by shaking hands with him, and she said she would wait a year for him. And so they said good-bye to each other. Víťazko mounted his horse, cleared the rampart at a leap, killed the horses on the meadow for the black raven, and hastened home.

"Well, how have you fared?" asked Holy Sunday.

"Very well, but if it hadn't been for a ring which was given me by a princess I should have fared very badly," answered Víťazko, and he told her everything. She told him to go home with the golden apples and to take the magic horse with him too. Víťazko obeyed.

The griffin and the mother were carousing again. They were greatly startled when Víťazko came riding home; they had never expected that he would return alive even from the garden of the Griffin. The mother asked what she should do; but the griffin had no more shifts; he made off to the tenth room at once and hid himself there. When Víťazko had given the apples to his mother, she pretended that the mere sight of them had cured her, and, rising from the bed, she put the finest of food before Víťazko and then began to caress him as she used to do sometimes when he was a tiny baby. Víťazko was delighted to see his mother in good health again. The mother took a strong cotton cord and said jestingly: "Lie down, dear son; I will wind this cord round you as I used to wind it round your father, to see if you are as strong as he was, and if you can break it."

Víťazko smiled and laid himself down, and allowed his mother to wind the cord round him. When she had finished, he stretched his limbs and snapt the cord in pieces.

"You are strong," she said. "But wait! I will wind this thin silk cord round you to see if you can break it also."

So she did. Víťazko tried to stretch his limbs, but the more he stretched, the deeper the cord cut into him. So he was helpless, and had to lie like a baby in its swaddling-clothes. Now the griffin hastened to cut his head off; he hewed the body in pieces and hung the heart from the ceiling. The mother packed the body in a cloth, and put the bundle on the back of the magic horse, which was waiting in the courtyard, saying:

"You carried him alive, so you can carry him dead too, wherever you like."

The horse did not wait, but flew off, and soon they reached home.

Holy Sunday had been expecting him, for she knew what would probably happen to him. Without delay she rubbed the body with the Water of Death, then she put it together and poured the Water of Life over it. Víťazko yawned, and rose to his feet alive and well. "Well, I have had a long sleep," he said to himself.

"You would have been sleeping till doomsday if I hadn't awakened you. Well, how do you feel now?"

"Oh! I am all right! Only, it's funny: it's as though I had not got any heart."

"That is true; you haven't got a heart," answered Holy Sunday.

"Where can it be, then?"

"Where else should it be, but in the castle, hanging from the crossbeam?" said Holy Sunday, and she told him all that had happened to him.

But Víťazko could not be angry, neither could he weep, for he had no heart. So he had to go and get it. Holy Sunday gave him a fiddle and sent him to the castle. He was to play on the fiddle, and, as a reward, was to ask for the heart, and, when he got it, he must return at once to Holy Sunday – those were her orders.

Víťazko went to the castle, and when he saw that his mother was looking out of the window, he began playing beautifully. The mother was delighted with the music below, so she called the old fiddler (for Holy Sunday had put that shape upon him) into the castle and asked him to play. He played, and the mother danced with the griffin; they danced hard, and did not stop until they were tired. Then the mother gave the fiddler meat and drink, and she offered him gold, but he would not take it.

"What could I do with all that money? I am too old for it," he answered.

"Well, what am I to give you, then? It is for you to ask," said the mother.

"What are you to give me?" said he, looking round the room. "Oh! give me that heart, hanging there from the crossbeam!"

"If you like that, we can give it to you," said the griffin, and the mother took it down and gave it to Víťazko. He thanked them for it, and hastened from the castle to Holy Sunday.

"It is lucky that we have got it again," said Holy Sunday; and she took the heart in her hands, washed it first in the Water of Death and afterwards in the Water of Life, and then she put it in the bill of the Pelican bird. The bird stretched out his long neck and replaced the heart in Víťazko's breast. At once Víťazko felt it joyfully leaping. And for this service Holy Sunday gave the Pelican bird his freedom again.

And now she said to Víťazko: "You must go once more to the castle and deal out justice. Take the form of a pigeon and, when you think of me, you will regain your own shape."

No sooner had she said this than Víťazko was changed into a pigeon, and away he flew to the castle. The mother and the griffin were caressing each other when suddenly a pigeon alighted on the window-sill. As soon as the mother saw the pigeon she sent the griffin to shoot him, but before the griffin could get hold of his crossbow the pigeon flew down into the hall, took human form, seized the sword and cut the griffin's head off at a stroke.

"And what am I to do with thee, thou good-for-nothing mother?" he said, turning to his mother, who in terror fell at his feet begging for mercy. "Do not be afraid – I will not do you any harm. Let God judge between us." He took her hand and led her to the castle yard, unsheathed his sword, and said: "Behold, mother! I will throw this sword into the air. If I am guilty, it will strike me; if you are guilty, it is you it will strike. Let God decide."

The sword whirled through the air, it darted past Víťazko's head, and smote straight into his mother's heart.

Víťazko lamented over her and buried her. Then he returned to Holy Sunday and thanked her well for all her kindness. He girded on the sword, took his beech-tree in his hand, and went to his beautiful princess. He found her with her royal father, who had tried to make her marry various kings and princes, but she would marry none of them. She would wait a year, she said. The year was not yet over when one day Víťazko arrived in the royal palace to ask for the maiden's hand.

"This is my betrothed," exclaimed the princess joyfully, as soon as she saw him, and she went straight up to him.

A splendid feast was made ready, the father gave his kingdom into their hands, and that is the end of this story.

BOOTS, CLOAK, AND RING

Once there was a blacksmith, and he had only one son, John by name. They sent him to school, but fortune changed and his parents fell into poverty, so they were forced to take their son home again. John had already passed through the higher standard, but he could not support his parents. So one day he said:

"Father and mother! What can I do at home? There is no business here, so I can't be a clerk, and I am too old now to learn a trade. So I will go out into the world and find myself a job, and, whenever I can, I will send you some money. And when I get a good job, you must sell your cottage and come and live with me."

His father and mother wept, because he wanted to leave them, but they knew that he was right, for there was no chance for him if he stayed at home. So they let him go. They gave him their blessing before he went out into the world. John wept till his heart nearly broke at parting with his aged parents.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.