

FILLMORE PARKER

THE SHOEMAKER'S
APRON: A SECOND
BOOK OF
CZECHOSLOVAK FAIRY
TALES AND FOLK TALES

Parker Fillmore

**The Shoemaker's Apron: A
Second Book of Czechoslovak
Fairy Tales and Folk Tales**

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NOTE

The stories in this volume are all of Czech, Moravian, and Slovak origin, and are to be found in many versions in the books of folk tales collected by Erben, Nemcova, Kulda, Dobsinsky, Rimavsky, Benes-Trebizsky, Miksicek. I got them first by word of mouth and afterwards hunted them out in the old books. My work has been that of retelling rather than translating since in most cases I have put myself in the place of a storyteller who knows several forms of the same story, equally authentic, and from them all fashions a version of his own. It is of course always the same story although told in one form to a group of children and in another form to a group of soldiers. The audience that I hope particularly to interest is the English-speaking child.

Some few of the stories – such as Nemcova's very beautiful *Twelve Months* and Erben's spirited *Zlatovlaska* and to a less degree Nemcova's hero tale, *Vitazko*– are already in such definitive form that it would be profanation to "edit" them. They – especially the first two – have been told once and for all. But the same cannot be said of most of the other stories. Nemcova's renderings are too often diffuse and inconsequential, Kulda's dry, pedantic, and homiletic. Erben, the scholarly old archivist of Prague, seems to me the greatest literary artist of them all. His chief interest in folklore was philological, but he was a poet as well as a scholar and he carried his versions of the old stories from the realm of crude folklore to the realm of art.

A small number of the present tales have appeared in earlier English collections coming, nearly always, by way of German or French translations. In the one case they have been squeezed dry of their Slavic exuberance and in the other somewhat dandified. So I make no apology for offering them afresh.

Variants of most of the tales are, of course, to be found in other countries. Grimm's *The White Snake*, for instance, is a variant of *Zlatovlaska*. My rule of selection has been to take stories that do not have well-known variants in other languages. I have to confess that *The White Snake* is very well known, but here I break my own rule on account of the greater beauty of the Slavic version.

In Grimm there are also to be found variants of *A Gullible World* (*The Shrewd Farmer*), *The Devil's Little Brother-in-Law* (*Bearskin*), *Clever Manka* (*The Peasant's Clever Daughter*), *The Devil's Gifts* (*The Magic Gifts*), *The Candles of Life* (*The Strange Godfather and Godfather Death*), *The Shoemaker's Apron* (*Brother Jolly*). In all these tales the same incidents are presented but with a difference in spirit and in background that instantly marks one variant Teutonic and its fellow Slavic. Moreover, as stories, the German versions of these particular tales are neither as interesting nor as important as the Slavic versions.

Both German and Slavic versions go back, in most cases, to some early common source. Take *Clever Manka*, for instance, and its German variant, *The Farmer's Shrewd Daughter*. *Clever Manka* is very popular among the Czechs and Slovaks and is considered by them especially typical of their own folk wisdom and folk humor. And they are right: it is. But it would be rash to say just how early or how late this story began to be told among the peoples of the earth. The catch at the end appears in a story in the Talmud and at that time it has all the marks of a long and honorable career. The story of the devil marrying a scold, another great favorite with the Slavs, also has its Talmudic parallel in the story of Azrael, the Angel of Death, marrying a woman. The Azrael story contains many of the incidents which are used in different combinations in some half-dozen of the folk tales in the

present collection. And yet when comparative folklore has said all that it has to say about variants and versions the fact remains that every people puts its own mark upon the stories that it retells. The story that, in the Talmud, is told of Azrael is Hebrew. The same story passed on down the centuries from people to people appears finally as *Gentle Dora* or *Katcha and the Devil* or *The Candles of Life* and then it is essentially Slavic in background, humor, and imagination.

Besides its fairy tales and folk tales the present volume contains a cluster of charming little nursery tales and a group of rollicking devil tales. It is intended as a companion volume to my earlier collection, *Czechoslovak Fairy Tales*. Together these two books present in English a selection of tales that are fairly representative of the folk genius of a small but highly gifted branch of the great Slav people.

P. F.

May, 1920.

THE TWELVE MONTHS

THE STORY OF MARUSHKA AND THE WICKED HOLENA

THE TWELVE MONTHS

There was once a woman who had two girls. One was her own daughter, the other a stepchild. Holena, her own daughter, she loved dearly, but she couldn't bear even the sight of Marushka, the stepchild. This was because Marushka was so much prettier than Holena. Marushka, the dear child, didn't know how pretty she was and so she never understood why, whenever she stood beside Holena, the stepmother frowned so crossly.

Mother and daughter made Marushka do all the housework alone. She had to cook and wash and sew and spin and take care of the garden and look after the cow. Holena, on the contrary, spent all her time decking herself out and sitting around like a grand lady.

Marushka never complained. She did all she was told to do and bore patiently their everlasting fault-finding. In spite of all the hard work she did she grew prettier from day to day, and in spite of her lazy life Holena grew uglier.

"This will never do," the stepmother thought to herself. "Soon the boys will come courting and once they see how pretty Marushka is, they'll pay no attention at all to my Holena. We had just better do all we can to get rid of that Marushka as soon as possible."

So they both nagged Marushka all day long. They made her work harder, they beat her, they didn't give her enough to eat, they did everything they could think of to make her ugly and nasty. But all to no avail. Marushka was so good and sweet that, in spite of all their harsh treatment, she kept on growing prettier.

One day in the middle of January Holena took the notion that nothing would do but she must have a bunch of fragrant violets to put in her bodice.

"Marushka!" she ordered sharply. "I want some violets. Go out to the forest and get me some."

"Good heavens, my dear sister!" cried poor Marushka. "What can you be thinking of? Whoever heard of violets growing under the snow in January?"

"What, you lazy little slattern!" Holena shouted. "You dare to argue with me! You go this minute and if you come back without violets I'll kill you!"

The stepmother sided with Holena and, taking Marushka roughly by the shoulder, she pushed her out of the house and slammed the door.

The poor child climbed slowly up the mountain side weeping bitterly. All around the snow lay deep with no track of man or beast in any direction. Marushka wandered on and on, weak with hunger and shaking with cold.

"Dear God in heaven," she prayed, "take me to yourself away from all this suffering."

Suddenly ahead of her she saw a glowing light. She struggled towards it and found at last that it came from a great fire that was burning on the top of the mountain. Around the fire there were twelve stones, one of them much bigger and higher than the rest. Twelve men were seated on the stones. Three of them were very old and white; three were not so old; three were middle-aged; and three were beautiful youths. They did not talk. They sat silent gazing at the fire. They were the Twelve Months.

For a moment Marushka was frightened and hesitated. Then she stepped forward and said, politely:

"Kind sirs, may I warm myself at your fire? I am shaking with cold."

Great January nodded his head and Marushka reached her stiff fingers towards the flames.

"This is no place for you, my child," Great January said. "Why are you here?"

"I'm hunting for violets," Marushka answered.

"Violets? This is no time to look for violets with snow on the ground!"

"I know that, sir, but my sister, Holena, says I must bring her violets from the forest or she'll kill me and my mother says so, too. Please, sir, won't you tell me where I can find some?"

Great January slowly stood up and walked over to the youngest Month. He handed him a long staff and said:

"Here, March, you take the high seat."

So March took the high seat and began waving the staff over the fire. The fire blazed up and instantly the snow all about began to melt. The trees burst into bud; the grass revived; the little pink buds of the daisies appeared; and, lo, it was spring!

While Marushka looked, violets began to peep out from among the leaves and soon it was as if a great blue quilt had been spread on the ground.

"Now, Marushka," March cried, "there are your violets! Pick them quickly!"

Marushka was overjoyed. She stooped down and gathered a great bunch. Then she thanked the Months politely, bade them good-day, and hurried away.

Just imagine Holena and the stepmother's surprise when they saw Marushka coming home through the snow with her hands full of violets. They opened the door and instantly the fragrance of the flowers filled the cottage.

"Where did you get them?" Holena demanded rudely.

"High up in the mountain," Marushka said. "The ground up there is covered with them."

Holena snatched the violets and fastened them in her waist. She kept smelling them herself all afternoon and she let her mother smell them, but she never once said to Marushka:

"Dear sister, won't you take a smell?"

The next day as she was sitting idle in the chimney corner she took the notion that she must have some strawberries to eat. So she called Marushka and said:

"Here you, Marushka, go out to the forest and get me some strawberries."

"Good heavens, my dear sister," Marushka said, "where can I find strawberries this time of year? Whoever heard of strawberries growing under the snow?"

"What, you lazy little slattern!" Holena shouted. "You dare to argue with me! You go this minute and if you come back without strawberries, I'll kill you!"

Again the stepmother sided with Holena and, taking Marushka roughly by the shoulder, she pushed her out of the house and slammed the door.

Again the poor child climbed slowly up the mountain side weeping bitterly. All around the snow lay deep with no track of man or beast in any direction. Marushka wandered on and on, weak with hunger and shaking with cold. At last she saw ahead of her the glow of the same fire that she had seen the day before. With happy heart she hastened to it. The Twelve Months were seated as before with Great January on the high seat.

Marushka bowed politely and said:

"Kind sirs, may I warm myself at your fire? I am shaking with cold."

Great January nodded and Marushka reached her stiff fingers towards the flames.

"But Marushka," Great January said, "why are you here again? What are you hunting now?"

"I'm hunting for strawberries," Marushka answered.

"Strawberries? But, Marushka, my child, it is winter and strawberries do not grow in the snow."

Marushka shook her head sadly.

"I know that, sir, but my sister, Holena, says I must bring her strawberries from the forest or she will kill me and my mother says so, too. Please, sir, won't you tell me where I can find some?"

Great January slowly stood up and walked over to the Month who sat opposite him. He handed him the long staff and said:

"Here, June, you take the high seat."

So June took the high seat and began waving the staff over the fire. The flames blazed high and with the heat the snow all about melted instantly. The earth grew green; the trees decked themselves in leaves; the birds began to sing; flowers bloomed and, lo, it was summer! Presently little starry white blossoms covered the ground under the beech trees. Soon these turned to fruit, first green, then pink, then red, and, with a gasp of delight, Marushka saw that they were ripe strawberries.

"Now, Marushka," June cried, "there are your strawberries! Pick them quickly!"

Marushka picked an apronful of berries. Then she thanked the Months politely, bade them good-bye, and hurried home.

Just imagine again Holena and the stepmother's surprise as they saw Marushka coming through the snow with an apronful of strawberries!

They opened the door and instantly the fragrance of the berries filled the house.

"Where did you get them?" Holena demanded rudely.

"High up in the mountain," Marushka answered, "under the beech trees."

Holena took the strawberries and gobbled and gobbled and gobbled. Then the stepmother ate all she wanted. But it never occurred to either of them to say:

"Here, Marushka, you take one."

The next day when Holena was sitting idle, as usual, in the chimney corner, the notion took her that she must have some red apples. So she called Marushka and said:

"Here you, Marushka, go out to the forest and get me some red apples."

"But, my dear sister," Marushka gasped, "where can I find red apples in winter?"

"What, you lazy little slattern, you dare to argue with me! You go this minute and if you come back without red apples I'll kill you!"

For the third time the stepmother sided with Holena and, taking Marushka roughly by the shoulder, pushed her out of the house and slammed the door.

So again the poor child went out to the forest. All around the snow lay deep with no track of man or beast in any direction. This time Marushka hurried straight to the mountain top. She found the Months still seated about their fire with Great January still on the high stone.

Marushka bowed politely and said:

"Kind sirs, may I warm myself at your fire? I am shaking with cold."

Great January nodded and Marushka reached her stiff fingers towards the flames.

"Why are you here again, Marushka?" Great January asked. "What are you looking for now?"

"Red apples," Marushka answered. "My sister, Holena, says I must bring her some red apples from the forest or she will kill me, and my mother says so, too. Please, sir, won't you tell me where I can find some?"

Great January slowly stood up and walked over to one of the older Months. He handed him the long staff and said:

"Here, September, you take the high seat."

So September took the high seat and began waving the staff over the fire. The fire burned and glowed. Instantly the snow disappeared. The fields about looked brown and yellow and dry. From the trees the leaves dropped one by one and a cool breeze scattered them over the stubble. There were not many flowers, only wild asters on the hillside, and meadow saffron in the valleys, and under the beeches, ferns and ivy. Presently Marushka spied an apple-tree weighted down with ripe fruit.

"There, Marushka," September called, "there are your apples. Gather them quickly."

Marushka reached up and picked one apple. Then she picked another.

"That's enough, Marushka!" September shouted. "Don't pick any more!"

Marushka obeyed at once. Then she thanked the Months politely, bade them good-bye, and hurried home.

Holena and her stepmother were more surprised than ever to see Marushka coming through the snow with red apples in her hands. They let her in and grabbed the apples from her.

"Where did you get them?" Holena demanded.

"High up on the mountain," Marushka answered. "There are plenty of them growing there."

"Plenty of them! And you only brought us two!" Holena cried angrily. "Or did you pick more and eat them yourself on the way home?"

"No, no, my dear sister," Marushka said. "I haven't eaten any, truly I haven't. They wouldn't let me pick any more than two. They shouted to me not to pick any more."

"I wish the lightning had struck you dead!" Holena sneered. "I've a good mind to beat you!"

After a time the greedy Holena left off her scolding to eat one of the apples. It had so delicious a flavor that she declared she had never in all her life tasted anything so good. Her mother said the same. When they had finished both apples they began to wish for more.

"Mother," Holena said, "go get me my fur cloak. I'm going up the mountain myself. No use sending that lazy little slattern again, for she would only eat up all the apples on the way home. I'll find that tree and when I pick the apples I'd like to see anybody stop me!"

The mother begged Holena not to go out in such weather, but Holena was headstrong and would go. She threw her fur cloak over her shoulders and put a shawl on her head and off she went up the mountain side.

All around the snow lay deep with no track of man or beast in any direction. Holena wandered on and on determined to find those wonderful apples. At last she saw a light in the distance and when she reached it she found it was the great fire about which the Twelve Months were seated.

At first she was frightened but, soon growing bold, she elbowed her way through the circle of men and without so much as saying: "By your leave," she put out her hands to the fire. She hadn't even the courtesy to say: "Good-day."

Great January frowned.

"Who are you?" he asked in a deep voice. "And what do you want?"

Holena looked at him rudely.

"You old fool, what business is it of yours who I am or what I want!"

She tossed her head airily and walked off into the forest.

The frown deepened on Great January's brow. Slowly he stood up and waved the staff over his head. The fire died down. Then the sky grew dark; an icy wind blew over the mountain; and the snow began to fall so thickly that it looked as if some one in the sky were emptying a huge feather-bed.

Holena could not see a step before her. She struggled on and on. Now she ran into a tree, now she fell into a snowdrift. In spite of her warm cloak her limbs began to weaken and grow numb. The snow kept on falling, the icy wind kept on blowing.

Did Holena at last begin to feel sorry that she had been so wicked and cruel to Marushka? No, she did not. Instead, the colder she grew, the more bitterly she reviled Marushka in her heart, the more bitterly she reviled even the good God Himself.

Meanwhile at home her mother waited for her and waited. She stood at the window as long as she could, then she opened the door and tried to peer through the storm. She waited and waited, but no Holena came.

"Oh dear, oh dear, what can be keeping her?" she thought to herself. "Does she like those apples so much that she can't leave them, or what is it? I think I'll have to go out myself and find her."

So the stepmother put her fur cloak about her shoulders, threw a shawl over her head, and started out.

She called: "Holena! Holena!" but no one answered.

She struggled on and on up the mountain side. All around the snow lay deep with no track of man or beast in any direction.

"Holena! Holena!"

Still no answer.

The snow fell fast. The icy wind moaned on.

At home Marushka prepared the dinner and looked after the cow. Still neither Holena nor the stepmother returned.

"What can they be doing all this time?" Marushka thought.

She ate her dinner alone and then sat down to work at the distaff.

The spindle filled and daylight faded and still no sign of Holena and her mother.

"Dear God in heaven, what can be keeping them!" Marushka cried anxiously. She peered out the window to see if they were coming.

The storm had spent itself. The wind had died down. The fields gleamed white in the snow and up in the sky the frosty stars were twinkling brightly. But not a living creature was in sight. Marushka knelt down and prayed for her sister and mother.

The next morning she prepared breakfast for them.

"They'll be very cold and hungry," she said to herself.

She waited for them but they didn't come. She cooked dinner for them but still they didn't come. In fact they never came, for they both froze to death on the mountain.

So our good little Marushka inherited the cottage and the garden and the cow. After a time she married a farmer. He made her a good husband and they lived together very happily.

ZLATOVASKA THE GOLDEN-HAIRED

THE STORY OF YIRIK AND THE SNAKE

ZLATOVASKA THE GOLDEN-HAIRED

There was once an old king who was so wise that he was able to understand the speech of all the animals in the world. This is how it happened. An old woman came to him one day bringing him a snake in a basket.

"If you have this snake cooked," she told him, "and eat it as you would a fish, then you will be able to understand the birds of the air, the beasts of the earth, and the fishes of the sea."

The king was delighted. He made the old wise woman a handsome present and at once ordered his cook, a youth named Yirik, to prepare the "fish" for dinner.

"But understand, Yirik," he said severely, "you're to cook this 'fish,' not eat it! You're not to taste one morsel of it! If you do, you forfeit your head!"

Yirik thought this a strange order.

"What kind of a cook am I," he said to himself, "that I'm not to sample my own cooking?"

When he opened the basket and saw the "fish," he was further mystified.

"Um," he murmured, "it looks like a snake to me."

He put it on the fire and, when it was broiled to a turn, he ate a morsel. It had a fine flavor. He was about to take a second bite when suddenly he heard a little voice that buzzed in his ear these words:

"Give us some, too! Give us some, too!"

He looked around to see who was speaking but there was no one in the kitchen. Only some flies were buzzing about.

Just then outside a hissing voice called out:

"Where shall we go? Where shall we go?"

A higher voice answered:

"To the miller's barley field! To the miller's barley field!"

Yirik looked out the window and saw a gander with a flock of geese.

"Oho!" he said to himself, shaking his head. "Now I understand! Now I know what kind of 'fish' this is! Now I know why the poor cook was not to take a bite!"

He slipped another morsel into his mouth, garnished the "fish" carefully on a platter, and carried it to the king.

After dinner the king ordered his horse and told Yirik to come with him for a ride. The king rode on ahead and Yirik followed.

As they cantered across a green meadow, Yirik's horse began to prance and neigh.

"Ho! Ho!" he said. "I feel so light that I could jump over a mountain!"

"So could I," the king's horse said, "but I have to remember the old bag of bones that is perched on my back. If I were to jump he'd tumble off and break his neck."

"And a good thing, too!" said Yirik's horse. "Why not? Then instead of such an old bag of bones you'd get a young man to ride you like Yirik."

Yirik almost burst out laughing as he listened to the horses' talk, but he suppressed his merriment lest the king should know that he had eaten some of the magic snake.

Now of course the king, too, understood what the horses were saying. He glanced apprehensively at Yirik and it seemed to him that Yirik was grinning.

"What are you laughing at, Yirik?"

"Me?" Yirik said. "I'm not laughing. I was just thinking of something funny."

"Um," said the king.

His suspicions against Yirik were aroused. Moreover he was afraid to trust himself to his horse any longer. So he turned back to the palace at once.

There he ordered Yirik to pour him out a goblet of wine.

"And I warn you," he said, "that you forfeit your head if you pour a drop too much or too little."

Yirik carefully tilted a great tankard and began filling a goblet. As he poured a bird suddenly flew into the window pursued by another bird. The first bird had in its beak three golden hairs.

"Give them to me! Give them to me! They're mine!" screamed the second bird.

"I won't! I won't! They're mine!" the first bird answered. "I picked them up!"

"Yes, but I saw them first!" the other cried. "I saw them fall as the maiden sat and combed her golden tresses. Give me two of them and I'll let you keep the third."

"No! No! No! I won't let you have one of them!"

The second bird darted angrily at the first and after a struggle succeeded in capturing one of the golden hairs. One hair dropped to the marble floor, making as it struck a musical tinkle, and the first bird escaped still holding in its bill a single hair.

In his excitement over the struggle, Yirik overflowed the goblet.

"Ha! Ha!" said the king. "See what you've done! You forfeit your head! However, I'll suspend sentence on condition that you find this golden-haired maiden and bring her to me for a wife."

Poor Yirik didn't know who the maiden was nor where she lived. But what could he say? If he wanted to keep his head, he must undertake the quest. So he saddled his horse and started off at random.

His road led him through a forest. Here he came upon a bush under which some shepherds had kindled a fire. Sparks were falling on an anthill nearby and the ants in great excitement were running hither and thither with their eggs.

"Yirik!" they cried. "Help! Help, or we shall all be burned to death, we and our young ones in the eggs!"

Yirik instantly dismounted, cut down the burning bush, and put out the fire.

"Thank you, Yirik, thank you!" the ants said. "Your kindness to us this day will not go unrewarded. If ever you are in trouble, think of us and we will help you."

As Yirik rode on through the forest, he came upon two fledgling ravens lying by the path.

"Help us, Yirik, help us!" they cawed. "Our father and mother have thrown us out of the nest in yonder tall fir tree to fend for ourselves. We are young and helpless and not yet able to fly. Give us some meat to eat or we shall perish with hunger."

The sight of the helpless fledglings touched Yirik to pity. He dismounted instantly, drew his sword, and killed his horse. Then he fed the starving birds the meat they needed.

"Thank you, Yirik, thank you!" the little ravens croaked. "You have saved our lives this day. Your kindness will not go unrewarded. If ever you are in trouble, think of us and we will help you."

Yirik left the young ravens and pushed on afoot. The path through the forest was long and wearisome. It led out finally on the seashore.

On the beach two fishermen were quarreling over a big fish with golden scales that lay gasping on the sand.

"It's mine, I tell you!" one of the men was shouting. "It was caught in my net, so of course it's mine!"

To this the other one shouted back:

"But your net would never have caught a fish if you hadn't been out in my boat and if I hadn't helped you!"

"Give me this one," the first man said, "and I'll let you have the next one."

"No! You take the next one!" the other said. "This one's mine!"

So they kept on arguing to no purpose until Yirik went up to them and said:

"Let me decide this for you. Suppose you sell me the fish and then divide the money."

He offered them all the money the king had given him for his journey. The fishermen, delighted at the offer, at once agreed. Yirik handed them over the money and then, taking the gasping fish in his hand, he threw it back into the sea.

When the fish had caught its breath, it rose on a wave and called out to Yirik:

"Thank you, Yirik, thank you. You have saved my life this day. Your kindness will not go unrewarded. If ever you are in trouble, think of me and I will help you."

With that the golden fish flicked its tail and disappeared in the water.

"Where are you going, Yirik?" the fishermen asked.

"I'm going in quest of a golden-haired maiden whom my master, the king, wished to make his wife."

"He must mean the Princess Zlatovlaska," the fishermen said to each other.

"The Princess Zlatovlaska?" Yirik repeated. "Who is she?"

"She's the golden-haired daughter of the King of the Crystal Palace. Do you see the faint outlines of an island over yonder? That's where she lives. The king has twelve daughters but Zlatovlaska alone has golden hair. Each morning at dawn a wonderful glow spreads over land and sea. That's Zlatovlaska combing her golden hair."

The fishermen conferred apart for a moment and then said:

"Yirik, you settled our dispute for us and now in return we'll row you over to the island."

So they rowed Yirik over to the Island of the Crystal Palace and left him there with the warning that the king would probably try to palm off on him one of the dark-haired princesses.

Yirik at once presented himself at the palace, got an audience with the king, and declared his mission.

"H'm," the king said. "So your master desires the hand of my daughter, the Princess Zlatovlaska, eh? H'm, h'm. Well, I see no objection to your master as a son-in-law, but of course before I entrust the princess into your hands you must prove yourself worthy. I tell you what I'll do: I'll give you three tasks to perform. Be ready for the first one tomorrow."

Early the next day the king said to Yirik:

"My daughter, Zlatovlaska, had a precious necklace of pearls. She was walking in the meadow over yonder when the string broke and the pearls rolled away in the tall grasses. Now your first task is to gather up every last one of those pearls and hand them to me before sundown."

Yirik went to the meadow and when he saw how broad it was and how thickly covered with tall grasses his heart sank for he realized that he could never search over the whole of it in one day. However, he got down on his hands and knees and began to hunt.

Midday came and he had not yet found a single pearl.

"Oh dear," he thought to himself in despair, "if only my ants were here, they could help me!"

He had no sooner spoken than a million little voices answered:

"We are here and we're here to help you!"

And sure enough there they were, the very ants that he supposed were far away!

"What do you want us to do?" they asked.

"Find me all the pearls that are scattered in this meadow. I can't find one of them."

Instantly the ants scurried hither and thither and soon they began bringing him the pearls one by one. Yirik strung them together until the necklace seemed complete.

"Are there any more?" he asked.

He was about to tie the string together when a lame ant, whose foot had been burned in the fire, hobbled up, crying:

"Wait, Yirik, don't tie the string yet! Here's the last pearl!"

Yirik thanked the ants for their help and at sundown carried the string of pearls to the king. The king counted the pearls and, to his surprise, found that not one was missing.

"You've done this well," he said. "Tomorrow I'll give you your second task."

The next day when Yirik presented himself, the king said:

"While my daughter, Zlatovlaska, was bathing in the sea, a golden ring slipped from her finger and disappeared. Your task is to find me this ring before sundown."

Yirik went down to the seashore and as he walked along the beach his heart grew heavy as he realized the difficulty of the task before him. The sea was clear but so deep that he couldn't even see the bottom. How then could he find the ring?

"Oh dear," he said aloud, "if only the golden fish were here! It could help me."

"I am here," a voice said, "and I'm here to help you."

And there was the golden fish on the crest of a wave, gleaming like a flash of fire!

"What do you want me to do?" it said.

"Find me a golden ring that lies somewhere on the bottom of the sea."

"Ah, a golden ring? A moment ago I met a pike," the fish said, "that had just such a golden ring. Wait for me here and I'll go find the pike."

In a few moments the golden fish returned with the pike and sure enough it was Zlatovlaska's ring that the pike was carrying.

That evening at sundown the king acknowledged that Yirik had accomplished his second task.

The next day the king said:

"I could never allow my daughter, Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired, to go to the kingdom of your master unless she carried with her two flasks, one filled with the Water of Life, the other with the Water of Death. So today for a third task I set you this: to bring the princess a flask of the Water of Life and a flask of the Water of Death."

Yirik had no idea which way to turn. He had heard of the Waters of Life and Death, but all he knew about them was that their springs were far away beyond the Red Sea. He left the Crystal Palace and walked off aimlessly until his feet had carried him of themselves into a dark forest.

"If only those young ravens were here," he said aloud, "they could help me!"

Instantly he heard a loud, "Caw! Caw!" and two ravens flew down to him, saying:

"We are here! We are here to help you! What do you want us to do?"

"I have to bring the king a flask of the Water of Life and a flask of the Water of Death and I don't know where the springs are. Do you know?"

"Yes, we know," the ravens said. "Wait here and we'll soon fetch you water from both springs."

They flew off and in a short time returned, each bearing a gourd of the precious water.

Yirik thanked the ravens and carefully filled his two flasks.

As he was leaving the forest, he came upon a great spider web. An ugly spider sat in the middle of it sucking a fly. Yirik took a drop of the Water of Death and flicked it on the spider. The spider doubled up dead and fell to the ground like a ripe cherry.

Then Yirik sprinkled a drop of Living Water on the fly. The fly instantly revived, pulled itself out of the web, and flew about happy and free once again.

"Thank you, Yirik," it buzzed, "thank you for bringing me back to life. You won't be sorry. Just wait and you'll soon see that I'll reward you!"

When Yirik returned to the palace and presented the two flasks, the king said:

"But one thing yet remains. You may take Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired, but you must yourself pick her out from among the twelve sisters."

The king led Yirik into a great hall. The twelve princesses were seated about a table, beautiful maidens all and each looking much like the others. Yirik could not tell which was Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired, for each princess wore a long heavy white veil so draped over her head and shoulders that it completely covered her hair.

"Here are my twelve daughters," the king said. "One of them is Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired. Pick her out and you may lead her at once to your master. If you fail to pick her out, then you must depart without her."

In dismay Yirik looked from sister to sister. There was nothing to show him which was Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired. How was he to find out?

Suddenly he heard a buzzing in his ear and a little voice whispered:

"Courage, Yirik, courage! I'll help you!"

He turned his head quickly and there was the fly he had rescued from the spider.

"Walk slowly by each princess," the fly said, "and I'll tell you when you come to Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired."

Yirik did as the fly ordered. He stopped a moment before the first princess until the fly buzzed:

"Not that one! Not that one!"

He went on to the next princess and again the fly buzzed:

"Not that one! Not that one!"

So he went on from princess to princess until at last the fly buzzed out:

"Yes, that one! That one!"

So Yirik remained standing where he was and said to the king:

"This, I think, is Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired."

"You have guessed right," the king said.

At that Zlatovlaska removed the white veil from her head and her lovely hair tumbled down to her feet like a golden cascade. It shimmered and glowed like the sun in the early morning when he peeps over the mountain top. Yirik stared until the brightness dimmed his sight.

The king immediately prepared Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired, for her journey. He gave her the two precious flasks of water; he arranged a fitting escort; and then with his blessing he sent her forth under Yirik's care.

Yirik conducted her safely to his master.

When the old king saw the lovely princess that Yirik had found for him, his eyes blinked with satisfaction, he capered about like a spring lamb, and he ordered that immediate preparations be made for the wedding. He was most grateful to Yirik and thanked him again and again.

"My dear boy," he said, "I had expected to have you hanged for your disobedience and let the ravens pick your bones. But now, to show you how grateful I am for the beautiful bride you have found me, I'm not going to have you hanged at all. Instead, I shall have you beheaded and then given a decent burial."

The execution took place at once in order to be out of the way before the wedding.

"It's a great pity he had to die," the king said as the executioner cut off Yirik's head. "He has certainly been a faithful servant."

Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired, asked if she might have his severed head and body. The king who was too madly in love to refuse her anything said: "Yes."

So Zlatovlaska took the body and the head and put them together. Then she sprinkled them with the Water of Death. Instantly the wound closed and soon it healed so completely that there wasn't even a scar left.

Yirik lay there lifeless but looking merely as if he were asleep. Zlatovlaska sprinkled him with the Water of Life and immediately his dead limbs stirred. Then he opened his eyes and sat up. Life poured through his veins and he sprang to his feet younger, fresher, handsomer than before.

The old king was filled with envy.

"I, too," he cried, "wish to be made young and handsome!"

He commanded the executioner to cut off his head and he told Zlatovlaska to sprinkle him afterwards with the Water of Life.

The executioner did as he was told. Then Zlatovlaska sprinkled the old king's head and body with the Water of Life. Nothing happened. Zlatovlaska kept on sprinkling the Water of Life until there was no more left.

"Do you know," the princess said to Yirik, "I believe I should have used the Water of Death first."

So now she sprinkled the body and head with the Water of Death and, sure enough, they grew together at once. But of course there was no life in them. And of course there was no possible way of putting life into them because the Water of Life was all gone. So the old king remained dead.

"This will never do," the people said. "We must have a king. And with the wedding feast and everything prepared we simply must have a wedding, too. If Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired, cannot marry the old king, she'll have to marry some one else. Now who shall it be?"

Some one suggested Yirik because he was young and handsome and because, like the old king, he could understand the birds and the beasts.

"Yirik!" the people cried. "Let Yirik be our king!"

And Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired, who had long since fallen in love with handsome Yirik, consented to have the wedding at once in order that the feast already prepared might not be wasted.

So Yirik and Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired, were married and they ruled so well and they lived so happily that to this day when people say of some one: "He's as happy as a king," they are thinking of King Yirik, and when they say of some one: "She's as beautiful as a queen," they are thinking of Zlatovlaska, the Golden-Haired.

THE SHEPHERD'S NOSEGAY

THE STORY OF A PRINCESS WHO LEARNED TO SAY "PLEASE"

THE SHEPHERD'S NOSEGAY

There was once a king who had a beautiful daughter. When it was time for her to get a husband, the king set a day and invited all the neighboring princes to come and see her.

One of these princes decided that he would like to have a look at the princess before the others. So he dressed himself in a shepherd's costume: a broad-brimmed hat, a blue smock, a green vest, tight breeches to the knees, thick woolen stockings, and sandals. Thus disguised he set out for the kingdom where the princess lived. All he took with him were four loaves of bread to eat on the way.

He hadn't gone far before he met a beggar who begged him, in God's name, for a piece of bread. The prince at once gave him one of the four loaves. A little farther on a second beggar held out his hand and begged for a piece of bread. To him the prince gave the second loaf. To a third beggar he gave the third loaf, and to a fourth beggar the last loaf.

The fourth beggar said to him:

"Prince in shepherd's guise, your charity will not go unrewarded. Here are four gifts for you, one for each of the loaves of bread that you have given away this day. Take this whip which has the power of killing any one it strikes however gentle the blow. Take this beggar's wallet. It has in it some bread and cheese, but not common bread and cheese for, no matter how much of it you eat, there will always be some left. Take this shepherd's ax. If ever you have to leave your sheep alone, plant it in the earth and the sheep, instead of straying, will graze around it. Last, here is a shepherd's pipe. When you blow upon it your sheep will dance and play. Farewell and good luck go with you."

The prince thanked the beggar for his gifts and then trudged on to the kingdom where the beautiful princess lived. He presented himself at the palace as a shepherd in quest of work and he told them his name was Yan. The king liked his appearance and so the next day he was put in charge of a flock of sheep which he drove up the mountain side to pasture.

He planted his shepherd's ax in the midst of a meadow and, leaving his sheep to graze about it, he went off into the forest hunting adventures. There he came upon a castle where a giant was busy cooking his dinner in a big saucepan.

"Good-day to you," Yan said politely.

The giant, who was a rude, unmannerly fellow, bellowed out:

"It won't take me long to finish you, you young whippersnapper!"

He raised a great iron club to strike Yan but Yan, quick as thought, flicked the giant with his whip and the huge fellow toppled over dead.

The next day he returned to the castle and found another giant in possession.

"Ho, ho!" he roared on sight of Yan. "What, you young whippersnapper, back again! You killed my brother yesterday and now I'll kill you!"

He raised his great iron club to strike Yan, but Yan skipped nimbly aside. Then he flicked the giant with his whip and the huge fellow toppled over dead.

When Yan returned to the castle the third day there were no more giants about. So he wandered from room to room to see what treasures were there.

In one room he found a big chest. He struck it smartly and immediately two burly men jumped out and, bowing low before him, said:

"What does the master of the castle desire?"

"Show me everything there is to be seen," Yan ordered.

So the two servants of the chest showed him everything – jewels and treasures and gold. Then they led him out into the gardens where the most wonderful flowers in the world were blooming. Yan plucked some of these and made them into a nosegay.

That afternoon, as he drove home his sheep, he played on his magic pipe and the sheep, pairing off two by two, began to dance and frisk about him. All the people in the village ran out to see the strange sight and laughed and clapped their hands for joy.

The princess ran to the palace window and when she saw the sheep dancing two by two she, too, laughed and clapped her hands. Then the wind whiffed her a smell of the wonderful nosegay that Yan was carrying and she said to her serving maid:

"Run down to the shepherd and tell him the princess desires his nosegay."

The serving maid delivered the message to Yan, but he shook his head and said:

"Tell your mistress that whoever wants this nosegay must come herself and say: 'Yanitchko, give me that nosegay.'"

When the princess heard this, she laughed and said:

"What an odd shepherd! I see I must go myself."

So the princess herself came out to Yan and said:

"Yanitchko, give me that nosegay."

But Yan smiled and shook his head.

"Whoever wants this nosegay must say: 'Yanitchko, please give me that nosegay.'"

The Princess was a merry girl, so she laughed and said:

"Yanitchko, please give me that nosegay."

Yan gave it to her at once and she thanked him sweetly.

The next day Yan went again to the castle garden and plucked another nosegay. Then in the afternoon he drove his sheep through the village as before, playing his pipe. The princess was standing at the palace window waiting to see him. When the wind brought her a whiff of the fresh nosegay that was even more fragrant than the first one, she ran out to Yan and said:

"Yanitchko, please give me that nosegay."

But Yan smiled and shook his head.

"Whoever wants this nosegay must say: 'My dear Yanitchko, I beg you most politely please to give me that nosegay.'"

"My dear Yanitchko," the princess repeated demurely, "I beg you most politely please to give me that nosegay."

So Yan gave her the second nosegay. The princess put it in her window and the fragrance filled the village until people from far and near came to see it.

After that every day Yan gathered a nosegay for the princess and every day the princess stood at the palace window waiting to see the handsome shepherd. And always when she asked for the nosegay, she said: "Please."

In this way a month went by and the day arrived when the neighboring princes were to come to meet the princess. They were to come in fine array, the people said, and the princess had ready a kerchief and a ring for the one who would please her most.

Yan planted the ax in the meadow and, leaving the sheep to graze about it, went to the castle where he ordered the servants of the chest to dress him as befitted his rank. They put a white suit upon him and gave him a white horse with trappings of silver.

So he rode to the palace and took his place with the other princes but behind them so that the princess had to crane her neck to see him.

One by one the various princes rode by the princess but to none of them did the princess give her kerchief and ring. Yan was the last to salute her, and instantly she handed him her favors.

Then before the king or the other suitors could speak to him, Yan put spurs to his horse and rode off.

That evening as usual when he was driving home his sheep, the princess ran out to him and said: "Yan, it was you!"

But Yan laughed and put her off.

"How can a poor shepherd be a prince?" he asked.

The princess was not convinced and she said in another month, when the princes were to come again, she would find out.

So for another month Yan tended sheep and plucked nosegays for the merry little princess and the princess waited for him at the palace window every afternoon and when she saw him she always spoke to him politely and said: "Please."

When the day for the second meeting of the princes came, the servants of the chest arrayed Yan in a suit of red and gave him a sorrel horse with trappings of gold. Yan again rode to the palace and took his place with the other princes but behind them so that the princess had to crane her neck to see him.

Again the suitors rode by the princess one by one, but at each of them she shook her head impatiently and kept her kerchief and ring until Yan saluted her.

Instantly the ceremony was over, Yan put spurs to his horse and rode off and, although the king sent after him to bring him back, Yan was able to escape.

That evening when he was driving home his sheep the princess ran out to him and said:

"Yanitchko, it was you! I know it was!"

But again Yan laughed and put her off and asked her how she could think such a thing of a poor shepherd.

Again the princess was not convinced and she said in another month, when the princes were to come for the third and last time, she would make sure.

So for another month Yan tended his sheep and plucked nosegays for the merry little princess and the princess waited for him at the palace window every afternoon and, when she saw him, she always said politely: "Please."

For the third meeting of the princes the servants of the chest arrayed Yan in a gorgeous suit of black and gave him a black horse with golden trappings studded in diamonds. He rode to the palace and took his place behind the other suitors. Things went as before and again the princess saved her kerchief and ring for him.

This time when he tried to ride off the other suitors surrounded him and, before he escaped, one of them wounded him on the foot.

He galloped back to the castle in the forest, dressed once again in his shepherd's clothes, and returned to the meadow where his sheep were grazing. There he sat down and bound up his wounded foot in the kerchief which the princess had given him. Then, when he had eaten some bread and cheese from his magic wallet, he stretched himself out in the sun and fell asleep.

Meanwhile the princess, who was sorely vexed that her mysterious suitor had again escaped, slipped out of the palace and ran up the mountain path to see for herself whether the shepherd were really with his sheep. She found Yan asleep and, when she saw her kerchief bound about his foot, she knew that he was the prince.

She woke him up and cried:

"You are he! You know you are!"

Yan looked at her and laughed and he asked:

"How can I be a prince?"

"But I know you are!" the princess said. "Oh, Yanitchko, dear Yanitchko, I beg you please to tell me!"

So then Yan, because he always did anything the princess asked him when she said: "Please," told her his true name and his rank.

The princess, overjoyed to hear that her dear shepherd was really a prince, carried him off to her father, the king.

"This is the man I shall marry," she said, "this and none other."

So Yan and the merry little princess were married and lived very happily. And the people of the country when they speak of the princess always say:

"That's a princess for you! Why, even if she is a princess, she always says 'Please' to her own husband!"

VITAZKO THE VICTORIOUS

THE STORY OF A HERO WHOSE MOTHER LOVED A DRAGON

VITAZKO THE VICTORIOUS

There was once a mother who had an only son. "He shall be a hero," she said, "and his name shall be Vitazko, the Victorious."

She suckled him for twice seven years and then, to try his strength, she led him out to the forest and bade him pull up a fir-tree by the roots.

When the boy was not strong enough to do this, she took him home and suckled him for another seven years. Then when she had suckled him for thrice seven years, she led him out to the forest again and ordered him to pull up a beech-tree by its roots.

The youth laid hold on the tree and with one mighty pull uprooted it.

"Now, my son, you are strong enough," the mother said. "Now you are worthy of your name Vitazko. Forget not the mother who has suckled you for thrice seven years but, now that you are grown, take care of her."

"I will, my mother," Vitazko promised. "Only tell me what you want me to do."

"First," the mother said, "go out into the world and find me a splendid dwelling where I may live in peace and plenty."

Taking in his hand the uprooted beech-tree as a club and armed only with it, Vitazko set forth. He followed the wind here and there and the other place and it led him at last to a fine castle.

This castle was inhabited by dragons. Vitazko pounded on the castle gates but the dragons refused to admit him. Thereupon the young hero battered down the gates, pursued the dragons from room to room of the castle, and slaughtered them all.

When he had thrown the last of them over the wall, he took possession of the castle. He found nine spacious chambers and a tenth one the door of which was closed.

Vitazko opened the door and in the room he found a dragon. This dragon was a prisoner. Three iron hoops were fastened about his body and these were chained to the wall.

"Oho!" Vitazko cried. "Another dragon! What are you doing here?"

"Me?" the dragon said. "I'm not doing anything but just sitting here. My brothers imprisoned me. Unchain me, Vitazko! If you do, I will reward you richly."

"I will not!" Vitazko said. "A fine scamp you must be if your own brothers had to chain you up! No! You stay where you are!"

"With that Vitazko slammed the door in the dragon's face and left him.

Then he went for his mother and brought her to the castle.

"Here, my mother," he said, "is the dwelling I have won for you."

He took her through the nine spacious chambers and showed her everything. At the tenth door he said:

"This door is not to be opened. All the castle belongs to you except this room only. See to it that this door is never opened. If it is opened, an evil fate will overtake you."

Then Vitazko took his beechen club and went out hunting.

He was hardly gone before his mother sat down before the tenth door and said to herself over and over:

"I wonder what can be in that room that Vitazko doesn't want me to open the door."

At last when she could restrain her curiosity no longer, she opened the door.

"Mercy on us!" she said when she saw the dragon. "Who are you? And what are you doing here?"

"Me?" the dragon said. "I'm only a poor harmless dragon. They call me Sharkan. My brothers chained me here. They would have freed me long ago but Vitazko killed them. Unchain me, dear lady, and I will reward you richly."

He begged her and cajoled her until she was half minded to do as he asked.

"You are very beautiful," Sharkan said. "If only I were free I would make you my wife."

"Ah, but what would Vitazko say to that?" the woman asked.

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