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ROMANIA – TRADITIONAL TALE

"The Story of Harap Alb"

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THE STORY OF HARAP
ALB

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CHAPTER 1:

THE EMBER-EATING FLYING HORSE

Once upon a time in a beautiful kingdom there lived an old king who had three sons. He had an even older brother who was called Green Emperor. This one was emperor in another country, a far, far away country, separated by desolated lands, lying at the margins of the earth.

This brother, who lived very far, did not have any sons, but only three daughters. Many years passed since the two brothers had not seen each other. And the cousins, the King's sons and the emperor's daughters had never seen each other in their entire lives. For the Green Emperor's country lay at one end of the world and the kingdom of the other, at the opposite end. And in those times, almost all countries in the world were ravaged by cruel wars. The roads by land and sea were little known, tortuous and winding. That's why in those days travelling was full of perils, unlike today.

And the one who set out for one part of the world would rarely be seen again.

But let's not get carried away, and continue with our story.

The story goes that the emperor, as he advanced in age, wrote a letter to his brother, the king. In this letter he asked his brother to send him the greatest and smartest of his three sons. Moreover, Green Emperor promised that he would give one of his daughters' hand to the most courageous one. On receiving a letter, the king calls upon his sons and tells them:

"Here's what my brother, your uncle asks of you: He who is fit to rule over such a great country like mine, let him come and take my place!"

Then, the eldest son had the courage to say:

"Father, I think the honour must be mine because I am the eldest of my brothers; that is why I ask you to give me some travel money, clothes for the journey and weapons to defend myself and a horse to ride, because I want to begin my journey without any delay."

"Farewell my beloved son! If you think you can reach that place and be the emperor, then choose any horse you like from the stable, take as much money you need, take as many clothes as you like and as suitable weapons as you can handle and go with God, my son!"

Then, Old King's eldest son gathers everything he needs, bids his father farewell and sets out joyfully for his uncle's empire.

But, wishing to be sure of his son's bravery, right after his eldest son's departure, Old King secretly dresses up as a bear, mounts his horse and rides to surprise his son, hiding

under a bridge. When the prince reached the bridge, all of a sudden an angry bear rose before him. Then, the horse reared on his hind legs nearly overthrowing his master. The king's son, unable to control his horse and afraid to continue his journey, turns back ashamed, to his father.

His father arrived back at the castle before his son, hid the bear's skin and waited for the prince. When he appeared in front of him, sad and ashamed, the king asked him:

"Did you forget anything, my dear boy? It seems to me that you have forgotten something. I know that this is not a good sign."

"No, I haven't. But at the bridge I was attacked by a terrible bear. He scared the life out of me. I barely escaped from his paws and I thought to return to you, father, rather than to fall in the hands of wild beasts. From now on," the eldest son added, "I need nothing: neither empire, nor crown, neither lands, nor beautiful wife. I just want to live here with you."

"You have done the right thing, my son," said Old King. "It seems to me that you are not fit and worthy to rule over the empire. Instead of confusing people is better to stay aside. However, your uncle will be angry."

Then, the second son raised and said:

"Father, if you allow me, I want to go there myself."

"You may go, my son, but mind you do not return if you see a rabbit or something equally helpless, because your shame will be greater than your elder brother's. However, I think you should try your luck, so go on, my son."

The prince begins to prepare all his things for the departure in a hurry. He takes the letter for his uncle, says farewell to his father and his brothers and leaves the palace. He rides on and on, until the night falls. When he arrives at the bridge, all of the sudden a growling and awful bear appears in front of him. The prince's horse begins to jump in two feet and draws back. The king's son, seeing that the bear was not a joke, puts aside his desire to become an emperor or to have an empire and returns to his father.

When the king sees him, he says:

"Oh, my dear son! I see the saying applies to you ... <Protect me from hens, for dogs I do not fear.>"

"What kind of words are these, father? says his son ashamed. "Do you compare bears with hens? Such a big bear can destroy an army. I am fortunate that I got out alive. Thank God I have enough food and shelter in your castle, father!"

"I know" said the king upset, "that there is plenty of food here. But what about your shame?! I have three sons and none of them is good for something. Then, you eat my food

in vain. What kind of nephews are you? There is a saying: *For a pie you go ahead, But for fight, you hide in bed!*

Old King was very disappointed by the trials and the failures of his two elder sons. He retreated in his room and locked himself in silence.

The youngest son, being ashamed of his father's words, ran into the palace's garden and started crying. He was deeply hurt and he did not know how to get rid of his family's deep shame. While he was lost in his thoughts, an old woman who used to beg appeared before his eyes and said:

"Why are you so deeply lost in your thoughts, fair prince? Drive sorrow out from your heart! Good luck is smiling at you from everywhere and you have no reason to be upset. Now, please, can you spare a coin for me?"

"Let me be, aunty, do not bother me! I have something else that troubles me," said the prince.

"Young prince, tell this old woman what troubles you? Who knows, maybe I am able to help you somehow."

"Let me be, woman! I am so upset that I can barely see anything in front of my eyes."

"Kind prince," insisted the old woman, "you are making a mistake. You can see, no doubt, but not so well. And this is because you cannot see who can help you. I have hidden the powers and gifts of a fortune teller."

"It is so easy for you to make light of things, old woman. How on earth could someone like you help me?"

"It might seem strange to you," said the old woman, "but I can help you. Our Lord also puts His gifts in helpless hands, for the powers gifted to me are great. But first, please give me some pennies! Take pity of me, great prince!"

The prince was moved and his curiosity was triggered by the old woman's words, so he took a golden coin and said:

"Take this, old woman, and farewell. Less from me, more from the Lord!"

"What you give me may Lord return to you tenfold!" said the old woman. "You have great news waiting for you. Not long from now, you will become a powerful emperor, the most loved and glorified through all the empires. Now, my dear prince, since you showed me mercy, please keep quiet, look into my eyes and listen to what I will tell you: Soon you will be emperor. Go to your father and ask him to give you the horse, the weapons and the garments he wore as a bridegroom. Put a tray of burning embers in the horse stable to choose your horse. Then you can go where your brothers could not, because it is written to you from above to be given this honour. Your father may be against this, but you have

to ask him kindly, to convince him. Remember what I say to you: we may find ourselves endlessly at the end of the world: for there is a hillside, but still a human being!

And while the old woman said these words, the prince sees her disappearing into the air. Then he feels a strong emotion, he feels fear and astonishment, but trusting in his luck, he went to his father and said:

“Father, allow me to follow the footsteps of my brothers and try my luck. I do not know if I succeed or not, but I promise you that once I leave this house I will never come back, unless I win.”

“How unexpected, dear boy, to hear these words from you,” said the king. “Your brothers proved they do not have strength in their hearts and I lost all the hope in them. But you should be braver, although I do not think that. But if you want to try, I will not stop you. I am only afraid that you will meet another rabbit on your way, become frightened and change your bravery into shame. If this happens, my boy, I tell you: do not come back home!”

“Well, father, a man can try. Lord is great and I may have a chance. But, please, give me your horse, weapons and garments that you wore as a bridegroom in order to leave.”

Old King, hearing that, said:

“My dear boy, your words reminded me of an old saying: *<Young boy on an old horse, Staying on the hard way, of course!>*

But who on Earth may know what happened to my horse, if it is still alive. It could not have lived as long as I. But who has told you about my old horse?”

“Father, whether the horse is alive or not is my problem. I want to know if you give him to me or not.”

“From my point of you, my dear boy, it is fine. I wonder if you can find it.”

“I will not complain about that, father; I am glad that you give him to me; if he is still alive, he will be mine.”

Then, the prince goes to the attic and brought from there a bridle, a whip, a saddle, all covered with dust and very old. Then, from an old chest, he takes out some garments, a bow and some arrows, a sword and a mace, all full of rust; he begins to clean them and to polish them. Later that day, he fills a tray with ember, goes inside the stable and puts it down among the horses. All the horses step back and only an old, skin and bones horse whose ribs can be counted approaches. He comes straight ahead toward the tray and takes a full mouth of embers. Amazed and confused by the miserable appearance of this horse, he tries to pull him back and shouted:

“You, ugly horse! From all these fine horses only you come forward to eat embers! Lousy beast, you will get into trouble if you show up again!”

Then, the prince places another hot tray of embers among the horses and again, the skinny horse hurries to take a mouth full of embers. Again, the prince cracks his whip near the horse and begins walking among the horses hoping that another one will come forth and eat from the tray. But the third time the same horse comes and eats all the embers. The angry prince takes the horse and thinks: “Should I take him or should I leave him? I am afraid people will laugh at me.”

“Mount on me, my lord, and hold on tight!”

The prince mounts the horse. The magic horse flies to the clouds and goes back like an arrow. Then, he flies once again to the moon and goes back quickly as the lightning. Then he flies for the third time to the sun and goes back while asking the prince:

“Prince, was I fast enough? Did you ever think that you could reach the sun with your legs, the moon with your hands and fly through the clouds like a bird?”

“What can I say, my dear friend? I was frightened to death,” answers the prince.

“The same dizziness I felt when you tried to hit me, my lord. And I wanted you to feel the same thing! Without my embers I am also weak among those horses in the stable. But this is life. I think you know by now that I can be either ugly or handsome, either weak or strong. And from now on I am ready to take you everywhere you want. Please tell me, how would you like to travel: fast like the wind or swift like the dream?”

“If you carry me like a dream, you could scare me; if you take me like the wind, it will be the best for us, my little horse.” said the prince.

“Well, my lord, mount on me light hearted and I will take you wherever you want.”

The prince, while riding caressed him and said to him:

“Let’s go, my horse!”

The horse flies gentle as the wind and arrives in the prince’s garden in no time. The prince returns to his father’s court holding the magic horse on his reins:

“Welcome among us, my hero!” said Old King. “What kind of horse did you choose?”

“Well, father, according to my luck. I have visited many places and I do not want people to envy me. I will go riding, or on foot.”

While saying these, he puts the saddle on the horse, hangs the weapons in the saddle, takes some food and money, gathers some clothes and brings a can full of water.

Then, he kisses his father's hand, takes the letter for his uncle, says farewell to his brothers and leaves the house. He goes and goes until late in the night. When he arrives at the bridge, that ferocious bear appears from beneath and furiously attacks him. The horse jumps on the bear with the front feet and the prince raises the sword to strike it. Just before hitting the bear, the prince hears a human voice:



"My dear one, do not hit me! I am your father."

The prince dismounts and his father takes him in his arms saying:

"My son, good companion you did choose; if somebody taught you that, he or she did well. You have a smart head on your shoulder and a brave heart in your chest. Go on because you are worthy to take the throne. But remember my advice: during your journey you will encounter good and bad people; but beware of the Red Man and especially of the Smooth Face. Do not deal with them because they are very cunning. And to come to an end, I tell you that the horse, your companion, will advise you what to do because he got me out from lots of dangers. I give you this bear skin, too. It could be handy to you sometime."

Then, caressing the horse, Old King kissed them both and said to them:

"Go in peace, my dears! Only Lord knows when we will see each other again!"

The prince mounts on his horse and the horse turns into his strong and young shape. And jumping backward and forward, they start their journey.

<Heading to the remote kingdom

Lord giving them wisdom

The story of Harap Alb and his friend

Is not yet at the end.>

CHAPTER 2: THE STORY OF HARAP - UNDER THE POWER OF BOLD-MAN ALB

They travel for one day, they travel for two days, they travel maybe for more days, until they enter into a strange and deep wood. Silvery chandeliers of Spanish-Moss were covering each of the long tree branches, and sneaking eyes of unknown creatures blink, twinkle and wink for everywhere. Not too far away from the wood boundaries a tall character with no hair on his head appears in front of them.. He speaks loudly and challenging:

“Good day, young man! My name is Smooth Face. Do you need some help on your way? Can I be your shield-bearer? Or can I be your attendant, or your servant? It is so dangerous to ride alone through these places. In any moment a wild beast can jump in front of you suddenly ending your trip. I know very well these places.”

“Maybe I need, maybe I do not need help,” said the prince looking at Smooth Face. “For now, I’ll take my chances alone.”

And riding his horse, he continued his journey. While they were advancing through the deep forest, Smooth Face appears again in front of the prince and his horse, this time disguised in other clothes. He says:

“Good day, traveller!”

“Have a good heart,” says the prince, and thinks: “How many bold men are in this country?”

“Oh, my heart,” said Smooth Face slightly. “We all know that a good man is not always a lucky man. I am not against work, but I have worked in vain and for no compensation all my life. I know a proverb that says: <If you serve a poor master, you will always be a poor servant.> Do you need a good servant? Do not think too much! Take me to serve you and be helpful to you during your journey. These places are dangerous and you are alone.”

“For the moment, I do not need much help,” says the prince with a hand on the handle of his sword. “I can help myself, thank you!” And the prince continues his journey.

The prince and his horse continues going through the dark forest for a long period of time. At some point they arrive at a crossroads, where a long cut tree lie on the road. The way is closed. The prince doesn’t know which way to take.

“What a mess,” he thinks. “It is nothing around, no village, no man and no signs. I can see only wilderness. I am so sorry now that I did not accept those Smooth Face’s offers for guidance. It is true, my father advised me to be careful with them and to be careful with their insidious offers of service, but I do not think that they are so bad.”

While he is waiting there, lost in the woods, guess who appeared in front of his eyes? It is Smooth Face himself, this time disguised in other clothes and riding a very fine horse. With a changed voice, he says these:

“My poor man, you are on the wrong way! You are certainly a stranger, and you do not know these places! You are lucky that I am here, because down in this valley, there is an awful bull that kills a lot of people. Go back, or go ahead, but take someone to help you. Hire me as your guide, if you want!”

The prince thinks: “Why on earth there are so many bold men in these woods? However, it seems they are kind and friendly because they keep offering their help, as opposed to what my father advised me.” And then, with a loud voice, he says:

"It seems I have to accept your offer, my good man. I will tell you the truth: When I left home, my father advised me to stay away from red beard men and, especially, from bold men. However, I think I may hire you."

"Traveller," said Smooth Face, "if this is what you think, be careful. You will not find the help you want because in this place there are only bald men. Now tell me, what kind of harm can happen to you if you hire me? Don't you know the old saying: <When there are not black eyes, take the blue ones.> You can thank Lord for finding me. Hire me as your servant! I want to serve you, my prince, do not doubt that. The night is falling, and you do not appear to have a good horse. With this old horse I am afraid you will fail to move too much ahead. I am so sorry for you both!"

"I do not know what to do," says the prince. "Since I was a child, I used to listen to my father and so, I am frightened to hire you. I have met on my way two more bald men. I believe now that I am in the bald-men's land. I reckon I have to hire you."

Thus, the prince hired Smooth Face to be his shield-bearer and helper during the journey, and they continue the way together. After a good distance, Smooth Face pretends to be thirsty and asks for the bottle of water. The prince gives it to him and Smooth Face puts it to his mouth and suddenly overthrows it. The prince, very surprised, shouts:

"Wow! Smooth Face, what have you done? Don't you know there is no water around? It is hot, and we can die without water."

"I am so sorry, my prince, but that water was bad. Don't worry, we will find a deep well with fresh ice-cold water soon, a well I know about. There, we will make a little stop and I will fill the bottle with fresh water to have on the way."

But further on, all the other wells are all dry.

So they begin riding on the path and soon enough they come upon a clear place where they see a well with its wooden lid open. The well is wide, but it has neither wheel, nor handle or chain. It is only a rope ladder to get down to the water.

"Now, Smooth Face, it is time to show me how brave you are," said the prince.

"Nothing easier," smiled Smooth Face.

He goes down into the well and he fills the bottle with fresh water. Then he shouts loudly from the depth:

"Oh, what a refreshing place is here! I do not even think to get out from this well! Lord blessed the person who dug this well! On hot days like this one, it is so good to relax down here in this cold place."

After a while, he comes out from the well and says:

“My prince, I feel light as a feather, and I feel like flying. Don’t you like to go down there yourself to refresh?”

The prince, being not-trained at all in such quackery, goes down in the well without fear or care, without thinking of what could happen to him. As he stays inside the well and feels fine in the refreshing air, Smooth Face drops the heavy lid on the well with a big noise, and, jumping on it, he says with a triumphant voice:

“Ha! Son of the wise man, are you looking for a trap? You have just fallen in it. How easy was to catch you! Now, you must tell me who you are for real, where you come from and where you go. If you do not tell me all these, your bones will rot in this well.”

The prince is very frightened. He cannot do anything but to tell Smooth Face the whole story. He tells him everything in detail and Smooth Face is very pleased. Laughing, he says with a poisonous voice:

“Well, son of the viper, this is all I want to know from you. If you told me lies, I would kill you, but I take pity of your youth. If you want to see the sunlight again and to step on the green grass, swear now by your sword that you will give me obedience and submission in all, even if I ask you to jump on the fire. From now on, I will be the emperor’s nephew and you shall be my servant, my helper and my shield-bearer. You will serve me till your death. Everywhere you will go with me, you will not speak about this secret because, otherwise, I will wipe you out of the ground. Can you do this? If you cannot do this, I do know what to do with you.”

The prince, seeing himself caught in this trap, swears full obedience and good faith to Smooth Face, hoping for Lord’s mercy and help. After that, Smooth Face puts his hands on the Old King’s letter to his brother, on the money and on the prince’s weapons. He takes out the poor prince from the well and says:

“From now on your name will be “Harap Alb” (White Moor). You are not a prince anymore, you are my servant for everything.”

What a turn! They mount on their horses and start to ride towards the remote place of Green Emperor. Now, Smooth Face is the master and the prince is the servant.

<And the story of the king’s land is still away from its end.>

THE STORY OF HARAP -
ALB
CHAPTER 3:
A THE BEAR’S SALAD AND THE STAG’S PRECIOUS STONES

They went a long way, and crossed over nine countries and nine seas. The journey was hard and tedious. No matter how long it took them, the time for other people elapsed even longer. The faster they moved, the shorter time they ran for them. The faster and longer they travelled, thinner and thinner they got, according to the people's words. Finally, they arrived at Green Emperor's palace. With the letter in his hand, Smooth Face introduced himself as the royal nephew. The good emperor read the letter and he was happy that his nephew made it to his palace. He introduced him to the court and to his daughters. The court accepted him with all consideration for a pure-blood prince and an emperor's successor. Smooth Face was very sure that his lies were taken for granted. Then, proud-hearted and full of vanity, he sent for Harap Alb and told him harshly:

"You will stay at the stable and will take care of my horse. If I go there and I do not find your tasks well done, you will take for your skin off. Do you hear my words?"

"Yes, master," said Harap Alb and went to the stable humiliated.

The princesses noticed how the so-called prince made a point in mistreating and hurting his servant. They took Harap Alb's part and said to Smooth Face:

"Cousin, you are wrong if you do so. If Lord gave us a greater position we must be rather humble and wise, and have pity on these people, because the poor of them are humans!"

"Hei, my dearest cousins," said Smooth Face with his usual cunningness, "in this world there are good men and bad men. We must keep a tight hand over the last ones. This servant of mine did bad things and he is dangerous and wild. I have to keep a sharp look at him all times."

The princesses did not like his words. They didn't like Smooth Face's disrespectful behaviour in spite of their relationship, because kindness has no connection with wickedness.

They started to speak among them about that strange cousin: "He is ugly and he does not resemble our family! Neither the look, nor the manners! And Harap Alb, his servant, has a more pleasant appearance and seems to have a kinder soul. Maybe their hearts told them that Bald-Man was not their cousin and that was why they could not stand him. They hated him so much that they would have wanted to get rid of him like Satan, but they did not want to make their father-the emperor suffer.

One day, Smooth Face joined his uncle at dinner. The servants brought them some special salad. The emperor said to his nephew:

"Dear nephew, have you ever eaten such good salad in your life?"

Indeed the salad was huge and simply melted into one's mouth. The taste was so special that it let everyone at the table without words after eating them. Its green colour was

deeper than emeralds and fresher than cool air. The salad was soft and one did not need anything else to add: no salt, no spices.

"No, my uncle," said Smooth Face, "I have never tasted such marvellous vegetable. I just want to ask you where have you got it from? I could eat a whole sack of it without having enough."

"I do believe you, my nephew. But you do not know how hard it is to bring it here. The salad grows up only in the Bear's Garden, at the other end of the world. Almost no one can get it and escape with his life. Only one man from the entire empire can bring it me. He brings me salad from time to time because he is afraid not to be killed by the bear."

Hearing that, Smooth Face, who wanted to get rid of Harap Alb at any price, said to the emperor:

"Good Lord, dear uncle, my servant will bring us the salad!"

"I believe you are joking, my nephew! A young man like him ignorant of the whereabouts... could never do this. If you have pity of him, let him alone."

"My uncle, do not worry about that. I bet he will bring us a lot of these because I know what his powers are. Just wait and see."

Then, Smooth Face called Harap Alb and said to him harshly:

"Go right now and bring me this kind of salad from the Bear's Garden. Go now in a hurry because there is no time to lose. Mind my orders for I am your master!"

Harap Alb went out very upset and reached the stable. He caressed his horse and told him with sadness:

"Oh, my little horse, if you know what problems I have! I did not listen to my father and now I am the servant of a villain. I have to obey him; otherwise my life is in danger."

"Dear prince," said the horse, "do not worry. Let's go and Lord will take care of us. Jump on me and hold tight because I will take you as fast as the wind."

Harap Alb felt a little better and rode the horse. The magic horse flew with Harap Alb high to the clouds: *<Over the tress, over the seas, over the mountains, over the houses.>* In a few moments, they landed on an island in the middle of the sea. It was impossible for anybody to cross this sea because it was boundless. However, the ember-eating horse came close to the sea. He flew low and put his hoof into the sea water. After touching the water, he transformed himself into a sea-horse; the sea was not hostile for them anymore. The horse and the sea were one now.

When they arrived on the little island, they found on the sand a little house covered with silk-like velvety moss. The prince dismounted and, to his surprise, he saw in the threshold the old beggar whom he gave one coin before leaving home.

"Hey, Harap Alb, you have listened to my words, that we will meet. I must confess: I am Holy Sunday and I know what your trouble is. Smooth Face wants to kill you and he sent you to bring him salad from the Bear's Garden. You must stay here for the night, to think what to do next."

The gratified prince thanked Holy Sunday for her hospitality and for her help. She answered:

"Be sure that not I but the power of mercy and your good heart will help you, Harap Alb," said Holy Sunday getting out and letting him to rest.

Later during the night, she ran to the garden through the dew and picked up some sleeping plants. She boiled them together with honey and sweet milk. Then, she went to the Bear's Garden and poured the mixture into the Bear's fountain. And waiting there by the fountain, she saw the Bear coming early in the morning very furious, growling fearlessly. As soon as he reached the fountain, he began to drink water. He drank and growl contently. Then he suddenly became dizzy and fell down, like a dead animal. Then, seeing the bear like that, Holy Sunday went quickly to the house and waking Harap Alb up in the middle of the night, she said to him:

"Cover yourself into the bear's skin given by your father; go right ahead and at the crossroads you will find the Bear's Garden. Jump the fence, walk in and freely take how much salad you want, for I took care of the Bear. Be careful though! If the Bear wakes up and comes to you, throw your bear skin toward him and run as quickly as you can towards my house."

The prince did as Holy Sunday advised him to do; as he reached the garden, he began to pick up the best salad, stuffing it in a big bag. When he wanted to get out from the garden, the Bear woke up and came after him growling. The prince threw the bear's skin in the beast and ran to Holy Sunday's house. He arrived there safe.

The prince thanked the old woman, kissed her hand, took the bag full of salad and left. They arrived at the Green Emperor's palace and gave the lettuces to Smooth Face. Seeing that, the emperor and the princesses were very surprised. Then Smooth Face said arrogantly:

"Ei, dear uncle, what do you say about that?"

"What can I say, my nephew! If I had such a servant, I would be very glad."

"Why do you think my father send him with me? Only for his courage!"

Short after that, the emperor showed Smooth Face some special jewellery, telling him:

“My dear nephew, have you ever seen such precious and beautiful stones as these in your life?”

“I have seen some, my uncle, but never like these ones. Where can I find them?”

The precious stones were different: diamonds, rubies, sapphires, but the most intriguing of all were the emeralds (we all know that we were in the Green Emperor's land). They had the most beautiful, most intense and most radiant green that can possibly be imagined. The curious green of these emeralds was soft, yet dense; it was the symbol of life itself. Moreover, the colours kept changing between the bright light of the day and the pale light of the torches. No human eye had ever admired such precious stones.

“There is a strange story about these precious stones,” continued the emperor. “A big stag lives in the wild forest. As I was told, that stag's head is covered with these precious stones. I heard that it has one on its forehead, which shines like the sun. Nobody can get closer and no weapon can kill this stag. This happens because the stag is bewitched and, if he sets his eyes on you, your life is lost. Many animals and people lie dead in the forest. In spite of all these facts, sometimes, someone tries to see this famous stag and, entering the forest, he or she finds one or more precious stones lost on the ground. These stones represent my kingdom's glory. Many princes and kings come here and see them.”

“Oh, uncle,” said Smooth Face, “what kind of men are these? Are they all so faint-hearted? I bet my servant will bring us the stag's skin and his head all full of unique precious stones.”

He did not wait and called the servant:

“Go right now in the Stag's Forest and bring me his head full of precious stones. But mind my words: do not steal any of the stones because you will be a dead man.”

The prince went again to the stable, and caressing his horse, said full of sorrow:

“My dear horse, Smooth Face got me again into trouble. If I escape from this once again, I will be very lucky.”

“What kind of weird order have you received today?” asked the horse.

“My friend, a more frightened order than ever.”

“Do not worry, master!” said the horse. “We will start again from the beginning, but both of us will get to the end of the story this time. Lord will have mercy on us again.”

So the prince mounted his horse. The magic stallion started to fly, very slowly, at first, slower than a whisper. Then he tensioned his strong muscles and said:

“Hold it tight, my prince! We are flying faster again!”

High in the sky

*We started to fly.
From cloud to the sun
We run and we run
Between the stars and the Moon
We'll be over the island quite soon.>*



Then, they arrived at the Holy Sunday's house again. When he saw the prince at her door, she said kindly:

"My prince, do you need me again?"

"Yes, mother," he answered softly. "Smooth Face got me into trouble again. He certainly wants to kill me. I would rather die than live such a life."

"My son, please do not say that. I did not know you were so fearful. Stay here tonight and I will tell you in the morning what to do next. You must be patient because you will not escape so easy this time."

"Maybe you are right, mother. It is too much trouble for me, though."

"Well, let us just think what you are going to do with the stag. You have a master and you have to follow his orders."

The old lady went to the attic and took out from a box the helmet and the sword from the Long Beard Dwarf. She had all these objects since the dwarf was the master of the dark inside the earth. Holy Sunday gave these tools to Harap Alb and told him:

"Take these things because you will need them where you are going; we have to be successful this time, too."

When the day broke, Holy Sunday went to the prince and took him to the Stag's Forest where they dug a deep pit, close to the spring where the stag used to drink water and to sleep until the sun set. When they finished digging, Holy Sunday said:

"Now, my boy, jump into this pit and stay there all day. Put on the helmet and hold the sword in your hand. When the stag comes to the spring to drink water and to sleep with the eyes opened as usual, you just get slowly out of the pit, cut his neck with a single move and quickly jump back into the pit and stay there till the sunset. All this time the stag's head will call you with human voice, because he wants to see you. His head has a poisonous eye which can kill anyone. You do not get out of the pit until the sunset."

And the prince did what Holy Sunday told him. After he cut the stag's head with one move, he hid in the pit. The head of the stag cried and called the name of the prince:

"Good prince, get out only for a while so I can see you, because you are so brave and I want to give you my treasures. I want to see you, to see you"

But the prince did not answer and stayed quiet there in the pit. After the sunset, the sag cried no more and the prince got out from his pit. He peeled out the skin of the stag, took his head with all the precious stones and ran to Holy Sunday. He told her:

“With Lord’s help and with your help, we have finished this terrible task, mother. I hate Smooth Face and I want to see him only when the pigs fly.”

“Leave him to his fate, my prince. You have done your duty. Now go home and take care.”

So, the prince thanked Holy Sunday for her help, hugged her and rode his horse to the Green Emperor’s palace.

*<They went to the kingdom
Lord gave them wisdom
And the story of the king’s land
Is still away from its hand.>*

On his way back, everywhere they stopped, people came to see him because the big precious stones from the head of the stag were sparkling brighter than the sun. During this time, one evening, Smooth Face, Green Emperor and one of his daughters were talking in the palace garden. They saw some bright rays of light from the distance. It was the prince riding his horse and carrying the skin of the stag and his head covered with precious stones.

The cunning Smooth Face said:

“Do you see, uncle? What have I told you?”

“I see, nephew, if I had had such a servant, I would invite him to dinner with us and I would put him to sit on the top of the table.”

“Oh, uncle, a servant is a servant, not a relative. You have strange ideas. I think you are too old and you would better put me in your place very soon. You will see what a good life everyone will have. I am the right man.”

The king was amazed by these words and the princesses had their doubts. They looked at him like the cat looks to a dog. They felt what a bad man he was.

After some time, the emperor invited a lot of princes and noble men from all around to feast. The princesses asked Smooth Face to let his servant come to the feast to help. Smooth Face agreed with the condition to stay only behind of his master.

In the middle of the feast, when the wine was sweeter and the food was tastier, a wonderful bird knocked at the palace window and said with human voice:

“You all drink and eat and are joyful, but nobody thinks at Red Emperor’s daughter and her grief.”

All the guests did not know what to say. Nobody knew who the princess and Red Emperor, her father, were or where they lived. The guests began a vivid debate on who the tyrannical emperor and his daughter were. Some thought he was a dangerous wizard; some thought he himself was the bird on the mission to create fear and doubt.

Smooth Face, looking to his servant, caught a smile on his face and angrily said to him:

“You, miserable servant, you know something about the princess. Go right now, find her and capture her for me. No matter where she is! Reveal the mystery; you are such a good adventurer.”

“Yes, master, I will go,” said the prince and went to the stable to his horse.

“My friend, Smooth Face gave me a new order today. I know nothing about Red Emperor’s daughter. Where she is? Who is this emperor? How can I find them?”

“Master,” said the horse, “what’s the matter with you? Do not worry because we both have been successful in everything. Soon, we will see the end of this story. Leave this task to me; you will discover my real powers now.”

The prince mounted the horse and it flew:

*<High in the sky
We started to fly.
From the clouds to the sun
We run and run
Between the stars and to the moon
We’ll be over the island quite soon.>*

CHAPTER 4:

THE ANT’S WEDDING, FROST AND OTHER FRIENDLY CREATURES

The prince and his horse went straight ahead through deserted and desolated places, hardly meeting anyone. When they were about to cross a bridge over the lead lake, they noticed on the bridge an ant wedding passing by, with the bride-ant and the groom-ant and all the guest-ants. The prince taught what to do: “If I pass on the bridge, I will kill the ants. I feel pity for them. It is better to jump in the water and try to reach the ground.”

And so he did. When they went further away a flying-ant appeared in front of them and said:

“Because you were so good and had pity on us, I want to do something for you. Take this flying-ant wing and when you are in trouble set it on fire. My people and I will help you.”

The prince thanked the ant and put the wing in his pocket. They went further away. Suddenly, the prince heard something like a buzz. He looked to the right, then to the left and when he looked upward he saw a swarm of bees which flew up and down looking for a place to settle. Having such a merciful heart he took off the helmet from his head, put it on the grass and waited. The bees flew and all of them gathered into the helmet. The prince wanted to do even more for the bees. He found a log and hollowed it out. He gathered in it sweet smelling weed, took the helmet with the bees and turned it over inside the hole. Then he and his horse went on their way.

While travelling on, pleased of what they did, the prince saw before his eyes no more and no less than the queen of the bees, who said to him:

“Prince, because you were so good and made a shelter for us, I want to do something for you, too. Take this bee-wing and when you get into trouble set it on fire. I will be in a hurry to help you.”

The prince thanked the bee-queen, took the wing and went on his way. They travelled for a long period of time. When they were near the big forest, he saw an ugly creature. With his ears flapping, this creature sat next to a big fire and screamed out of his lungs that he is.... freezing. He had an iced breath which froze everything around. The prince, frozen himself, said:

“How many lives a man lives, still many miracles he sees. Tell me the truth: are you Jack Frost?” asked the prince.

“You may laugh,” answered the creature, “But you cannot go without me wherever you go. My name is Frost.”

“All right. Come along if you wish.” said the prince.

So they both went together. After walking a long distance through the forest, the prince saw another strange creature: a big man who has just eaten two cows, a calf, one sheep and still screaming for food. He was still hungry.

“Well,” said the prince, “you must be Hungry Man, who has never enough food for his appetite.”

“You laugh at me, young prince, but you know how much I can help you on your way. My name is Greedy Guts.”

“Come with me, my friend, if you say so. I will help you now; you will help me next time.”

And so, all three continued the way. Not long after these encounters, the prince saw another creature. This one kept saying that he drank twenty lakes and a river and he cried that he is still very thirsty.

“Who are you?” asked the prince “Are you the son of draught?”

“Do not laugh at me, young prince. I have been waiting for you for a long time. Holy Sunday told me you were coming. I am here to help you on your way. My name is Dry Throat.”

“It seems that you will also be helpful for me. Come along and join us, let the mills work you’ve done enough harm.”

So, they went ahead to find Red Emperor’s land. After a while, going through the forest, the prince stopped and amazed, noticed before his eyes on the green grass a man with a single eye, big as a plate, but with which he could see all the way to the middle of the earth.

“Poor man,” says the prince, “I think you are the Big Blind’s Brother.”

“Yes, I am. I am also going to help you to find Red Emperor’s daughter. My name is Keen Eye.”

“Well, whatever you say, come with us,” said the prince. “Lord will reward you for your kind help.”

And so, the five mates travelled together along the country road. Around a turn, they had to stop: in the middle of the road, there was another strange creature with little pointed ears, having a bow in his hand.

“Who are you?” asked the prince.

“My name is Birdcatcher, because when I see a bird flying up I can extend my hand to reach it out and I can do that in all directions. I could reach the moon or the stars. And if I cannot touch the bird with my hand, I can aim it with my bow. I was waiting for you, my prince. Take me in your team, so I can help you. You do not know get in what trouble you are. Red Emperor’s daughter is very dangerous. When she wants to be a bird, she turns into a miraculous bird flying to the moon ... and catch her if you can. Only I could catch her!”

“If things are like that, of course, I will take you with me. We need all the help we can get.”

They set on the way again. Sometimes slower, sometimes faster, sometimes easier, sometimes quicker, they arrived at Red Emperor’s palace.

<They went to the kingdom

God gave them wisdom

And the story of emperor’s land

Is still away from its end.>

CHAPTER 5:

AT RED EMPEROR AND HIS COOPER HOUSE OF FIRE



The tale says that the prince and his mates entered the city. The prince introduced himself to Red Emperor and told him why he came for. The emperor was amazed when he heard those words and how daring the young man was to ask for his daughter. He gave him no answer for the moment, but he kindly asked him to stay there for the night. Then, he secretly called for a devoted servant and ordered him to settle the guests in the famous copper house, where a lot of young men who asked for his daughter died.

Our friend was tired, so he accepted immediately this strange bedroom. They were ready to go to sleep. The servant set a huge fire under the copper house until it became as red as embers. When the night fell down, the servant invited the guests in the house for rest. But Frost said:

“Mind you here and do not enter the house before me, for you will die. I know this Red Emperor and his bad fame across this country. He is a cruel man. However, I found a needle in the devil’s skin on this night.”

They went to the house and stopped in front of the door. Frost blew three times on the door and the house became neither hot, nor cool, just as good as to sleep in it. They entered and everybody slept soon, except Frost, of course. He kept crying all night long that he was cold and that his tongue was frozen in his mouth.

When the sunrise came, they began to shout that the house was too cold. The servant, hearing this ran to the emperor and told him the miracle. The emperor went there and saw with his own eyes that the former hot copper house was all frozen. The prince said:

“Your highness, Green Emperor’s nephew is waiting for me with your daughter. I think you will give me the princess now, because I have to go home.”

“Very well,” said the Red Emperor, “we will see all about this later. Now it is better to eat some food to your liking.”

“What good words are coming from your mouth, your highness. We will die of hunger,” said Greedy Guts.

“... and of thirst, your highness,” added Dry Throat. “To my opinion, food is only a waste of time. Drinking is the bottom line for a man.”

The emperor listened to them and thought: “I will prepare something to get rid of you very soon.”

The servant brought them twelve big baskets of bread, twelve cows, twelve roasted pigs, twelve turkeys, twelve sheep, twelve pigeons and twelve barrels and a bottle of red wine. They started eating, but Greedy Gut and Dry Throat ate and drank everything and kept yelling that the food and drink was too little and that they were hungry and thirsty. The emperor listened to these strange people, feeling frightened. How on earth could he send them back without his daughter?

When this fabulous feast was finally over, the prince said:

“Your highness, thank you very much for such a good meal! I think that you can give me the princess’ hand now, because the emperor’s nephew is waiting impatiently for us.”

“Hey, young man, there is time for everything. You have just eaten and drunk to your heart’s content. Now you have to work a little. Will you give me a hand? Here is a bag of poppy seeds mixed with a bag of fine sand. I want you to select the poppy seeds on one side and the sand on the other side, by tomorrow morning. But if you do not succeed, I will take your heads off tomorrow.”

The emperor entered his palace. The prince and his friends were petrified. The prince said:

“Until now the work was easy with your help, my friends, but now we are caught in the trap. I think this is an impossible mission to accomplish.”

“I could do this if I had the mouth of an ant,” said Keen Eye.

“Did you say the mouth of an ant?” asked the prince. “Wow, I remember the ant and her wing.”

Quickly, he took the wing out of his pocket and set it on fire. What a miracle! As far as the eyes can reach, a lot of ants were coming. Some from the grass, some from the underground, some flying and, in no time they chose the seeds from the sand aside. The prince thanked the ants for their help and they all went to sleep till the morning came.

At the break of the day the emperor came full of joy, thinking that the young man could not accomplish his order. To his great surprise, he saw the seeds set in order and their work well done. He felt into despair.

The prince said again:

“Your highness, I think that you will give me the princess because we want to let you in peace and go home.”

The emperor thought quickly to another trick for them and said:

“Well, young man, we have enough time to think about this. For the moment you have another work to do. Guard my daughter’s door during this night. She uses to go to bed in

her bedroom, but this night you have to guard her till tomorrow morning. If she is there in the morning, I may give her to you. But if she is not there, I will cut your heads." And the emperor goes away.



CHAPTER 6:

THE RUNAWAY PRINCESS AND THE FANTASTIC RACE

After the mean emperor told our heroes all these, Frost exclaimed:

"Oh, lord, we are deep into hot water!"

"What can we do?" said Greedy Guts.

"Lord will help us," said Birdeatcher "and do not forget that Keen Eye and I can find her everywhere where she flies."

After the night's fall, the prince turned into a little bird and flew between the guardians. But Keen Eye saw her and said to Birdeatcher man:

"Oops, the princess played us a trick. Now she is a bird and nobody sees it but you. However, we could catch her and bring her home. I will show you where she is and you will catch her. Let's go!"

They did not go a long way when Keen Eye said:

"Look there, on the top of the mountain, behind the rock!"

Birdeatcher extended his hand after her but she flew behind the moon. Then, Birdeatcher took the moon in his hands, shook it and caught the bird. The bird, who was the princess, said to him:

"Please, release me and let me go free, for I will give you an imperial gift."

"No way," he said. "Please, do not make me angry. I want to go home with my head on my shoulders," said Birdie. When the prince saw this he started to sing of happiness:

<What a trouble is for you,

If you don't know what to do

Thanking you from our heart

For Keen Eye and Birdeatcher were so smart.>

The whole group congratulated Birdeatcher and Keen Eye for their great team work. When he was told what happened, Red Emperor came in a hurry to see everything with

his eyes if his daughter was caught or not. When he saw his daughter safe in her bedroom, guarded by the prince and his friends, he became angry and irritated.

Then, the prince said:

“Now your highness, you have no choice but to give me the princess.”



“Well, young man,” said the emperor sadly, “the time for this has come. I just want to say something. I have nice who has the same age as she and who looks exactly like her – a perfect twin. You have to choose between them, you have to decide who the princess is. Take a sharp look! If you guess, take her and go away. But if you do not guess, go back and run away from my empire.”

The poor prince did not know what to do and went out of the room. He asked for a short time to think. He thought that if there was anyone to help him, he remembered the bee queen and her wing. He took it out from his pocket and set it on fire. All of the sudden, the bee queen was on his shoulder and asked:

“Do you need me? I am ready to help you.”

The prince explained his trouble and the queen said:

“Go into the house and look very well to the girls. If you see one who defends herself with the handkerchief, that one will be the princess.”

The prince returned to the room with the bee on his shoulder. There, Red Emperor, all the court and the two girls were waiting for the prince to choose. He looked at the girls and the bee landed on one of the girl’s cheek. The girl moved a little and the prince went to her, took her hand and said to the emperor:

“Now, your highness, the princess is mine. I fulfilled all your orders.”

Red Emperor answered him:

“You can take her. I give her to you from all my heart because you are a brave man.”

The prince thanked him kindly and said to the girl:

“Come with me to Green Emperor for our mission here is over.”

But the princess said:

“Not so impatient young man! Before this I want you to do something for me, too. I have a turtle-dove. Your horse and my turtle-dove must go and bring me three branches from the sweet apple tree and the life giving water and the death giving water from the mountains that duel each other. If my turtle dove comes back first, before your horse does, I will not go with you.”

These words being said, the horse and the bird began the race. Certainly, the dove-turtle, being smaller and lighter, arrived before the horse and took in the beak three branches of an apple tree and the life giving water and the death giving water and flew back home as the lightning. When the bird was very close to the palace, the horse stopped her speaking with a mild and sweet voice:

“Little bird, dear turtle-dove, give me all these things and go back to take others for you. You are faster and lighter than me, you will reach me from behind. Do this, please, for my master and for your princess, otherwise they will be in big danger. Please, dear turtle-dove!”

Amazingly, the little bird gave the horse the things she had already gathered. The magic horse took all the things and ran as the wind to his prince. Harap Alb felt his heart full of happiness and kissed the horse. When the turtle-dove arrived at home the princess said to her:

“Now go to Green Emperor and let him know we are on our way.”

And saying these, the princess kneeling in front of his father said:

“Bless me father and farewell. I must go with the prince. This is my fate.”

They mounted the horse and started a long journey back together with Frost, Greedy Guts, Dry Throat, Red Eye and Birdcatcher. After some time, the five friends stopped and said:

“Now we say farewell to you and we wish you to find happiness. We go back in the woods, we had enough adventures together.”

The young prince thanked them warmly and continued his way with the princess. On his way to his uncle's palace, he thought he did enough for Smooth Face and he would not give him the princess. She was as beautiful as a rose and he fell in love with her and he wanted to marry her. The girl, like all the girls, shared the same feeling with him. Just like that song:

*<Go away and come again,
Let me free, then have me chain.>*

In no time the turtle-dove arrived at Green Emperor's palace and announced that the prince and Red Emperor's daughter would be there soon.

Green Emperor made all the arrangements for receiving them. After some time, they arrived at the palace. Green Emperor, the princess, Smooth Face and all the imperial court were waiting for them. Smooth Face, looking at the beautiful princess, came close quickly and took her in his arms, but the girl pushed him away and said:

“Stay away from me, Smooth Face; do you think I come here for you? I am here for the true prince because he is the real Green Emperor’s nephew.”

Smooth Face, full of rage, cut the prince’s head with one stroke. Seeing the disaster, the horse took Smooth Face in its teeth and threw him to the sky and then down to earth. The mean man broke in many little pieces. In a miraculous way, the princess set the prince’s head back in its place, put the branches around his neck, poured death giving water on his neck, and then poured life giving water.

Almost immediately the prince stood on his feet and said:

“I think I have slept a little....”

“You were ready to sleep for good, but the princess saved you,” said the emperor.

Hearing all the happenings, the prince said to his uncle:

“Now, that you know I am your true nephew, I want your blessing because I want to marry this princess.”

Then, both knelt before the emperor and they swore faith to each other forever.

What it followed was a fantastic wedding to which they had invited the ants, the bees and their friends, Frost, Greedy Guts, Dry Throat, Keen Eye and Birdcatcher. They enjoyed themselves, eating, drinking and dancing for three days and three nights. Then, Green Emperor named the prince as his successor and the chief of the state and they all lived happily ever after.

*<And the story about the king’s lad
Is now at the end. >*

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