Wonder Tales from Many Lands

[Illustrated]

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KATHARINE PYLE

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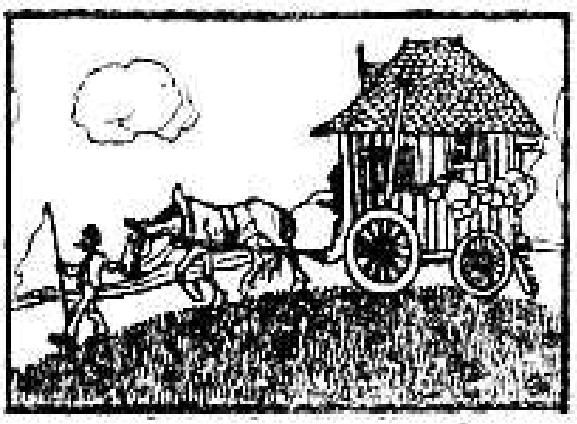
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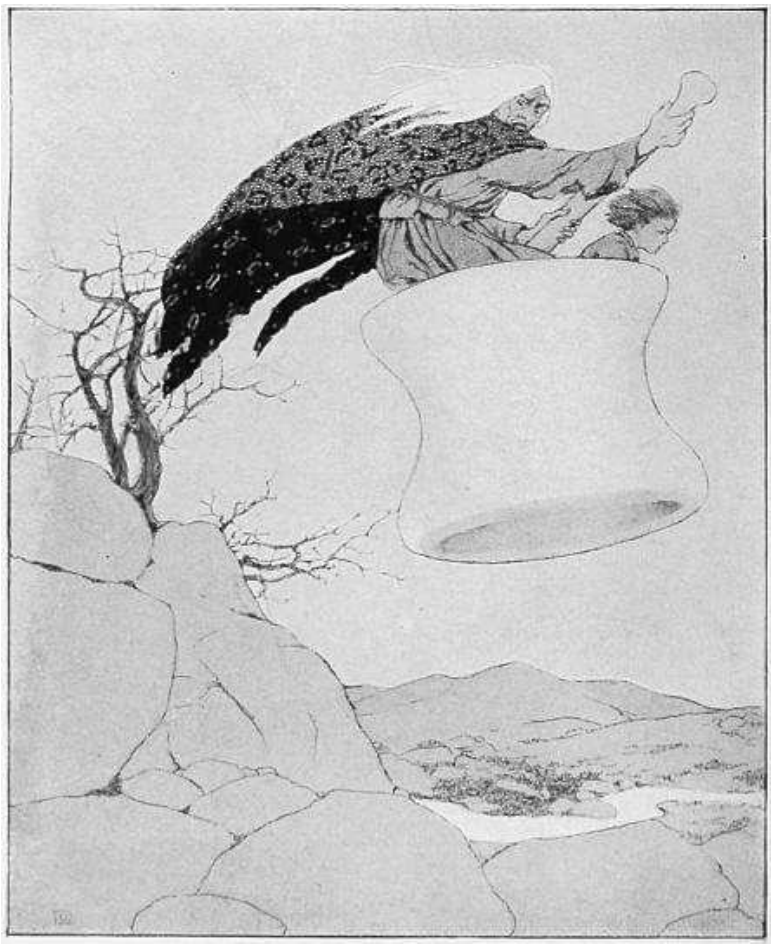
FROM MANY LANDS



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED

BY

KATHARINE PYLE



THE BABA YAGA AND PETER

Fr.

LONG, BROAD, AND SHARPSIGHT

A STORY FROM BOHEMIA

THERE was once a King who had one only son, and him he loved better than anything in the whole world—better even than his own life. The King's greatest desire was to see his son married, but though the Prince had travelled in many lands, and had seen many noble and beautiful ladies, there was not one among them all whom he wished to have for a wife.

One day the King called his son to him and said, "My son, for a long time now I have hoped to see you choose a bride, but you have desired no one. Take now this silver key. Go to the top of the castle, and there you will see a steel door. This key will unlock it. Open the door and enter. Look carefully at everything in the room, and then return and tell me what you have seen. But, whatever you do, do not touch nor draw aside the curtain that hangs at the right of the door. If you should disobey me and do this thing, you will suffer the greatest dangers, and may even pay for it with your life."

The Prince wondered greatly at his father's words, but he took the key and went to the top of the castle, and there he found the steel door his father had described. He unlocked it with the silver key, stepped inside, and looked about him. When he had done so, he was filled with amazement at what he saw. The room had

twelve sides, and on eleven of these sides were pictures of eleven princesses more beautiful than any the Prince had ever seen in all his life before. Moreover, these pictures were as though they were alive. When the Prince looked at them, they moved and smiled and blushed and beckoned to him. He went from one to the other, and they were so beautiful that each one he looked upon seemed lovelier than the last. But lovely though they were, there was not one of them whom the Prince wished to have for a wife.

Last of all, the Prince came to the twelfth side of the room, and it was covered over with a curtain, and the curtain was of velvet richly embroidered with gold and precious stones. The Prince stood before it and looked at it and looked at it. He tried to peer under its edges, but he could see nothing; never in all his life had he longed for anything as he longed to lift that curtain and see what was behind it.

At last his longing grew so great that he could withstand it no longer. He laid his hand upon the folds and drew it aside, and when he had done so, his heart melted within him for love and joy. For there was the portrait of a maiden so fair and lovely that all the other eleven beauties were as nothing beside her.

The Prince stood and looked at her, and she looked back at him, and she did not blush or beckon to him as the others had done, but rather she grew pale.

"Yes," said the Prince at last, "you and you only shall be my bride, even though I should have to go to the ends of the world to find you."

When he said that, the picture bowed its head gravely.

Then the Prince dropped the curtain and left the room and went down to where the old King was waiting for him. As soon as he came before his father, the old man asked whether he had found the room and entered it.

"I did," answered the Prince.

"And what did you see in the room, my son?"

"I saw a picture of the maiden whom I wish to have for a wife."

"And which of the eleven was it?"

"It was none of the eleven; it was the twelfth—she whose portrait hangs behind the curtain."

When the old King heard this, he gave a cry of grief. "Alas, alas, my son! What have you done! Did I not warn you not to lift the curtain and not to look behind it?"

"You warned me, my father, and yet I could not but look, and now I have seen the only one whom I will ever marry. Tell me, I pray of you, who she is, that I may go in search of her."

"Well did I know that misfortune would come upon you if ever you entered that room. That Princess whom you have seen is indeed the most beautiful Princess in all the world, but she is also the most unfortunate. Because of her beauty, she was carried away by a wicked and powerful Magician who wished to marry her. To this, however, she would not consent. He still keeps her a prisoner in an iron castle far away beyond forest, plain, and mountain at the very end of the world. Many princes and heroes and brave

men have tried to rescue her, but none has ever succeeded. They have lost their lives in the attempt, and the Magician has turned them all into stone statues to adorn his castle. And now you are determined to throw away your life also."

"That may be," said the Prince; "and yet it may also be that I shall succeed even though others have failed. At any rate, I must try, for I cannot live without her."

When the King found that his son was determined to go, and that nothing could stay him, he gave him a jewelled sword and the finest steed in his stable and bade him God-speed.

So the Prince set out with his father's blessing, and he rode along and rode along until at last he came to a forest that was so vast there seemed to be no end to it. In this forest he quite lost his way. He was therefore very glad when he saw some one trudging along in front of him.

The Prince rode on until he overtook the man, and then he reined in his horse and bade him good day.

"Good day," answered the man.

"Do you know the ways through this forest?" asked the Prince.

"No, I know nothing about them, but that never bothers me. If at any time I think I am going in the wrong direction, it is easy to right myself."

"How is that?" said the Prince.

"Oh, I have the power of stretching myself out to any length, and if I lose my way I have only to make myself tall enough to see over the tree-tops, and then I can easily tell where I am."

"That must be very curious. I should like to see that," said the Prince.

Well, that was easy enough, and the man would be glad enough to oblige him. So he began to stretch himself. He stretched and stretched and stretched until he was taller than the tallest tree in the forest. His head and body were quite lost to sight among the branches, and all that the Prince could see were his legs and feet.

"Is that enough?" the man called down to the Prince.

"Yes, that is enough," answered the Prince, and he had to shout to make himself heard, the man's head was so far away.

Then the man began to shrink. He shrank and shrank until he was no taller than the Prince himself.

"You are a wonderful fellow," said the Prince. "What is your name?"

The man's name was Long.

"And what did you see up there?"

"I saw a plain and great mountains beyond, and still beyond that an iron castle, and it was so far away that it must be at the very end of the world."

"It is that castle that I am seeking," said the Prince, "and now I see that you are the very man to guide me there. Tell me, Long, will you take service with me? If you will, I will pay you well."

Yes, Long would do that, and not for the sake of the money either, but because he had taken a fancy to the Prince.

So the Prince and his new servant travelled along together, and presently they came out of the forest on to a plain, and there, far in front of them, was another man also travelling along toward the mountains.

"Look, Master!" said Long. "Do you see that man? His name is Broad. You ought to have him for a servant too, for he is even more wonderful than I am."

"Call him, then," said the Prince, "and I will speak with him."

No, Long could not call him, for Broad was too far away to hear him, but he could soon overtake him. So Long stretched himself out until he was tall enough to go half a mile at every step. In this way he soon overtook Broad and stopped him, and then he and Broad waited until the Prince had caught up to them.

"Good day," said the Prince to Broad.

"Good day," answered Broad.

"My servant here tells me that you are a very wonderful person," said the Prince. "What can you do that is so wonderful?"

What Broad could do was to spread himself out until he was as broad across as he wished to be.

"I should like to see that," said the Prince.

Very well! Nothing was easier, and Broad was willing to show him. "But first," said Broad, "do you get behind those rocks over yonder. Otherwise you may get hurt. And now I will begin."

"Quick! quick, Master!" cried Long, in a voice of fear. "We have not a moment to lose," and he ran at full speed and crouched down behind the rocks. The Prince followed him, and he also got behind the rocks, but he did not know why Long was in such a hurry, nor why he seemed so frightened. He soon saw, however, for when Broad began to spread, he spread so fast and with such force that unless the Prince and Long had been behind the rocks, they would certainly have been pushed against them and crushed.

"Is that enough?" cried Broad, after he had spread out so wide that the Prince could scarcely see across him.

"Yes, that is enough."

So Broad began to shrink, and soon he was no fatter than he had been before.

"Yes, you are certainly a very wonderful fellow, and I should like to have you for a servant," said the Prince. "Will you come with me also?"

Yes, Broad would come, for a master who was good enough for Long was good enough for him too. So now the Prince had two servants. He rode on across the plain toward the mountains, and the two followed him.

After a while they came to a man sitting by the way with a bandage over his eyes. The Prince stopped and spoke to him.

"Are you blind, my poor fellow, that you wear a bandage over your eyes?"

"No," answered the man, "I am not blind. I wear the bandage because I see too well without it. Even now, with this bandage, I can see as clearly as you ever can. If I take it off, I can see for hundreds of miles, and when I look at anything steadily my sight is so strong that the thing is riven to pieces, or bursts into flame and is burned."

"That is a very curious thing," said the Prince. "Could you break yonder rock to pieces merely by looking at it?"

"Yes, I could do that."

"I would like to see it done," said the Prince.

Well, the man was ready to oblige him. So he took the bandage from his eyes and fixed his gaze on the rock. First the rock grew hot, and then it smoked, and then, with a great noise, it exploded into tiny fragments, so that the pieces flew about through the air.

"Yes, you are even more wonderful than these other two," said the Prince, "and they are wonderful enough. How are you called?"

"My name is Sharpsight."

"Well, Sharpsight, will you take service with me, for I need just such a servant as you?"

Yes, Sharpsight would do that; so now the Prince had three servants, and they were such servants as no one in the world ever had before.

They travelled along over the plain, and at last they came to the foot of the mountain that lay between them and the iron castle.

"Now we must either go over it or round it," said the Prince; "and which shall it be?"

"No need for that, Master," answered Sharpsight. "Just let me unbandage my eyes, but be careful you are not struck by any of the flying pieces when the mountain begins to split."

So the Prince and Broad and Long took shelter behind a clump of trees, and then Sharpsight uncovered his eyes. He fixed his eyes on the mountain, and presently it began to groan and split and splinter. Pieces of sharp rock and stones flew through the air. It was not long before Sharpsight's gaze had bored a way straight through the mountain and out on the other side. Then he put back the bandage over his eyes and called to the Prince that the way was clear.

The Prince and his companions came out from their shelter, and when they saw the way that Sharpsight had made through the mountain they could not wonder enough. It was so broad and clear that ten men could have ridden through it abreast.

With such a way before them it did not take them long to go through the mountain, and then they found themselves in the country beyond, and a black and terrible land it was too. Nowhere was there any sound or sign of life. There were fields, but no grass. There were trees, but they bore neither leaves nor fruit. There was a river, but it did not flow, and there was light, and yet they saw no sun. But darker and gloomier than all the rest was the castle which rose before them. It was the iron castle where the Black Magician lived.

There was a moat round the castle and an iron bridge across it. The companions rode across the bridge, and no sooner were they over than the bridge rose behind them and they were prisoners.

They could not have turned back even if they had wished to, but none of them had any thought of such a thing.

The Prince struck with his sword upon the great door of the castle, and at once it opened before him, but when he entered he saw no one. Before him was a great hall, and on either side of it was a long row of stone figures. These statues were all figures of knights and kings and princes. The Prince looked at them and wondered, for they were so lifelike that it seemed scarcely possible to believe that they were of stone.

He and his companions went on farther into the castle, and everywhere they found rooms magnificently furnished, but silent and deserted. Nowhere was there any sign of life.

Last of all they entered what seemed to be a dining-hall. Here was a table set with the most delicious things to eat and drink. There were four places about the table, and one of them was somewhat higher than the others, as though intended for the prince or king.

"One might think this table had been set for us," said the Prince. "We will wait for a while, and then, if no one comes, we will eat, at any rate."

They waited for some time and then took their places at the table. At once invisible hands filled the goblets and other invisible hands passed the dishes.

The Prince and his companions ate and drank all they wished, and then they rose from the table, meaning to look farther through the castle.

At this moment the door opened and a tall man with a long grey beard came into the room. From head to foot he was dressed entirely in black velvet, even to his cap and shoes, and round his waist his robe was fastened with three iron bands. In one hand was an ivory wand, curiously carved; with the other he led a lady so beautiful, and yet so pale and sad-looking, that the heart ached to look at her. The moment the Prince saw her he knew her as the one whose picture he had seen behind the golden curtain—the one whom he had said should be his bride.

The Magician, for it was he, spoke at once to the Prince. "I know why you have come here, and that you hope to win this Princess for your bride. Many others have come here with the same wish and have failed. Now you shall have your turn. For three nights you must watch here with her. If each morning I return and find her still with you, then you shall have her for a bride after the third morning. But if she is gone, you shall be turned into a stone statue, such as those you have already seen about my palace."

"That ought not to be a hard task," said the Prince. "Gladly will I watch with her for three nights; if in the morning you find her gone, I am willing to suffer whatever you will. But my three companions must also watch with me."

Yes, the Magician was willing to agree to that, so he left the lady there with the four, and then went away, closing the door behind him.

As soon as the Magician had gone the Prince and his followers made ready to guard the room so that no one could come in to take the lady away, nor could she herself leave without their knowing it.

Long lay down and stretched himself out until he encircled the whole room, and anyone who went in or out would have to step over him. Sharpsight sat down to watch, while Broad stood in the doorway and made himself so broad that no one could possibly have squeezed in past him. Meanwhile the Prince tried to talk to the lady, but she would not look at him nor answer him.

In this way some time passed, and then suddenly the Prince began to feel very drowsy. He tried to rouse himself, but in spite of his efforts his eyes closed, and he fell into a deep sleep.

It was not until the early morning that he woke. Then he roused himself and looked about him. His companions too were only just opening their eyes, for they, like himself, had been asleep, and the lady was gone from the room.

When the Prince saw this he began to groan and lament, but his companions told him not to despair.

"Wait until I see if I can tell you where she is," said Sharpsight. He leaned from the window and looked about.

"Yes, I see her," he said. "A hundred miles away from here is a forest. In that forest is an oak-tree. On the topmost bough of that oak-tree is an acorn, and in that acorn is the Princess hidden."

"But what good is it to know where she is unless we can get her back before the Magician comes?" cried the Prince. "It would take us days to journey there and to return."

"Not so long as that, Master," answered Long. "Have patience for a moment until I see what I can do." He then stepped outside and made himself so tall that he could go ten miles at a step. He set Sharpsight on his shoulder to show him the way, and away he went, and he made such good time that he was back in the castle again before the Prince could have walked three times round the room.

"Here, Master," he said, "here is the acorn. Take it and throw it upon the floor."

The Prince threw the acorn upon the floor, and at once it flew open, and there stood the Princess before him.

Hardly had this happened when the door opened and the Magician came into the room. When he saw the Princess he gave a cry of rage, and one of the iron bands about his middle broke with a loud noise.

He looked at the Prince, and his eyes flashed as if with red fire. "This time you have succeeded in keeping the Princess with you," he cried, "but do not be too sure that you can do the same thing again. To-night you shall try once more."

So saying he went away, taking the Princess with him. In the evening he came again, and again he brought the Princess.

"Watch her well," said he to the Prince, with an evil smile. "Remember, if she is not still here to-morrow morning you will share the fate of the others who have tried to watch her and have failed."

"Very well," answered the Prince. "What must be must be, and I can only do my best."

The Magician then went away, leaving the Princess with them as before.

The Prince and his companions had determined that this night they would stay awake, whatever happened, but presently their eyelids grew as heavy as lead, and soon, in spite of themselves, they all fell into a deep sleep.

When they awoke the day was breaking, and the Princess had again disappeared. The Prince was ready to tear his hair with despair, but Sharpsight bade him take heart.

"Wait until I take a look about," he said. "If I cannot see her, then it will be time for you to despair."

He leaned from the window, and first he looked east, and then he looked west, and then he looked toward the north. "Yes, now I see her," he said, "but she is far enough away. Two hundred miles from here is a desert. In that desert is a rock, in that rock is a golden ring, and that ring is the Princess."

"That is far away indeed," groaned the Prince, "and at any moment the Magician may be here."

"Never mind, Master," cried Long. "Two hundred miles is not so far when one can go twenty miles at a step." He then made himself twice as tall as the day before, and taking Sharpsight on his shoulders he set out for the desert.

It was not long before he was back again, and in his hand he carried the golden ring. "If it had not been for Sharpsight," he said, "I would have been forced to bring back the whole rock with me, but he fixed his eyes upon it, and at once it split into a thousand pieces and the ring fell out. Here! Take the ring, Master, quick, and throw it upon the floor."

The Prince did so, and as soon as the ring touched the ground it was transformed into the Princess.

At this moment the Magician opened the door and came into the room. When he saw the Princess he stopped short, and his face turned black with rage and fear. At the same moment the second band about his middle flew apart.

"Ah, well!" he cried to the Prince, "no doubt you think you are very clever, but remember there is still another night, and next time you may not prove so lucky in keeping the Princess with you."

So saying he went away with the Princess, and the Prince saw him no more until evening. Then for the third time he came, and brought the Princess with him.

"Watch her well," said he, "for I promise you will not have so easy a task this time as you have had before."

Then he went away, and the four comrades set themselves to watch. But again all happened as it had before. In spite of themselves they could not stay awake. First they nodded and then they snored, and then they fell into such a deep sleep that if the walls had fallen about them they would not have known it. For this was an enchanted sleep that the Magician had thrown upon them in order to take away the Princess.

Not until day began to dawn did the four awake, and when they did there was nothing to be seen of the Princess.

"Well, she is not here in the room," said Sharpsight, "so methinks I'd better look outside."

Then he leaned from the window, and for a long time he looked about him. At last he spoke. "Master, I see the Princess, but to bring her back will not be such an easy task as it was before. Three hundred miles from here is a sea. At the bottom of the sea is a shell. In that shell is a pearl, and that pearl is the Princess. But to bring that pearl up from the sea is a task for Broad as well as Long."

"Very well," said the Prince, "then Long must take Broad with him on one shoulder. Only make haste and return again quickly, in heaven's name, or the Magician may be here before you are back, and we shall be turned into stone."

Well, the three servants were willing enough to be off. Long stretched himself out until he was three times as tall as he had

been the first time, and that was the most he could stretch. Then he went away, thirty miles at a step. At that rate it was no time before he came to the sea. But the sea was fathoms deep, and the shell lay at the very bottom of it, and try as he might he could not reach it.

"Now it is my turn," said Broad. Then he lay down and put his mouth to the sea and began to drink. He drank and drank and swelled and swelled until it was wonderful to see him, and in the end he swallowed so much of the water that it was easy enough for Long to reach down and pick up the shell.

"And now we must make haste," cried Sharpsight, "for as I look back at the castle I see that the Magician is already waking."

At once Long took his companions on his shoulders and started back the way he had come. But Broad had drunk so much water and was so heavy that Long could not go as fast as he otherwise would. "Broad, you will have to wait here, and I will come back for you later," he cried, and with that he threw Broad down from his shoulder as though he had been a sack full of grain.

Broad had not been expecting such a fall and was not prepared for it. He gasped and choked, and then the sea he had swallowed rose all about them; it filled the valley and washed up over the foot of the mountains. Long was so tall that he was able to wade out of it, though the water was up to his waist, and Sharpsight too was safe, for he was on Long's shoulder; but Broad was like to have been drowned. He only saved himself by catching hold of Long's hand, and so he was drawn out of the water and up on dry land.