



# The Golden Hair

ONCE there was a king who lived in a very beautiful palace. But even more beautiful was the garden which surrounded his palace. In this garden grew such rare flowers that many people came from far and wide just to see them. It was said, too, that the fragrance of these flowers at night was such that it could put anyone to sleep.

The king was very proud of his garden. There was only one thing about it which caused him concern. The flowers never remained in the garden for longer than a day. Every morning when the king woke up and looked into the garden, he noticed that all the flowers that were there the day before would be gone. Try as he might, the king could never discover how and why his flowers vanished.

Now this king had seven sons. One day, the

king called his sons together and told them that he would give half his kingdom to whichever one of his sons could discover what happened to the flowers. The sons decided that they would take turns keeping watch in the garden. The eldest son was the first to spend the night in the garden. The first hour passed. Nothing strange happened. The second hour passed. Again there was nothing strange. By this time, the eldest son was beginning to feel very sleepy. With every few minutes that passed, he found it more and more difficult to keep his eyes open. The night was still, the breeze softly caressed his face, the flowers





swayed gently in the night air. Soon he was fast asleep. Next morning, when he awoke, the flowers had disappeared yet another time. Head bowed, the eldest son stood before his father, and reported, "I am sorry, father. I do not know what happened to the flowers. I fell asleep last night."

The next night, it was the second brother's turn to keep watch. He settled himself in a corner of the garden, determined to do better than his older brother. But soon he too fell fast asleep. When he awoke the next morning, the flowers had gone and he had seen nothing. He too confessed to his father that he had been unable to stay awake.

Just as it had happened with the two oldest brothers, so too all the other brothers, except the youngest, were unable to remain awake when their turn came. Finally, it was the time for the last brother to keep watch.

This brother went into the garden, taking with him a knife and some salt. When it was almost ten o' clock, he began to feel very sleepy. In order to stay awake, he took the knife and cut his hand. The pain was enough to keep him awake for another hour. Then he began to feel sleepy again. This time he



took some of the salt he had brought with him and rubbed it into his cut. It burnt him so much that it was impossible for him to sleep.

Another hour passed. The youngest brother was still awake. When it was exactly midnight, he saw a magnificent white horse coming through the garden. Upon this horse sat a very handsome man, dressed in brightly shining garments. As the horse passed through the garden, the man on the horse bent to pick flower after flower until all the flowers had been picked.

The youngest prince stood up and walked

bravely to the man on the white horse.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am the protector of the flowers," answered the man.

"Where do you come from?" continued the prince.

"I come from a world of the spirit, a world you do not know," was the answer.

"And why do you pick our flowers, destroying them like this?" asked the prince.

"I do not destroy your flowers. I pick them so that they may continue to live. When you pick them, they soon die. When I pick them, they live forever."

The prince explained to this strange man why he was spending the night in the garden. He then asked the man to accompany him to his father's palace. But the stranger on the horse refused to see the king. He told the prince instead that he would give him a strand of golden hair from the horse. This the prince must show to the king as proof that he had really seen the stranger that night.

The stranger also told the prince that he should never lose the strand of golden hair. If ever he need-





ed anything, he had only to hold the strand of hair in his right hand and make his wish. His wish would be granted immediately. Then, promising never to return, the horse and rider disappeared into the night.

When the other brothers heard what had happened to the youngest brother, they were all very jealous. They decided to leave the kingdom, half of which now belonged to their youngest brother. But this brother could not bear the thought of being left alone so he decided to go with them. Although he could not hunt like his brothers, he felt certain that his golden hair would provide him with whatever he

needed.

The brothers journeyed from kingdom to kingdom. One day, they came to a kingdom where the king was offering his daughter's hand in marriage to whichever suitor could pass a test of strength. Princes came from all over to try their luck and win the beautiful princess. So far not a man had succeeded.

When the youngest brother saw the beautiful princess, he at once fell in love with her and determined to win her hand. He held the golden hair in his right hand and wished that he could be transformed into a wealthy prince. Right away, his humble clothing was changed into the most beautiful clothes he could desire. Then he asked for a handsome stallion. And there it appeared before his eyes. Mounting the horse, he made his way to the castle in order to try to win the princess.

Soon it was the youngest brother's turn to face the test of strength. He called upon the golden hair to help him pass the test. To the astonishment of all the people gathered there, the prince performed the feat with the greatest ease in the world. But when the king's messengers came to take him before the king, none could find him. He had suddenly



disappeared. No-one could understand this. No-one knew from where came this handsome prince. They looked all over for him but he was nowhere to be found.

The youngest brother, soon after he had succeeded at the task, had asked the golden hair to make him invisible. He had then returned home where he met his other brothers. They were all talking excitedly about what had taken place in the palace that day. They themselves had tried the test but they had all failed. They now wondered who the handsome prince was. In the midst of their chatter, the youngest



brother said, "I was there. I saw it all. Was he not handsome and strong?"

His brothers turned to him and laughed, "You saw it all? How could you have been there? All you do is remain in the house all day. Next thing, you'll be saying that you know the strange prince!"

"I do know the prince!" answered the youngest brother. "I am he!"

"Ha! You really are mad!" one of the brothers shouted out. "You're such a weakling! And where could you get such fine clothes?"

"I think he's been shut up in the house for too long. He has really lost his mind!" exclaimed another.

Indeed, the brothers believed that their youngest brother was mad. They feared having this mad man around them. They feared that the king would send them away from his kingdom if he should hear of their mad brother.

That night, while the youngest brother was sleeping, they took him and threw him into a pond and drowned him. But having done this cruel deed, the other brothers could not rest in peace. They now feared that they would be found out one day. So, quietly, hidden under the cover of darkness, they

sneaked out that very night and set off for another kingdom where no-one knew them.

The following day, the king's soldiers were passing near to the pond where the youngest brother had been drowned. One of the king's soldiers decided to have a drink of water. As he bent down to drink the water he heard a voice singing from the pond:

"I have six brothers  
Who love me not  
I have a wife  
Who knows me not  
Only she can pluck me up."





When the soldier looked up, he happened to notice a most beautiful flower floating on the surface of the water in the middle of the pond. Never before had there been such a beautiful or sweetly smelling flower. When the soldier reported what he had seen and heard, people from near and far came to try to pick the flower. But no-one succeeded. Eventually, everyone gave up trying.

The princess, too, had heard the soldier's story. She had wanted to try to get the flower but her father had forbidden her from so doing. He was afraid that she would fall into the pond and drown. But the princess begged and pleaded with her father until he was forced to agree.

As soon as the princess reached the edge of the pond, the flower drifted slowly over the surface of the water and came to rest before her. The princess bent slowly down and gently picked the flower. She removed it from the water. To her great surprise, the flower changed into the handsome young prince who had disappeared after he had passed the test of strength. The princess recognized him at once and joyfully embraced him. Hand in hand, they walked back to the palace where they were married and lived

happily together for the rest of their lives.

What a strange way things turned out in the end! The youngest brother had been ridiculed by his other brothers. They had thought that he was mad. They had even thrown him into a pond and drowned him. Now it was this very brother who was to enjoy the love of the beautiful princess. The stranger on the white horse had made all this possible with his gift of the golden hair.

