

A STORY FOR  
CHILDREN.

# THE LAND OF YOUTH

A SCANDINAVIAN POPULAR  
TALE

**T**HERE was once in a great kingdom a good King, brave in battle, wise in council, happy in all his undertakings. But a day came when, seeing his locks turn white and feeling himself weakened by age, he thought he had not much longer to live on earth; he held to life, however, and demanded of the savants of his kingdom whether there was not any way of escaping death. These men deliberated over this great question, and were unable to solve it.

One day there came to the palace an old sorceress who had travelled far over land and sea, and who was renowned for her knowledge. The King asked her what news she brought.

"I have heard," she said, "that you are greatly in fear of death, since you have become old, and I have come to show you a way to recover both strength and health."

"Speak, speak!" cried the King, delightfully.

"A long way—a very long way—from here, there is a country called Ungdomland, where there are magnificent apples and marvellous water. Whoever eats of those apples and drinks of that water immediately recovers his youthfulness. But it is not easy to get possession of the two: they are so far away, and the road leading to them is so perilous."

So said the sorceress. The King rewarded her magnificently, and resolved to send one of his sons in search of the apples and water of youthfulness.

He prepared for him a brilliant equipage, gave him money, and the Prince departed on his quest. But he did not go far. He stopped at a city which pleased him, and lived there gaily, without thinking of the errand on which his father had sent him, nor of his father.

The old man, after long waiting for his return, and neither seeing him come back nor hearing of him, sent towards that Land of Youth his second son, who, on arriving at

the city where his brother was living, found there the same seductions, and, in his turn, gave himself up to a life of gaiety, and completely forgot his mission and his father.

The King aged and saddened more and more. His young son, named Carl, expressed a wish to go in search of the Land of Youth. The King, having only this son left to him, did not like to part with him; but Carl was so determined that he finally overcame all resistance. He departed, like his brothers, with a brilliant equipage; and the old man was left alone and deeply distressed at the desertion of his sons.

Carl passed by the city where his brothers were stopping, and they tried to detain him with them. But he wished to redeem the promise he had made to his father, and travelled through vast regions. Everywhere he inquired the way to the Land of Youth, but nobody could direct him.



"CARL'S BROTHERS TRIED TO DETAIN HIM."

One evening, in the heart of a dense forest, he saw a tiny light shining a long way off, and making towards it, in the hope of finding a resting-place, reached a cottage, the dwelling-place of an old woman, who kindly consented to give him lodgment, and asked him who he was and whither he was going.

"I am the son of a King," answered Carl, "and I am in search of the Land of Youth."

"Ah!" replied the good old woman, "I have lived three hundred winters and have never heard of that country. But I am the Queen of the Quadrupeds; to-morrow morning I will question them, and perhaps one of them may be able to give you some useful information."

The Prince cordially thanked her for her civility, and slept soundly.

At sunrise the next morning the old woman blew her horn; a great noise was instantly heard in the forest. All the four-footed animals, large and small, assembled about the cottage. Their Queen asked them whether

they knew where the Land of Youth was, and all replied that they had not the least idea where it was to be found.

The polite old woman turned towards the Prince, and said:—

"You see that I cannot direct you on your way; but go, from me, to my sister, who is Queen of the Birds; perhaps she will know better than I. Mount on the back of this wolf, he will carry you to her."

The Prince again thanked her, and set off on the back of his strange steed. In the evening he found himself in the depths of a forest and saw, once more, a tiny light shining in the distance. The wolf stopped and said:—

"Yonder is the dwelling-place of the sister of my sovereign. Here we must part."

The Prince descended into an underground cabin, and found there another good old woman, who received him politely, and asked him for what purpose he was travelling. He replied that he was in search of the Land of Youth.

"Ah!" she said, "I have lived six

hundred winters, and have never heard speak of that country. But to-morrow I will question the birds."

The Prince thanked her and slept soundly.

Next day the old woman blew her horn, and immediately a great noise was heard in the air. The birds flew hurriedly from all sides. Their Queen asked them whether they knew where the Land of Youth was, but they replied that they did not know.

Turning towards the Prince, the Queen said:—

"You see that I cannot direct you as I wish, but my sister, who is the Queen of the Fishes, may, perhaps, be better informed than I. Seat yourself between the two wings of this eagle, and he will carry you to her."

The Prince obeyed, and, in the evening, alighted at a small cabin. There he found an old woman, who inquired who he was and where he wished to go.

"I am the son of a King," he replied. "I am in search of the Land of Youth, and have come to you with the recommendation of your sister."

"I have lived nine hundred years," said the good old woman, "and have never heard tell of the country to which you wish to go; but to-morrow I will question the fishes."

Next day, in fulfilment of her promise, she

blew her horn, and instantly a great commotion was seen in the waves, all the fishes darting through the waters and assembling about their Queen, who inquired whether they knew where the Land of Youth was, and they all answered that they did not know.

"But I don't see amongst you the old whale," cried the Queen.

In a moment, a great noise was heard in the water; it was caused by the hurried arrival of the whale.

"Why are you so late?" demanded the Queen.

"I have had a long way to come—several thousand leagues."

"Where have you been?"

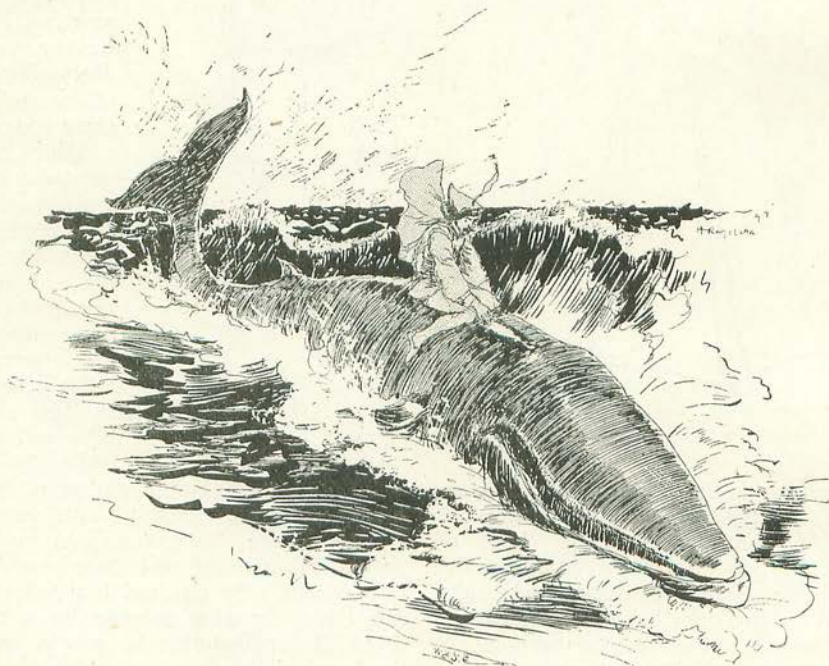
"To the Land of Youth."

"Very well. You have failed in your duty by not coming sooner in answer to my summons; as a punishment, you will bear this young man to the land from which you have come and bring him back."

The Prince warmly thanked the good nine-hundred-years-old woman and got upon the back of the whale, which sped rapidly through the waters. By the arrival of evening, he had reached the shore on which he desired to land.

The whale then said to him:—

"Listen to the advice I am going to give you—do not forget it, and follow it punctually.



"THE WHALE SPED RAPIDLY THROUGH THE WATERS."

At midnight everything sleeps in the enchanted castle before you; you may, therefore, enter it at midnight, but do not pluck more than one apple, nor take more than one phial-full of the magic water; do not linger, but return in all haste, otherwise you will expose yourself and me to a mortal danger."

"Thanks!" replied Carl; "I will remember your instructions."

At midnight he entered the enchanted castle. All within it was plunged in sleep, as the whale had said would be the case. In front of the door there were a number of frightful beasts, bears, wolves, and dragons, lying beside each other, their eyes closed.

He passed through many superb rooms and saw with admiration the riches they contained. At length he came to one larger than the rest, the walls of which were covered with plates of gold and silver. In the middle of this room was the tree on which shone the magic apples, and near it, rippling over precious stones, with a marvellous sound, ran a clear and luminous stream of water — the water of which the bold traveller had come so far in search.

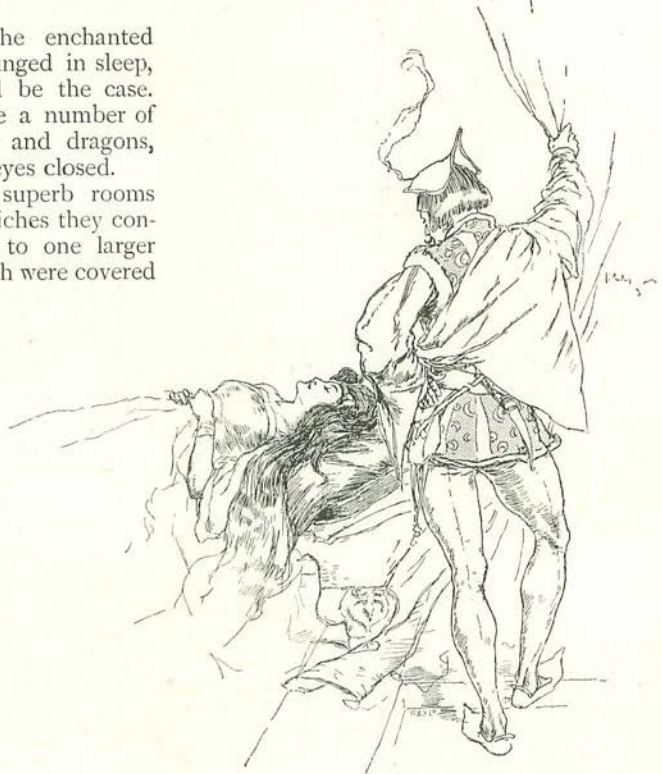
He filled a phial with the water of youthfulness, but, after doing that, forgot the whale's advice, and plucked as many golden apples as he could get into his wallet. Having got all he wanted, he wished to quit the enchanted castle, but he could not find the way by which he had entered. He wandered from room to room, searching in vain for the outer door.

At length he entered a room yet more splendid than any he had before seen. It contained a bed of blue silk, on which was reposing a young girl of incomparable beauty. Carl stood before her motionless and speechless in an ecstasy of delight. At the same time the young girl saw, in a dream, the image of this charming Prince so distinctly that, thenceforth, she could not forget him, and in her ear a mysterious voice murmured: "This is he whom you must marry."

Carl at length tore himself from the contemplation of the beautiful sleeper, wrote his name, and the name of his country, on the wall near her, and went out.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold of the door ere everything in the castle awoke and all there became movement. He sprang upon the back of the whale, which was impatiently awaiting him.

On reaching the middle of the sea, the gigantic animal suddenly plunged into the



"THIS IS HE WHOM YOU MUST MARRY."

depths of the waters, then, remounting, said to the Prince:—

"Did that plunge frighten you?"

"Yes; I confess it greatly frightened me."

"Well, I was quite as much alarmed when you filled your wallet with apples."

When he had gone a little further, the whale again plunged, only deeper than the first time, and then said to the Prince:—

"Were you afraid?"

"More than ever I have been before."

"Well, I was quite as much frightened when you stopped to look at the Princess."

A little further on, the whale once more plunged and remained longer under the water, saying to the Prince on rising again to the surface:—

"Were you afraid?"

"Yes, terribly."

"Well, I was quite as much terrified when you wrote your name on the wall."

In the evening Carl arrived at the cottage of the Queen of the Fishes. As a return for the service she had rendered him, he gave her a golden apple and some drops from the marvellous spring.

As soon as the nine-hundred-years-old woman had drunk the water and eaten the apple, the wrinkles disappeared from her face; between her lips shone two rows of white teeth; her form became upright; and, in short, in place of a decrepit old woman, appeared a young girl with golden tresses, sparkling eyes, and rosy cheeks. She warmly thanked Carl for his generosity, and said to him, as he was departing:—

"I also have a present for you. Take this bridle and shake it—and you will see what it will give you."

The Prince obeyed, and at the same moment saw before him a superb horse, which quietly allowed itself to be mounted and, with the rapidity of the wind, bore him to the Queen of the Birds.

To her also he gave some water of youthfulness and an apple, which rejuvenated her in an instant. And as he was departing, she said, thanking him for his generosity:—

"I also have a present for you. Take this tablecloth, and, as soon as you spread it, it will furnish you a royal repast."

Carl remounted his good horse, rode to the Queen of the Quadrapeds, and renewed her youthfulness, as he had done to her two sisters. She also thanked him cordially and said, as he was departing:—

"I wish to give you a proof of my gratitude; take this sword, at sight of which no adversary can offer resistance, not even the most savage animal."

With this powerful sword, the precious tablecloth, and the enchanted bridle, the Prince continued his journey, and reached the city where his two brothers still remained, and after joyfully embracing them, related to them all his adventures.

On hearing that he had been so successful in his enterprise, the two brothers, feeling at once ashamed of their want of energy and furious at his success, resolved to strip him of what he had so bravely won. To celebrate his return, they said, they prepared a grand banquet, and, deceiving him by these pretended evidences of affection, during the night, and without his having the least suspicion of their villainy, changed the

treasure he had brought from Ungdomland for other water and other apples.

Carl continued on his way homeward, eager to see his father again, and filled with happiness at the idea of being able to give him back his lost youthfulness. As soon as he had embraced him, he gave him, with joyful confidence, his phial of water and apples.

But neither the water nor the apples produced any effect, and the old man was deeply pained and irritated by what he imagined to be the deception practised by his son. Innocent Carl saw that he had been robbed.

Some time afterwards, his two wicked brothers arrived. They told to their father a prodigious story of vast regions they had passed through, and perils they had dared, to reach the enchanted land. Then they gave him the true water and the true apples which they had stolen from Carl.

Instantly the white locks of the old King regained their primitive hue, his wrinkles vanished, his limbs got back their youthful strength and elasticity.

Transported with joy, he pressed his two sons to his bosom, calling them his heroes, his benefactors. He lavished tenderness and distinction on them; and then, suddenly remembering the youngest, who had tried to deceive him, he became furious against him, and ordered him to be cast into the lions' den and left there without assistance.

Nobody dare oppose this terrible sentence, and Carl was given over to the wild beasts, that ought instantly to have devoured him. But he had preserved the presents of two of the old women. At the sight of his sword the lions drew back humbly. When he was hungry he spread his tablecloth, which was instantly laden with the choicest food.

Meanwhile the young Princess of Ungdomland thought of him constantly, and, believing he would return, waited for him, day after day. One night she saw him again in a dream, no longer with a smile on his lips and light in his eyes, as she had seen him when he was near her, but downcast, anxious, captive. At the same time a mysterious voice murmured in her ear: "This is he whom you must marry."

She listened, she looked: this dream was for her a reality, and her mind was quickly made up—he could not come to her, therefore she must go to him; he was sad, she must console him; he was captive, she must deliver him.

On the wall he had written his name and

the name of his country ; to that country she set off with a large number of ships, a mass of precious things, and a legion of soldiers.

At sight of this foreign fleet all the inhabitants of the rejuvenated King's capital were greatly alarmed—it had come with hostile intentions, perhaps, and it certainly appeared formidable.

But the young Princess only asked to see the young man who had been in Ungdomland. Her wish was one that could easily be satisfied. The King hastened to send his eldest son to her ; but she had no sooner set eyes on him than she cried :—

“ This is not he of whom I am in search ! ”

The King sent his second son.

She awaited him on board her magnificent ship, surrounded by her officers, and no sooner saw him than she exclaimed :—

“ This is not he of whom I am in search ! ” adding : “ It is of no use trying to deceive me. I must see the young Prince who came to Ungdomland ; otherwise, I vow that of this royal capital I will not leave one stone standing upon another.”

At those words the two impostors were dumfounded, and the King, pale and trembling, remembered the dreadful sentence he had pronounced.

What was to be done ? Doubtless, the young Prince had long before been devoured by the wild beasts. They went, however, to the

edge of the pit into which he had been cast, and found him seated calmly in the midst of the lions.

A cry of joy announced this miracle, and was repeated on all sides. The King flew to his son, threw himself on his knees before him, and begged pardon for his iniquity. Carl tenderly raised him, held him to his heart, and returned with him to the city, where he had been so much beloved and regretted. The crowd pressed upon his steps, and filled the air with enthusiastic shouts.

On reaching the palace, he arrayed himself in his festival clothes, shook the magic bridle, and, mounted on a superb horse, advanced towards the foreign flotilla.

Hardly had the Princess cast her eyes upon him ere she cried :—

“ That is he ! I recognise him. It is he who came to Ungdomland ! ”

They approached each other. She held out her hands to him ; he was the spouse designed to her by the mysterious voice.

Next day the marriage of the handsome Prince and the beautiful Princess was pompously celebrated, and they departed together to the Land of Youth, where they lived long and happily.

The two traitors were cast into the den of lions into which they had caused their innocent brother to be thrown.



“ THAT IS HE ! ”