

By Howard Pyle  
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Once upon a time there was an old king who had a faithful servant. There was nobody in the whole world like him, and this was why: around his wrist he wore an armlet that fitted as close as the skin. There were words on the golden band; on one side they said:

“WHO THINKS TO WEAR ME ON HIS ARM  
MUST LACK BOTH GUILF AND THOUGHT OF HARM”

And on the other side they said:

“I AM FOR ONLY ONE AND HE  
SHALL BE AS STRONG AS TEN CAN BE.”

At last the old king felt that his end was near, and he called the faithful servant to him and besought him to serve and aid the young king who was to come as he had served and aided the old king who was to go. The faithful servant promised that which was asked, and then the old king closed his eyes and folded his hands and went the way that those had travelled who had gone before him.

Well, one day a stranger came to that town from over the hills and far away. With him he brought a painted picture, but it was all covered with a curtain so that nobody could see what it was.

He drew aside the curtain and showed the picture to the young king, and it was a likeness of the most beautiful princess in the whole world: for her eyes were as black as a crow’s wing, her cheeks were as red as apples, and her skin as white as snow. Moreover, the picture was so natural that it seemed as though it had nothing to do but to open its lips and speak.

The young king just sat and looked and looked. "Oh me!" said he, "I will never rest content until I have such a one as that for my own."

"Then listen!" said the stranger, "this is a likeness of the princess that lives over beyond the three rivers. A while ago she had a wise bird on which she doted, for it knew everything that happened in the world, so that it could tell the princess whatever she wanted to know. But now the bird is dead, and the princess does nothing but grieve for it day and night. She keeps the dead bird in a glass casket, and has promised to marry whoever will bring a cup of water from the Fountain of Life, so that the bird may be brought back to life again." That was the story the stranger told, and then he jogged on the way he was going, and I, for one, do not know whither it led.

But the young king had no peace or comfort in life for thinking of the princess who lived over beyond the three rivers. At last he called the faithful servant to him. "And can you not," said he, "get me a cup of the Water of Life?"

"I know not, but I will try," said the faithful servant, for he bore in mind what he had promised to the old king.

So out he went into the wide world, to seek for what the young king wanted, though the way there is both rough and thorny. On he went and on, until his shoes were dusty, and his feet were sore, and after a while he came to the end of the earth, and there was nothing more over the hill. There he found a little tumbled-down hut, and within the hut sat an old, old woman with a distaff, spinning a lump of flax.

"Good-morning, mother," said the faithful servant.

"Good-morning, son," says the old woman, "and where are you travelling that you have come so far?"

"Oh!" says the faithful servant, "I am hunting for the Water of Life, and have come as far as this without finding a drop of it."

"Hoity, toity," says the old woman, "if that is what you are after, you have a long way to go yet. The fountain is in the country that lies east of the Sun and west of the Moon, and it is few that have gone there and come back again, I can tell you. Besides that there is a great dragon that keeps watch over the water, and you will have to get the better of him before you can touch a drop of it. All the same, if you have made up your mind to go you may stay here until my sons come home, and perhaps they can put you in the way of getting there, for I am the Mother of the Four Winds of Heaven, and it is few places that they have not seen."

So the faithful servant came in and sat down by the fire to wait till the Winds came home.

The first that came was the East Wind; but he knew nothing of the Water of Life and the land that lay east of the Sun and west of the Moon; he had heard



he young king looks upon y<sup>e</sup> beautiful picture which the stranger sheweth him.



folks talk of them both now and then, but he had never seen them with his own eyes.



The next that came was the South Wind, but he knew no more of it than his brother, and neither did the West Wind for the matter of that.

Last of all came the North Wind, and dear, dear, what a hubbub he made outside of the door, stamping the dust off of his feet before he came into the house.

“And do you know where the Fountain of Life is, and the country that lies east of the Sun and west of the Moon?” said the old woman.

Oh, yes, the North Wind knew where it was. He had been there once upon a time, but it was a long, long distance away.

“So; good! then perhaps you will give this lad a lift over there tomorrow,” said the old woman.

At this the North Wind grumbled and shook his head; but at last he said “yes,” for he is a good-hearted fellow at bottom, is the North Wind, though his ways are a trifle rough perhaps.

So the next morning he took the faithful servant on his back, and away he flew till the man’s hair whistled behind him. On they went and on they went and on they went, until at last they came to the country that lay east of the Sun and west of the Moon; and they were none too soon getting there either, I can tell you, for when the North Wind tumbled the faithful servant off his back he was so weak that he could not have lifted a feather.

“Thank you,” said the faithful servant, and then he was for starting away to find what he came for.

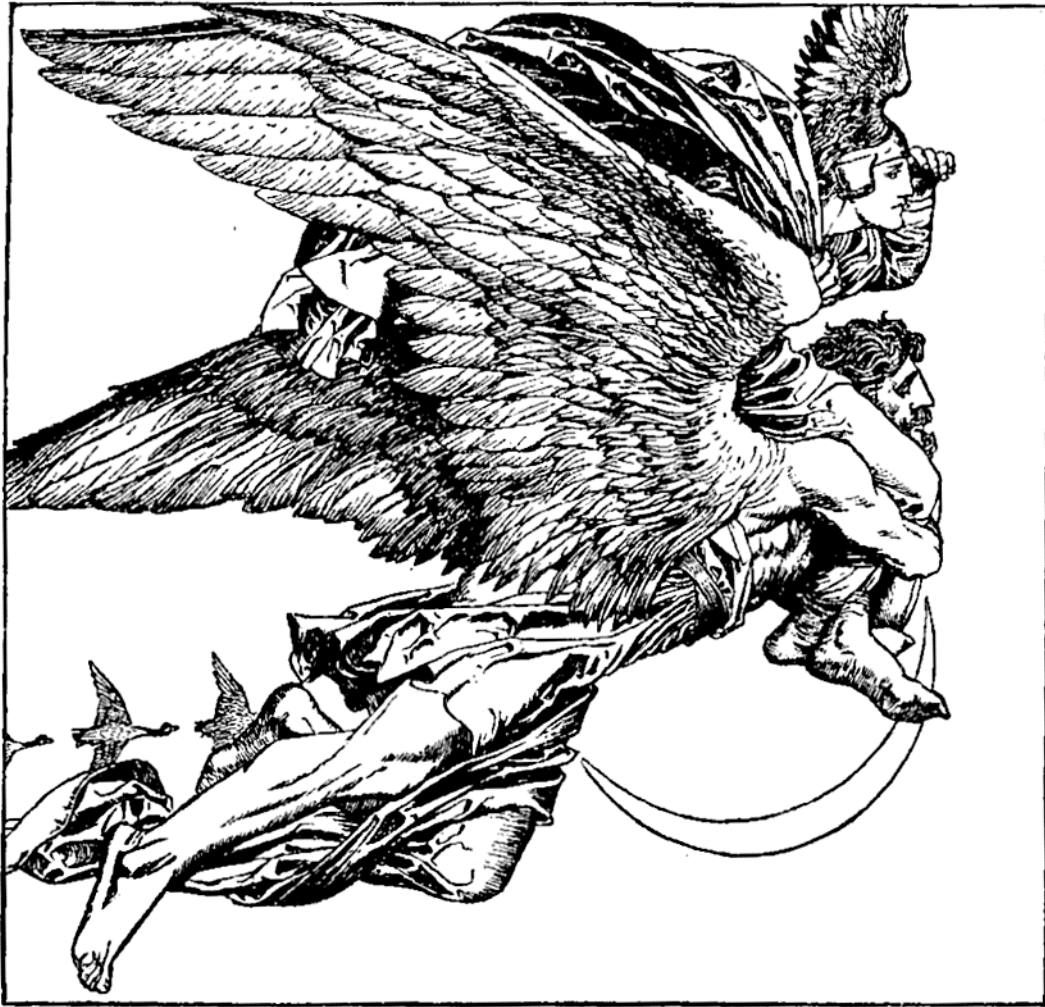
“Stop a bit,” says the North Wind, “you will be wanting to come away again after a while. I cannot wait here, for I have other business to look after. But here is a feather; when you want me, cast it into the air, and I will not be long in coming.”

Then away he bustled, for he had caught his breath again, and time was none too long for him.

The faithful servant walked along a great distance until, by and by, he came to a field covered all over with sharp rocks and white bones, for he was not the first by many who had been that way for a cup of the Water of Life.

There lay the great fiery dragon in the sun, sound asleep, and so the faithful servant had time to look about him. Not far away was a great deep trench like a drain in a swampy field; that was a path that the dragon had made by going to the river for a drink of water every day. The faithful servant dug a hole in the bottom of this trench, and there he hid himself as snugly as a cricket in the crack in the kitchen floor. By and by the dragon awoke and found that he was thirsty, and then started down to the river to get a drink. The faithful servant lay as still as a mouse until the dragon was just above where he was hidden, then he thrust his sword through its heart, and there it lay, after a turn or two, as dead as a stone.

## The North Wind flies with y<sup>e</sup> Faithful Servant.



After that he had only to fill the cup at the fountain, for there was nobody to say nay to him. Then he cast the feather into the air, and there was the North Wind, as fresh and as sound as ever. The North Wind took him upon its back, and away it flew until it came home again.

The faithful servant thanked them all around — the Four Winds and the old woman — and as they would take nothing else, he gave them a few drops of the Water of Life, and that is the reason that the Four Winds and their mother are as fresh and young now as they were when the world began.

Then the faithful servant set off home again, right foot foremost, and he was not as long in getting there as in coming.

As soon as the king saw the cup of the Water of Life he had the horses saddled, and off he and the faithful servant rode to find the princess who lived

over beyond the three rivers. By and by they came to the town, and there was the princess mourning and grieving over her bird just as she had done from the first. But when she heard that the king had brought the Water of Life she welcomed him as though he were a flower in March.

They sprinkled a few drops upon the dead bird, and up it sprang as lively and as well as ever.

But now, before the princess would marry the king she must have a talk with the bird, and there came the hitch, for the Wise Bird knew as well as you and I that it was not the king who had brought the Water of Life. "Go and tell him," said the Wise Bird, "that you are ready to marry him as soon as he saddles and bridles the Wild Black Horse in the forest over yonder, for if he is the hero who found the Water of Life he can do that and more easily enough."

The princess did as the bird told her, and so the king missed getting what he wanted after all. But off he went to the faithful servant. "And can you not saddle and bridle the Wild Black Horse for me?" said he.

"I do not know," said the faithful servant, "but I will try."

So off he went to the forest to hunt up the Wild Black Horse, the saddle over his shoulder and the bridle over his arm. By and by came the Wild Black Horse galloping through the woods like a thunder gust in summer, so that the ground shook under his feet. But the faithful servant was ready for him; he caught him by the mane and forelock, and the Wild Black Horse had never had such a one to catch hold of him before.

But how they did stamp and wrestle! Up and down and here and there, until the fire flew from the stones under their feet. But the Wild Black Horse could not stand against the strength of ten men, such as the faithful servant had, so by and by he fell on his knees, and the faithful servant clapped the saddle on his back and slipped the bridle over his ears.

"Listen now," says he; "to-morrow my master, the king, will ride you up to the princess's house, and if you do not do just as I tell you, it will be the worse for you; when the king mounts upon your back you must stagger and groan, as though you carried a mountain."

The horse promised to do as the other bade, and then the faithful servant jumped on his back and away to the king, who had been waiting at home for all this time.

The next day the king rode up to the princess's castle, and the Wild Black Horse did just as the faithful servant told him to do; he staggered and groaned, so that everybody cried out, "Look at the great hero riding upon the Wild Black Horse!"

And when the princess saw him she also thought that he was a great hero. But the Wise Bird was of a different mind from her, for when the princess came to talk to him about marrying the king he shook his head. "No, no," said





he young king bringeth y<sup>e</sup> cup  
of water of life to the beautiful Queen.



he, "there is something wrong here, and the king has baked his cake in somebody else's oven. He never saddled and bridled the Wild Black Horse by

himself. Listen, you must say to him that you will marry nobody but the man who wears such and such a golden armlet with this and that written on it.”

So the princess told the king what the Wise Bird had bidden her to say, and the king went straightway to the faithful servant.

“You must let me have your armlet,” said he.

“Alas, master,” said the faithful servant, “that is a woful thing for me, for the one and only way to take the armlet off of my wrist is to cut my hand from off my body.”

“So!” says the king, “that is a great pity, but the princess will not have me without the armlet.”

“Then you shall have it,” says the faithful servant; but the king had to cut the hand off, for the faithful servant could not do it himself.

But, bless your heart! the armlet was ever so much too large for the king to wear! Nevertheless he tied it to his wrist with a bit of ribbon, and off he marched to the princess’s castle.

“Here is the armlet of gold,” said he, “and now will you marry me !”

But the Wise Bird sat on the princess’s chair. “Hut! tut !” says he, “it does not fit the man.”

Yes, that was so; everybody who was there could see it easily enough; and as for marrying him, the princess would marry nobody but the man who could wear the armlet.

What a hubbub there was then! Every one who was there was sure that the armlet would fit him if it fitted nobody else. But no; it was far too large for the best of them. The faithful servant was very sad, and stood back of the rest, over by the wall, with his arm tied up in a napkin. “You shall try it too,” says the princess; but the faithful servant only shook his head, for he could not try it on as the rest had done, because he had no hand. But the Wise Bird was there and knew what he was about; “See now,” says he, “maybe the Water of Life will cure one thing as well as another.”

Yes, that was true, and one was sent to fetch the cup. They sprinkled it on the faithful servant’s arm, and it was not twice they had to do it, for there was another hand as good and better than the old.

Then they gave him the armlet; he slipped it over his hand, and it fitted him like his own skin.

“This is the man for me,” says the princess, “and I will have none other;” for she could see with half an eye that he was the hero who had been doing all the wonderful things that had happened, because he said nothing about himself.

As for the king — why, all that was left for him to do was to pack off home again; and I, for one, am glad of it.



And this is true; the best packages are not always wrapped up in blue paper and tied with a gay string, and there are better men in the world than kings and princes, fine as they seem to be.



**The Faithful Servant gives y<sup>e</sup>**  
**young king y<sup>e</sup> golden bracelet from his**  
**wrist as the other desires. ¶**

