The boy apprenticed to an enchanter

by

Padraic Colum

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THE BOY APPRENTICED
TO AN ENCHANTER
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BY

PADRAIC COLUM

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To

ELLA YOUNG

IN MEMORY OF THE MANY STORIES
SHE HAS TOLD ME
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PROLOGUE

THE HORSES OF KING MANUS

As for the youth who had tried to steal the white horse that the King owned, he was bound hand and foot and taken into the castle of the King. There he was thrown down beside the trestles of the great table, and the hot wax from the candles that lighted the supper board dripped down upon him. And it was told to him that at the morrow’s sunrise he would be slain with the sword.

Then the King called upon one to finish the story that was being told when the neigh of the white horse was heard in the stable. The story could not be finished for him, however, because the one who had been telling it was now outside, guarding the iron door of the stable with a sword in his hand. And King Manus, sitting at the supper board, could not eat nor refresh himself because there was no one at hand to finish the story for him.
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And that is the way that the story of The Boy Apprenticed to an Enchanter used to begin.

But first I shall have to tell you about King Manus and his three horses.

King Manus ruled over the Western Island, and he had a castle that was neither higher nor wider than any other King’s castle. But he had a stable that was more strongly built than any other King’s stable. It had double walls of stone; it had oak beams; it had an iron door with four locks to it. And before this door two soldiers with drawn swords in their hands stayed night and day.

In those days, if one went before a King and asked him for a gift the King might not refuse to give what was asked of him. But King Manus was hard to come to by those with requests. For before the chamber where he sat or slept there stood a servant to take the request, and if it were one that might not be brought to him, to make an excuse for the King.

It was all because of the King’s three horses — a white horse, a red horse, and a black horse. The white horse was as swift as the plunging wave
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of the sea, the red horse was as swift as fire in the heather, and the speed of the black horse was such that he could overtake the wind of March that was before him, and the wind of March that was behind could not overtake him.

Many had tried to get one of the King's horses by request or by robbery. But those who would ask for a gift were kept away from the King, while the stone walls, double thick, with the door of iron with four locks to it, kept robbers outside. Besides there were the two soldiers with drawn swords in their hands to prevent the horses being taken out of the stable by any one except their own grooms. And so it was thought very certain that King Manus would never lose his famous horses.

But this very night, when the King and his lords were at supper, the neigh of a horse in the stable was heard. Then it was that the story-teller stopped in his story. The trampling of a horse was heard. Straight out King Manus ran, and his harper and his story-teller and his lords ran with him. When they came to the stable they saw that the two soldiers were sitting before the
iron door fast asleep, with the swords on the ground before them. And the locks were off the door of iron.

Just as they came there the iron door of the stable opened and the King's white horse was led out. He who had the rein was a strange youth dressed in a foreign dress. The youth was about to spring on the horse's back when those who were with the King sprang upon him and held him and held the bridle of the horse.

And having secured the youth they went into the stable, and they found the red horse and the black horse eating at their mangers. They led the white horse back and put him in his own stall. The watchers who had been before the stable door could not be wakened, so those who were with the King carried them to another place, and left two others, the harper and the story-teller, to keep watch, with the soldiers' swords in their hands. As for the youth who had tried to steal the white horse, he was placed as has been told you, and every one there knew what doom would befall him.
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It was then that the King called upon one to finish the story that was being told him when the white horse neighed. It was then that he sat at the supper board, not able to take rest nor refreshment on account of his not having heard the story to its end. And it was then that one of the lords said to the King, “Let the youth who is lying bound beside the trestles of the table tell us what it was that made him go into such danger to steal one of the horses of King Manus.”

The King liked that saying, and he said, “Since my story-teller abides outside guarding the door of the stable, I will have this youth tell us the story of why he entered into such danger to steal one of my horses. And more than that. I declare that if he shows us that he was ever in greater danger than he is in this night I shall give him his life. But if it is not so shown the story he tells will avail him nothing, and he shall perish by the sword at the morrow’s sunrise.”

Then the youth was taken from where he lay by the trestles of the table, and the cords that bound him were loosened. He was put in the
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story-teller's place and fresh candles were lighted and set upon the table.

"Your danger is great," said the King, "and it will be hard for you to show us that you were ever in such danger before. Begin your story. And if it is not a story of a narrow and a close escape there will be little time left for you to prepare for your death by the sword."

Thereupon the youth in the foreign dress looked long into the wine cup that was handed him, and he drank a draught of the wine, and he saluted the King and the lords who sat by the King, and he said:

"Once I was in greater danger, for its mouth was close to me, and no hope whatever was given me of my saving my life. I will tell the story, and you shall judge whether my danger then was greater than is my danger now."

And thereupon the youth in the foreign dress, who had tried to steal the white horse that King Manus owned, began the story which is set down here in the very words in which he told it.
THE STORY OF EEAN THE FISHERMAN'S SON
PART I

THE STORY OF EEAN THE FISHERMAN'S SON

I. THE COMING OF THE ENCHANTER

My father (said the youth) was a fisherman, and he lived on this Western Island. It may be that he is still living here. His name was Anluan, and he was very poor. My own name is Eean, and the event that begins my story took place when I was twice seven years of age.

My father and I had gone down to the shore of the Western Ocean. He was fishing in the pools of the sea, and I was putting willow rods into the mouths of the fish caught so that I might carry them in my hands to the market that very day and sell them there. I looked out and saw a speck upon the water, a speck that came nearer. I kept watching it while my father dragged the pool with his net. The speck became a boat, and the boat
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came on without sails or oars. It was a shining boat, a boat of brass. I called to my father and my father straightened himself up and watched it. In the boat that came toward us of its own accord there was a man standing.

The boat came into the full water between the rocks, and then it sank down, this boat of brass, until its rim touched the water. It remained still as if anchored. The man who was in the prow of the boat stepped out on the sand between my father and me.

He looked a man of high degree — like a prince or a potentate. He had a dark face and a dark, curly beard, and he had eyes that were like hawks' eyes. He had on a straight coat of a blue material covered all over with curious figures, and in his hand he held a long polished staff that had the shape of two serpents twisting together. He looked at me and I was frightened of him, and I turned to my father. But my father was standing there, holding the fishing pole in his hands, his mouth open, gasping like one of the fishes upon the rocks.

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The stranger looked me over again — looked me over from my feet to my head, and then he said to my father, "There is no need that he should do aught about these fishes. I have need of an apprentice, and it would be well for you both if he should come with me."

My father then found his voice, and he said, "If my son does not sell these fishes in the market to-day he cannot bring back the bag of meal for our household."

Said the man from the strange boat, "Bring me to your house and I shall put down gold for every copper that your son would get in the market."

My father made a sign to me to throw the fishes back into the water. This I did, but I did it fearfully. And then my father stepped out of the pool of the sea and he made a sign to the stranger to follow us. We walked from the seashore and up the path of the cliffs, and we went through the heather of the headlands, following the goat tracks till we came to the wattled house where we lived. The man from the strange boat followed my father, and I came last of all. And when
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I went in and stood on the floor of our house my heart was thumping within me at the thought of what was before.

And there was the pot boiling over the fire with a few green herbs in it. There was Saba, my mother, stirring the last handful of meal amongst the green herbs. And there were my brothers, all older than I, sitting by the fire, waiting for the herbs and the meal to be ready.

When my mother looked toward us she saw the man from the strange boat. She thought that some crime had been committed by me or my father to bring a man of such high degree amongst us. She and my brothers were greatly afraid, for they were poor, and those who were high were harsh to them. But the stranger spoke softly, saying, "Good fortune has come to you from the sea to-day." And when they all turned toward him he said, "I who am very knowledgeable will take your son with me as an apprentice, and I shall instruct him in arts and crafts and mysteries."

My mother said, "The boy is young, sir, and we thought he would be with us for a time longer."
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But the man from the strange boat said, "I would not take him to instruct him in arts and crafts and mysteries if he were a day older than he is now." He said no more, but he went to the table and he laid down on it piece after piece of shining gold.

My father went to the table and held his hands around the gold. My mother looked on me who was just twice seven years old that day. I know she thought that she could never bear to part with me. But then she looked on her other sons, and she saw that they were men grown, and she thought they should have more to eat than the meal and the green herbs that were in the pot. She threw her arms around me and I knew it was a last clasp.

"He will have to go into far places to learn the arts and crafts and mysteries that I would teach him," the stranger said. "Will he ever come back to me?" cried my mother. "He will come back to you when his cunning baffles my cunning," was what the stranger said.

My father took the gold that was on the table and made it into a heap. My mother took her
arms from around my neck, and my brothers kissed me farewell. Then the man from the strange boat opened the door of our wattled house and went out, and I followed him.

We did not go back to the place where he had left his boat of brass. We went to another place where there was a harbor with ships. There we found a ship ready to sail for Urth.

My master sent me on board to ask the captain if he would take us on a voyage beyond Urth. The captain said that if my master would guide them past the Magnetberg he would give him the ship to sail where he would after the cargo had been landed. My master said he would do this, and we went on board the ship. It was evening now, and a breeze came up, and the ship sailed away, bringing me from the place where I was born and reared and toward the strange countries that were beyond the rim of the sea. I asked one of the sailors what was the Magnetberg, and he told me that it was a mountain of loadstone that drew the iron out of ships that came near it and left them loosened timbers upon the water.
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II. THE INACCESSIBLE ISLAND

You have heard me so far, O King. Know now that the one to whom I was apprenticed was an Enchanter. His name is Zabulun, and in all the world there are only three Enchanters more powerful than he. The first is Chiron the Centaur, who is half man and half horse, and who taught Achilles and made him the greatest of the princes who had gone against Troy. The second is Hermes Trismegistus, the wise Egyptian. And the third is Merlin the Enchanter, whose home is in an island that is west of your Western Island.

When the night came on, Zabulun took the steering gear into his hands, and he steered the ship by a star that he alone knew. When the morning came we saw on the sea all around us the masts and the spars and the timbers of ships that had come too near the Magnetberg, and that had lost their nails and bolts, and had become loosened timbers on the waters. Those on the ship were greatly afraid, and the captain walked up and
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down, pulling at his beard. The night came on, and again my master took the steering gear into his own hands and steered the ship by a star that he alone knew of. And when the morning came there were no masts and spars of ships, and no loosened timbers afloat on the waters. The captain laughed and made all on the ship rejoice that they had passed the dangerous neighborhood of the Magnetberg—that mountain of loadstone that drew the iron out of ships as a magnet draws pins on a table.

We came to Urth. The great cargo that was on the ship was for the King of Urth, and it was taken off and sent over the mountain to the King's city in packs that the sailors carried on their backs. Then the captain gave the ship over to my master to sail it where he would.

He did not come upon the land nor did he look upon the country at all. But when the last pack had been carried off the ship, he said to me:

"You will have to do this, my first command to you. Go on the land. Stay by a pool that is close to the forest. Birds will come down to that
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pool — birds of the whiteness of swans, but smaller. Set snares and catch some of these birds, not less than four, and bring them to me uninjured.”

And I went on the land and came to the pool that was close to the forest. And there I saw the birds that were of the whiteness of swans, but smaller. I watched them for a while so that I might know their ways. Then I made a crib of rods and set it to catch the birds. One went under the crib, and I pulled the string and caught the first bird. And then, hours afterward, I caught another. And waiting and watching very carefully, I caught a third. The fourth bird was wary, and I feared I should not catch it, for night was coming down and the birds were making flocks to fly away. One remained near the crib, and its neck was stretched toward it. But then it shook its wings, and I thought it was going to fly to the others. It went under the crib. Then I pulled the string and caught the fourth bird.

I brought the birds to the ship and my master gave them grains to feed on. At night we sailed away. My master held the steering gear while it
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was dark, but when light came he gave it to me to hold. Then he unloosed one of the birds. It flew in the middle distance, winging slowly, and remaining a long time in sight. He told me to hold the course of the ship to the flight of the bird.

At night he took the steering gear again into his hands and held the ship on her course. In the daylight he unloosed another bird and bade me steer by its flight. And this was done for two more days.

The morning after the last of the white birds had been freed my master bade me look out for land. I saw something low upon the water. "It is the Inaccessible Island," said my master, "where I have my dwelling and my working place." He steered the ship to where the water flowed swiftly into a great cave that was like a dragon's mouth. In that cave there was a place for the mooring of ships. The Enchanter moored the ship in its place, and then he took me up the rocky landing place.

There was a flight of great steps leading from
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the landing place — it was in a cave as I have told you — up to the light of day. There were a thousand wide black steps in that flight. The Enchanter took into his hands the black staff that was shaped as two serpents twisting together, and he took me with him up the stairway.

We came out on a level place and I saw a high castle before me. There was no wall around the castle, and there was no gate to be opened. But when I came near it I found I could take no step onward. I went up, and I went down, and I tried to go onward, but I could not. Then Zabulun the Enchanter said to me:

"Around this castle of mine is a wall of air. No one can see the wall, but no one can pass it. And a bridge of air crosses my wall of air. Come now with me and I will take you over the bridge."

As the wall of air that went round the Enchanter's castle was not to be seen, neither was the bridge that went across the wall of air. But I saw my master mounting up and walking across as on a bridge. And although I saw

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nothing before me nor beneath me, I mounted upon something and walked across something. Following him I went downward and into the courtyard of the castle.

Within that courtyard there was a horse of brass with a giant man of brass upon it, the giant man holding a great bow in his hands. My master said to me, "If one came over the bridge of air without my authority, the arrow of that bow would be loosened, and he who came across the bridge would be slain by this giant man of brass." We went within the castle. In the hall were benches and tables, and there were statues holding torches in their hands standing by the wall. Also in that hall there was the statue of a woman holding a dart in her hand. When my master came within, the statue that held the dart flung it, and the dart struck a gleaming carbuncle that was in the wall. Lights came into the torches that the statues held, and all the hall was lighted up.

I sat with my master at a table, and the statues moved to us, bringing us wine and fruits. We ate and drank, and afterward a golden figure came to
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the Enchanter, and, sitting down before him, played a game of chess with him.

The next day my master showed me more of the wonders of the Inaccessible Island. No ships came near, for there was no way to come to that island except by following the birds that were of the whiteness of a swan and that flew always in the middle distance. On this island Zabulun the Enchanter had lived for longer than the lifetimes of many men, studying magic and all the ways of enchantment. And for three years I, Eean, the son of the fisherman of the Western Island, stayed with him, learning such things as were proper for one apprenticed to an Enchanter to know.

III. THE ENCHANTER GOES TO BABYLON

In the three years that were passed in the Inaccessible Island, nothing that is worth my telling happened, O King. But at the end of the three years my master said to me, "We will leave the Inaccessible Island, for I have a mighty business before me." And when I asked, "Where do we
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go, O master?" he answered, "We go to Babylon."

And then, when it was the first day after the new moon, we descended the black stairway that led into the cave where the waters came. There we found a boat of brass that was like the boat that came to the Western Island on the day when my father and I were fishing in the pools of the sea. We went into that boat of brass, and it took us through the water, steering itself. We rested on lonely islands, and at last we came to a mainland, and there the Enchanter left the boat to sink beneath the water. As travelers then we went on. We came to a town, and there my master bought for himself and me the dresses of merchants. Then we came to the river that flows toward Babylon. Men go down the river in round boats that are made of rods woven together. In every boat a live ass is carried, and when the cargo is landed the boats are broken up, for they cannot go back against the current of the river. And the cargo is loaded on the ass and brought into the market in Babylon. And whatsoever the merchants buy in Babylon is loaded
on the ass, and the ass is driven back over the mountains into the country that they came from, these men.

And in such boats we went down the river and came into Babylon. No city in the world is as mighty or as wonderful as Babylon. It has three hundred and sixty-five streets, and in every street there are three hundred and sixty-five palaces, and to every palace there are three hundred and sixty-five steps leading up to its door of gold and ebony. The streets when we came into them were thronged with mighty, black-bearded men. I was much in dread when I stood in those great streets, and looked on the mighty men who went through them.

In the center of the city were the palace and the wide-spreading gardens of the King. In those gardens, as my master told me, were one or two of all the beautiful or terrible animals of the world. Those gardens I will speak of again, O King, for it was within them that I came upon the danger that was greater than the danger that I am now in.
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But first the Enchanter showed me that great wonder that was near the gardens — the Tower of Babylon. It was a red tower mounting very high into the air. Outside of it there were steps that went round it and to the very top of it—a thousand steps. And on the top of the tower, resting against the Spear of Nimrod, was the Magic Mirror of Babylon. Zabulun the Enchanter made me look to the top, and I was made fearful by looking so high.

Oh, that I might tell you, King Manus, of the wonders of the Tower of Babylon! In the shadow of it there slept two mighty ones — the two Genii who guarded Babylon, Harut and Marut they were named. Giant beings they were. As they slept there the beard of each was spread across his mighty chest, and it was a beard so broad that no horse of the mighty horses that the King owned could leap across it. Very great but very old were Harut and Marut, the Genii who guarded Babylon.

I was made fearful by looking to the top of the tower. And then I was made still more fearful
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by the words that Zabulun said to me. "We have come here," he said, "to steal the Magic Mirror of the Babylonians.

"It is there on the top of the tower," said the Enchanter, "resting against the Spear of Nimrod. One looking into that mirror sees all the Kings of the world. The one who threatens Babylon is shown with a spear raised in his hand. And if a King should bring an army against Babylon, the number of its men and the ways by which it comes would be shown in the mirror. The Babylonians, by means of this Magic Mirror of theirs, are always ready for their enemies, and because of this no King in all the world will venture to make war on Babylon.

"But we shall steal the mirror and make the Tower of Babylon fall. Know that I, Zabulun, was once a Prince of Babylon. They dishonored me, the men of Babylon, and drove me out of their city. And for that I shall make an end of their pride and an end of their security.

"Fear not. It will not be hard to steal the mirror and throw down the tower. Know that the
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King of the city is a foolish King, and that he cares only for his gardens and for the beautiful and terrible beasts that he can bring into them. And as for the Genii who guard Babylon — behold them! They are mighty beings, truly, Harut and Marut! Immeasurably old are they, and they pass their days in sleep beside the tower that they guard. I say to you that it will not be hard to overthrow the tower, and take away from the Babylonians the Magic Mirror that is their security."

As Zabulun spoke the terrible beasts in the King’s gardens roared mightily, and Harut and Marut, the mighty beings who slept in the shadow of the Tower of Babylon, turned in their sleeping. The flocks of birds that had built nests in their beards (the oldest owl and the littlest humming bird were amongst them) flew up and rested on the steps of the tower.

The black-bearded men of Babylon passed in their throngs, while he who was once a prince in their city, and who was now Zabulun the Enchanter, stood there with his staff in his hands and smiling to himself. And I, Eean, The Boy Ap-
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prenticed to the Enchanter, felt as if I were fall-
ing, falling down from the top of the tower.

IV. THE PALACE OF THE KING OF BABYLON

And now at the supper board of King Manus
those who were eating, or drinking, or whispering
to each other as the youth began his story, became
silent and eager when he spoke of Babylon and
the Tower of Babylon. The King himself was
fain to hear about that city that was the greatest
in the world, and about the King who was the
mightiest of all Kings, and he commanded the
attendants to cease going here and there. So the
servers and chamberlains and stewards, with the
dishes, and napkins, and rods of office in their
hands, stood still behind those who were seated at
the table. The lords leaned forward with their
eyes upon the youth who sat in the story-teller's
place, and the King made a sign for him to tell
on. But the youth Eean was speechless for a
while. Such was the memory of the high Tower
of Babylon upon him that had he been standing
he would have fallen down. His head sank on
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the arm rest of the chair, and those near him who touched his hand felt it chilled. Then King Manus signed for a chamberlain to go to him, and he went and wiped Eean’s brow with a napkin, and then brought him a goblet of the richest wine. He raised up his head and drank, and looked down the table, and saw the high candles that burned brightly, and saw the face of the King and the faces of the lords who sat with the King. But for a while his look was the look of a man whose spirit is in another place. He heard the words that were spoken around him — words that were about the King of Babylon, and the King of Babylon’s palace. The youth caught at these words, and went on to speak of what befell him.

The walls of the King’s palace (said Eean, The Boy Apprenticed to an Enchanter) make seven circles, one wall rising higher than the other, and each wall having a different color. The first wall is white, the second wall is black, and the third wall is scarlet; the fourth wall is blue, the fifth wall is orange, the sixth wall is plated with
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silver, and the seventh wall is plated with gold. I was filled with wonder when I looked on the walls of the King's palace.

The Enchanter that day had put on the dress of a merchant, but under it he had left his own garb — the straight dress that had the curious figures upon it. He took into his hand the staff that was made of two serpents twisting together, and he told me that the time had come to go to the palace and speak with the King.

At an early hour, before it was yet market time, we went through the streets of the city. The soldiers let us pass through the Gate of Brass along a way that has on each side great lions carved in stone. We came to the palace, and my master spoke to the doorkeepers and they permitted us to enter. We went through the outer courts where there were soldiers who carried naked swords in their hands. And because my master gave himself out to be a merchant from far-off parts, and because the King greatly desired to speak with those who came from far-off parts, we were brought into the presence of the King of Babylon.

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He looked, O King Manus, like a King that was of a long line of Kings. His black beard was powdered with gold, and spices burned before him. But his face was white, and it was like to the face of a man in a dream. Only one person stood near him—a dwarf from the Country of the Dwarfs. He had on his head a crown of scarlet feathers.

When we came before him, and after we had bowed, the King looked upon us. He spoke to my master, and said, “What have you to sell, merchant?”

And my master, before he spoke, let fall his merchant’s robe, and he showed himself in the straight garb that was covered with curious figures—the garb of a Magus it was.

“What I have to sell,” he said, “is the meaning of dreams, O King.”

And now, O King Manus, I have to tell of a cheat worked upon a King, and of a cheat worked by my master, Zabulun the Enchanter, upon the King of Babylon. Pretending to speak of the meaning of dreams he led the King to destruction,
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hoping thereby to encompass the destruction of Babylon.

The King turned to his ancient dwarf and he said, "Remind me of my dreams." And then the ancient dwarf said to the King, "Of the three dreams that seemed remarkable to you, O King, the first was the Dream of the Three Dishes."

"It is even so," said the King. "I dreamed that there were three dishes set before me, no more than three dishes. And then I dreamed that afterward these three dishes were hidden from me and were not to be found. There was no one to tell me the signification of this dream."

"The signification of this dream," said Zabulun the Enchanter cunningly, "is easy to discover. In the lore of the Chaldeans a dish signifies a treasure. You have dreamed of a threefold treasure that is hidden away."

But the dwarf who was beside the King spoke up and said, "Why does a dish signify a treasure?"

"That is something I may not reveal," said my master, Zabulun the Enchanter, and he turned to the dwarf the staff that was formed of two ser-
THE BOY APPRENTICED TO AN ENCHANTER

pents twisting together. The end of the staff lifted itself as though the serpents were rising up. The dwarf covered his eyes, and cried out, "O Magus!"

"Remind me of the second dream that was considered remarkable," said the King. And the dwarf said, "The second dream was the Dream of the Laden Ass."

"It is even so," said the King. "I dreamed that I looked down the Way of the Lions, and there came along the way a laden ass. Of that dream also those skilled in the signification of dreams could tell me nothing."

"And yet the dream is plain," said the Enchanter, looking full into the eyes of the King. "A laden ass signifies a treasure found — your dream is of a treasure being brought into your palace."

"It is so," said the ancient dwarf with the crown of scarlet feathers upon his head. "In dreams an ass is always laden with treasure."

"And what was my third dream?" said the King.
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"Your third dream," said the ancient dwarf, "was the Dream of the Arrows."

"It is even so," said the King. "I dreamed of arrows that were shot upward to a great height."

And then the King was silent, and he and the dwarf looked long upon Zabulun the Enchanter. But Zabulun took a step nearer to them, and he said:

"In the lore of the Chaldeans, arrows shot upward signify a very high tower. I can tell you now the significance of your three dreams, O King. They are of a treasure that is to come into your possession. The treasure is hidden. It is hidden beneath a tower. The height to which the arrows were shot shows that the treasure is hidden under the highest of towers — under the Tower of Babylon."

At the mention of the Tower of Babylon, O King of the Western Island, a great fear came over me, for I knew that it was now that Zabulun's plan for the taking of the Magic Mirror was being put into practice. And it seemed to me that fear came over the ancient dwarf too, for he fell