

A RIDDLE OF THE ORCHARD

There was an orchard in a village. But that orchard wasn't usual. It lived its own life. Nobody could say - it's my orchard. Nobody looked after the orchard. But it looked tidy - healthy trees with rustling leaves, jolly sand paths among them, soft green grass. And what tasty fruits were there!

The villagers were respectful to the orchard and treated it as if it were some creature. Though it didn't have any guard, nobody entered there. A lot of people gathered only when harvest came. The orchard often helped villagers in lean years. The wheat harvest could be poor, but apples, pears and cherries were always in abundance.

The village was on the edge of an extensive steppe wherein lurked many dangers - hot winds, fires, wild tribes of the nomads...

And once, on a hot summer day, when all the villagers were working in the field, suddenly a strong wind began blow. The sky became dark and the air filled with far wild bawls...

There were the nomads. They lived among the steppe and their favourite work was robbery. They studied the science of war from their childhood. They gathered in huge force and attacked villages and towns like locusts ravaging everything on their way. It was the biggest danger that the steppe hid.

The villagers didn't even have weapons and as usual they plunged into the nearby forest gathering their children.

Suddenly one of the villagers looked back and exclaimed - Wait! Look! Look! People stopped, looked back and stood motionless staring at the wonder which had appeared.

A hazy castle like a big white cloud was in the air above the orchard. The dark lowering sky accentuated its greatness. Lower, on the very edge of the orchard the tall white horseman stood. He was glowing with some soft light, his long white cloak was streaming behind him, and a golden crown was glittering on his white-haired head.

The white horse reared and rushed towards the approaching black army. After some time, the army of the nomads and the white king stopped opposite each other. A black horseman separated from the army and rode nearer to the white king. His eyes glared with fury. The king looked at him strongly and composedly.

They stared at each other for a long time. At last the black horseman turned his horse and rode back towards his army. Soon the entire dark army rushed away.

The sky cleared, and the sun lit up the earth. The white king went towards the orchard, where a beautiful woman waited for him. She stood in her shining white dress, her long white hair was streaming behind her and a little golden crown was sparkling on her head. The king reined his horse, leapt down from it and came to the queen. They smiled at each other and embraced.

At that very moment the vision melted and the warm summer rain started. Villagers stood on the edge of the forest and even men smiled through tears... Maybe it was raindrops... maybe...