

## **Robyn O' Well**

**By Lucas Mohan**

“Once, O dearest of mine,” said a father to his two sons as they sat by a flickering fire, “in the days of old, there was lived a poor blacksmith named Robyn. Not *Robin*, mind you, for in the village where he lived, good spelling was taken not only as offensive, but also as the sure sign of an idiot. Now, the trade of a blacksmith requires a good deal of water as well as coal. Red, hot horseshoes or other such items are dipped in water to cut short any long period of time which would otherwise have to be set aside for the cooling process. In that area however, rain water was scarce, and running water, scarcer. So, Robyn-the-Blacksmith set out to dig a well. He dug for a year and a day, until finally he was forced to abandon the enterprise. He was in a piteous state of mind: he still had no water and he had earned what he thought to be a deplorable, odious nickname; from that day forth he was known as Robyn O' Well.

As you will learn, my sons, it is the worker with a steady living who lusts for languid days of lethargic repose, and those with nothing to be done who seek some labor, or at least idle preoccupation with which to divert themselves. Robyn O' Well was very much in the latter group and, because of this he was in the habit of sitting on his door stoop waiting for a potential equine customer to come plodding along with its rider slouched like a grain sack on the poor beast's back. As a rule of thumb, the better the mount, the fatter was the one in the saddle, and if the stomach was well lined, so too was the pocket. Now, as Robyn was employed in his usual morning vigil, a curious little man (if a man he was), on a curious little pony came to his forge in need of some assistance. Both horse and rider were quite near impossible to describe. However, having thus excused myself of possible fallacy in my description, I shall endeavor to do my best. The pony was a glistening gray-blue, with white mane and tail. The hooves were painted shiny black and both saddle and bridle were crafted of fine brown leather. Its master was even stranger: a roly-poly figure swaddled in green cloth, his long white beard tucked into his black belt. His facial hair, which would otherwise have been an irksome inconvenience, was checked by his downward curving nose which pinned his whiskers neatly against his expansive chest. ‘I am Uldor, son of Taymyr, king of eastern-lands and third of his name,’ said he as he brought his pony to a stop. ‘I require your services Robyn-the-Blacksmith.’ ‘Tell me what you need me to do, my masters, and I shall do it,’ said Robyn O' Well with a clumsily gallant sweep of his cap to both horse and rider. Uldor, son of Taymyr, king of

eastern lands and third of his name grunted and said, 'I require only two things: one of them is water, for the journey has wearied me and yet they say none who pass through the great deserts of Kalfhaggar pass easily. As for the second, my horse dropped a shoe by the wayside; hitch up your mule, find it, and bring it to me.' Robyn did so whilst the stranger waited at the door and the pony grazed by the cattle wade.

Nearly an hour later, Robyn came back with the shoe. His extravagant customer was nowhere to be seen. For a time, Robyn was in a state of near panic; then he saw the lazy puffs of the pipe smoke which is only issued by the man who has made himself completely at home. Through a square hole in the wall which served as a window, Robyn could see the shadowy figure of Uldor, son of Taymyr, king of eastern lands and third of his name, his form softly illuminated by the light of his pipe which burned a queer shade of blue. Robyn turned away frightened by the elderly figure wreathed in pipe smoke, burning queer blue pipe-weed in his mysterious slow manner. The blacksmith went to the grazing pony and nailed the shoe he had found to its hoof. Presently the prince Uldor emerged and asked for water from the well. Robyn was forced to tell him he had none, and that the well was dry. His illustrious guest gave a low bellow of displeasure, rather akin to the discord of a giant organ. He saddled his pony quickly and easily, and just as quickly he rode away. However, unseen by his humble and dejected host, before he left, Uldor walked to the well and emptied the smoldering ashes of his gilded pipe into it.

The next morning, Robyn rose early and prepared himself for his daily task of idleness. When he walked out of his door into the morning sun, the curiosity seized him to see how deep his well was. He took a piece of cloth, greased it, set it ablaze, then dropped it into the well. Down it fell; deeper and deeper still, until it was like a star in the sky. Then suddenly, it went out. He heard a hiss and a puff of steam floated up and moistened his brows. Excited by this sign which seemed to indicate water, he tried another test, this time tearing up a piece of heather and lowering it down on a string until he heard a splash. He pulled the heather up excitedly to find that it had changed: it was now pure silver, glistening in the sunlight.

The news spread quickly. One day, a respected silversmith came from the north with three pebbles which he wanted turned into silver to be made into a crown for his king. Likewise, another man came with three stones. Yet another day, a sage from the neighboring village came, not with three pebbles, nor three

big stones, but three large rocks. These rocks, the wise man lowered slowly into the well. As he pulled them back up the shaft, the sunlight graced the rocks' water-slicked surface turning them not into silver, but into gold. 'The foolish receive silver, and the wise receive gold', cried the sage, chuckling spitefully to himself. Robyn called to him entreating the man to release the rope, but, too late, for as you know, a rock of plain granite and a piece of gold the same size weigh quite differently, the gold being many times heavier. When the rock turned to gold, it suddenly became as heavy as a cart horse. It was in vain that Robyn entreated the wise fool to release his load: he clung to the rope like a monkey clinging to a handful of nuts. Though he could by no means haul up the precious metal, the gold could most certainly pull him. He was tugged down into the watery depths and was never seen by eyes of man again. After the unfortunate event, the well was left for Robyn alone to use. He lived a long and comfortable life, more or less by himself, with the exception of those rare occasions when an old man with a long beard riding a blue-gray pony came to visit. And from then to the days far anon, that's how they tell it."