



## **BEGINNING LEVEL READING**

### **THE WHITE SNAKE**

Once there lived a King who was famed for his wisdom. Nothing was hidden from him, and it seemed as if news of the most secret things was brought to him through the air.

Every day after dinner, when the table was cleared, and no one else was present, the King had a trusty servant bring him one more dish. It was covered and even the servant did not know what was in it. No one knew, for the King never took off the cover to eat of it, until he was alone.

One day, the servant was so curious that he could not help carrying the dish into his room. When he had carefully locked the door, he lifted up the cover, and saw a White Snake lying on the dish. When he saw it, he could not deny himself the pleasure of tasting it, so he cut off a little bit and put it into his mouth.

The moment it touched his tongue, he heard a strange whispering of little voices outside his window. He went to listen and noticed that it was the sparrows who were chattering together and telling one another of all of the things which they had seen in the fields and woods. Eating the Snake had given him power to understand the language of animals!

It so happened, that on this very day the Queen lost a beautiful ring, and suspicion of having stolen it fell upon this servant. The King threatened the man with angry words that unless he could, before the morrow, point out the thief, he himself should be looked upon as guilty and be executed. In vain, he declared his innocence.

He went down into the courtyard and thought about how to help himself out of his trouble. He saw some ducks sitting together by a brook and whilst they were making their feathers smooth with their bills, they were telling one another of all the places where they had been waddling about all morning, and what good food they had found. One said, in a pitiful tone, "Something lies heavy on my stomach; as I was eating in haste, I swallowed a ring which lay under the Queen's window."

The servant at once seized the duck, carried her to the kitchen, and said to the cook, "Here is a fine duck. Pray kill her."

"Yes," said the cook, and weighed her in his hand; "she has spared no trouble to fatten herself and has been waiting long enough to be roasted."

As the duck was being dressed for the spit, the Queen's ring was found inside her.

The servant could now easily prove his innocence. The King, to make amends for the wrong, allowed him to ask any favor. The servant asked only for a horse and some money for traveling, as he had a mind to see the world. When his request was granted, he set out on his way.

One day he came to a pond, where he saw three fish caught in the reeds and gasping for water. He heard them lamenting that they must perish so miserably. As he had a kind heart, he got off his horse and put the three prisoners back into the water.

They quivered with delight and cried to him, "We will remember you, and repay you for saving us!"

He rode on, and after a while he heard a voice in the sand at his feet. He listened, and heard an Ant-King complain, "Why cannot folk, with their clumsy beasts, keep off our bodies? That stupid horse, with his heavy hoofs, has been treading down my people without mercy!"

So, he turned on to a side path and the Ant-King cried out to him, "We will remember you—one good turn deserves another!"

The path led him into a wood, and there he saw two old ravens standing by their nest, throwing out their young ones. "Out with you, you idle creatures!" cried they; "You are big enough and can provide for yourselves."

The poor young ravens lay upon the ground crying, "Oh, what helpless chicks we are! We must shift for ourselves, and yet we cannot fly! What can we do, but lie here and starve?"

So, the good young fellow alighted, killed his horse with his sword, and gave it to them for food. The ravens satisfied their hunger, and cried, "We will remember you—one good turn deserves another!"

He then walked to a large city. There was great noise and crowd in the streets, and a man rode up on horseback, crying, "The King's Daughter wants a husband. But

whoever sues for her hand must perform a hard task. If he does not succeed, he will forfeit his life.”

Many had already made the attempt, but in vain. Nevertheless, when the youth saw the King’s Daughter he was so overcome by her great beauty, that he forgot all danger, went before the King, and declared himself a suitor.

He was led out to the sea, and a gold ring was cast into it. Then the King ordered him to fetch this ring up from the bottom of the sea, and added, “If you come up without it, you will be thrown in again and again until you perish amid the waves.”

He stood on the shore and considered what he should do, when suddenly he saw three fish come swimming toward him. They were the very fish whose lives he had saved. One held a mussel in its mouth, which it laid on the shore at the youth’s feet, and inside the shell was the gold ring. Full of joy he took it to the King. But when the proud Princess perceived that he was not her equal in birth, she scorned him, and required him first to perform another task. She went down into the garden and spread ten sacksful of millet-seed on the grass.

Then she said, “Tomorrow morning before sunrise these must be picked up, and not a single grain be wanting.”

The youth sat down in the garden and considered how he might perform this task. But he could think of nothing, and there he sat sorrowfully awaiting the break of day. As soon as the first rays of the sun shone into the garden, he saw all ten sacks standing side by side, quite full, and not a single grain was missing. The Ant-King had come in the night with thousands and thousands of ants, and the grateful creatures had picked up all of the seeds.

The King’s Daughter came down into the garden and was amazed to see that the young man had done the task she had given him. But she could not yet conquer her proud heart, and said, “Although he has performed both the tasks, he shall not be my husband, until he has brought me an apple from the Tree of Life.”

The youth did not know where the Tree of Life stood, but he set out, and would have gone on forever, searching. He had wandered far and came one evening to a wood, and lay down under a tree to sleep.

He heard a rustling in the branches, and a Golden Apple fell into his hand. Three ravens flew down to him, perched themselves upon his knee, and said, “We are the three young ravens whom you saved from starving. We heard that you were seeking the Golden Apple, so we flew over the sea to the end of the world, where the Tree of Life stands, and have brought you the apple.”

The youth, full of joy, took the Golden Apple to the King’s beautiful Daughter. They cut the Apple of Life in two and ate it together; and then her heart became full of love for him, and they lived to a great age in undisturbed happiness.

## **INTERMEDIATE LEVEL READING**

### **THE WHITE SNAKE**

A long time ago, there lived a King who was famed, through all the land, for his wisdom. Nothing was hidden from him, and it seemed as if news of the most secret things was brought to him through the air.

The King had a strange custom. Every day after dinner, when the table was cleared, and no one else was present, a trusty servant had to bring him one more dish. It was covered and even the servant did not know what was in it. No one knew, for the King never took off the cover to eat of it, until he was alone.

One day, the servant was overcome with such curiosity that he could not help carrying the dish into his room. When he had carefully locked the door, he lifted up the cover, and saw a White Snake lying on the dish. When he saw it, he could not deny himself the pleasure of tasting it, so he cut off a little bit and put it into his mouth.

No sooner had it touched his tongue than he heard a strange whispering of little voices outside his window. He went to listen and noticed that it was the sparrows who were chattering together and telling one another of all kinds of things which they had seen in the fields and woods. Eating the Snake had given him power to understand the language of animals!

Now, it so happened, that on this very day the Queen lost her most beautiful ring, and suspicion of having stolen it fell upon this trusty servant. The King ordered the man to be brought before him, and threatened with angry words that unless he could, before the morrow, point out the thief, he himself should be looked upon as guilty and be executed. In vain, he declared his innocence.

He went down into the courtyard and thought about how to help himself out of his trouble. He saw some ducks were sitting together by a brook and whilst they were

making their feathers smooth with their bills, they were telling one another of all the places where they had been waddling about all the morning, and what good food they had found. One said, in a pitiful tone, "Something lies heavy on my stomach; as I was eating in haste, I swallowed a ring which lay under the Queen's window."

The servant at once seized the duck, carried her to the kitchen, and said to the cook, "Here is a fine duck. Pray kill her."

"Yes," said the cook, and weighed her in his hand; "she has spared no trouble to fatten herself and has been waiting long enough to be roasted."

As the duck was being dressed for the spit, the Queen's ring was found inside her.

The servant could now easily prove his innocence. The King, to make amends for the wrong, allowed him to ask any favor. The servant asked only for a horse and some money for traveling, as he had a mind to see the world. When his request was granted, he set out on his way.

One day he came to a pond, where he saw three fish caught in the reeds and gasping for water. Now, though it is said that fishes are dumb, he heard them lamenting that they must perish so miserably. As he had a kind heart, he got off his horse and put the three prisoners back into the water.

They quivered with delight and cried to him, "We will remember you, and repay you for saving us!"

He rode on, and after a while he heard a voice in the sand at his feet. He listened, and heard an Ant-King complain, "Why cannot folk, with their clumsy beasts, keep off our bodies? That stupid horse, with his heavy hoofs, has been treading down my people without mercy!"

So, he turned on to a side path and the Ant-King cried out to him, "We will remember you—one good turn deserves another!"

The path led him into a wood, and there he saw two old ravens standing by their nest, throwing out their young ones. "Out with you, you idle creatures!" cried they; "You are big enough and can provide for yourselves."

The poor young ravens lay upon the ground crying, "Oh, what helpless chicks we are! We must shift for ourselves, and yet we cannot fly! What can we do, but lie here and starve?"

So, the good young fellow alighted, killed his horse with his sword, and gave it to them for food. The ravens satisfied their hunger, and cried, "We will remember you—one good turn deserves another!"

Using his own legs, walking a long way, he came to a large city. There was great noise and crowd in the streets, and a man rode up on horseback, crying, "The King's

Daughter wants a husband. But whoever sues for her hand must perform a hard task. If he does not succeed, he will forfeit his life.”

Many had already made the attempt, but in vain. Nevertheless, when the youth saw the King’s Daughter he was so overcome by her great beauty, that he forgot all danger, went before the King, and declared himself a suitor.

He was led out to the sea, and a gold ring was cast into it. Then the King ordered him to fetch this ring up from the bottom of the sea, and added, “If you come up without it, you will be thrown in again and again until you perish amid the waves.”

He stood on the shore and considered what he should do, when suddenly he saw three fish come swimming toward him. They were the very fish whose lives he had saved. One held a mussel in its mouth, which it laid on the shore at the youth’s feet, and inside the shell was the gold ring. Full of joy he took it to the King. But when the proud Princess perceived that he was not her equal in birth, she scorned him, and required him first to perform another task. She went down into the garden and spread ten sacksful of millet-seed on the grass.

Then she said, “Tomorrow morning before sunrise these must be picked up, and not a single grain be wanting.”

The youth sat down in the garden and considered how he might perform this task. But he could think of nothing, and there he sat sorrowfully awaiting the break of day. As soon as the first rays of the sun shone into the garden, he saw all ten sacks standing side by side, quite full, and not a single grain was missing. The Ant-King had come in the night with thousands and thousands of ants, and the grateful creatures had picked up all of the seeds.

The King’s Daughter came down into the garden and was amazed to see that the young man had done the task she had given him. But she could not yet conquer her proud heart, and said, “Although he has performed both the tasks, he shall not be my husband, until he has brought me an apple from the Tree of Life.”

The youth did not know where the Tree of Life stood, but he set out, and would have gone on forever, though he had no hope of finding it. He had wandered through three kingdoms, he came one evening to a wood, and lay down under a tree to sleep.

He heard a rustling in the branches, and a Golden Apple fell into his hand. Three ravens flew down to him, perched themselves upon his knee, and said, “We are the three young ravens whom you saved from starving. We heard that you were seeking the Golden Apple, so we flew over the sea to the end of the world, where the Tree of Life stands, and have brought you the apple.”

The youth, full of joy, took the Golden Apple to the King’s beautiful Daughter. They cut the Apple of Life in two and ate it together; and then her heart became full of love for him, and they lived to a great age in undisturbed happiness.

