

A blurred background image of a person wearing a red hooded cloak, holding a playing card (Ace of Diamonds) in their hand. The person's face is partially visible but out of focus. The overall scene suggests a magical or theatrical performance.

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***THE MAGICIAN'S
SHOW BOX, AND
OTHER STORIES***

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The Magician's Show Box, and Other Stories

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There was once a boy, named Gaspar, whose uncle made voyages to China, and brought him home chessmen, queer toys, porcelain vases, embroidered skullcaps, and all kinds of fine things. He gave him such grand descriptions of foreign countries and costumes, that Gaspar was not at all satisfied to live in a small village, where the people dressed in the most commonplace way. At school he was always covering his slate with pictures of Turks wearing turbans as large as small mosques, or Chinese with queues several yards long, and shoes that turned up to their knees. Then he read every story he could find of all possible and impossible adventures, and longed for nothing so much as to go forth, like Napoleon or Alexander, and make mincemeat of the whole world.

One day he could bear it no longer; so, taking with him an oaken dagger which he had carved with great care, off he started on his conquering expedition. He walked along the sunny road, kicking up a great dust, and coming to a milestone, threw a stone at a huge bullfrog croaking at him from a spring, and made it dive under with a loud splash. Pleased with his prowess, he took a good drink at the spring, and filled his flask with the sparkling water. At the second milestone he threw a pebble at a bird, singing in a tree. Off flew the bird, and down fell a great red apple. "Ah, how fine!" he exclaimed, picking it up; "and how the bird flies! I wish I had such wings." On the third milestone sat a quiet-looking little man, cracking nuts; so Gaspar stopped to crack nuts, and have a chat with him.

The man was very entertaining, and Gaspar listened and listened to his wonderful stories until he saw the milestone

shadow stretching far along the bank. Then he jumped up and was going to walk on, but hop went the little man quite across the road. Gaspar went the other side; hop came the little man back again; and so they dodged about, hither and thither, until Gaspar's patience was quite exhausted.

"He is only a small fellow, after all," he thought; "I can take a good run and jump over him." He took the run and gave the jump, but the little man shot up high into the air, and he might as well have tried to jump over the moon.

"It is a most singular thing!" said Gaspar to himself; "a little gray man, not much larger than I am, and yet he seems to be every where at once, like sheet lightning. There is no getting by him, and all the time he looks at me with those bright eyes and that quiet smile, as if he were really very much amused. Well, he must go to sleep by and by, and then I can step over him and walk off."

So he lay down, pretending to sleep, and the little man lay down also, with his face turned to the sky. When Gaspar thought him fast asleep, he arose very softly, believing he could now surely escape; but at his very first step up came a sly hand, catching him by the foot, so that down he fell at the old man's side, and there saw the bright eyes gazing up at the stars, without a wink of sleep in them. But Gaspar soon forgot his travels, with all his bold intentions, and fell asleep himself, to dream of skewers and cimeters.

In the morning the little man said, "Come now, it is foolish for you to go trudging about over the world. You will never see any thing more than polywogs and sandflies, and those you can find in your native village. Give me a drink from your flask, and a bite of your apple, and I can show you

more wonders in a day in my show box here, than you would find wandering about for a lifetime."

Then he drew from the pocket of his gray coat a neat box, carved of ivory, and having taken a bit of the apple and a sip of the water, which Gaspar never thought of refusing, he touched a spring, up flew the lid, and Gaspar peeped in. Ah, but it was a wondrous sight; for on and on moved a procession of all imaginable things. Lions and elephants seemed mere puppies, for here were mastodons and ichthyosaurs, and animals that lived before the flood was ever dreamed of; and as for Turks and turbans, why, there were people with headdresses that towered up into the skies, and ladies who made rainbows pale. There were queens whose thrones were all one driven pearl, and warriors whose swords were a flash of sunbeams.

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Gaspar; "this is better than travelling. But how shall I remember all these enchanting sights? I must make a note of them." And seizing his wooden sword, he began to draw in the sandy road each figure as it appeared.

Hour after hour the procession passed on in the little ivory box. Hour after hour he drew it in the sand, and that little man stood by, with his quiet smile and great politeness. At length a loud hallooing was heard, and they saw all the boys from the village running towards them.

"What is going on here?" they called out. "Never were such clouds seen as have been sailing over the village to-day. Whales and astronomers, kings and crocodiles, and nobody knows what. They all sail from this direction, and we have come to see what is going off here. Can it be you,

Gaspar, who are raising such a wind? Did you draw all these lively things in the sand, and blow them up into clouds?"

Gaspar said he knew nothing about the clouds, but he thought it was getting rather dark, and was as much surprised as any of the boys, to see what grand figures he had thrown up into the sky. He begged his new friend to show the boys his box; but he said, "No, it was not for them," and put it into his pocket.

They all laughed at it, and said such great creatures never came out of that little paint box.

Gaspar went back to the village with the boys, and for a while was quite contented with the remembrance of what he had seen; but at last his old love of travelling awoke in him. He did not feel satisfied to have seen wonderful nations and animals merely passing through a show box, but wanted to see them in living reality; but how was he to get by the little magician? On foot he knew it was impossible, but thought he might succeed on a fleet horse. So he went to his friend Conrad, and offered him the apple which could never be eaten, for his good cantering horse. Most boys are fond of red apples, but Conrad cared for nothing else but apples and apple dumplings, not even for his cantering horse, and readily exchanged him for Gaspar's apple, which he could be constantly eating. Off rode Gaspar with whip and spur, sure now that the little gray man could not stop him.

As he cantered along the road very grandly, there were those bright eyes fixed upon him.

"Whither so fast to-day?" said the gray man, with his queer smile.

"That's nothing to you," answered Gaspar; and on he tried to go; but hop went the little man, to and fro, just as he did before, and Gaspar did not like to run his horse directly over him; indeed he might as well have tried to ride over the winds of heaven; so he jumped off, exclaiming, "It's no use dodging about in this way; come, now, let's fight it out;" and he drew his oaken dagger with a great flourish.

"Ah, ha! that is it, is it?" said the magician; and out flashed a steel dagger. At it they went, striking their weapons against each other with might and main. At every stroke Gaspar's wooden dagger became sharper and sharper, and when he left off fighting he found it was changed into good steel; but it was useless to hope for victory from such a combatant, who might have pierced him through and through at any moment, as Gaspar very soon saw; so he put up his dagger, and they sat down on the stone, cracking their nuts and jokes together in the old way.

"Now," said Gaspar, "if I had a few bags of nuts like these, I could make my fortune. They do not grow in our village, and I have told the boys about them until they are all wild to have some. But I suppose you cannot give me any, for although you never get out of them, you seem only to have a handful at a time."

"Gaspar," answered the gray man, "there is no end to my nuts; we might crack here until doomsday, and I should still have thousands and thousands of uncracked ones left. I do not think much of them myself, but you are young and easily amused, and if you would like a bag or two, why, here they are;" and he held up his hands with a great sack full of nuts in each. Gaspar jumped on his horse, dragged the bags

up after him, while the little man looked smiling on, and rode home to the village.

What a shouting there was when the boys saw him riding through the streets with his great bags of nuts! They offered him bat and ball, hoop and kite; but Gaspar said he did not care for such childish things; he wanted something to be of use on his travels round the world. "You had better go to Lawyer Clang's," called out a newsboy; "he has a horse such as never was seen afore."

Gaspar rode straight to Lawyer Clang's office, and walked in, horse, sacks, and all.

"Sir," said he, "what will you give me for this cantering horse and these very hard nuts?"

"My horse Wayfare; and a more serviceable animal was never known. I am getting a little tired of him myself, but he is just the thing for you, if you wish to see the world."

The horse was brought round, a great gaunt creature, but handsomely bridled and saddled, and Gaspar thought he looked tough and sound, and would be far more useful than his cantering horse, which was only suitable for pleasure riding, so he changed horses, threw in the nuts, and rode off, bidding the boys good by, for many long years, he told them.

When he came to the first milestone he found the mossy spring was frozen over. At the second he saw the leafless apple tree, with a deserted bird's nest upon it; and at the third he discerned something that looked like the little magician; but he believed it was only a snow wreath: at any rate, it did not stop the way, and on he rode, exulting, though a little cold.

It was all very pleasant until night came; and then he was glad to see an inn, with a bright fire shining through the windows. He pulled in the reins, but the horse would not stop. He pulled harder and harder, and called "Whoa!" until he was breathless. It was all of no use. On went the horse, and the inn, with its bright windows, was soon left far behind. And over the wide plain he rode all night, through the wind and the snow, which was not at all agreeable. In the morning he was quite faint, and wanted to stop at a cottage for some breakfast, and a good warming for himself, and some oats for his horse. But no; Wayfare had nothing to do with such trifles. He went calmly on, always at the same jog-trot pace, and that not a very easy one. Gaspar had to catch at some berries as he rode through the woods, but found them poor fare, and was glad to find himself, the next day, getting into a warmer climate, where even oranges grew; but not many could he gather as he rode by the trees, and it was very provoking to see the horse, instead of stopping at a running brook, trot straight through it, and across a green pasture, as if it were all a parched desert.

"What an old foggy of a horse he is! I am sure he must be made of wood," exclaimed Gaspar; and he gave a great pound on the horse's neck. "Hollow, I declare! Nothing but a wooden horse, after all, and goes by machinery. I wonder how long he is wound up to go, and whether I shall ever get off the dreadful nightmare's back. What a fool I was to change my good cantering horse for such a machine as this! But I must endure it now I am in for it."

Day after day they trotted on, through strange countries, among unknown people and animals; but the horse never

noticed them, nor they the horse. Gaspar wished to jump off and let the great creature go; but it was so high, and went on so steadily, that he could not get a chance. At last they passed through a gate in a high wall, which he thought must be the Chinese Wall, and a pagoda in the distance soon convinced him that he was right.

"I shall at least see peaked shoes and mandarins, and that is some satisfaction," he thought, and rode on, looking about him with great curiosity, until he came to a palace all gilding and porcelain. Here the horse came to a stand, as if he had been wound up to go so far and no farther.

"This I know must be the emperor's palace, and that must be the very gentleman himself, looking out of the window," said Gaspar. "How fortunate that uncle Gammon taught me Chinese!" He bowed and addressed the emperor, who was quite surprised to see such a very small foreign boy on such a very large horse, speaking his language so correctly. He came down to examine the horse, and when he found it went by machinery instead of being alive, expressed the greatest delight, saying it was just the kind of horse he had always desired, and if Gaspar would give it to him, he should be made one of his chief mandarins. Gaspar replied that his greatest desire was to be a mandarin; so he alighted in the most dignified manner, and entering the palace, was presented with layers of richly embroidered robes, which reached to his feet, and just allowed the peaks of his shoes to peep out. Then he was introduced to a large circle of mandarins who stood round, incessantly bowing to one another. He began to bow too, as if he had done nothing else all his life, and when dinner was served, managed his

chop-sticks most dexterously, and smoked as if smoking had been his only vocation. In short, he ate and bobbed, and slept and woke, in the most approved manner.

Now he had attained the summit of his wishes. Every thing was entirely Chinese,—jars, mats, sweetmeats, dresses, bobbing, and stupidity. Rank, luxury, grandeur he called it, and for a while flattered himself that he was immersed in perfect happiness; but, somehow,—he could not tell what it was; perhaps he was not quite old enough,—but somehow he did become a little weary of being a mandarin. The palace was deliciously perfumed, but he longed for a puff of fresh wind. Nothing could be richer than their dresses, but the embroidery was rather heavy. Nothing could be profounder than their politeness, but it would have been a relief to have given some boy a good snowballing. Nothing could be serener than their silence, but he would gladly have given any body three cheers for nothing.

He began to make plans for escape from this palace of his desires, when one morning, just as one venerable mandarin was saying to another, in their usual edifying style of conversation, “Pelican of the Morning, before the magic charm of thy lofty countenance I am spell-bound, like an albatross bewildered amid the flapping sails of a mighty—” down burst the door with a crash, and a lion rushed roaring in among them. What a scrambling there was of the long-flowered dresses! What a tumbling, a flying, a groaning, a screaming! Never before were such confusion and fear in an assembly of bobbing mandarins. But Gaspar felt his breast swell with courage. Throwing off his long robes, he sprang upon the lion, and struggled fiercely with him; but the

powerful creature would soon have laid him low if he had not suddenly remembered the dagger, sharpened in his conflict with the little gray man. Drawing it from the belt in which he always wore it, beneath his embroidered robe, he plunged it into the lion's throat, and victory was won. He did not wait for the dispersed mandarins to return; but throwing one of the richest dresses over his shoulder, as Hercules wore the lion's skin, he walked off, taking his way straight to the gate in the wall, for he had had quite enough of China and the Chinese empire.

Now began glad days for him—roaming, like a wild hunter, from land to land, coping single handed with crocodiles and cameleopards, riding upon elephants, mastering tigers and young hyenas, visiting mosques and mausoleums. In every land he made collections of its greatest curiosities in art, literature, science, natural history, and politics. A sphinx, an obelisk, a winged bull from Nineveh, stuffed porcupines, live monkeys, fossil remains, a pinchbeck president of the United States, and many rare specimens even more curious, did he collect, and after years of wandering, by land and by sea, carry with him to his native village. There he converted an old barn into a museum, and gave out to the villagers that he was prepared to instruct them in all that the world contains. They flocked to the museum, and he was occupied every hour of the day going from one object to another, making a little set speech about each to entertain his bewildered visitors. Great admiration was expressed, and perhaps great knowledge was acquired. Gaspar felt that he was the benefactor of his race, and bought a pair of very tight boots to walk around

in, and a neat little silver-tipped stick with which to point out the curiosities.

But, alas! even now, when the cup of happiness seemed full, was he not to be satisfied. Had he not attained all that the most eager hopes of his boyhood had promised? Had not the highest honors and the most yellow of garments been lavished upon him in that long-desired Chinese empire? Had he not conquered innumerable wild animals—African, Asiatic, and above all, American? Was he not the focus of life and intelligence in his native village? And yet, how weary had he become of describing to his gaping audience, for the three hundred and sixtieth time, the daily habits of the laughing hyena, and the exact manner in which kangaroos jump! What sad indifference to the nature of whigs and walruses, to the tendencies of sea otters and free institutions, was creeping over him!

“Ah, if a lion would but walk in again, and if I could but have another good fight!” he exclaimed one day. At that moment the door suddenly opened. Hope whispered, “The lion!” and a fair young girl entered. She glanced around the room, cast her eyes on the president, the bones of a mastodon, a parrot in the corner, and a mummy or two.

“Old bones and stuffed animals!” she whispered to her companions, and they all began to laugh.

“I suppose she will call me a stuffed animal too,” thought Gaspar; “but I must show them the specimens.” So he stepped forward, and began to point out the various objects, and go over his usual descriptions. He did it in his neatest manner; but the girl kept smiling, as if it were all a great joke, and yet she looked at him with some interest. Gaspar

went into another room to put on his mandarin's dress and peaked shoes, which he thought would produce a great effect; but if she had only smiled before, now she fairly laughed. Then he caught down his dagger which hung on the wall as one of the curiosities, and felt for a moment as if she were the lion, and he would plunge it into her; but the next moment he saw her beautiful face bending over it. "Ah, this dagger I like! How sharp the point is! It looks as if you might have done something with it. Tell me all about it, will you not?" said the girl.

"If you will come here a week from to-day, I will tell you its history," answered Gaspar; and she promised that she would surely come.

At the appointed time she appeared—alone, now, Gaspar was glad to see, for he did not like to have her whispering and laughing with the other girls. However, he hoped she would not laugh now. He led her through the museum into another room, where he had been painting a picture of his fight with the lion.

"That is excellent!" said the girl; "that is just the thing. There goes the dagger into the throat of the lion. How much better than a petrified peacock, or a labelled dromedary! And you killed the lion and painted the picture too?"

"Yes," answered Gaspar, quite gently.

"And the dagger—where did you find that?"

Gaspar told her how he had carved it of heart of oak when he was a boy, and had changed it to steel in fighting with the magician.

"I must see that magician; let us go and find him," said the girl. So away they went. As they walked along Gaspar