

Aplec de Rondaies Mallorquines d'En Jordi d'es Racó

Antoni Maria Alcover

The Love of the Three Oranges

Riding and riding along he came to a river; on the bank there was an old woman who seemed anxious to get across.

They greeted each other.

"Praised be the Lord, good mother."

"For ever... Oh! Bernardet, son of the King, so it is you?"

"Yes, it's me. What are you about just now?"

"I want to get across this river."

"Easy, my dear! I will take you over. Just a moment; I will mount you on the pillion of the horse."

He lifted her on, urged his horse into the river, and in a few minutes they were on the other side.

The old woman then dismounted and said:

"Oh, Bernardet, what a great favour you have done me! Only God in Heaven can repay you."

"It is nothing, good mother. If there is anything more I can do for you..."

"Tell me where you want to go in these parts, and perhaps I can show you the way."

"I am trying to find *The Love of the Three Oranges*. You would be doing me a great favour if you could tell me where she is."

"In the east. Keep going straight towards where you see the sun rise."

"They tell me, mother, that I have to cross a field full of ants, one full of wild animals, and one where there is a seven-headed serpent. And then there are some bronze gates that are constantly opening and slamming shut, and never let anybody pass."

"That is quite true, Bernardet."

"And what can I do so the ants will say nothing and let me through?"

"Take them some wheat."

"And the wild animals?"

"Ewes and lambs."

"And the seven-headed serpent?"

"Seven pitchers of milk."

"And the bronze gates?"

"Grease the hinges with good lard; they will stop slamming and making a noise; the giants will fall asleep, and you can go ahead."

"God bless you, good mother!" said Bernardet, and he gave her a handful of gold doubloons.

Then the old woman put her hand in her pocket and brought out three twists of wool, one green, one ash-colour, and one red, and also a ball of cotton.

"Take this," she said. "To go into the garden without being heard, put this cotton on your horse's hoofs; then when the giants are chasing you, if you find them getting too close, drop these twists of wool. Alright, Bernardet, go your way; and may God protect you from danger and help you to achieve your purpose."

"Amen," said Bernardet, and he went off smartly to the east.

Translated by David Huelin