



*Go I Know Not Whither—Fetch I*

*Know Not What*

Robert Nisbet Bain

Russian

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*Intermediate*

*29 min read*

By the blue sea, in a certain empire, there dwelt once upon a time a king who was a bachelor, and he had a whole company of archers, and the archers used to go a-hunting with him and shoot the birds that flew about, and provided meat for their master's table. In this company served a youthful archer named Fedot, a clever marksman was he, never missing his aim, wherefore the King loved him better than all his comrades. One day he chanced to go a-hunting very early, even at break of day. He went into a dense, drear forest, and there he saw a dove sitting on a tree. Fedot stretched his bow, took aim, fired and broke one of the dove's little wings, and the bird fell from the tree down upon the damp earth.

The marksman picked it up, and was about to twist its neck and put it in his pouch, when the dove thus spoke to him: "Alas! young marksman! do not twist my poor little silly neck; drive me not out of the white world. 'Twere better to take me alive, carry me home, put me in thy little window, and lo! the moment that slumber comes over me, at that very moment, I say, stroke me the wrong side down with thy right hand, and great good fortune shall be thine!" The marksman was much amazed. "Why, what is this?" thought he. "Mine eyes tell me 'tis a bird, and naught else, yet it speaks with a human voice! Such a thing has never happened to me before." So he took the bird home, placed it in the window-sill, and waited and waited. 'Twas not very long before the bird laid its head beneath its wing and began to doze.

Then the marksman raised his right hand and stroked it, quite lightly, the wrong side down. The dove instantly fell to the ground and became a maiden-soul, and so beautiful that the like of it can only be told in tales, but is neither to be imagined nor guessed at. And she spoke to the good youth who was the royal archer, and said: "Thou hast had wit enough to win me, have also wit enough to live with me. Thou art my predestined husband, I am thy pre-ordained wife."

They were immediately of one mind. Fedot married, lived at home, and rejoiced in his young wife, yet forgot not his service either. Every morning, before break of day, he took his weapon, went into the forest, shot various kinds of wild beasts, and took them to the royal kitchen. But it was plain that his wife was much tormented by these hunting expeditions, and one day she said to him: "Listen, my friend! I am fearful for thee! Every blessed day thou dost cast thyself into the forest, dost wander through fen and morass, and returnest home wet through and through, and we are none the better for it. What sort of a trade dost thou call this! Look now, I have a plan whereby thou also shalt profit by it. Get me now a hundred or two of rubles, and I'll manage all the rest."

Then Fedot hastened to his comrades, and borrowed a ruble from one, and two rubles from another till he had collected about two hundred rubles. These then he brought to his wife. "Now," said she, "buy me various kinds of silk with all this money!" The archer went and bought various kinds of silk with the two hundred rubles. She took them and said: "Be not sorrowful! Pray God and lay thee down to sleep, the morning is wiser than the evening!"

So the husband fell asleep, and the wife went out upon the balcony, opened her book of spells, and immediately

two invisible youths appeared before her and said: "What art thou pleased to command?"—"Take this silk, and in a single hour weave me a carpet more wondrous than anything to be found in the wide world, and let the whole kingdom be embroidered on this carpet, with all its cities and villages and rivers and lakes."

Then they set to work and wove the carpet, and it was wondrous to behold, wondrous above everything. In the morning the wife handed the carpet to her husband. "There," said she, "take it to the market-place and sell it to the merchants; but look now! haggle not about the price, but take whatever they offer thee for it."

Fedot took the carpet, turned it round, hung it over his arm, and went to the market-place. A merchant saw him, ran up to him at once, and said to him: "Hearken to me, honoured sir, wilt thou not sell me that carpet?"

—"Willingly!"

—"And what then is the price?"

—"Thou art a frequenter of the marts, therefore will I leave the price to thee!" The merchant fell a-thinking and a-thinking, he could not price the carpet—he was at his wits' end. Another merchant came running up, and after him a third and a fourth till a great crowd of them collected; they looked at the carpet, marvelled at it, and could not fix the price. At that moment the royal steward passed by that way, saw the crowd, and wanted to know what all the merchants were talking about.

So he went up to them and said, "What is the matter?"—"We cannot price this carpet," said they. The steward looked at the carpet, and he also was amazed. "Hearken, archer!" said he, "tell me the real truth; where didst thou get this lordly carpet?"—"My wife wrought it!"—"How much dost thou want for it?"—"I myself know not the value of it; my wife bade me not to haggle over it, but to take whatever was offered."—"Then what dost thou say to 10,000 rubles?" The archer took the money and gave up the carpet.

Now this steward was always by the King, and ate and drank at his table. So he went to dine with the King now also, and took the carpet with him. "Would it please your Majesty to look at the carpet I have bought to-day?" The King looked, and saw there his whole realm just as if it were on the palm of his hand, and he heaved a great sigh. "Why, what a carpet is this! In all my life I have never seen such cunning craft. Say now, what wilt thou take for this carpet?"

And the King drew out 25,000 rubles and gave them into the hand of the steward, but the carpet they hung up in the palace. "That is a mere nothing," thought the steward, "I'll make a much better thing out of the second chance." So he immediately went in search of the archer, sought out his little hut, entered the dwelling-room, and the moment he saw the archer's wife, at that very instant he forgot all about himself and the errand on which he had come. Nevertheless the steward manned himself with a great effort and turned sullenly homewards. From henceforth he bungled over everything he took in hand, and whether asleep or awake, he [69]thought only of one thing, the wonderfully lovely little archeress.

The King observed the change in him, and asked him, "What ails thee? Has any great grief befallen thee?"—"Alas! my king and father, I have seen the wife of the archer—such a beauty the world knows not of nor has ever seen!" The King himself was seized with a desire to fall in love with her, and he also went to the abode of the archer. He entered the living-room, and saw before him a lady of a loveliness unspeakable. "Love's burning chilblain oppressed his heart." "Why should I remain a bachelor any longer?" thought he; "lo! now, I'll marry this beauty, she's too good for a mere archer. From her birth she was evidently meant to be a Queen!"

The King returned to his palace and said to the steward, "Hearken! thou hast had wit enough to show me the archer's wife, that unspeakable beauty; thou must now have wit enough to remove the husband out of the way. I want to marry her myself. And if thou dost not remove him, look to thyself; although thou art my faithful servant, thou shalt be hanged upon a gallows!"

Then the steward went about much more afflicted than before, and think as he would, he could not devise a method of getting rid of the archer. He wandered about the broad market-places and the narrow lanes, and there met him one day a miserable old hag. "Stay, thou King's servant!" cried she. "I can see all thy thoughts, thou wantest help against thy unavoidable woe."

—“Ah, help me, dear little granny! I’ll pay thee what thou wilt!”—“Thou hast received the royal command to get rid of Fedot the archer. The thing is not so very easy. He indeed is simple, but his wife is frightfully artful. Well now, we’ll hit upon an errand which will not be accomplished so speedily. Go to the King and say that he must command the archer to go I know not whither, and fetch I know not what. Such a task as that he’ll never accomplish, though he live for ever and ever; either he will vanish out of knowledge altogether, or if he does come back, it will be without arms or legs.”

The steward rewarded the old hag with gold, and hastened back to the King, and the King sent and commanded the archer to be brought before him. “Well, Fedot! thou art my young warrior, and the first in my corps of archers. Render me then this service: Go I know not whither, and fetch me I know not what! And mark me, if thou bring it me not back, ’tis I, the King, who say it to thee, thy head shall be severed from thy shoulders.”

The archer turned to the left, quitted the palace, and came home very sad and thoughtful. And his wife asked him: “Why art thou so sorrowful, darling; has any misfortune befallen thee?”—“The King has sent me I know not whither to fetch I know not what. ’Tis through thy beauty that this ruin has come upon us!”—“Yes, indeed! this service is no light one! It takes nine years to get there, and nine years to get back again, eighteen years in all, and God only knows if it can be managed even then!”

—“What’s to be done then, and what will become of me?”—“Pray God and lie down to sleep, the morning is wiser than the evening. To-morrow thou wilt know all.” The archer lay down to sleep, and his wife sat watching till midnight, opened her book of spells, and the two youths immediately appeared before her. “What is thy pleasure, and what thy command?”—“Do ye know how one can manage to go I know not whither, and fetch I know not what?”—“No, we do not know.”

She closed the book, and the youths disappeared from before her eyes. In the morning the archeress awoke her husband. “Go to the King,” said she, “and ask for gold from the treasury for thy journey. Thou hast a pilgrimage of eighteen years before thee. When thou hast the money, come back to me to say farewell.”

The archer went to the King, received a whole purseful of money, and returned to say good-bye to his wife. She gave him a pocket-handkerchief and a ball, and said: “When thou goest out of the town, throw this ball in front

of thee, and whithersoever it rolls, follow it. Here too is my pocket-handkerchief; when thou dost wash thyself, wherever thou mayst be, always dry thy face with this handkerchief." The archer took leave of his wife and of his comrades, bowed low on all four sides of him, and went beyond the barriers of the city. He threw the ball in front of him; the ball rolled and rolled, and he followed hard after it.

A month or so passed away, and then the King called the steward and said to him: "The archer has departed to wander about the wide world for eighteen years, and it is plain that he will not return alive. Now eighteen years are not two weeks, and no little disaster may have befallen him by the way; go then to the archer's house and bring me his wife to the palace!"

So the steward went to the archer's house, entered the room, and said to the beautiful archeress: "Hail, thou wise woman! The King commands thee to present thyself at court!" So to the court she went. The King received her with joy and led her into his golden halls, and said to her: "Wilt thou be a Queen? I will make thee my spouse!"—"Where was such a thing ever seen, where was such a thing ever heard of, to take a wife away from her living husband? Though he be nothing but a simple archer, he is for all that my lawful husband."—"If thou come not willingly, I'll take thee by force!" But the beauty [73]laughed, stamped upon the floor, turned into a dove, and flew out of the window.

The archer passed through many countries and kingdoms, and the ball kept rolling ever onwards. Whenever they came to a river the ball expanded into a bridge, and whenever the archer wished to rest, the ball widened into a downy bed. Whether the time be long or whether it be short the tale is quickly told, though the deed be not quickly done; suffice it to say that at last the archer came to a vast and wealthy palace; the ball rolled right up against the door and vanished. The archer fell a-thinking. "I had better go straight on," thought he, so he went up the staircase into a room, and there met him there three lovely damsels.

"Whence and wherefore hast thou come hither, good man?" said they. "Alas! lovely damsels, ye ask me not to rest from my long journey, but ye begin to torment me with questionings. First ye should give me to eat and drink and let me rest, and then only should ye ask me of my tidings!" They immediately laid the table, gave him to eat and drink, and made him lie down to rest. The archer slept away his weariness, rose from his soft bed, and the lovely damsels brought him a washing-basin and an embroidered towel. He washed himself in the clear spring-water, but the towel he would not take. "I have my handkerchief wherewith to wipe my face," said

he, and he drew out the handkerchief and began to dry himself. And the lovely damsels fell a-questioning him.

“Tell us, good man! whence hast thou got that handkerchief?”

—“My wife gave it to me.”

—“Then thou must have married one of our kinswomen.” Then they called their old mother, and she looked at the handkerchief, recognizing it the same instant, and cried: “This is indeed my daughter’s handkerchief!”

Then she began to put all manner of questions to the archer. He told her how he had married her daughter, and how the King had sent him I know not whither, to fetch I know not what. “Alas! my dear son-in-law, not even I have heard of this marvel.

But come now, perchance my servants may know of it.” Then the old woman fetched her book of spells, turned over the leaves, and immediately there appeared two giants. “What is thy pleasure, and what is thy command?”—“Look now, my faithful servants, carry me together with my son-in-law to the wide sea Ocean, and place us in the very centre of it—in the very abyss.”

Immediately the giants caught up the archer and the old woman, and bore them, as by a hurricane, to the wide sea Ocean, and placed them in the centre of it—in the very abyss; there they stood like two vast columns, and held the archer and the old woman in their arms. Then the old woman cried with a loud voice, and there came [75]swimming up to her all the fish and creeping things of the sea, so that the blue sea was no longer to be seen for the multitude of them.

“Hark! ye fishes and creeping things of the sea. Ye who swim everywhere, have ye perchance heard how to go I know not whither, to fetch I know not what?” And all the fishes and creeping things exclaimed with one voice, “No, we have never heard of it.” Suddenly a lame old croaking frog forced its way to the front and said, “Kwa, kwa; I know where this marvel is to be found.”—“Well, dear, that is just what I want to know,” said the old woman, and she took up the frog and bade the giants carry her and her son-in-law home.

In an instant they found themselves in their own courtyard. Then the old woman began to question the frog.

“How and by what road can my son-in-law go?” And the frog answered, “This place is at the end of the world—far, far away. I would gladly lead him thither myself, but I am so frightfully old, I can scarcely move my legs. I could not get there in fifty years.” The old woman sent for a big jar, filled it with fresh milk, put the frog

inside, and said to her son-in-law, "Hold this jar in thy hand and the frog will show thee the way."

The archer took the jar with the frog, took leave of his mother-in-law and his sisters-in-law, and set out on his way. On he went, and the frog showed him the way. Whether it be far or near, long or short, matters not; suffice it that he came to the fiery river; beyond this river was a high mountain, and on this mountain a door was to be seen. "Kwa, kwa," said the frog, "let me out of the jar, we must cross over this river."

The archer took it out of the jar and placed it on the ground. "Now, my good youth, sit on me. More firmly. Don't be afraid. Thou wilt not smash me." The youth sat on the frog and pressed it to the very earth. The frog began to swell; it swelled and swelled till it was as large as a haystack. All that the archer now thought of was the risk of falling off. "If I fall off it will be the death of me," thought he. The frog, when it had done swelling, took a leap and leaped with one big bound right across the fiery stream, and again made itself quite little.

"Now, good youth, go through that door and I'll wait for thee here; thou wilt come into a cavern, and take care to hide thyself well. In a short time two old men will come; listen to what they are saying, and see what they do, and when they are gone, say and do as they."

The archer went into the mountain, opened the door, and in the cavern it was dark enough to put one's eyes out. He fumbled his way along and felt all about him with his arms till he felt an empty chest, into which he got and hid himself. And now, after he had waited some time, two old men entered and said: "Hi! Shmat-Razum! Come and feed us." At that very instant—there's no telling how—lightning-flashes lit candelabras, it thundered plates and dishes, and various wines and meats appeared upon the table. The old men ate and drank, and then they commanded—"Shmat-Razum! take it all away."

And immediately there was nothing, neither table, nor wine, nor meats, and the candelabras all went out. The archer heard the two old men going out, crept out of the chest, and cried: "Hi! Shmat-Razum!"—"What is your pleasure?"—"Feed me."

Again everything appeared. The candelabras were lighted, the table was covered, and all the meats and drinks appeared upon it. The archer sat down at the table and said, "Hi! Shmat-Razum. Come, brother, and sit down with me, let us eat and drink together. I can't stand eating all alone." And an invisible voice answered him: "Alas! good man, whence hath God sent thee? 'Tis thirty years since I have served right trustily the two old men

here, and during all that time they have never once asked me to sit down with them.”

The archer looked about him and was amazed. He saw nobody, yet the meats disappeared from the dishes as if some one was sweeping them away, and the wine bottles lifted themselves up, poured themselves into the glasses, [78]and in a trice the glasses were empty. Then the archer went on eating and drinking, but he said: “Hearken, Shmat-Razum! Wilt thou be my servant? Thou shalt have a good time of it with me.”—“Why should I not? I have long been growing weary here, and thou, I see, art a good man.”—“Well, get everything ready and come with me.” The archer came out of the cave, looked around him, and there was nothing. “Shmat-Razum, art thou there?”—“I am here. Fear not. I’ll never desert thee.” “Right,” replied the archer, and he sat him on the frog. The frog swelled out and leaped across the fiery stream; he placed it in the jar, and set off on his return journey. He came to his mother-in-law and made his new servant regale the old woman and her daughters right royally. Shmat-Razum feasted them so bountifully that the old woman very nearly danced for joy, and ordered the frog three jars of fresh milk every nine days for its faithful services. The archer then took leave of his mother-in-law and wended his way homewards. He went on and on till he was utterly exhausted, his swift feet trembled beneath him, and his white arms sank down by his side. “Alas!” said he, “Shmat-Razum, dost thou not see how weary I am? My legs fail me.”—“Why didst thou not tell it me long ago? I will bring thee to the place alive and well.” And immediately the [79]archer was seized by a whirlwind and carried through the air so quickly that his hat fell from his head. “Hi! Shmat-Razum! Stop a minute. My hat has fallen from my head.”—“Too late, master. Thou canst not get it. Thy cap is now 5000 miles behind thee.” Towns and villages, rivers and forests, melted away beneath the feet of the archer.

And now the archer was flying over the deep sea, and Shmat-Razum said to him: "An thou wilt let me, I would make a golden bower on this sea, and thou wilt be able to rest and be happy!"—"Do so then," said the archer, and straightway they began descending towards the sea. Then, for a moment, the waves splashed high, and then an islet appeared, and on the islet was a golden pleasure-house. Shmat-Razum said to the archer: "Sit in this pleasure-house and rest and look out upon the sea; three merchant vessels will sail by and stop at the islet. Thou must invite the merchants hither, hospitably entertain them, and exchange me for three wondrous things which the merchants will bring with them. In due time I will return to thee again." The archer kept watch, and lo! from the west three ships came sailing up, and the merchantmen saw the islet and the golden pleasure-house.

"'Tis a marvel!" said they; "how many times have we not sailed hither, and nothing was to be seen but the sea! and now, behold! a golden pleasure-house is here. Come, friends, let us put to shore and feast our eyes upon it!" So immediately they lowered the sails and cast the anchor, three of the merchants sat them in a light skiff, and they came to the shore. "Hail, good man!"—"Hail, ye wayfaring merchants, ye men of many marts! be so good as to turn in to me, stroll about at your ease, make merry and repose; this pleasure-house was built expressly for guests that come by sea!" The merchants entered the bower and sat them down on footstools. "Hi! Shmat-Razum!" cried the archer; "give us to eat and drink."

The table appeared, and on the table was wine and savoury meats; whatever the soul desired was there with the wishing. The merchants sighed for envy. "Come," said they, "let us make an exchange. Thou give us thy servant, and take from us what marvels thou likest best."—"But what marvels have ye then?"—"Look and see!" And one of the merchants drew out of his pocket a little casket, and he had no sooner opened it than a lovely garden spread out all over the island with fragrant flowers and pleasant paths; but when he shut the casket the garden immediately disappeared.

The second merchant drew from beneath the folds of his garment an axe, and began to tap with it: "Rap-tap!" out came a ship. "Rap-tap!" out came another ship. A hundred times he rapped, and made a hundred ships with sails and guns and crews complete; the ships sailed, the sailors stood by the guns and took orders from the merchant. The merchant gloried in it for a while, but then he concealed his axe and the ships vanished out of sight just as if they had never been. The third merchant produced a horn, blew into one end of it, and

immediately an army appeared, both horse and foot, with cannons and banners, and through all the ranks went the roll of martial music, and the armour of the warriors flashed like fire in the sunlight. The merchant rejoiced in it all, then he took his horn and blew into the other end of it, and there was nothing to be seen, the whole of that martial might was no more.

“Your marvels are well enough, but they are of no use to me,” said the archer; “your hosts and your fleets would do honour to a Tsar, but I am only a simple archer. If you would change with me, then must you give me all your three wonders in exchange for my one invisible servant.”—“But won’t that be too much?”—“Know ye that I’ll make no other exchange.” The merchants considered amongst themselves: “What’s the use of this garden, these ships, and these hosts to us? ’Twill be better to make the exchange; at any rate we shall always be able to eat and drink our fill without the least trouble.”

So they gave the archer their wonders, and said: “Well, Shmat-Razum, we’ll take thee with us; wilt thou serve us well and loyally?”—“Why should I not serve you? ’Tis all one with me with whom I live.” The merchants returned to their ships and regaled all their crews right royally. “Hi! Shmat-Razum! bestir thyself!” And every one on board ate and drank his fill and lay down and slept heavily. But the archer sat in his golden bower and grew pensive, and said: “Alas! my heart yearns after my faithful servant, Shmat-Razum. I wonder where he is now!”—“I am here, master!” The archer was glad. “Is it not time for us to hasten home?” And he had no sooner spoken than a whirlwind as it were seized him and bore him into the air.

The merchants awoke from their sleep and wanted to drink away the effects of their carouse: “Hi! Shmat-Razum, give us some more drink by way of a pick-me-up!” But no one answered, no one rendered them that service. Order and shout as they might, things remained precisely as they were. “Well, gentlemen! this sharper has befooled us! The devil take him, and may the island vanish and the golden bower perish.” Thus the merchants lamented and lamented, then they spread their sails and departed whither their business called them.

The archer flew back to his country, and descended in a waste place by the blue sea. “Hi, Shmat-Razum, can we not build us a little castle here?”—“Why not? It shall be ready immediately.” And immediately the castle sprang up, more beautiful than words can tell, ’twas twice as good as a royal palace. The archer opened his casket and a garden immediately appeared round the castle with pleasant country paths and marvellous flowers. There sat

the archer at the open window, and quite fell in love with his garden. Suddenly a dove flew in at the window, plumped down upon the ground, and turned into his lovely young wife. They embraced and greeted each other. And the wife said to the archer, “Ever since thou didst leave the house I have been flying as a blue dove among the woods and groves. How happily we will now live together for evermore!”

Early the next morning the King came out on his balcony and looked towards the blue sea, and behold! on the very shore stood a new castle, and round the castle was a green garden. “Who then is this presumptuous stranger who builds on my land without my leave?”

Then his couriers ran thither, asked questions, and came back and told him that this castle was built by the archer, and he himself dwelt in this castle and his wife with him. The King was more angry than ever, and he bade them assemble a host and go to the shores of the sea, root up the garden, smash the castle into little bits, and bring the archer and his wife to him. The archer saw the King’s army coming against him, and it was very strong; then he seized his axe quickly and rapped with it, “Rap-tap!” Out came a ship. He rapped one hundred times, and made one hundred ships.

Then he seized his horn and blew once, and a host of footmen rolled out. He blew in the other end, and a host of horse rolled out. The commanders of all the corps came rushing up to him, and asked him for orders. The archer bade them begin the battle. The music struck up, the drums rolled, the regiments moved forwards against the royal host. The infantry, like a solid wall, broke down their centre, the horse cut them off at the wings and took them captive, and the guns from the fleet played upon the capital. The King saw that all his host was flying, rushed forward to stop them—but how? He could not do it, and in a moment he was swept from his horse in the midst of the fierce fight and trampled underfoot. When the fight was over the people assembled together and begged the archer to accept the whole realm from their hands. To this he gave his consent, and ruled that kingdom peaceably all the days of his life.

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